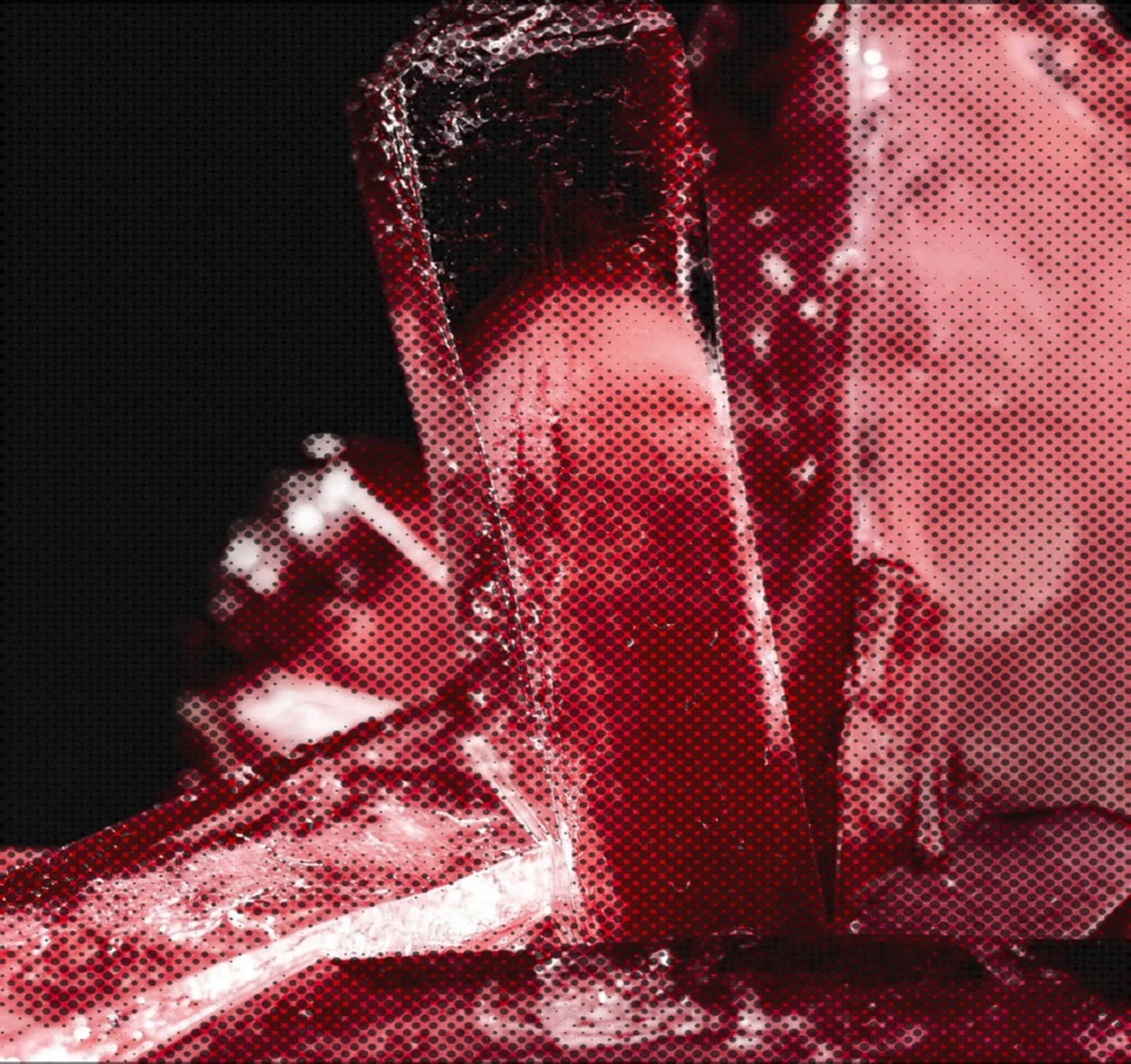


Bernard Edward Joseph Capes



The Lake of Wine

Bernard Edward Joseph Capes

The Lake of Wine



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4066338108203

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I.](#)

[CHAPTER II.](#)

[CHAPTER III.](#)

[CHAPTER IV.](#)

[CHAPTER V.](#)

[CHAPTER VI.](#)

[CHAPTER VII.](#)

[CHAPTER VIII.](#)

[CHAPTER IX.](#)

[CHAPTER X.](#)

[CHAPTER XI.](#)

[CHAPTER XII.](#)

[CHAPTER XIII.](#)

[CHAPTER XIV.](#)

[CHAPTER XV.](#)

[CHAPTER XVI.](#)

[CHAPTER XVII.](#)

[CHAPTER XVIII.](#)

[CHAPTER XIX.](#)

[CHAPTER XX.](#)

[CHAPTER XXI.](#)

[CHAPTER XXII.](#)

[CHAPTER XXIII.](#)

[CHAPTER XXIV.](#)

[CHAPTER XXV.](#)

[CHAPTER XXVI.](#)

[CHAPTER XXVII.](#)
[CHAPTER XXVIII.](#)
[CHAPTER XXIX.](#)
[CHAPTER XXX.](#)
[CHAPTER XXXI.](#)
[CHAPTER XXXII.](#)
[CHAPTER XXXIII.](#)
[CHAPTER XXXIV.](#)
[CHAPTER XXXV.](#)
[CHAPTER XXXVI.](#)
[CHAPTER XXXVII.](#)
[CHAPTER XXXVIII.](#)
[CHAPTER XXXIX.](#)
[CHAPTER XL.](#)
[CHAPTER XLI.](#)
[CHAPTER XLII.](#)
[CHAPTER XLIII.](#)
[CHAPTER XLIV.](#)
[CHAPTER XLV.](#)
[CHAPTER XLVI.](#)
[CHAPTER XLVII.](#)
[CHAPTER XLVIII.](#)
[CHAPTER XLIX.](#)
[CHAPTER L.](#)
[CHAPTER LI.](#)
[CHAPTER LII.](#)
[CHAPTER LIII.](#)
[CHAPTER LIV.](#)
[CHAPTER LV.](#)

CHAPTER I.

[Table of Contents](#)

Some time in June of the year 1800 (as privately chronicled) there came a famous evening at Whitelaw's Club in St. James's Street, off Piccadilly, London. There and then—according to the unattested evidence of an eyewitness—Mr. Ladislav lost his head, Lord Dunlone his mistress, Sir Robert Linne his fortune, and Major Dalrymple his life. Thus it appears these four were all losers, and each of a material property, save the first, who, alone of the quartette, commuted his self-possession for a very real equivalent in hard cash.

“Whitelaw's” in those days ran, of a host of gambling clubs, the deepest. It was there all heavy potations and long stakes (at which many a self-martyr burned); but the first of these were put down and the second up with an accepted solemnity of decorum that was traditional to the place and the sign of its moral endowment. Fox, in his heavier moments, had been known to hazard in its glooms occasionally, and to lose, of course; and—equally of course—to find immediate balm for his scorched fingers in the inevitable “Herodotus.” Selwyn, also, and Topham Beauclerc, and many another Georgium sidus, had played and hiccupped within its pregnant walls; but always with gravity and a weight of personal responsibility towards the foundation. “Brookes's” might have held in its time more showy revelry; “Almack's” have gambled in broad-brimmed straw hats, bedecked with flowers, and masks to hide the play of emotions. “Whitelaw's” would have none of these. It

had ever stood coldly aloof from flash and notoriety, accepting Todd's definition of a club as "An association of persons subjected to particular rules," rather than that of Johnson (the rendering has a warm personal flavour), who calls it "An assembly of good fellows, meeting under certain conditions." From first to last it remained ponderous in self-importance and rigid in exacting the observance of its unwritten codes of conduct. If its gaming operations were large, it desired the company of no feather-brain "plungers"; but rather of players of substance, to whom cards were a market, not a raffle.

Therefore, when on this particular night no fewer than four of its members—like those in the fable—suddenly revolted against the central system, and, for a space of minutes, made havoc of its respectable traditions, it is no wonder that "Whitelaw's" rose at the outrage like one man, and, in the upshot, pronounced sentence of club ostracism upon the delinquents. This, as it affected three, is matter of private history. The fourth escaped the distinction there and then through the interposition of "the man with the scythe."

Faro was the game, and the stakes were swingeing. The four had played from three o'clock of a Thursday afternoon to six of the Friday morning. In the white spread of day their eyes showed up blood-shot, their cheeks grimy with candle soot, their hair slack and unstrung. My lord Dunlone, who was a slipslop youth, colourless and jejune, with stains of wine on his chin and high cravat, brooded in fathomless sulkiness, the only pronounced expression he was ever real master of. His neighbour, Sir Robert Linne, had the look of a fine tormented devil, desperate and at bay.

These were the losers. Of the winners, Mr. Ladislaw was a perspiring cabbage of a man, stunted and over-headed; and he seemed drunk and amazed with his good fortune; and the major presented a lean and hungry appearance, as if his passions were devouring worms—which indeed I believe they were.

About six of the clock there came a pause in the game—the lull before the crash. Mr. Ladislaw, twinkling prosperity, bent obsequiously to the baronet, his cards clumped together in one hand.

“The stakes as before, Sir Robert?” he said in a small, confidential voice.

The other gave a hollow laugh, checking it frowningly in mid-career.

“I think so,” he said. “If there happens a margin, why—we must make it a broad one, on paper.”

“As you please, sir.”

Major Dalrymple, with his thick lips dropped apart, was gazing breathingly at his sulky neighbour. The latter, conscious of the inquiring scrutiny, pulled himself erect—a cub of ill-temper.

“Curse it!” he muttered, with a surly sidelong glance. “What am I being stared at for, curse it?”

“Your pardon, my lord,” said the major, in a high, stiff voice. “I looked only to inquire your stake.”

“I can settle it myself, sir, without your help”—and, with a very meaning action, he held his cards face-downwards upon his breast.

The major went back in his chair, his corded hands thrust out rigidly before him on the table.

"My lord Dunlone," he said, "impugns not only my judgment, but my honour!"

"Oh, curse it!" cried the Viscount. "What have I said?"

"It was your action spoke, sir."

Sir Robert laughed recklessly.

"You're hard on my lord. He clasped his dear love to his bosom—no more. 'Tis an amorous way he has."

The dyspeptic face of the soldier went dark. He recognized an allusion in the bantering words. The Viscount Dunlone, in fact (it was notorious), had outbidden him in the favour of a certain Mademoiselle Carminelle, a *figurante* at Vauxhall in the suit of Mr. "Tom Restless"; and, popularly, he was supposed to have aged under the disappointment.

"Come!" cried the baronet. "Give us the privilege of driving to the devil our own way. You mustn't criticize the actions of dying men. We writhe with wounds, sir, while you are sound."—He turned to Mr. Ladislaw, who sat staring, apprehensive. "I stake my all," he said; and named a sum sufficiently desperate.

There were a few late *habitués* in the room. One of these, a dry, long man, with a face like a puckered medlar and a short-sighted contraction of the eyelids, had been . for some time a stealthily intent observer of the quartette. Now this individual, humouring a habit of his by drawing in his breath with a wincing sound, gave his chair a shift, and seemed to be awaiting results, at a distance, with some secret interest.

"Stake, and have done with it!" cried Sir Robert boisterously to the young lord.

The latter turned an insolent, languid glance on Major Dalrymple. They were a contrast. The soldier set, spare,

bilious, with a great hooked nose and cracked heavy lips; the other a ruffled *petit-maitre* of the first folly, pearl-powdered, cherry-mouthed, a model of sartorial elegance from his choking cravat—so amplified as that his face looked like a peach stuck in a napkin—to his full pantaloons of apricot-coloured velvet.

“I stake,” lisped this exquisite—“I stake your reversion, sir.”

There were influences of wine and ill-fortune fermenting in the fool’s empty head. Otherwise he would have hardly dared such perilous banter.

“I fail to gather your lordship,” said the soldier, going red.

“The adorable Carminelle,” began the Viscount drawlingly, when the other jumped up with a furious face, upsetting his chair in the act, and clapped his left hand instinctively upon his thigh.

There was a moment’s commotion. One or two in the room rose; but the dry, short-sighted stranger sat on, quietly rubbing his chin.

Nonplussed for the moment, as it seemed, by the absence of his weapon, Major Dalrymple gasped, hesitated—and sat down again. As he did so, some were aware of a blue streak across his forehead that remained there after his flush of passion had subsided.

“I stake a thousand pounds against that,” he said, with a sudden fall to intense quietness of intonation.

The incident passed, and the deal. There was a stern spirit of expectancy in the room. This was not “Whitelaw’s” way—either as regarded the outburst, or the nature of the declaration that had produced it.

Then, all in a moment, Sir Robert Linne had leaped up and flung his cards in Mr. Ladislaw's face, and the major was on his feet again, stamping and declaiming.

The baronet's victim, taken completely by surprise, started and fell over on his back, his chair splintering beneath him. The place was in an uproar at once—red and angry visages on all sides. Only Sir Robert stood placid with folded arms, smiling grimly down on the havoc he had wrought.

"I call all to witness," screamed the major, panting and struggling in the arms of two who had seized him, "that I accepted my lord's stake, but not his infernal insult. I have won the right of protection over an outraged lady, and I now call upon him to answer for his brutal abuse of her name in public"—and, despite his captors, he whipped up a glass of wine from the table, and dashed it at the stupid face of the lordling, who still sat, sullenly defiant of the spirit he had evoked. The glass cut his forehead and half-stunned him for the moment.

"Mr. Jephson," cried the soldier, glaring round, and selecting one from the excited group about him—"you will do me the service to ac——"

The word snapped in his teeth like a pipe-stem. With a groan he sank upon the ground, and his face was purple from ear to ear.

An instant's silence followed, then babble of voices and the pressing inward of the spectators around the fallen man. Lord Dunlone sat mopping his red forehead in foolish vacancy; and Sir Robert Linne strode over to Mr. Ladislaw, who had been helped to his feet and stood apart and alone.

"I took full licence for a ruined man," said the baronet; "and am prepared to give the fullest satisfaction."

The injured one almost whimpered.

"That is the devil of *luck*," he said hysterically. "You force a quarrel on me, and deprive me of the fruits of it."

"Oh, sir! Not necessarily."

"You know I'm damned bad at shot and thrust."

The loser smiled wickedly. The only stealthy witness of the little scene was the short-sighted man.

"You desire to compound the insult, then?" said Sir Robert.

"Oh! surely, sir, with your kind permission."

The other laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and turned away. Mr. Ladislaw took a forward step and ventured timidly:

"You exaggerated, I trust, when you spoke of yourself as ruined?"

"Do you question my statement, sir?"

He flapped round with a mockery of fierceness. The little man fell back, scared.

"Oh, dear me, no!" he cried.

Sir Robert laughed again, shot a contemptuous look at the group by the table, and went quietly from the room.

In the Club-hall he came to a momentary pause.

"The fellow should have fought," he muttered. "I would have made myself a broad target to him."

Then he sighed.

"But there's a shorter cut."

CHAPTER II.

[Table of Contents](#)

Sir Robert Linne, as he left the club, had no thought but to sever the tangle of things by cutting his own throat. He intended to do this agreeably and decently, and to step off the world into chaos with as little inconvenience to himself and to others as was compatible with the severity of the deed.

After considerable reflection, the plan that suggested itself to him was to proceed to some riverside station, hire a wherry, work his way down stream an indefinite distance; and then, sitting on the thwarts, neatly and philosophically put a weight in his pocket and a bullet in his head, and so overboard.

Ordinarily, he permitted himself some nausea and ill-temper after a night's debauch. This morning he would have none of them.

"It would be churlish," he thought, "to hand in my credentials with an ill-grace. If I have represented his sable majesty faithfully, he has his own good reasons, no doubt, for recalling me."

Therefore, to prove how the will can overcrowd the nerve, he whistled on his way, and was very affable and kindly to all his fellows with whom he came in contact. They were not many at that early hour. An amazed roysterer waking on a step; a kennel-scraper driving his broom before him at a shambling trot; Giles the apprentice, yawning over the shutters, and a pretty mop-squeezer or so who affected a

demure propriety as he waved a kiss to them in passing, and blushed and giggled when he had gone by.

He turned into St. James's Park, where Moll and Meg were tethering their cows at the sweet-stuff stalls; and bought and drank a glassful of white innocence with a sort of pleasant bravado of geniality. It made him feel good for the moment—pastoral and boyish once more.

"What's your wish in life, Molly?" he said, turning with a smile to the girl who had supplied him.

"Sure your honour's quizzing!"

"No, I'm not. In truth now?"

"Tea at Bagnigge Wells, then, with china and a gilt spoon."

He burst out laughing and then looked grave.

"Your ambition hath a goose-flight. What would you give for the treat?"

"Anything but my good name."

"I stand corrected, sweetling. Here, take your golden egg, and never part with your goose."

He took her chin in his hand.

"Bite," he said, and clipped a guinea between her white teeth.

"That shall go to my credit," he said to himself as he walked off; and made his way slowly to his rooms in Whitehall.

Therein he did not remain long, but came out very shortly, a pocket of his riding-coat bulged in a sinister manner.

He went down the Strand and Fleet Street, at a faster pace now, passed Temple Bar, with its three gaunt spikes

yet shooting from the topmost arch, like dry stalks from which the ugly blossom had long withered and fallen, and turning into the cloisteral recesses of the Temple, fell loitering again, moved by the silence and antiquity of the place.

It was a fresh-blown morning, sweet with virginal sunshine, and the old haunted walls and windows of the courts seemed elbowing one another in eagerness to obtain largesse of light.

Glancing upward, he read on a dial set in the stained red brick wall of a house in the Inner Temple—"Begone about your business."

"A sexton's motto," he murmured. "Must leisure be always a stolen happiness, and every clock a treadmill for Time to toil on? But I accept the churlish reminder," and he made his way, with a melancholy smile, to a rearward gate in the river wall, and came out upon a flight of stone steps, that went down through ooze and slime to the water level.

The muddy stream, as far as the view could reach, was all patched with sunshine, like a beggar's fustian with cloth of gold. Life was awake on the flood, but in such enchanted guise that for the moment his eyes filled with tears. Wherries shot the ripples, like bobbins traversing a loom of silver tissue; hay barges, soft apple-green along the thwarts and stacked high with yellow trusses, slid placidly past until the blue distance covered them with a haze like glass. From the happy shoreward mists, voices and anvils chimed in intricate harmony, but so subdued by distance as to seem the veritable bells of elf-land.

Sir Robert gazed in that entrancement of the spirit that is impersonal and momentarily divine—that comes of a complete surrender to influences outside the bourne of Nature. A voice hailing him, brought him back to the ugly prose of being.

“Boat, sir, boat!”

“Hi! my lad. Pull in here!”

The wherry came alongside the steps, and the man touched his hat.

“Waterman, what’s the value of your boat?”

“She’s not to sell, sir.”

“Perhaps she’s to buy. I’ll give you ten guineas for her.”

The craft was old and cranky. The man scratched his head, grinned and spat into the water.

“I’m at your service, sir.”

“And damn your company, say I. I don’t want it. If you’re for selling, there’s my offer. If you’re not, I’ll go elsewhere.”

“Short and sweet. What d’ye want of her?”

“That’s my business. Mind you your own, and——”

He thought he caught a glimpse of a figure moving the other side of the gateway in the wall.

“Come!” he cried hurriedly. “Take or reject. I’ve no time for barter.”

He brought a handful of gold out of his pocket as he spoke. There was the sum he had named and a little over.

The man hesitated—not from any doubt as to his own advantage in the bargain, but from a dread that he might be lending himself to some compromising transaction. The glitter of the pieces decided him. He stepped forward, hollowed his two hands together, and looked up greedily.

“Take it a bargain,” he said. “I’m for your honour.”

A moment later he was holding the wherry while the baronet climbed in, sat down and unshipped the sculls.

The stern swung out into the stream. At that instant a figure came softly and hastily through the doorway, with a finger on its lips. It slipped a crown into the waterman’s ready palm. The prow of the wherry, held by the latter, jerked and bobbed and settled steady. He in the boat was at wrestle with the sculls.

“Let her go!” he cried, without looking round.

The waterman gave the craft a vigorous shove, and stepped back.

“What’s in the wind with you, my dandy galloot?” he murmured watching, hand on hip; and—“Your honour makes better time with tongue-pad than with sculls,” he added with a grin. And, indeed, it must be confessed that Sir Robert was no accomplished oarsman.

However, he shuffled his craft out into mid-stream somehow, being indifferent to the manner; and then he poised his sculls, letting the boat drift down with the tide which was running to sea.

Even now he could hardly take himself with that seriousness that the nature of his intention would seem to demand.

“Did ever man,” he said aloud, “meet the devil half-way with such a sense of humour?”

“You have none,” said a creaking voice in the bows.

He twisted his head about—scarcely marvelling at the response.

“So you have taken me at my word?” he said.

"You think I am the devil—eh?"

"You flatter yourself. A monarch to condescend to the practical executive! I take you for one of his imps."

"Well, sir—I don't despair of you. I gave the waterman a *douceur*, and slipped in as you pushed off."

"So, you are not the devil?"

"No; only one of his imps—an attorney."

"Then I am lost indeed."

"H'm!—May I have a little bout at reasoning with you—before you—eh?"

"Before I—eh?—just so, my friend. Now, balance the *pros* and *cons*, I pray. Here am I, going to damnation, and thinking myself equipped with all decent loneliness for the journey. I turn my head, and find——"

"Counsel, waiting to argue the case for you. Congratulate yourself. Heaven is——"

"No, no. State your case, without blasphemy."

"Very well (take care of that barge).—I revert to my original postulate. You said—'Did ever man meet the devil half-way with such a sense of humour?'—and I answered: 'You have none.'"

"You did—and I throw the word in your teeth. No man, I make bold to say, has more than I."

"Yet you propose killing yourself?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"My mission in life was to be foil to the virtuous. 'Tis a costly business, and not to be maintained save with luck. Luck has cold-shouldered me. I have staked and lost my last

penny, and so my mission ends; and I jump off the cliff of the world with a light heart."

"And with a poor sense of humour. I repeat it."

"Pardon me. You said with *no* sense of humour."

"Well—I qualify that."

"That is a concession from a lawyer. Now, has it occurred to you that you have obtruded yourself upon a reckless and desperate man?—that, to a lost soul standing on the brink of Cocytus, it may seem a small matter, and the humouring of a very trifling aggravation, to push a fellow-traveller over into the gulf before he leaps himself?—At this moment it suggests itself to me that no ghostly letter of credit would serve me half so well down there as an attorney *in esse*. The devil needs lawyers to argue his case. Generally they evade him at the last by some technicality. Shall I take you, to prove at least that suicides come not, without exception, of the humourless class?"

"I made no such statement. But this I say—that any man who contemplates self-destruction has, for the time being, lost his sense of humour."

"I am in no hurry. Why?"

"Because he is taking himself with that exaggerated seriousness which is the trade-mark of the bore."

"Is a suicide a bore?"

"Certainly. He is a man with a grievance, who, professing to accept life as a game of chances, cries out if the cards are against him. His tone may be clamorous or subdued; but it always carries the same refrain. At a certain point he would almost resent good fortune, for he hath persuaded himself that he is born the butt of Providence; and his vanity

is such that he would not have even a diseased judgment of his refuted. Vanity, vanity—he is the very maggot of it.”

“Continue, continue, my friend. This is not Coke or Lyttleton.”

“Sir, I will continue. You decry my profession; but what doth it teach a man, if not to look below the surface? The suicide is he who will not take his own destinies in hand; for at heart he is a sensuous fellow, who hath subordinated his instinct for combativeness to a poor sentiment of fatality. In a world of noble struggle he would lie down and ignobly sleep. Thus, like a distempered cur, he turns and gnaws his own flesh; or, weakly despairing, stings himself to death like the fire-ringed scorpion.”

The baronet sat amazed.

“This is no lawyer,” he cried; “but a Wesley come to judgment!”

The dried-stick of a man in the bows drew in his breath, and leaned forward, with moist eyes, the lids whereof were like dead sea-weed.

“Oh, sir!” he cried, in a full voice, “let me entreat you—see the game out. If I lose and am disqualified, there is no whit the less interest in the play that goes on. There are plenty to continue it—plenty to profit by the lesson of my downfall. From being pupil I have become teacher; and shall I by self-destruction diminish the number of that blest company?”

“My good sir,” said the baronet, with some emotion (and, “Pull your right scull,” said the lawyer anxiously), “you have a great advantage of me; but I respect and honour your

sentiments. Why I should find you here, or why you should take an interest in my fate, passes my comprehension."

"No doubt," said the other.

"I know you, I think, by sight," said Sir Robert. "You are a member of 'Whitelaw's,' if I am not greatly mistaken."

"I was elected five years ago. Recently, I have presumed to take a watchful interest in your fortunes, as they were presented to me by report and by actual observation. I have sorely marked you—I crave your indulgence—in your race to the devil."

"I have a good mount. I shall win."

"Sir! sir!"

"Why, what a to-do is this! Do you disparage your master? I am no attorney; yet I could prove black the very moral of innocence."

"As how?"

"As thus. To desire—conscious of unworthiness—one's own salvation, is to aim at self-aggrandisement. To be careless of one's own salvation, is to be unselfish. To be opposed to one's own salvation, is to be actually virtuous. The devil may be considered the Apostle of this creed—*ergo*, the devil teaches virtue."

"Well, and well. I take you on clause two of your reasoning. If, in being careless of your own salvation, you are careless of that of others (and surely it so follows, having regard to precept and influence), you are selfish. But, if you think of others, you are not careless of your own; for no man would of his true generosity help his neighbour to that which he himself scorns. Now, the manner of your purposed exit; the unexampled sweetness, sir, with which

you have met my most impertinent intrusion, convince me that you are far from feeling a careless indifference to your fellows."

"I have a measure of good-humour. I would not kick the stool from under my neighbour because I sit upon a stone. But the first test of humour is to know itself bested; to succumb to the finer wit—and that the devil hath shown."

"Disprove him. He hath stood so long in his own shadow that he fancies himself a giant. He tiptoes against the setting sun, and his dead image seems to embrace the world. Upset him, and he lies but a pigmy."

"My friend, he is not to be felled but by the stone of godliness. That I never possessed, for it is not purchasable. And if it were, my pouch is empty."

"Yet you gave, in hard cash, ten guineas for this crank vessel that is worth——"

"It was my all—I swear it. And now I have bought Charon's ferry-boat, and future souls must swim. Not much consideration for my neighbour in that."

"So I have said nought to move you from your purpose?"

"I greatly regret—nothing."

The spare stranger groaned.

"It shall be a lesson to my self-sufficiency. Well, sir, I must play a better card."

"If you please."

"Run the boat into the hard there, and accompany me to my office. I will hand you the title-deeds of an estate that shall give you a new lease of life."

CHAPTER III.

[Table of Contents](#)

Like one who accepts an indifferent gift, rather to pleasure a friend than for his own gratification, Sir Robert Linne held his reprieve in his pocket, as it were, with a careless hand, and, accompanied by the lawyer, re-entered the humming lists of life.

Silently the two made their way westwards, the man of deeds accommodating his pace, with some secret chafing, to the leisurely progress of his companion. Now and again he would glance stealthily aside into the latter's face, and give a half-comical shrug of chagrin over its expression of tranquil good-humour that seemed such a genial satire upon the situation.

"If he hobnobs with death so calmly, how will his philosophy accept a living estate?" thought the uneasy scrivener; and, "light come, light go," he groaned in his heart.

Presently they were in Holborn, without the rag of a sentence to pass between them; and so came opposite the block of houses known as Middle Row.

Here suddenly Sir Robert stopped, and took his companion by the arm.

"You itch to improve on the situation," said he, with a twinkling gravity. "Harkee! Now's your opportunity. Here am I;—yonder stands Branscome's lottery office. Draw your moral, my friend, and ease you of your load."

The lawyer drew in his breath, his face crinkling.

“Well,” said he—fore-read and embarrassed but conscious of right—“the man was an earl’s fellow once.”

“It proves him the more admirable for being a rich man now!”

“Sir Robert, Sir Robert! ’tis an evil system and a mistaken. How is he rich? On the pitiful savings of shoeblacks and servant wenches. ’Tis such as he bid industry sit hands in lap and starve on illusive hopes. For a single chance in fifty thousand he buys her ruin; and what is all this but bitter gambling?”

“Ha, ha! old gentleman. We reach the point at once. But, believe me, sir, I never starved a servant wench or took anything from her but a kiss—and that I returned.”

The lawyer sighed.

“Go your ways,” he said. “You have your father’s laugh.”

“What—you knew him?”

“I had the fortune to do him a service once—’twas during the riots of ’68, when foul John Wilkes was committed to King’s Bench, on a writ of *capias utlagatum*, and the red-coats let fly at the mob. Your father commanded. They called it the St. George’s Fields massacre, and all concerned in it gained a mighty unpopularity.”

“Yet he was but a simple soldier and obeyed orders.”

“Well, sir, an unpopular king must needs have unpopular ministers, and so down the scale. Let a tyrant fall (I speak in illustration only—God bless his Majesty!) and his very scullions come down with him. I did Sir Robert a service, I say; and he repaid me with his confidence.”

“His son is beholden to you. You repeat yourself on behalf of a scapegrace, I fear. You were not his adviser?”

“In one matter only that you shall learn. Now, my friend?”

The last words were addressed to an odd-looking individual who had come up to them as they talked, and who now presented certain savoury goods to their inspection with a dumb gesture of invitation.

The creature was a lank, middle-sized man, with a meagre face of decorum and rather delicate features set in an expression of confident apathy. He was scrupulously attired in dress-coat, vest and knee-breeches of stainless black broadcloth; and black silk stockings, ending in shoes decorated with large steel buckles, encased his neat deliberate legs. A great shirt-frill stood out from his breast, like a table napkin from a tumbler, and his neck cherished the spotless embrace of a lawny cravat. On his head he wore no covering save its natural one; but this was so clipt and bepowdered as almost to give the appearance of a close cap of linen. A short apron of the softest texture, which concealed a third of his glories, seemed designed rather to advertise his calling than to protect his broadcloth.

Thus apparelled, he presented to the talkers a little round tray, on which was set for consideration a pudding, neatly sliced and sugared, that gave out a pleasant fragrance. To the obvious merits of this he silently drew attention with a short, bright spatula which he carried in his other hand.

“No, no,” said the lawyer. “Not to-day, my friend; not to-day.”

He smiled good-humouredly; and the oddling dropped a courtly bow—“the loss is mutual,” it expressed—and carried his comestible elsewhere.

“Sir Robert,” said the attorney, with a droll, kindly look, “the lottery office missed fire; but I have another moral for you.”

“It shall have my respectful attention, sir, in honour of my father’s friend.”

The words were spoken with gravity. The other gave a twitch of surprise. Then said he in a pretty gentle voice:

“’Tis from him with the pudding. They call him the Flying Pieman; but his proper business is to paint pictures, at which he has a fine skill, they say. Fortune missed him, however. He married ‘for love’—a course for which there is plenty of precedent, but no authority—and love begets a family, but nothing to put in its empty crops. At the last pinch he kicked over his easel and went out to sell puddings. He did nought by halves. If his pictures are half as good as his victuals he deserves the Presidency. He hath made himself a character in the neighbourhood, but a finer one in God’s eyes, I will venture. ’Tis said that, no whit faithless to his art, he trades all day that he may indulge his real bent after hours. That is to be a man and an example.”

“To me, sir, to me, you would say; and so he is. I have no family; but that is an accident—not an excuse. I take the pieman to my heart, and see no ostentatious vanity in his shirt-frill. I read another moral here too. This is ‘Heavy Hill,’ and goes to Tyburn.”

“Oh, Heaven send you to the House of Correction! Come on, I beg. My office is close by.”

“Then your prayer is answered. You shall do the overseer, and whip me with maxims.”

The lawyer smacked in his lips as if he were sampling some sharp but not disagreeable berry; regarded his incorrigible companion a moment through covert eyelids; then turned and led the way across the road and under the old gate-arch of Gray's Inn.

Beyond this portal, a short distance, pleasant tranquillity prevailed. It is the humour of the Law to hatch in antique solitudes the plots that vex many lives with turmoil and disquiet. Around its Inn Halls the Devil's cloisters invite to peripatetic contemplation of quibble and sophistry; and its silent gardens cherish that grimy tree of Death whose trunk is freckled like the serpent's with discs of yellow.

Up a step or two, through a venerable doorway with fluted pilasters, the long man ushered his visitor, and so to a dusty comfortable room on the first floor, where tiers of japanned boxes, the caskets of dead passions and aspirations, were piled high against the walls like coffins in a family vault.

"Mr. Creel?" said the baronet, sitting up on a high stool and crossing his legs.

The lawyer bowed.

"So I read it on the door, sir. Believe me, I hold the name in honour for my father's sake."

"It is a good sign," said the other; "and so far of happy augury. Here, I hope, is soil that may be renewed and yield yet a plentiful crop of wholesome grain."

He sat himself down, and, toying with a pencil, fixed his eyes steadily and gravely on the young man.

"I crave your permission," he said gently, "to speak very plainly, very freely, and—within proper limits—without

reserve.”

“Surely, sir; for should I not be dead by now? ’Tis a *post-mortem* examination. Out with your scalpel, and cut and dissect as you list.”

“It is a family matter and very private to your ear.”

“Mr. Creel, who so taciturn as a ghost? Even a lawyer may give his confidence to a shadow.”

“You please to jest. Will you be serious for once? What I have to say affects you nearly. I represent your dead father—am his agent, not in authority, but in loving-kindness.”

“I listen, I listen. Perhaps I am a little light-headed. I have thrown out all my ballast, remember.”

“You saw but little of the late Sir Robert?”

“I was eleven years old when he died. That was in the war of ’80. He fought under Clinton and lies in Charleston where he fell. He was always a soldier in my vague memory of him—saturnine, pre-occupied, with a rare smile for odd moments.”

“He feared God and loved his king—rest his memory! He had one other love—his only child; but him he was troubled for.”

“Troubled for? But why should I ask?”

“The boy was of high spirit, reckless, generous. He wore, even at that age, his heart on his sleeve for daws to peck at.”

“They have left all threadbare. Well, well!”

“Sir Robert’s was not a great fortune; but it was sufficient, with management, for his wants.”

“They were fewer than mine, good man. I feel sure, sir, this retrospect is for a worthy purpose. Otherwise—well, it is

obvious I was acquainted with the extent of my own inheritance."

"I ask no account of your stewardship. That is no part of the solemn commission I accepted from my friend. Maybe you have been more sinned against than sinning. Yet, is it not true that your father's apprehensions were justified?"

"Why else was I in the wherry?"

"You are ruined?"

"I am ruined."

The lawyer sighed.

"It was foreseen," he said, "by him who was dearest to you—foreseen and provided against."

"Provided against?"

Mr. Creel made no answer; but he quietly arose, went to one of the japanned boxes, unlocked it and took thence a bundle of papers.

"These," he said, "are the title-deeds of an estate that is yours—on certain conditions."

The young man had no word to say; but watched the other in amazement as he took from the little heap a certain paper that was folded and sealed with his father's monogram.

"I follow my direction," said the lawyer, "and break this seal. The contents of the document are for your ear, but they are addressed to me. I ask your attention while I make them known to you."

He shifted so as to secure a full light, knitted his brow, and, without pause or comment, read out in a brassy legal voice the lines before him:—

“To my honoured friend, Mr. James Creel, of Gray’s Inn, I have committed, to hold in trust for certain purposes, the estate of ‘Delsrop,’ in the county of Hampshire; whereof are dwelling-house and messuage, ninety-four acres, together with two farms held on long leases, the which it is not my desire to particularize in this the present connection. But rather to state clearly that in event of the bankruptcy at any time after my death of my only son, Robert (which calamity I, considering the bent of his nature, do sorrowfully foresee), and in no other event, the said estate is to be handed over to him, to work to a profit if he will, and so redeem the past; but on the condition that from that time being he shall forego his honourable title and know himself and be known as Robert Tuke, which name of Tuke hath his mother borne before him to her maiden honour and renown. And this I state clearly, that he may take or reject without further question, knowing the estate to be mine to give, and else seeking to know nothing. And I offer it, a last chance of redemption, that he, sloughing all that foulness of the past with his dishonoured name may turn the fruits of evil to the account of good.”

In the minute of amazed silence, during which the listener sought to ponder the import of this astonishing message, Mr. Creel refolded the paper, returned it to the packet, and, sitting down again, tapped and scraped his chin with the latter in a dry manner of expectancy.

“Well?” he said at length.

Sir Robert tilted himself to his feet, and stood rumpling his hair.

"I am at sea!" he cried, in a lost voice. "What does it all mean? I never heard of this estate; nor, I protest, did the executors. How did it come to him, and when?"

"That I may answer you. It was in the year '79—not many months before his death."

"And from whom?"

The lawyer shook his head grimly.

"Ah!" said the baronet. "You love a secret, of course. Am I never to know more than this?"

"Sir, you understand the conditions. You are to take or reject."

"A message and the rest of it? And where is the working capital?"

"These many years I have nursed the property against this contingency. It has yielded fairly, and there will be an accumulated sum to your credit."

"And if I reject?"

"Then the whole reverts to me."

The young man's eyes took a sudden softness. He was only thirty-one, and susceptible yet to impressions of unworldliness.

"I fail to see your profit in the matter," he said.

"My profit," answered the lawyer sternly, "was in a good man's confidence."

Then he went on more gently:

"I sought *no* profit in the transaction. I would have sacrificed more than the estate to save you and myself the necessity of this explanation. It was my affection for your father bound me to this solemn compact, as it was my