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AS YOU WERE!
a tale of the Nineties
~~Published through Gannet.~~

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Mine host of the "Angler's Rest" caught the warning in the eye of his visitor. Being a sensible man, he knew that an elderly aristocrat with a hawk nose and a square jaw was not to be trifled with, especially when, as in the present case, accoutred in the full panoply of an Archdeacon.

"Please do not forget for a moment", ordered the Senior severely, "that I am the vicar of the adjoining parish."

The words caught the ear of a loudly-dressed youth, redolent of horse and dog, who entered the tap-room at that moment with a lounging swagger, flung himself ^{to} on the settee in the bow window, and called for old ale.

"Certainly not, Dr. Bompas", replied the inn-keeper respectfully, as he hastened to serve the newcomer with a tankard of the foaming amber.

"It is an act of ordinary courtesy", pursued the Archdeacon, as if no interruption had occurred, "that has dictated my visit. It appeared to me not improbable that a member of my own cloth might welcome an introduction to the clerical society of the vicinity; and hearing, in the course of my matutinal ramble, that one of your guests was in Holy Orders, I determined to extend my peregrinations to this hostelry.

The rubicund landlord passed his visitor's book across the bar.

"I can't read the gentleman's writing", he explained; "I never had any call to ask his name."

The calligraphy of the person in question presented no difficulty to the archdeaconal eye. He read the entry aloud with a throaty relish. "Rev. Newman Justin Daly, Seamen's Home, The Causeway, Wapping."

He wiped his spectacles, and remarked amiably that in his spare moments it amused him to play with the fancy that he might have made an excellent detective.

"It affords much relaxation to my brain", he observed, "to pass an occasional hour in solving the puzzles and rebusses, or even the Chess and Draughts problems, which occupy the appropriate columns in some of our higher-class periodicals. I have frequently thought that much may be learned of a man by so simple a method as considering the import of his name. In the present instance, Mr. Ladd", he continued, ^{briskly,} "it is clear that your guest is of Irish family. We may further deduce an hereditary interest in sacred matters, since not the individual but his parents are responsible for his baptismal appellations. From the name Justin it is clear that his family was not ignorant of hagiology. It might even be plausible to hazard the suggestion that the name affords a clue to the day of his nativity. Still more remarkable indications occur to the mind in connection with the name Newman. It is at least probable that the great controversies which agitated the Anglican church in Victorian times, are responsible for the choice of the sublime, if mistaken, protagonist of the revival of Romanism in England as the first name of my colleague. So much", concluded the Archdeacon, with an amiable childlike smile, "the ingenious mind may

discover from so apparently indifferent a datum as an entry in the register of a Riparian Inn."

The Herculean occupant of the settee lowered the sporting paper behind which he had entrenched himself, and interrupted in a booming bass which might have been magnificent if it had not been for his hoarse and surly intonation.

"All Sir Garnet", he growled; "but maybe that isn't his name, and then where are you?"

The Archdeacon turned almost fiercely, hesitating for a moment whether to ignore the insolence of his critic or to crush him. He decided on the latter course.

"Do you presume to suggest", he rasped out with acerbity, "that a consecrated priest would condescend to an alias?"

The young man emptied his tankard and rapped on the table for more before replying.

"Perhaps he isn't a priest", came the slow malignant words.

The Archdeacon was undaunted. He countered with satirical lightness.

"Do you consider it decent, sir, to put forward the hypothesis that, in this age of education and progress, so blasphemous a masquerade would be adopted by any one calling himself a man?"

This retort, stinging as it was, merely drove his antagonist to a third line of defence.

"Perhaps he isn't a man", grunted the cantankerous youth; "great blue eyes like plates and a mop of curly hair and no more beard than a baby, and he talks as if he were afraid some one might hear him. Do

you call that a man?"

The old clergyman sprang instantly to the defence of his colleague. There was biting acid in the tone with which he replied.

"You will excuse me if I point out that there are different standards and ideals of manhood."

It was part of the business of the worthy landlord of the Angler's Rest, especially on Saturday evenings, to play the part of peacemaker. There were moments when alcohol inflamed local antipathies to the point of expression, or the jealousies of rival waltonians caused them to forget the obligations of piscatorial freemasonry. He hastened to intervene.

"The young gentleman is certainly a rum'un. I can't say myself as how I exactly cotton to him. If a man isn't a sportsman, bless me if I know how to take him. And what could have put it into the head of this here Rev. Daly to stay down here is more'n I know. He don't fish - As for that, Mr. Powell, no more do you. He don't go out of the house, not scarce once in a week. His lamp's going all night pretty well, to judge by the oil he burns."

"The midnight oil, the midnight oil", purred the Archdeacon in a mellow murmur.

"All he does," continued mine host, "is reading. His room's full of books, Latin and Greek, I dare say; I looked at 'em, couldn't make head or tail of the business. It's a queer sort of game, the way I see it."

"French novels, more likely", muttered Powell, half under his breath.

The Archdeacon indulged in a smile gently patronizing. "How old would you say he is?"

His host scratched his head. "A bit of a boy", was his verdict. "Two and twanty, mostlike."

"Very good, very good", remarked Dr. Bompas. "The case is perfectly clear, and represents no feature in the slightest degree unusual. It is obvious that Mr. Daly has come down here for a period of quiet study and repose. He is probably engaged in preparing himself for some examination, or in composing a thesis."

The figure on the settee refused to be mollified. He discarded his newspaper entirely, called for a further supply of old ale, and took up the cudgels once more.

"Likely enough", he argued, "on what you know. It's what you don't know that upsets favourites. My room is next to your studious curate's, and what he does after dark - well, I'm not going to guess; but whatever it is, I know I lose my sleep."

"He has possibly formed the habit of reading aloud to himself", suggested the Archdeacon. "Such was my own case when absorbed in my studies."

During this conversation Doctor Bompas had been attentively observing his opponent, whose appearance ^{seemed to} puzzled him not a little. For his age, enough of the hobbled ^ehoy remained to make it certain that he was not yet twenty-one. His dress and manners denoted the stable; and yet there was something in his carriage which the observer instinctively recognized as not being that of a servant; perhaps he might be the son of a rich bookmaker, employed by his father to tout for the latest

news in haunts frequented by trainers and jockeys.

Yet what could a boy of this type be doing down here? He had noticed his name in the register - Hopgood Powell, 1. Wellcome Crescent, Upper Holloway - and he had apparently arrived at about the same time as that very different specimen of mankind, the mild young curate. At the Angler's Rest, there was literally nothing to do but to fish. There were no hounds for many miles, practically no society, nothing to shoot, scenery of the tamest - it was the most forgotten corner of England; with only one merit, the excellence of the fishing. As to the quality of the young men's mind, the Archdeacon could diagnose dull obstinacy, mottled with patches of surly irritability. And yet he could not help being impressed by the ingenuity with which Powell had found positions, however untenable, to rebut his own common-sense speculations. He decided to draw the badger.

"Well, Mr. Powell", he said, with a pleasant smile, "I'm sorry indeed that you suffer from insomnia even in so ideal a haunt of repose as this Inn. I imagine, if you will pardon the curiosity and presumption of an old man, that you came here yourself with the very object of finding peace and forgetfulness. Terrible, terrible: insomnia! I have been at times myself a sufferer!"

Powell heaved a Gargantuan sigh.

"Indeed", he said heavily, "mine is a hideous story. You are not far from the truth. Yet that truth is worse than the most gloomy forebodings ~~you~~ ^{could} imagine. You see me, young, robust beyond the average; my worldly circumstances are easy, my heart is unscarred by love, my mind unburdened by thought of any description; I may boast humbly that

my conscience is as clear as cherry brandy, and being, like yourself, an Anglican, my soul feels as safe as the most famous masterpiece of Griffiths. What then can ail me? I rely frankly on the intellectual powers of which you have recently given so signal an example, to divine what doom has driven me to so desperate a deed as taking up my residence in this infernal inn."

It appeared as if the Archdeacon hardly caught the sense of these remarks, he was so overcome with amazement at the sudden change in the character of Powell's delivery. But before he could reply, the situation was altered by the appearance of a newcomer who roared a hearty greeting from the doorway. The three men saw a burly bronzed athlete who might have been within two years of forty either way. He was dressed in riding breeches and top boots, a check coat, a scarlet waistcoat and a hunting stock. He swung a heavy crop as he strode. Dr. Bompas went quickly to meet him.

"Why, this is indeed a pleasure", he chirped. "I need not ask how is my dear old friend, Squire Randall?" He put out his hand with peculiar vigour; his keen eyes darted a look of penetrating power as if to warn their object against some action which might disconcert certain designs which the two men had in common. Indeed, there seemed to be a momentary hesitation, covered by the exaggeration of the grasp; but it passed like the flurry of a started pheasant.

"Good gad!" thundered the Squire, "You're looking in good shape yourself. Well, Mr. Ladd, can you spare a drop of the old ale for a thirsty man?"

An acute observer might have remarked a shade of embarrassed

surprise in the manner of the landlord, as he grasped the Squire's extended hand before proceeding to serve him.

"Just rode over from the Hall", cried Randall; "couldn't pass the old place without taking a drop for the good of the house. Eh, could I now?"

The Archdeacon acquiesced, and remarked slyly that he thought he might break his rule for once, that some of the same would do him no harm.

It seemed that Powell was annoyed by this interruption to his conversation. He joined the others at the bar.

"Three I have had", he groaned; "I feel no better. However, I'll try what a fourth can do."

Bompas thought it better to introduce Powell to the Squire, and did so.

"We were talking", he went on, after the men had shaken hands and glared at each other the armed neutrality peculiar to new acquaintances in England. "I really came here to look up a young colleague of mine, and Mr. Powell and I were discussing the question as to what he was like. I fear our young friend is a mad sceptic. He threw doubts on all my theories." He gave a little laugh as he added, "He even suggested that Newman Daly, so far from being a priest, was not even a man."

"Daly!" cried Randall, slapping his thigh; "that settles the business. Rum; very rum, Mr. Powell! I'm sure you'll forgive me for saying that even the youngest of us may sometimes drop bricks. By all that's wonderful, Newman Daly! - rum, very rum! Damn queer - beg pardon, Bompas - how things happen. I was dining with Blackett and his wife last

night - Blckett's our local Galen - we played bridge till all hours. I sculled back by moonlight and, bless my soul, what should I see on Wareham Reach but a punt with two men! The face of one shone bright in the moonlight. I knew it - and yet I didn't! You know what I mean? But the minute you said Daly, why of course! He doesn't know me, but I know him. He rowed six for Oxford two years ago; no, three years. ~~So you see he's a man, Mr. Powell!~~ So you see he's a man, Mr. Powell!"

Refutation of an ~~idea~~ theory could hardly account for the look of consternation with which Powell received this remark, and there seemed no explanation whatever for the almost savage glance of reproof which the Archdeacon darted at the speaker. He hastened to turn the conversation. But before he could speak, the young man burst out:

"I don't understand. Some mistake. Daly doesn't know a soul here. Him row six for Oxford? - rats! That kid? He isn't eight stone four! And what would he be doing in a punt in the middle of the night?"

Bompas gave a deprecatory cough. "Mr. Powell", he said, very suavely, "was telling his troubles when you came in. He asked me to formulate a theory as to their nature, but in view of ^{the exigency of} the data he supplied, I frankly confess myself at a loss."

Powell accepted the challenge. "It may seem comic rather than tragic to men like you, who have faced life and conquered", he began with a certain dignity. "You have no doubt often thought how dull and imbecile are the sorrows of the Werthers, Hamlets, and other young men who take themselves and their woes seriously."

The landlord stared, uncomprehending; the two other men nodded and sighed, as if to say that they too had had their share of sentiment-

tal suffering.

"The world", continued the youth, "is like a backwater full of drainage, covered with slime, choked with sedge; no fish, hardly so much as a water rat."

Dr. Bompas murmured something about Schopenhauer, and Randall observed that he always felt that way after backing a loser, but that Blackett insisted on putting part of the blame on the liver.

"May I ask", interrupted Bompas in the sympathetic tone which he usually reserved for widows or mothers of unmanageable offspring, "the particular application of this affliction?"

"I could bear up against personal griefs", replied Powell in a melancholy monotone; "I almost wish I had one - a bullet to bite on, as you might say. But worse luck! The whole world seems such a rotten show! Here, look at this! This is the sort of thing!"

He lumbered over to the settee and returned with the newspaper. His thick forefinger found a column headed "Cried in the Cri", from a contributor known as Tom Thumb. The second paragraph ran thus; he read it in a voice of toneless despair, though it was obviously intended to sparkle with the sprightliest persiflage.

"The younger bloods are musing over a problem in theology which might have made Thomas Aquinas wriggle on his chair. If God helps those who help themselves, will he or won't he help the Duke of Durham? We all love Dolly, and we miss him quite a lot. We also mourn for him; and when we are through mourning, we wonder where he is, and why? And did he fall or was he pushed? He certainly helped himself in some sense, and yet we fear that some one helped to help him. Alas, poor Dolly!

Take him for all in all, we shall not look upon his like again!

"By the way, as the sub-editorial hangman snarls over my shoulder, this column may be read by somebody in Tasmania who will fail to catch the drift of these remarks, and forget to renew his subscription. I beg to inform him, with apologies, that Dolly Durham is our most darling duke; that he is a ward in Chancery, a legal infant who is liable to be sent to penal servitude for life if he should wink without the consent of the Lord Chancellor. Judge then of our anxiety at his elopement with the fairest and most fascinating flapper of frivolous France, Claire St.Lo, who danced her way into diamond dog-collar circles last year, and has broken her engagement at the Alcazar as if it were a mere man's heart, in order to commit matrimony with the aforesaid scion of strawberry leaves. The sleuths of Scotland Yard are baying on the trail, which has already led them to Algiers; the Sahara Desert has been divided into sections which are being systematically patrolled by aeroplanes. It can only be a matter of days before Dolly is brought back in chains and sent to build breakwaters for his contempt of Court; while his companion will, no doubt, be turned over to French justice to expiate her kidnapping in the climate of Cayenne."

"The Duke is a dear friend of yours, no doubt", said the Archdeacon sympathetically.

"Never met him in my life, and don't expect to!"

Squire Randall gave a chuckle. "Aha, you had your eye on the lady, eh?"

"No", said Powell, "I can't say that I know the lady. I wish the Duke joy of her."

The Archdeacon saw light. "There is a sympathy of youth for youth", he suggested pompously; "you feel their sorrows as if they were your own. A very noble trait."

"There's something in what you say", returned Powell; "and yet there isn't everything in what you say. What gets me is the rottenness of the whole business. Why can't chaps leave a chap alone? Here's everyone, from the Lord Chancellor and the police to this damned penny²⁻-liner and his Tasmanian toad-in-the-hole, chivvying this silly Duke, instead of frying their own fish - to say nothing of Claire whatever-her-name-is getting her claws in his fur. But he's the luckiest of the lot. I've heard enough about Dolly Durham to risk a bob that he can take care of himself. He rowed ~~the~~ three years for Oxford, and there isn't a better heavy, bar pugs, in England. He could dodge the devil himself, as any Oxford man will tell you. He'll clear the hurdles. And he's got the finest girl that walks - clever and pretty and straight as a die. He's in luck, all right. My sympathy goes to her for being tied up to such a walloping fish, having to waste herself on stupid society and all that. Oh, it's rotten, rotten! It's a rank, rotten show! Let's forget it. Another of the same, Mr. Ladd!"

The Squire and the parson exchanged bewildered glances. Powell's explanation of his anxieties made them less intelligible than ever, but it was calculated to excite their curiosity to the highest point. The Squire insisted.

"Excuse me, sir; but I must seem very stupid to you, but I really can't see where the shoe pinches. This Dolly, now" -

Powell cut him short with an angry gesture. "I said, let's forget

it!" he cried; "it's not to the point. I only took it by chance - one case in millions and billions, and all simply rotten. It's a rotten world", he went on, raising his voice, "a rank, rotten, ridiculous world!"

He stopped abruptly, and stuck his face into that of the outraged Archdeacon. "Mine", he said with grim intensity, "is a hideous story."

His hearers began to wonder whether Powell was not one of those lunatics whose mild melancholia, finding no focus, expresses itself in vague unreasoning pessimism without even being able to formulate a fanciful grievance.

But the current of their thoughts ^{was} ~~were~~ diverted. The door opened stealthily; with a gliding motion, without audible footfall, they were joined by the slight clerical figure of the mysterious curate. He addressed the Archdeacon with a charming modesty, free from embarrassment or timidity on the one hand, and from self-assertion on the other.

As he advanced, Powell withdrew to the window, abruptly yet ~~and~~ adroitly; the two elder men, facing the newcomer, could not perceive the extravagant vehemence of the gesture which accompanied the retreat. The young clergyman could not have failed to notice this strange conduct; but whether he interpreted it as a threat, or a defiance, he did not allow himself to be betrayed into shewing the slightest surprise.

"Permit me to introduce myself", said he in low clear tones whose musical modulation had no touch of affectation or artificialty. I happened to see you pass my window, and resolved to make myself known to you as soon as I had completed my hour of Patristic study.",

with the same impenetrable cunning of manner that had marked

his retirement, the horsey youth swooped back to the bar, and stood at the curate's elbow. A sinister sneer smouldered in his sidelong eyes.

"I am indeed glad to meet you", returned the other graciously. "I am Archdeacon Bompas, the Vicar of the adjoining parish. The cause of my visit was indeed that I heard of your presence among us. I may say that you have been the subject of our conversation."

Before Daly could reply, Powell turned upon him with a sort of malignant intensity.

"I may as well tell you", he said with a snarl, "I have told these gentlemen that I think you are an impostor."

The curate coloured and shrank back. He tried to speak; words seemed to fail him; Bompas instantly came to the rescue.

You mustn't mind what Mr. Powell says", he cried in tones of incisive authority. "The conversation has made it clear to us that Mr. Powell has some very peculiar and original ideas. Very interesting, very interesting, indeed, I freely admit; though I will not pretend that I am perfectly clear in my mind as to their exact purport in all cases."

"I twig", said Powell. "I'm not as dippy as all that. I saw you thought I was a bit balmy long ago, and so I may be - so may every blooming one of us. What's more, I believe we all are! That's my grouse, with six to the Ace-King-Queen. But I know a hawk from a hand-saw. Look here! Just for the fun of the thing, and no hard feelings - here's my quid, Squire Randall" ---

He slapped a sovereign on the bar. "Put yours to that. Let the

Archdeacon there ask Mr. Daly a few straight questions, and if he is not clean bowled in the first over, you take the pot."

After a moment's hesitation on the part of the elder men, the curate decided them to humour their eccentric acquaintance.

"I beg of you", he said firmly, "to feel no false delicacy about hurting my feelings. I demand as a right to vindicate myself after so open a challenge."

Randall gave a queer laugh, as if amused by something incomprehensible to the others. He slapped his stake on the bar and shook Powell's hand, with the words: "It's a bet!"

Dr. Bompas seemed far from comfortable. He eased his neck from his collar with a fidgety forefinger, but seemed unable to commence his cross-examination, except by repeatedly clearing his throat.

"Well, sir?" smiled Daly, who had completely recovered his self-possession.

Bompas collected his faculties, and asked where and when Daly had received Orders.

The answers came as quickly as the questions were laboured. Dr. Bompas professed himself satisfied. But Powell protested at the perfunctory character of the inquiry. He pointed out that any impostor could invent names and dates in the absence of books of reference.

"Try him on points of doctrine", he insisted. "He probably doesn't know the Thirty-nine Articles from the butt-end of a broomstick."

"Very good, very good," acquiesced the Archdeacon. "The suggestion is timely - very much to the point. Perhaps, Mr. Daly, you will give us your views on this matter of the Thirty-nine Articles?"

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"With humble deference", said Daly, "I believe them to be essential; very essential."

Dr. Bompas evinced the liveliest satisfaction at these words, but Poell made the sour comment that they scarcely bore witness to any profundity of knowledge of the subjects involved.

"It's up to you", he added, with insolent emphasis, "to give me a run for my money, when I'm betting against your friend."

The old clergyman could not resent the remark, rude as it was, and Randall himself banged his fist on the bar.

"Fair enough!" he shouted. "Plough the beggar, if you can!"

The Archdeacon seemed to be racking his brains. There was a moment of silence.

"I must ask you", he said at last, in severe accents, "to quote your authorities for maintaining the attitude, the wholly admirable attitude which you have expressed."

The curate raised his hands and spread his slim white, ^{elegant} fingers to tick off his points as he phrased them.

"In this company and place", he began, "I prefer to take for granted names so sacred as ^{those of} St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. John?"

"Yes, yes; by all means", concurred Bompas.

"In that case I will begin with Slewkenbergius." He watched the face of his questioner with the keen alertness of a skilled fencer. What he read in it seemed to satisfy him.

"Next, and perhaps greater", he continued, "we may mention Dean Schwenck Gilbert. I refer to the famous passage in his letter to Canon Leher in which he refutes Rabbi ^{de Souza} Cohen."

Bompas nodded appreciatively.

"Third, Archbishop Cranmer. After him, Ridley and Latimer's tract, 'The Candle'; Luther's 'Lustige Witwe'; Pascal's incomparable 'Viens, Pou-poule'. Need I enumerate the lesser lights?"

The young man's display of learning appeared to overwhelm the Archdeacon, who grew more purple and more ill at ease every moment. He replied by an apoplectic nod.

"In my turn", pursued Daly, as if roused to the point of inviting a controversy, "may I ask you to throw the light of your ecclesiastical experience on a question which has recently perplexed me?"

The burly Squire concealed his uncontrollable delight at the turn affairs were taking in the huge pewter tankard which Ladd had just replenished. Dr. Bompas seemed to have been struck speechless.

"What precise meaning", went on the inexorable Daly, "do you attach to that remarkable phrase of the twenty-sixth Article, 'The validity of canonical exegesis is neither independent of, incompatible with, nor insusceptible at, the coherent consubstantiality of ecclesiastical custom?'"

The Archdeacon smiled a pitying smile. "Ah me, my dear young friend", he answered unctuously; "there speaks the voice of youth. How well I recognize my own early enthusiasms! Surely you know that this sublime passage which troubles you has been the source of equal perplexity to the very greatest minds in the Anglican Church? how can you expect me to elucidate a difficulty which has daunted men as superior to myself as Sir Isaac Newton to a Chinese coolie?"

At this answer the curate turned, with a glance of mild triumph,

upon his accuser.

Powell pushed grudgingly the two sovereigns over to Randall.

"Oh, well; you seem to be the real thing", he muttered. "But for all that, there's lots of things about you that look to me just a bit off. What does a pillar of learning and the church, like you, want in a punt when everybody's in bed except the prowling poacher and the busy burglar?"

"I take it", answered the curate with mild reproof, "that you have not been privileged to move, to any great extent, in what I may term University circles? You may not be aware that night and solitude, amid scenes breathing the peace of Nature, are favourable conditions for the pious exercises of meditation."

"Now I've got you", retorted Powell; "whatever else you are, you're a liar. You talk about solitude - how does the other man in the punt fit in with that?"

At this fierce onslaught, Daly seemed to shrink into himself. It was as if a pit had opened unawares beneath him.

But while the two younger men had been confronting each other, the Archdeacon had taken Randall quietly by the sleeve, and whispered earnestly in his ear. The Squire saved Daly by walking up to Powell with the demeanour of a provoked pugilist. He made hardly any pretence of politeness, saying point-blank:

"It's all very well for you, Mr. Powell, to pick holes in the conduct of unoffensive strangers, but I want you to know, without any beating about the bush, that you need to be explained yourself."

"Oh, do I?" growled the young man. "All right, what is it?"

Cough up!"

Dr. Bompas intervened. "We don't wish to create any ill feelings", he began in conciliatory tones, "but, as you have yourself admitted, you are rather a curious character,, with your somewhat aimless suspicions (if you will pardon my saying so), and your incomprehensible dissatisfaction with the Universe, to say nothing of the incongruity of these psychological points with your physical appearance. But, beside all that, your presence in this district is undeniably mysterious. In default of an intelligible motive, I am bound to say that to the censorious it may seem calculated to arouse suspicion."

The young man gave a dreary laugh.^u "Aren't we all in the same boat?" he growled. "What are we any of us doing here, or anywhere? Aren't we all incongruous? Isn't all life mysterious and meaningless? Tell me the motive of anything in creation. You know the church can't do it, philosophy can't do it, science can't; why bother with one penny puzzle when everything's a rotten riddle?"

"You exhibit remarkable ingenuity in evading our inquiries", returned Bompas. "Excuse me if I press them."

"Anything to please", replied the other. "I am a human being, male, born twenty years, eleven months and nineteen days ago. My father was a ~~farmer~~ sort of farmer with a taste for racing. Part of his life he took some interest in soldiers and all that. My mother never did much more than keep house and gossip. ^{He was} the eldest son, two brothers, one went soldiering, one went to sea. Three sisters, two of 'em married, one to some kind of preaching chap, t'other to a fellow in Canada, or one of those places; the youngest still to let. As for myself, I got

the usual sort of schooling. I'm fond of anything in the open air. I drifted somehow up to London, and got married, like a young ass, to a fairish sort of kid - nothing to talk about, I dare say. She suits me well enough, and that's the main thing."

Dr. Bompas had pricked up his ears; he exchanged significant glances with the burly Squire, whose expression indicated that he had suddenly seen a great Light.

Daly had listened to this speech with keen attention, as if to see whether he ~~could~~ spy any opening for revenge. The last item, apparently, suited him.

"Forgive me if I ask how it comes, in that case, that you are here without your wife?"

Almost in the same breath, the Squire burst out: "You haven't told us how you earn your living!"

"My father left me a bit", explained Powell, "and I make a bit at cards and on the ponies. I rub along somehow. About my wife - that's what I'd like to know myself. If she isn't here, why isn't she here? Ah, you're right there - it ~~would~~ be a wise man that could tell me what she's doing now!"

"You don't seem to take it much to heart", said Dr. Bompas.

"You don't seem to be looking for her very hard", Randell chimed in.

"You don't seem to have a proper sense of your responsibilities as a husband", cried the curate sharply.

"Oh, she's all right", drwled Powell lifelessly. "I don't worry one bit about her. I can find her when I want to. About my duty - that's

all poppy-cock. When she complains, it's time enough for me to fuss!"

The Archdeacon pursed his lips with displeasure. "You still avoid any direct answer as to the reason of your presence here."

Powell gave a snort of impatience. "Oh well, oh well", he grumbled; "if you must know, I'm here because I like the place. I know this part of England pretty well. One moment, now! Where do you live yourself, Squire?"

There was a momentary pause. Bompas flashed a commanding glance at his friend.

"Greenleigh Hall", answered Randall, with obvious unwillingness.

"Rising out of that answer", cried Powell quickly, "what has happened to Sir Archibald Barker?"

The most superficial observer could hardly have failed to see how inconvenient a question had been put. The Squire darted a savage glance at his friend, who returned it with a subtle smile. The diplomatic landlord swept two glasses to the floor, and began an incoherent lamentation.

Randall took advantage of the confusion to go to the window, and exclaim that his horse had got loose. On this pretext he ran out of the room, leaving his friend to bear the brunt of this unexpected counter-attack. For a full minute, his eyes met Powell's in a silent contest of will. Then the young man said in a low voice:

"May I have the pleasure of a few words in private?"

The other man assented with a certain suppressed eagerness, and followed Powell through the winding passages of the inn to the large

bed-sitting room, overlooking a deep pool, where the young man was quartered. Its owner threw himself on a couch, and motioned his visitor to the huge basket chair. Neither of the men seemed willing to speak. The silence became oppressive. The soft noise of the eddying water began to get on their nerves.

"I'll see you", said Powell at last. "It may be a busted flush, after all. I have to know - put down your cards."

To this strange speech the Archdeacon seemed at a loss to find the proper reply. He attempted to gain time.

"I don't understand", he said, half angrily.

The other yawned as if to imply that assumed obtuseness was a diplomatic mistake.

"I'm not the kind", he said with a sort of haughty weariness, "to give away something for nothing, and, as it happens, it's rather hard to avoid committing myself, even if I tell you what you very well know that I know about you."

"Perfectly true", flashed back Bompas, "but you've done it, you see, in saying that. You may as well put it plain."

"I'll risk it - it doesn't matter so much after all. I think I can guess the length of your foot within a few inches. I don't mind saying this much then. Of all the archdeacons I know, you are not the most archidiaconal."

The other man looked honestly puzzled.

"I did expect a man in your line", pursued Powell, "to jibe at Dean Gilbert and Canon Lehar, even if you didn't include Slawkenbergius in your repertory. You should, though; it's pitiful that persons

don't model themselves upon Sterne."

Dr. Bompas permitted himself something between a blush and a wince.

"I know my limitations", he apologized; "but I would hardly have foreseen that I should have been called upon for quite such technicalities. That swine let me in", he growled.

"I observed that your colleague had his own sense of humour", smiled Powell appreciatively. "However, to put it plainly, cucullus non facit monachum."

"Another blind spot", confessed Bompas, with the air of a convicted bluffer.

"Yes, a few Latin tags would help out, as Thane Cedric discovered in his visit to Front-de-Boeuf's castle. In English, the collar doesn't make the clergyman. You are no more a priest than I am a poet. My little book of verses merely proves it."

"All right", said the other, beginning to show irritation at the air of contentuous superiority with which he was being treated. "But not an Archdeacon, what am I?"

"That I don't know", said Powell, "and I certainly don't mean to guess. But I do want to know, and what's more, I jolly well mean to know, what you're doing down here in this comic costume, and what you want with my reverend neighbour, the curate?"

"I've nothing to hide", came the answer in very decided accents, after a pause, as if he had made up his mind with an effort; "I'm doing my duty. I'm an officer of justice - I have the Lord Chancellor's warrant in my pocket. On information received, I came here with my colleague.

We have been on a false trail. The people I'm after were pretty spry with their red herring. It came to our ears that two very curious cards were staying here. We thought it worth looking into."

"Very interesting, I'm sure", returned Powell nonchalantly, stretching himself and yawning. "Would it be impertinent to enquire whether I may offer you my congratulations?"

The other man scratched his head. "I can't say, I'm sure", he admitted. "You do look a bit like the party I want, and that fellow Daly might be the other. But what beats me is the way you talked. *if* you're my man, we know you are as clever as they make 'em. Then why did you start that hare about Daly being funny?"

"That might be explained on the principle of 'The Purloined Letter'; but like so many other explanations, it would be totally wrong."

"Why don't you put your own cards down?" asked the other; "whoever you are, there's a lot about you that looks pretty rum."

"There is", admitted the youth. "We thrashed out all that in the bar. But let's get to business. If I were what you think, what about it?"

"I should have to do my duty and ask Your Grace to accompany me to London."

The young man jumped up from the bed as if he had had the surprise of his life. "What!" he cried; "you think I'm Durham! By jove, that's really too rich. That's something to tell my grandchildren! You don't really think anything so absurd", he continued more soberly; "do tell me how ever you got the idea,"

The man in black seemed staggered. he bit his lip.

"Spit it out, Sherlock!" cried Powell.

"Well, you see", said the other, "we know His Grace likes his jokes. When you were pulling my leg in the bar, you said some queer things. You told us a pack of lies; and yet, if you are His Grace, they were perfectly true. The late Duke was a kind of farmer - /30,000 acres was about his mark. He did have a fancy for horses - won the Derby twice; and he was interested in soldiers - First Life Guards, Colonel; and Secretary for War after that. The Duke's brothers, same game; and his sisters, one married a Bishop and the other a Colonial Lord-Lieutenant."

"Dear me", that's exceedingly clever! But after all, it may be only coincidence; far stranger things have happened. You should read up the transactions of the S.P.R. It must be one of the dangers of really brilliant detectives to rely too implicitly on their fascinating ^{ul}facilities."

"You can't put me off like that", came the obstinate answer. "If you're not the Duke of Durham, who are you?"

"That's hardly your business, is it? I'm not the Duke; why prolong the agony?"

Before the elder man could reply, his opponent stopped him with an imperious gesture.

"But about your duty? **I**s that such a pill-box? I don't want to insult you, but couldn't you put the glass to your blind eye if the other eye saw something pretty? This duke of yours seems pretty clever - why not clever enough to make your employers believe that he fooled you? Professional pride is all very well in its way - but is it as good^a as, shall we say, a thousand in cash?"

The tempter's prospective victim paced the room in perplexity.

"That's plain talk. You've as good as admitted you're caught."

"~~But~~ ^{Not} the least in the world. I'm only putting a case."

"I don't see why it matters so much", answered the old man. "Another two weeks, you come of age. The worst that can happen to you is to get a rap on the knuckles for contempt of court."

"Put with your customary acumen", said the young giant. "With me it's merely a matter of personal pride. I object to being caught as much as the oldest trout in the pool here. Besides, I'm on my honeymoon. It would bore me extremely to break my routine of daily dalliance and romantic rambles after dark. The one thing I loathe is lawyers."

"Well", said the other, shortly, "if I did say 'yes', what price Randall?"

"The same price", drawled his antagonist coolly. "Tell you what, I'll go and get him."

The other man shook his head. "That cock won't fight. I know him - he's a fanatic about duty. What's more, I wouldn't do it myself. It's not so much the principle of the thing, but if it ever came out - my career is worth more than a thousand pounds to me."

"No harm in talking it over", replied Durham. "I'll go and get him. Give me ten minutes; if I can't convince you by then, all right, go ahead and arrest me."

"It's a deal. I'll help you to find him."

The young man smiled to himself at the simple-mindedness of this human bloodhound, who knew so little of the ways of the quarry he spent his life in stalking as to suppose that the Duke of Durham would condes-

ced to the ignominious expedient of escape.

They found Randall chatting calmly with the demure young person with the big blue eyes, and the quartette returned to the pleasant river-side apartment. The Archdeacon broached the subject with almost indecent directness. The indignation of Randall was unbounded. When at last it found words, they gushed forth in a stuttering storm. The blonde figure in the curate's costume positively quailed at the vehemence of Randall's outraged integrity. The stipulated ten minutes were fully occupied by his unbridled eloquence. It came to an end only because of the limits of physical endurance. The horsey youth's face fell like a barometer before a hurricane, and his accomplice's blue eyes were dimmed despite all the efforts of resolution to repress emotion.

"Well, it can't be helped," said the baffled tempter, rising to put an end to the scene. "It's a fair cop, I believe is the correct expression. I'll come quiet. I suppose you don't want to clap the Darbies on me?"

Both men protested that they had not dared to dream of inflicting such an indignity.

"Will it be all right", asked their victim, "if we go up to town in my car?"

His captors consulted in whispers.

"Quite the proper thing", said Bompas. "We don't want any fuss; we want it to look quite natural and friendly."

The little party adjourned to the bar, where the principal defendant insisted on a final round of drinks.

"I have persuaded my friends here", he said to the landlord, "to

join me in a little spin. Expect us when you see us."

The worthy host of the Angler's Rest effusively wished them a pleasant excursion. Five minutes later, they were on the road to London, laughing and joking as if, by common consent, they had forgotten the serious object of the journey. The Squire ralked his colleague with boyish ebullience as they approached the "adjoining parish".

"So these are our pastures", said Randall, mockingly. "what a pretty old church we have! Have you prepared your next Sunday sermon, my dear Doctor?"

"Oh yes," laughed back the other; my text is "The wicked flee when no man pursueth".

"I didn't flee", the victim of this gibe retorted from the wheel, "and I could have got away clean if I had wanted to. I spotted you almost from the first. I don't want to be rude - I only say this to encourage you; but your disguises are awfully thin. You can't get the style - no amount of perfection in detail will make a man look what he isn't."

"I confess the failure", replied Bompas; "but, after all, it served its turn. The proof is that we've got you. Besides, such acute observers of life as Your Grace are the rarest of mortals. Our disguises are quite good enough to deceive ninety-nine men out of every hundred."

The hundredth man gave an incredulous gesture.

"Very good; I will prove it", replied the other with a shade of irritation in his tone. "Stop when we come to the vicarage."

A delightful old house, in an admirably kept garden, stood just beyond the church. The owner of the car obediently came ~~down the path~~

to a standstill opposite the porch. A moment later, a dignified manservant came down the pathway to the curb.

"Lunch for five, James; and tell Parker to put this gentleman's car in the garage."

The man addressed as James, whatever he may have felt, manifested no mark of surprise. He bowed and opened the door. In bewildered amusement, the two young people, arm in arm, followed their seniors towards the house. At the door stood smiling an elderly lady, who received the party as if the leaders were in fact the Archdeacon, which he was.

"I know you can keep a secret, Ellen", he said pleasantly, "and this is a ~~Private~~^y Council one. Let me present Their Graces the Duke and Duchess of Durham."

"Mrs. Bompas received her romantic guests with unaffected delight, and asked Sir Archibald Barker after the health of his family.

"Lunch will be ready in twenty minutes", promised the purring hostess, after the first few commonplace compliments, and directed the butler to put the best spare room at the disposal of the new cheerful culprits.

The heavy-footed youth closed the door with exaggerated care. His eyes met those of his companion, and the room shook with innumerable laughter. The blue eyes were the first to clear away their mist. "we must keep it up", said their owner, setting his delicate jaw with extreme firmness. "It would break their hearts & they're enjoying the time of their lives."

"Keep it up? You bet! A lark like this will go straight to the pa-