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FOREWORD

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Of the various incidents related in this book, some of the more improbable are true; for example, the impersonation of "Martina Fields" in a remote continent, and the visit of a woman to the Australian trenches on the Somme. I say this, not to forestall criticism of my invention, but as a pensive commentary on the difficulty imagination has to keep level when truth is allowed to set the pace.

The characters throughout are either imaginary or dead. In no case have real names been used, except that of the King of France who lost his throne in 1830; as for my Governor-General, like my Premier, Cardinal, and Lord Mayor, he is pure fantasy, having no original among the distinguished gentlemen who have held that office in reality.

The chapter headings throughout are taken from Sir Thomas Browne.

H. S.

CHAPTER I

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> But remembering the early civility they brought upon these countreys, and forgetting long passed mischiefs; we mercifully preserve their bones.
> --*Religio Medici*.

Life can afford extravagance, books cannot; for this reason nobody will dream of believing in my two grandfathers. They are too true to be good--good fiction, at any rate; if I try to give some kind of picture of them, it is because they frame between them a vision of a golden age, which could only have existed in brand-new countries, among brand-new circumstances and laws. It was not a golden age for everybody, wives or servants for instance, but for these two it was; they were, to use a word which is almost dead, characters.

I am sorry to think what would happen to these two old gentlemen if they had the misfortune to live now; it would be something legal, that is certain, falling heavily to crush their magnificent egotism and eccentricity. Their wives, who in the 'seventies put up with them with the uncomprehending patience accorded by Insurance Companies to Acts of God, would nowadays divorce them. Servants would bring, and win, actions against them for assault. As for their families, these would scatter immediately after the first row or two, and go forth to earn their livings with all the horrid freedom that the post-war period accords. In an age of standardisation these old

crusted, crusty gentlemen, mellow even in their rages as the Madeira which they sent for a roll round the Horn before bottling, would have the deuce of a time.

Doctors, to begin with, who in the last half century have swelled up into demi-gods, would be the first to interfere. They would view the couple, with their picturesquely flushed faces, their sudden wraths after meals, as mere examples of treacherous glands, and hardening arteries. (Character is a word which has died from the doctors' vocabulary too.) They would accept five-guinea fees to persuade the old gentlemen that what they needed was calm; and there would be a great recommending of suitable institutions--"quite in the country, you know, cooking not bad, and just supervision, nothing irksome." When the doctors had done, the lawyers would take their turn. Death duties, they would tell their victims, could best be avoided by making over the estate during lifetime to a reliable son. Relatives would then appear, with hints, backed by statistics, concerning vegetarian diet, and the undesirability of port by the pint twice a day. And at last, having shorn the bewildered unfortunates, for their own good, of home, money, wine and liberty, the twentieth century would turn the key on them with a sigh of genuine relief.

There was none of this in the colonies of last century, which was, for the tyrants, the very grandest imaginable time. There were doctors, true, and lawyers, but they were kept in their place, and the tyrants used them. Land was for the asking. Convicts were done with, to everybody's relief--the last batch reached Sydney in 1840; but there was labour to be had, labour which, like the doctors and lawyers, knew

its place, and took its wage with a finger to the forelock. There were English immigrants who came after gold, and remained to use spade and shears. There were Chinese in numbers, who came, as they explained by an interpreter to astonished immigration officers, to earn prouder lacquered coffins in this rich new land than their own exhausted paddy-fields could yield them. (The price of the coffin once safe in a canvas bag, they broke their term of service and returned to China assured of respect.) To deal with the land and the labour, a great many laws were made, and printed, and forgotten on shelves; while on the land existed superbly a number of men and women who were laws to themselves; characters, obeyed as such, loved, feared, and occasionally murdered as such. And here we come upon those prime old personages, ripe and shocking and satisfying as good Stilton cheese, the despair of their families and neighbours, and worth the lot put together; Great-grandfather Boissy, and his son, Gustave-Félicité.

I may say at once that I never knew either.

CHAPTER II

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All places, all Aires, make unto me one country; I have been ship wrackt, yet am not an enemy with the sea or winds.
--*Religio Medici*.

I

The first unbelievable thing about Grandfather Boissy is that he was born over a century and a quarter ago, in one of those little island colonies which the French and English were accustomed to snap up in passing during the eighteenth century. Great-grandfather, a ne'er-do-weel of family--Boissy de Mortemar was the full name--was sent there for his country's good in 1789, just before the French troubles began, and there remained and was forgotten, very conveniently for him, by his country's successive masters. It must not be thought that this exile, though imposed with a view to relieving a certain irritation which his presence set up in Parisian society, was attended with any humiliation such as the average deportee was obliged to endure. No; my great-grandfather, Auguste-Anne, went off to Santisimo Corazon in style, with a brevet of Lieutenant-Governor in his pocket, to be the representative of his king; my uncle has this brevet yet, with its seals, and its scrolly lawyer's writing, and the brave beginning "Il est ordonné," and at the bottom a fine flourishing signature, "Louis," the L of it three inches tall.

In Paris, Auguste-Anne had, I gather, been a nuisance. In Corazon, freed of relations, with no means ready-made of frittering money, and a climate which after a year or two either calmed or killed the individual submitted to it, he became a very respectable governor. He enjoyed being God, and had a fair conception of how the part should be played. He had a taste for splendour, as had the blacks he ruled. He encouraged their religion, which had withdrawn into the shadows as persecuted faiths will, so that witch doctors throve; even, they got up a procession or two after the fashion of those held at Church festivals, to the great scandal of the official priesthood. In ordinary times these latter would have protested to France, and there would have been a reprimand, and eventually a new Governor with a narrower mind; but by now the year was 1794, priests were disapproved in Paris, and it was felt, after the news of the massacre of Thermidor, that it would be tactless to invite the attention of Robespierre and his colleagues to a religious dispute in a distant island. The clergy did indeed send off some form of protest to the Pope, who replied absent-mindedly with an illuminated blessing, and an indulgence of thirty days for whosoever should recite, fasting, a prayer for the conversion of the heathen. After this their reverences gave it up, and retired with dignity from all competition in processions, wherein, as they had the wit to realize, they were hopelessly outclassed.

Meanwhile Auguste-Anne and his blacks went their scandalous and vivid way, working, but no more than was necessary, and breaking off into refreshing orgies of religion from time to time. The governor's religion, true, was that of

Dr. Pangloss rather than of his baptism, but it included dancing and a certain show of physical prowess, and was perfectly understood by the governed. These, indeed, so far sympathised as to lend him occasionally their own mysterious drummers, though not the drums--sacred these, and strung with human hide; had they been borrowed and trifled with odd things might have happened. But the drummers had no objection to showing their skill, and condescended to rub knuckles on the garrison kettles, which thereupon spelt out the strangest aphrodisiac rhythms, unmilitary though commanding. Great-grandfather Boissy was probably the first European to tangle his feet in these rhythms, the germ of jazz, which fell upon barren ground, and bore no fruit for another century. It delights me to think of his two fiddlers and his solitary piper drawling out the artless melodies of old France--Bouton de Rose, Tendre Musette, Dans ce Bocage--with this primal wickedness thudding away underneath.

II

Such was his life on the island, while his impeccable relatives in Paris were scurrying this way and that like rats when a haystack burns. With two frontiers to defend, and a new philosophy to impose upon a sceptical hostile Europe, the Republic One and Indivisible had no thought to spare for Corazon. News came, blown in with stray ships, and was discussed, but without much interest. France was too far away. Then, somewhere about December 1794, came a warship flying the tricolour, from which landed two officers in full regalia with scarves of the three colours, to enquire of the governor why the devil the sacred three did not wave

above the little mud fortress which guarded the port. They required an immediate lowering of the detested white flag, together with proofs of citizenship and loyalty from Auguste-Anne. The latter, who happily lacked the kind of principle which obliges a man to strike attitudes, had the flag down at once, and put up a makeshift affair of red, white and blue, made by the garrison's wives out of old petticoats. As for the proofs of citizenship and loyalty, these he provided until the officers were totally exhausted, and unable to deal with a girl or a glass more. He then had them conveyed aboard their vessel by polite negroes, with a note to say that he believed there were English ships in the offing; which hint, when they had recovered sufficiently to read it, they took, and made off under all sail.

When they had gone Auguste-Anne had the tricolour flag hauled down and stowed in a locker for future use. The island dreamed on under the white and gold as before.

A few months later an English sloop appeared, and remained in the harbour a week. At the end of this time another flag, red and white crosses on a blue ground, was stowed in the same locker, and another ship's company went off with aching heads to sea. It was the captain's hope to obtain at least a step in rank by reporting this new acquisition to the territory of George III, and he drew up an impressive report, dwelling on the dangerous nature of the exploit, and the stubborn resistance of the islanders. (More than one of the Governor's ladies had taken fright at his ginger whiskers, which were looked on by the unsophisticated creatures as lusus naturae.) But the Admiralty of those days was ancestor to the Admiralty of

these. The king was having a fit when the tidings arrived, and so the report was initialled and docketed, and taken down into the bowels of the earth to be filed; that is to say, it was forgotten with all possible completeness, and the unlucky author remained a post-captain till death.

The years went on. Somewhere about the time when Napoleon was striking like forked lightning through Italy, a deputation waited on Auguste-Anne. He came from his bed to meet it in a peacock-coloured dressing-gown, and learned that it wished him to be king. Now that King Louis was dead, said the spokesman, nobody knew for certain whom the island belonged to. There were the Republicans, who sounded ferocious, and the English, who had run about after a little ball in full mid-day sun, and were regarded by the islanders as no better than lunatics. Remained Auguste-Anne; and the deputation, which included--privately glaring, but publicly all balm--the Bishop, and the most renowned of the witch-doctors, came to suggest that it was his duty to clear up the situation by accepting the crown. The whites harangued him, and drew examples from antiquity; the blacks wept and addressed him, not without a percentage of truth, as the father of their children. Seeing both parties so much in earnest, Auguste-Anne displayed no false modesty, but agreed then and there, all dressing-gowned as he was, to rule them. They thanked him without surprise and retired backwards to compose public demonstrations of rejoicing after their several manners. The blacks got up their inevitable procession, which was rained on, to the secret joy of the Bishop, whose Te Deum with augmented choir, and

the now Royal piper playing the serpent, was a triumph of comfort and good producing.

Auguste-Anne was present, needless to say, while the canons and choirs felicitated God on having acquired him as vicegerent, sitting close to the altar and looking impressive in a blackguardly way. Later, when the Bishop, fired by the success of his performance, worked up to a coronation service, he submitted to the various ceremonies with dignity, and was respectful to such relics as the tibia of St. Athanasius and the *ossa innominata* of St. Stipendius, taken for the occasion from a magnificent charnel-house of solid silver. When it was over, the King, though tired, walked in procession under a canopy to a sort of natural grassy amphitheatre near the bay, and went through the whole thing again, according to the rather more ancient and much more disreputable rites of the blacks. The Bishop, though piqued, feigned not to notice this deliberate encouragement given to Paganism; remembering the result of his application to the Pope, and the distance of Corazon from any authority, he retired with a judicious migraine, and thus avoided taking any scandal. Happily, he recovered in time for the Palace dinner that evening, and did it full justice, which is more than can be said for the chief Witch-doctor, who lay on the shore all night in a sweat of blood, troubled by the resentful ghosts of sacrificed virgins.

III

When these civil and religious sprees were over, life went on as before; that is to say, the people supplied themselves at Nature's expense with food, and spent the rest of their time with women, or composing liquid symphonies upon a

delectable ground-bass of rum. Such was the routine of blacks and whites alike, and Auguste-Anne was the last person to interfere with it. He left matters alone; it was his genius, the one thing he could do really well. Years had taught him that in an island such as Corazon, time and climate do all the ruling needed; glory, by which is usually meant wholesale killing, he left to the tornadoes which whirled through the gulf of Mexico every six or seven years. The anticipation of these disasters, and the rebuilding of life after they had occurred, were the island's artless substitutes for the thrills of civilised warfare, with this important difference, that the heads of the State and the poorest plodding conscript stood in exactly the same danger while the elements raged.

It was after one such tornado, which had blown in the Palace door as by a charge of gunpowder, flattening a couple of domestics, and cutting Auguste-Anne himself about the head with flying splinters, that the second deputation arrived. Auguste-Anne, piratical in bandages, received them and enquired their business; which was, put briefly, to get him married. They said that what with tornadoes and time they might lose him now any day. (Auguste-Anne started at this plain speaking, but the fact remained, he was forty-three and the climate was not tolerant to middle-age.) They knew, they said hastily, that so far there had been no diminishing of his remarkable physical powers, which had become a legend already, handed down in story from mothers to daughters when these attained suitable age; but all the same--

Then, as before, the whites harangued, and the blacks wept. "But where the devil," enquired Auguste-Anne, "am I to look for a wife in this bitch of an island?"

The deputation had an answer to this, having thought the whole situation out with care, amid the mourning and labour of a tornado's aftermath. It would not do, they agreed, to take a wife from the island. Women could not stand splendour; they had no heads for it. Lift up one island woman, and her first idea would be to trample the other island women, and these would rebel, and stir up their husbands, and there would be trouble in no time. (Witness that good-for-nothing daughter of old Tascher de Lapagerie, cocked up on a throne as Empress of the French, making her husband ridiculous with her extravagance and her bad taste in lovers.) Nor would it do, pursued the deputation, to return to France in search of a wife; nothing but parvenues now in France, none of the good old thin blood left, thin noses, thin notions; only a lot of dukes called after battles, and duchesses red-handed from the maternal wash-tub. America was out of the question, as was Canada, and the wilder republics of the south. The only place left where a personage like Auguste-Anne, last of a line of graceful existers, royalist and rich, might best look for a consort, was England. England swarmed with exiled ladies, poor but suitable, bending over embroidery, teaching deportment; even--these too--busied over wash-tubs. (But a wash-tub from which one has risen, and a wash-tub to which, after selling the last jewel, one descends, are two very different things.) The deputation's advice, then, was this: that Auguste-Anne should set sail in the next ship that touched

at the little harbour, leaving his people to tidy up the island against his return; that he should take his time in England, look about him, choose, unhurried, some young creature who might enjoy the thought of processions and progeny, and bring her back to reign. Finances, they explained, would hardly run to a second crown; but there was always the Virgin's, which she only wore on feast-days, and could well spare the loan of now and then.

In fact, they had the whole plan neatly cut and dried.

As usual, Auguste-Anne did not keep them waiting, but assented at once, and dismissed them to such rejoicings as the devastation and threatening famine of the land allowed.

CHAPTER III

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> Saltimbancoes, Quacksalvers, and Charlatans...whose cries cannot conceal their mischief. For their impostures arc full of cruelty, and worse than any other, deluding not only unto pecuniary defraudations, but the irreparable deceit of death.
> --*Vulgar Errors*.

I

Next month, in an opportune trading vessel, he set off to woo.

How he proposed to go about the business on landing at Bristol is unknown, for he was perfectly innocent of the English tongue, save for a few expletives, and had no introductions or passport except his brevet of governor and his still handsome though florid person. Probably this latter would have been the more useful of the two in a country where George the Prince Regent set fashions, but as things fell out he had no need to put it to the test, or to submit himself to the tilted eyebrows of dowagers, with fledglings in charge, ranged round a ballroom in Bath.

For while still in Bristol he met a young female by pure accident; ran her down, as a matter of fact, just as he was driving out for the first time in the immense chariot which had been specially built for him. The girl was small, and fair, and of no pretensions. Her nose was snub, not the aristocratic feature he had come to seek, but it had for the hawk--but purplish--beaked Auguste-Anne the violent attraction exercised by opposites.

She was hardly hurt at all, and had fainted more from a sense of propriety than anything else; and when she came to in the vast hotel bedroom to which she had been carried, and perceived herself to be wearing a gentleman's silk nightshirt, she was in half a mind to go off again. The nightshirt, however, had no immoral significance. The chambermaid had robed her in it at the bidding, but not in the presence, of Auguste-Anne. Still, he had come once to the door to see that his protégée was safely bestowed; and the sight of her lying there with her pale hair fanning out over the pillow caused him first a pang and then an exaltation. He swore at himself, a loud inconsequent French oath, but the exaltation persisted; then with a stamp of the foot, and a--"Why not? Sacred name of names!"--descended the stairs and ordered his horses to be put up again. He had decided with a truly royal impulsiveness to seek no further.

It must be remembered that he had had twenty years of sun and dark-favoured women, and this girl was fair, and the month an English November. It had rained since the day he arrived. The best inn was panelled throughout with oak, which absorbed any daylight left over from the narrow streets and high buildings. The best inn offered him twice a day mounds of half-raw meat in lieu of meals. There was an entire absence of any person who could converse in the only civil language. He had enquired if Bristol were a considerable city, and got the truthful reply that it was one of the greatest in England. He had enquired if any other part of England were less subject to rain, and was told no. He had enquired if there were anyone in the whole town who spoke French, and was briefly informed that there was a war

on. He went to the carriage makers, and found them ignoramuses, unable to understand how the quarterings on the panels of the chariot should go. They had never heard of his illustrious family, and in their easy British way thought that anything ought to do for a Frenchy, and only one of these Markees at that. They were used to Markees, coming round with such pitiful fine bows to solicit the lowest paid jobs, and had got in the way of despising them. Even that anomaly, a Markee with quantities of money, ought, they considered, to put up with such heraldry as they chose to give him. Auguste-Anne nearly burst a blood vessel before he could get his mullets and leopards and blackamoors' heads in the right places.

All this may explain, at least partly, why Auguste-Anne, having set out upon an errand of State, with money in his pockets and the title of queen to offer, should have contented himself--more than that; should have set his heart upon, clung to, and refused to relinquish the first presentable young thing that happened to fall in his way.

II

Literally, to fall in his way; but as I said, she had hardly a touch from the hoofs. She came to, and blushed at the nightdress alone; then rang for the maid, and demanded to know where she was, and to be taken instantly home to her mother. Auguste-Anne, informed through the housemaid of this request, said with a wave of the hand when he had got the sense of it:

"Bring this mother to her."

And brought the mother was, in the identical chariot which had downed her daughter, and put her pale head in

the way of a crown. She was a respectable middle-aged person in a clean cap, who let rooms to the grass-widows of sea-captains, and who somewhere in the Dark Ages had become the genuine, or turf-widow, of a sea-captain herself. It is impossible to guess at what she thought, and what the neighbours thought, when a large gilt chariot, its panels covered with blackamoors' heads, its horses glittering like successful generals, drew up with a prodigious jingling and stamping at her modest door. She was at once told of her daughter's accident, but having been brought up in a more practical and less ladylike way, neglected to swoon. Instead, she got into the vehicle, with a glance which made swift calculation of its cost, reflecting that this upset might turn out to be a bit of luck for the girl after all.

When she saw Auguste-Anne, however, she had something of a shock. Both England and France had grown out of the taste for brocades and bright colours. In civil life young gentlemen's choice for coats had dwindled down to a few sombre greens, black, mulberry, and a brown or two, though they might array themselves rather more picturesquely for any kind of slaughter. But Auguste-Anne, again remember, had not seen Europe for twenty years, and had lived among a people to whom strong colour was as natural and wholesome as strong wine. He wore now, in the year 1804, in Bristol, in November, a coat of bright yellow face-cloth, with a kind of laced stock, and crimson knee-breeches buckled with gold. Add to this a sword and a rather elaborate wig, curled so as to afford him an extra two inches of height; and the excellent mother's diffidence, her first

astonished cry--"Love-a-duck, play actors!"--is easily explained.

Auguste-Anne led the fluttered lady to a chair, and by means of his interpreter, an able-bodied seaman who had been discovered in the tap, made known his project. His meaning was at first obscured unintentionally by the seaman, whose knowledge of the language of Racine had been acquired as a prisoner in the hulks of Toulon. At this intermediary's first statement of his principal's requirements the outraged mother rose from her chair, seeming to fluff out to twice her size, like an angry cat.

"Never!" declared the mother. "Tell him never, the wicked rascal, and you should think shame yourself to repeat such words, you nasty wretch, you!"

To which the seaman replied without heat:

"Stow your gab, I never said 'e didn't mean to sleep with 'er honest, did I?"

"Marriage?" said the mother incredulously, staring at Auguste-Anne, who recognised the word and bowed, saying in his own tongue:

"I have the honour, madame, as this person says, to demand mademoiselle your daughter's hand in marriage."

"Well!" said the mother, at this repetition of the word, and looked once more up and down the flaunting figure of her daughter's suitor.

"If," pursued Auguste-Anne smoothly, "as is natural, you should wish to peruse my credentials, I have them here--"

And he took from his bosom the parchment displaying King Louis' brevet, unrolled and let it hang, ribbon and seals and all, before the uncomprehending eyes of the mother.

"What's all this?" the latter enquired of the seaman.

"Licence," replied that worthy readily, "writ out in Greek by 'is Nibs the Archbishop o' Canterbury. Didn't I tell yer he wants to (an intolerable word) the girl honest?"

Stupefied, the mother sat surveying the mysterious parchment, while her thoughts played with a dream of riding about to the end of her days behind four horses, and of having done for ever with lodgers. After a brief period, during which it must be confessed that these and similar considerations received due attention while the possible happiness of her daughter went without more than perfunctory enquiry, she signified her willingness to ratify the arrangement.

But certain safeguards had to be thought of first. If there was one thing which a life among the grass-widows of seafarers had taught her, it was the importance of always having a sum of money down, and as far as possible payment in advance. Written pledges to pay she scorned; she had in her younger, more guileless days acquired quite a collection of these, which it gave her very little satisfaction to recall. She sat with folded hands, the primmest creature, while her mind flickered up and down columns of imaginary figures--price of chariot, gold hilt to sword, menservants in livery, diamond pin; and she had arrived at this conclusion, that the mysterious suitor, whatever he might be worth a year, was good as he stood for five hundred guineas. She therefore named this sum in gold as the price of her consent, adding the stipulation that the marriage should be performed by a clergyman of the church of England.

Somehow or other the seaman managed to get this proposition into a form assimilable by Auguste-Anne, with the unimportant difference that the sum demanded, in the usual way, was increased by passing through the middleman's hands. The seaman's eye had summed up the eccentric being more truly than the mother's could do, so long accustomed to the narrow horizons of lodgers. He had seen nabobs, had the seaman, and if this was not one, though a toad-eating Frenchy, blast his bowels, and so on, with a wealth of physiological detail. He demanded, accordingly, one thousand guineas; and when the Frenchy without turning a hair agreed, and told a servant to hand the purse, could have cursed himself blue for not asking double.

It must have been a curious scene, the three of them round the table in that foggy panelled room. There was the pinched respectable visage of the widow, who sat, telling over the coins with genteelly mittened hands; the tarry-tailed seaman striving to catch her eye with a wink, a plea not to give him away; finally the pantomime presence of Auguste-Anne Boissy de Mortemar, in his canary coat and wig twenty years out of date.

The tally completed--and it may be said at once that the mother never did give the seaman away; but to his blasphemous surprise, all that came to his pocket out of the surplus was two guineas, and those of a suspiciously light weight--the tally completed, it was suggested that Miss should be sent for, and informed of her good fortune. The sailor accordingly, not without protest, was banished; and

the mother accepted a glass of wine from her son-to-be, while they waited for the girl to appear.

She came at last, looking timid and frail against the dark panelling, and ran towards her mother at once. There was a quick dialogue, unintelligible to Auguste-Anne, which may have run as follows:

"Oh, mother, whatever's been happening? Have you come to take me away?"

"Sit down, Bella, don't look so agitated. Not feverish, are you? Well, then, sit down."

"But who is that man? What does he want here?"

"That's not a man, child, that's a rich gentleman. Bob to him, do; look how he's bending himself nigh-on double--"

"Oh, the brute, that's him that was in the coach!"

"Well, what of it? He'll make you amends. He's a gentleman every inch--" here the purse in her pocket gave an approving clink--"and I don't want no better for my daughter. Ah, you'll be calling on your poor old mother, my dear, in your own carriage before long."

At this point the girl, turning one horrified glance on the hawk-face which, while it had not forgotten dignity so far as to smirk, was at any rate attempting an agreeable grimace, burst into tears, and subsided to a chair weeping. Over her bent head mother and suitor exchanged comprehending glances, and with a further bow, and a word or two of solace, Auguste-Anne left his heart's choice to a parent's care.

The argument was not soon over. Miss Bella had read quite a number of the fashionable horrid books in which mysterious strangers carried off damsels to castles hung

with pictures whose hands dripped blood, whose lofty corridors resounded by night with female screams. To her otherwise untutored mind this dark personage was just such a being, and she had no fancy for screaming in corridors however lofty. She preferred, being a nice, ordinary, unadventurous girl, and a milliner's apprentice, to remain at home making bonnets for the gentry of Bristol, and told her mother so, as firmly as she could for tears. But she was no match for that lady, or for that lady's strict sense of honour, which having accepted payment, insisted upon delivering the goods. Finally to tears she opposed tears, louder, saltier, more abandoned. The daughter weakened, was assailed more closely, and at last yielded; on which the mother, her victory won, pocketed her handkerchief after a brisk final blast, and sent a servant to tell the foreign gentleman that the young lady would see him now.

Though the interview which followed from an English point of view could hardly have been reckoned a success, being in fact nothing but a series of silences linked by sobs, Auguste-Anne was not disturbed by it. Marriages, in his pre-revolution world, were entirely affairs between parents. Red eyes at the betrothal were to him only decent, a proof of sensibility, nothing out of the way. He looked his acquisition up and down, discreetly, not to cause her embarrassment, and putting his gleanings with the more particular information afforded by the housemaid who had undressed her, sat down content, and in good appetite, to the supper he had ordered.

III

The marriage, which took place soon, by licence, must have been an absurd and pathetic ceremony. Bella would have let it go over without fuss, swallowing Auguste-Anne like a pill, in private. Auguste-Anne himself, to whom a marriage service conducted by heretics was about as binding as a thread of cotton, would likewise have preferred to keep it quiet, and have the show on their return to Corazon in a climate better adapted to display.

But the mother was inexorable. Not content with the certainty of ease, she was determined that all Bristol should know of her divorce from the obloquy of furnished rooms, and of her daughter's elevation to a gilded coach. She had visions of lawn sleeves blessing the couple. Was there not, only a dozen miles off, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and was a Bishop any too good for a man who could hand out a thousand guineas without a blink, like so much copper? A thousand pounds in thy courts is but a day, thought the widow, transposing the psalmist to the tune of Auguste-Anne's pockets, while she urged making a semi-royal spread of it, and asking the Mayor. She even went so far as to broach the idea of the Bishop to her rector, but that humble priest was so aghast at the idea of asking the Bishop to drive a dozen miles, and don his lawn sleeves to join a milliner's apprentice and a person who looked like a pirate, was in fact so sincerely shocked at the notion of requiring the Bishop to do anything but exist, that she gave way, and relinquished her dear ambition. With the Bishop departed hope of the Mayor, and with hope of the Mayor the whole official character of the thing, so that in no time it had come down to a pullulation of captain's wives and millinery

companions, and the glory had quite departed. It was the Rector himself who undertook to marry them in the end, and the service at any rate was fully choral.

It must have been a grand sight--though some of the milliners tittered--to see the ruler of Corazon in really full fig, heels, wig, colour, everything slightly higher than ordinary. Even his nose seemed to have a more pronounced cant upwards at the bridge; but this may have been due to the amused contempt with which the whole ceremony filled him, comparing it with what his own witch-doctors and canons could do in the same line. A puffy post-captain on leave borrowed for the occasion from an ex-lodger gave the bride away, so that her mother, who could be perfectly the lady when occasion called or opportunity offered, might ply the smelling salts and be genteelly overcome. One unfortunate though picturesque circumstance was the intrusion of the seaman whose exaggeration had obtained for the widow five hundred pounds over her due, and who had been so smoothly bilked of his rightful commission. This unbidden wedding-guest, having waited till the ceremony was well under way, began, in a voice that in its time had competed with tempests, to deliver his version of the bargain which had resulted in the present ceremony.

He made a most unbecoming uproar, and his neighbours and the vergers, though scandalised, were too much filled with respect for the Lord's house, and also perhaps too completely scared by his appearance, to make effective protest. They remonstrated in whispers, which availed against his bawling about as well as a lady's fan against a hurricane; they looked with disapproval, or else feigned to

ignore. The rumpus increased with their efforts until the bridal couple, who had got to the exchange of vows, could hardly hear themselves speak; at which point it occurred to the groom that the noise, which he, accustomed to oddities in religion, had at first supposed to be an integral part of the Church of England service, was in fact an interpolation. Accordingly, not being troubled by any scruples as to the sanctity of the place, he put the ring back in his pocket, and leaving the bride to the clergyman's mercies, advanced towards the disturber drawing his sword; seeing which the disturber fled, vaulting pews, and escaped with a thwack on his backside, which split his breeches and showed a semi-circle of white, as though that part of his anatomy grinned. Having purged the sacred edifice of din, the groom returned at the stately pace to which his heels compelled him, and concluded the business of getting married with the utmost decorum.

IV

A ship for the West Indies sailed that night on the tide, and they went aboard her from the church. There was a good deal of the kind of British merriment which seeks to veil with jocosity the deadly possibilities of every marriage. There was a good deal of assorted liquor of the very best quality; rum for the sailors, and champagne for the puffy post-captain, and for the ladies a little mild punch with ratafia biscuits. After justice had been done to these, and all the refined jokes had been made--the vulgar ones are inexhaustible, but were confined to the forecastle--the captain, being anxious for his tide, cleared away the guests with nautical finality. There were tears, and on the part of

the post-captain, dragged from his liquor untimely, a protest or two; but he was prevailed on, and departed at last, weeping, between a couple of seamen. The widow was, as was right, the last to go. She was in fact anxious to be quit of her daughter, whose behaviour during the fortnight of the betrothal had shown a complete lack of gratitude to fate; but the girl clung, down in the dark and narrow cabin, and it was only decent to remain, and pat her shoulder and prophesy, and take every means to console and reassure. Thus the widow, though glad to leave, was last along the gangway. She had, as has been said, a strong sense of right, and never failed to pay the tribute of a gesture to virtue. Accordingly, she remained on the wharf in a fine mizzling rain until the ship was warped out and began to slide down-channel. Then, full of elation, charged with the enviable task of selling the gilt chariot and keeping what she could get for it, happy in the consciousness of a thousand gold guineas safe hidden behind the chimney, she made her way up and down the curling streets of Bristol, home.

Her conviction that she need never more let lodgings, and that she would ride behind four horses was proved true, for two mornings later she was found by her new servant lying before the fireplace, from which some bricks had been removed. She had been dead since midnight, and there was an ugly knife, of the kind that seamen carry, standing up out of her breast.

V

Corazon, not having been warned of their majesties' arrival, which in any case was far sooner than anyone expected, had no flags out as the ship crept in on a light

dawn wind to Seven Wounds Bay. The flagstaff was bare--it may be told here, unofficially, that the military had gone off duty the day after their ruler's departure, and the flags of three political systems had shared the same sea-chest for months. The wreckage of wattle and daub houses was still to be seen everywhere, and the master's eye, looking towards the summit of the cathedral tower, observed that the gilded Virgin who formed the wind-vane no longer caught the sun. His telescope sought her, for she was one of the chief landmarks, and it was customary to take a bearing by her at a certain point in the narrow entry to the port. But she had gone, leaving only her pedestal.

This was the first news that greeted Auguste-Anne when he came on deck in the most gorgeous dressing-gown of all his repertoire. He was not much upset by it; he was seldom ruffled by any event which did not intimately affect his own comfort, and the Virgin, though celebrated and useful to mariners, had never really captured his attention, save when he cursed her for predicting the devastating nor'-west wind. He stood still, watching the morning light grow pink over the town, and for some few uncounted minutes was completely happy; that is to say, he did not know himself to be so. He breathed, and existed, and ignored time, like a god, until a touch on his arm brought him out of the clouds to realise that he had been experiencing a number of outmoded emotions such, for example, as love of home. It was his wife at his elbow.

"Augustus," she began, "my love--"

She persisted in this form of address, which humbled her husband but which he could not prevail on her to drop. She