



II

MR. SHEEPHANKS had just completed twelve months in Japan, where he occupied a nearly unique position. Possessed of a modest income, less than his wife's, and reluctant to become in any way indebted to her, he had readily accepted the post, on a commission basis of payment, of manager to the Mission of British Culture to the East, a more ambitious travesty of the French association which, having introduced into Japan some years previously at considerable expense the 'Le Baiser' of Rodin, had been deeply chagrined to receive notice from the Police that this piece of sculpture was detrimental to public morals and must be covered up immediately. Veiled in official sackcloth, it moped penitentially in the Ueno exhibition hall, amidst a mob of syrupy nude groups by Maurice Denis, etiolated tribads by Marie Laurencin, and Degas ballerinas, displaying every available petal of lingerie, none of which were found to be provocative, since they were not engaged in the act of kissing which, associated exclusively in this country with the extreme embrace, must on no account be represented or even hinted at in public. The 'Kisu' was rigidly excised from all the films as they came over from Hollywood; darkness would fall abruptly while the faces of, say, a Valentino and a Gish were still some few centimetres apart.

Mr. Sheepshanks was not taking any risks; so far, indeed, was he from challenging the Japanese moral code that his imported objects of virtu reflected nothing but

the wholesome tone of the British bourgeois. His collection included canvases, thoroughly workmanlike if a little heavy, by Sargent, Nevinson, Bayes, Wyndham Lewis, Farquharson and William Orpen; impeccable bronzes from the ghetto of M. Epstein; while 'slim volumes of verse', fragile masterpieces by John Oxenham or the Sitwell family, lent a home-like and suburban air, truly English, to the pair of rooms he had secured for a permanent depot at Aoyama Roku-chome, next door to the Pocahontas Presbyterian Publishing Syndicate.

Something gentle and shrinking in his character, 'a couple of feminine cells stowed somewhere about him', as a medical student had suggested, had rendered the notion of a business career, with its ugliness and its trampling in the mud, repugnant to him, though he was not averse to, and even felt himself talented for, the making of a trifle of money. He had developed artistic leanings ever since he had heard his mother exclaim at the vulgarity of the Pre-Raphaelites, from one of whom she was immediately descended; but by the time he reached his majority he was compelled to admit that if he could appraise to the wonder of all the 'arty' undergraduates of his year, his attempts at drawing excited their mirth even in periods of sobriety. During the Christmas vacation of his fourth year at Oxford he retired to Paris with a friend who admired him, in order to read steadily for his impending 'finals', and so happened to meet M. Rottembourg, the dealer in antiques, who was at this time paying court to Madame Foin, proprietress of the pension in the Rue Napoléon at which these two boys were staying and unconsciously entertaining an heterogeneous clientèle, all languishing for a subject to gossip about. M. Rottembourg, an astute Hebrew, was not long in discovering that 'ce

petit Anglais' had the gift of discernment—he spotted a Wenzel Hellar and a Della Bella without hesitation. 'You are as good as a Jew', he cried. 'Go to Munich and study a year under Professor Zaunpfahl and you will make your fortune'. Mr. Sheepshanks passed an industrious year at the feet of that ovine Semite but did not proceed at once to make his fortune. The war intervened, a devastating tidal wave that landed, simultaneously, himself as commander of an agricultural labour company at Berwick-on-Tweed, and Mr. Podler at Richebourg l'Avoué as a temporary Guardsman, where he won military crosses and otherwise made himself a nuisance to the contiguous battalions by organising model raids that set up the most vicious artillery reprisal imaginable, costing the Rutlands and the Vectensian Light Infantry severe and totally unnecessary losses.

It was typical of the two men that Podler should move Heaven and earth to get his commission in the Anglesea Guards, who only occupied the hottest places of the front line, while Sheepshanks volunteered, as he openly confessed, solely in order to avoid the opprobrium and discomfort of the pacifist's martyrdom, and, once commissioned, made the most of his somewhat ailing habit of body because he 'wasn't going to risk his precious life as long as there were any general service men left'. Such insensibility pained his Colonel and coloured so adversely his confidential report that he never rose beyond the rank of full lieutenant-acting captain, while in command of a detached company. Podler, on the other hand, was invalided out, twice wounded, and with the permanent rank of Major. 'Veniet felicior aetas', remarked the former as he resumed his civilian attire and habits, only to find the Board of Education established in his beloved Prints and Drawings Department of the

South Kensington Museum. It came, after some coy hesitations, with a rush ; in a month he had won some notoriety by discovering the *Little Passion* by the almost unknown Master of Sluis, and sexual and spiritual satisfaction by marrying Alba Healing, who had quarrelled with her eccentric father and launched out as assistant to Mr. Seligman, habitu  of Christie's and Willis's and expert in eighteenth century furniture and Waterford glass, a familiar figure in Duke Street, St. James's.

The next move of Tristram Sheepshanks was bolder and less fortunate. He discovered, and attempted to publish, the truth about the Stetson El Greco, that sombre yet lurid Crucifixion, with Philip II. as the Wicked Thief, which is now the crowning glory of the Metropolitan Museum of Buffalo. As luck would have it, the Tammany B. Thurst group of journals were so heavily bribed to shout him down—and strangely enough, the London Scatworthy ring adopted a similar tone—that the public remembered Dr. Bode and pronounced him to be a quack, although the painter of the El Greco was actually a friend of his, a Mr. Jones, of East Sheen. But Sir Chidiok Dhuinewassail, who had had occasion to dismiss Mr. Jones from a subordinate position in the Bloomsbury Gallery for borrowing a couple of Lazzaro Baldis, which were indeed returned soon after Solly Gupta, plutocrat and amateur of the school of Cortona, left heavily laden for Cape Town, believed and esteemed Mr. Sheepshanks, though he was too clever to protest publicly on his friend's behalf ; he saw where the trouble lay. Envisaging the whole situation, he determined that recompense should be made to Mr. Sheepshanks, but in such a manner as might save the faces of those concerned in the purchase of the undoubtedly spurious El Greco. It would never do, for instance, to quiet him with an official position in a

Museum. Just about at this time the British Mission of Culture was conceived by several enterprising spirits led by Mr. Seligman, and sufficiently recognised by Government to give it something of a cachet, as a profitable dumping venture; the market was getting cluttered up at home with modern eccentricities; the Japanese were known to be eager for 'the latest thing'. A tactful and energetic manager might feather his nest comfortably while heightening British intellectual prestige—why, it was the very job for poor Sheepshanks, who would thus be safely exiled in another hemisphere, and probably kept too busy to return to the charge. Besides, unless he was a fool, he would realise that he wasn't supposed to take the handsome commissions that were sanctioned for nothing. Wires were pulled, cigars consumed, and Mr. Sheepshanks presented with first-class passages for himself and his wife.

Mrs. Alba Sheepshanks was thrilled at the prospect of Japan. After a course of Lafcadio Hearn and Yone Noguchi, she built in fancy a glamorous and flowery paradise, the childishly naïve and idealistic population of which, too spiritual for the common levels of earth, took their tea and rice in frail lacquer eyries, scrupulously clean and scented with evanescent whiffs of incense, on liliated mountain ledges. And now, unexpectedly to realise her gossamer imaginings! To stand at dawn when the plangent night-heron swoops shadow-ward, on a red and gold bridge, and listen to the faint kissing shock of lotus-buds as they broke outward into stars, white or pink, in the tortoise-haunted pond before the slumbering temple; to wander down the naves of twisted pines in Hiroshige's Tokaido, to glimpse the silhouette of a drooping courtesan in the mode of Utamaro, thrown on to a lemon-lit paper window at dusk. Such were the delights that she anticipated on the

deck of the *Madrepore*, as it throbbed gently into Tokyo Bay on a serene spring morning, all cobalt and emerald. Ten minutes after disembarking at the desolate port of Yokohama, the pristine hideousness of which had been accentuated out of all measure by grimy red wreckage heaps scarcely touched since the earthquake of 1923, she met a long four-wheeled waggon drawn by an ox, and laden with neatly coopered little barrels, and it was thus that she first encountered one of those unimaginably dynamic stenches which, seldom mentioned by those who describe the Orient, are nevertheless predominant factors in the 'make-up' of this beautiful country. One becomes inured to them after six months steady inhalation; but at the first impact the world so staggered, as it were, before this cargo of crude sewage on its way to irrigate the market gardens, that she missed the golden comeliness of the ox and the charm of its leader, a nut-brown rustic in cotton trousers, so dyed as to represent blue bricks with white pointing—or of the brilliantly garbed and pretty children who were sailing paper boats in an open sewer near by. A greyish film seemed to creep between her and the sun, and Japan became at once sordid, miasmatic, infinitely horrible. She nearly wept with nostalgia for swept and garnished England, with its municipal scavengers and Urban District Councils, when she discovered that her romantic dream country was an immund garbage-heap. Following close on this first experience came a half-hour in a second-class railway carriage, like an old-fashioned tram in which one sat sideways to the direction of the train, upon dingy benches of blue plush. The floor was littered with orange-peel and paper, some of the latter having been obviously used as a pocket handkerchief. Tigerish glottal noises accompanied by a display of tonsils, explained the presence of half-a-dozen brazen spittoons.

Tooth-pick and ear-spoon were plied with the greatest gusto, and finally, the day being warm, a fair number of the male passengers stripped themselves down to vest and long 'pants', removing their (generally elastic-sided) boots, and squatting on the benches, or going to sleep at full length, with a display of long, diagonal and many-coloured teeth. This time Alba wept silently behind a newspaper.

After suffering from an acute nervous depression that verged on suicide for two months, she recovered suddenly to find that, after all, there was much beauty, even though it was marred by the disgusting manners of the inhabitants—disgusting, indeed, to the over hygienised English sense. The dead, grey gleam of roof-tiles ceased to fill her with loathing, the untidiness and litter of house refuse that filled vacant suburban lots and afforded a crèche for both flies and infants became, if not picturesque, an inevitable and not too noticeable part of the landscape. People assured her that there was more ugliness in North and South America, more dirt in China. The natives seemed on the whole an easy-going lot, whose habit of staring at foreigners was due more to curiosity than truculence, though xenophobic incidents would, of course, crop up from time to time. If the tradesmen regarded strangers as fair game for extortionate practices they would greet them with smiles so disarming that one felt inclined to forgive; while the mobs of little boys that swarmed from imperceptible alley-ways to yell 'Baka!' and 'Seiyo-jin' would have been amusing if they had been less afflicted with chronic nasal catarrh.

She caught glimpses of scarlet and gilt porticoes at the end of cryptomeria avenues, of green-mantled moats defending titanic feudal masonry, lichened and silver in the spring rains. This was the genuine thing; so, too,

was the itinerant who woke her with cries of 'Natto, natto', in a haunting modulation, and the night vendor of Chinese style macaroni, whose deeply moving phrase on the oboe combined the paganism of Debussy with Scriabin's mysticism. On mountain slopes where the russet volcanic grit had mellowed, rose irises, funkias and golden-rayed lilies in their season; salmon-trout leapt like steel falchions in lakes that now filled ancient wooded craters, and the egret, an arrow of snow, mirrored himself on surfaces that even the Japanese could not defile.

Given a sporting chance, Alba could be warranted to idealise anything for a time. It was a trick she had acquired from her father, rusty old Herbert Healing, M.A., Oxon., headmaster of Sea-View preparatory school at Bexhill. With him it had been now flagellation, now the Montessori system, or now again Yogi breathing. The boys might be striped one year with corporal punishment, and spotted less locally the next with the eruptions produced by a strict vegetarian diet. Thus drilled to be everything by starts, Alba now succeeded in re-idealising Japan, in persuading herself that it was the last asylum of adventure and romance, and that squalor was the price to be paid for a whole nation with an artistic temperament; look at the Middle Ages in Europe, and so on. And truly, despite a swift Americanisation, it preserved an abundance of old, unhappy, far-off things, among whom the profane reckoned an unexpectedly large number of worshippers of Pater and Oscar Wilde.

Mr. and Mrs. Sheepshanks believed that the interior of a house should express aesthetic experience, and be comfortable—in that order of merit. It was found impracticable to live entirely on the straw-matted floor, since their legs refused to adapt themselves to the manner

of sitting in which they must be bent double at the knee, an attitude that would cause excruciating pains after twenty minutes. Besides, Tristram Sheepshanks wanted to expose some foreign pictures for business purposes; a compromise was plainly indicated in the modest little Japanese house. Alba, after some lessons in flower arrangement, could turn out a quite creditable, if not impeccable *tokonoma*; the gold-powdered yet subdued papering of the sliding doors was the best of its kind, the tones of the unpainted woodwork, pines and cedars with undulating grain, were balanced to a nicety. So, as far as was possible, they managed to preserve something of the cool reticence of a Japanese interior without tormenting either their limbs by squatting, or their eyes by consenting to purchase the greened oak office-style furniture upholstered in red cotton velvet, which the salesman in the Kurokiya department store rightly assured them was all the rage among go-ahead Japanese who had been to Jersey City, and surely ought to know. Rather than do this Tristram resolved to appropriate to his use (and did) certain articles from the 'Collection', into which Seligman had thrown some duplicate antiques; some silvery, dry-point fantasias by Callot, a few baroque audacities from the burin of Hondius, and—unique perhaps in Japan—a set of (first) Empire furniture which he decided to put on the market only if the 'modern stuff' failed to sell readily. Otherwise he would buy it of Seligman out of his commission. But by declaring, in anticipation of the truth, that it was his private property, he turned it into a useful decoy duck. Rich Narikins with artistic foibles would be asked to dinner and to admire it. 'I'd sell it like a shot if it wasn't an heirloom', he would complain. 'My wife's poor old grandfather left it to us; he only died last year. The old gentleman was threatening to be a centenarian on a diet

of port wine and rump steaks. But look at these ; the living idiom of the age, my dear man '. Then out would come the Bombergs and the Gertlers and the Nina Hamnets, which, the Narikins would see t once, were far more likely to dazzle one's admiring friends than faded old sticks of furniture. One of the aesthetic sensations of the year was to enter, duly slippered, the lobby of Mr. Takahashi's new mansion in Azabu, built in the ferro-concrete, Egypto-Gothic style, and as one's eyes recovered from the sudden gloom, to start back in amaze from the apparition of a colossal negroid woman, nude and excessively fat, divided, as though unskilfully drawn and quartered, by quasi-geometrical lines. This piece of expressionist charcuterie, so justly admired by Mr. Warren Hastings Grelot, was the work of the Academician, Gonzago Paës ; England and the States having displayed an unaccountable reluctance to purchase, after vicissitudes in Paris, Florence and other equally irresponsive art centres, it had come East with Mr. Sheepshanks, to whom it was a blessing, if disguised.

But in his own house he took care to maintain the sobriety of educated inhibitions that passes for ' good taste ', supporting a prevalent monochrome with discreet but not insipid colours in a manner that came as a pleasant surprise to Mr. Podler, who at the very entrance hall recognised a type of culture with which he had long been out of touch. But other surprises, less pleasant, awaited him in the shape of Mrs. Furtwaengler who ran not merely all the Quaker Sunday-schools (there were two) in the country, but, as she believed, Totsuka ' high society ' as well ; and of plump little Mrs. Ditchling, naturalised German wife of an English schoolmaster, who liked to take the fullest advantage of his second Christian name, Smith, by wedding it with a hyphen to

the surname. Smith-Ditchling ; there was little in that combination to suggest Jno. Ditchling, Pork, County and Family Butcher, Bury St. Edmunds ; and Mrs. Ditchling, *nd* Toni Schramm, had so much to say about their connection with the Civil Service (Uncle Gehazi had been on a Board of Guardians) and her own border ancestry that they were beginning, in the phrase of Mrs. Furtwaengler, ' to get away with it ' . Toni made reverent love to the Bavarian Ambassador, who had a weakness for morsels of the plump, blonde type, albeit a harmless and amiable weakness, his own wife, a native of New Orleans, being vulgarly known either as Batouala, or the white-eyed Kaffir. One of Toni's plans, of which she had several, was to attain to sufficient standing in the foreign colony to get well ' in ' with the Embassy crowd, and then to go home and mingle with Foreign Office people, which might lead to introductions into heaven knows what high places. It was an old game, but Mrs. Furtwaengler happened to be playing it, too, and so both women detested each other. As ill luck would have it, both had chosen that day upon which to cheer in her morning solitude the lovely Alba Sheepshanks, who would far rather have been consuming a little gin and vermouth, the *Weekly Times* and many cigarettes against her husband's return.

Mr. Podler knew and loathed both these ladies, who had pursued him as soon as they discovered, independently, that his uncle was Lord Tyburn. Lord Tyburn, the heaviest bore and ultramontane who had ever left that papistical clique which good Protestants believe to sway the Foreign Office, for an offshoot of it which is as plainly pulling the strings behind the League of Nations ; a dullard whose chief pleasure in life was to have young men call him ' sir ' . Trust a republican, whether from Franconia or New England, to be snobbish in the way

the English used to be in Thackeray's time, he grumbled inwardly.

Mr. Sheepshanks made a wry face, and fortified himself with a Bismuth digestive tablet. 'I seem to recognise those voices; two of our champion climbers, I think. Anyhow, they'll go as soon as we show ourselves'.

'Waal, neighbour Sheepshanks, I'm real glad to see yer. And my! if that ain't Mr. Pahdler!' screamed the Quakeress, anxious to get in before her rival. 'I'm *verry* glad to have met you both, but I mustn't keep you from your food'.

'No, indeed', snapped Mr. Podler, unable to contain himself. He examined her large, flat feet, a process which he had found to be effective in annoying her, although she eschewed high heels on hygienic and spiritual grounds. But she must not show that she was rattled; Quakers and society leaders never are.

'Anyway, I hope to see you at our Fellowship dinner. Prince Goto'll be there', she added reverently. She employed the same intonation for mention of God and the Nobility.

'Good Lord, that awful woman!' Podler was beginning to say, having arrived at the stage at which he could only allay his irritation by rudeness; but she had already turned away to bestow on Alba one of her well-known dazzling smiles—and even if she heard it, her hide was notoriously thick.

To Mr. Sheepshanks Toni Ditchling lifted a short 'kimono' sleeve so as to reveal all the soft whiteness within. He seemed impressed, she thought with satisfaction; far more amenable to this kind of persuasion than the saturnine Podler. He had once told her inadvertently that he knew Jubb, the editor of

Poetry Bits ; and she had already published several passionate lyrics in the *Argus*.

These two unrestful women having vanished in a rafale of interjections, Podler sat down to consume a second cocktail and to take in his new surroundings. For some reason, partly perhaps because he had been annoyed at the absurd ladies, he felt slightly ill at ease, and deprived of the mental balance requisite to making a good first impression ; and the resentment he felt at having been so ruffled, aggravated by so much alcohol on an empty stomach, prompted him to venture an unfortunate remark, which was intended to sound familiar, humorous and unembarrassed, yet to strike at the same time the virile note that he believed to be characteristic of him.

‘ I should like to put that woman across my knees and spank her’.

Before he got to the end of the sentence he was hot all over with mortification. Mr. Sheepshanks winced visibly. What would Alba think of the company he was keeping ? She might forbid him ever to bring home any more friends, since, in addition to the discomfort of this solecism, there was probably some annoyance at the prospect of providing extra food at short notice. Hastily he endeavoured to create a diversion with one of his jokes which, in keeping with his preoccupation over matters of health, were medical in tone, but generally feeble.

‘ Oh, I wouldn’t let people like that worry you too much ; they can’t help it. You see, climbers are merely sports who retain the arboreal instincts of their ancestors ; or it may crop up through some endocrine disturbance. . . .’

As usual, Alba ignored him ; with a pleasant contralto laugh she turned to Mr. Podler and said, ‘ How interesting ! Which one ?’

‘Both for that matter’, replied Podler, immensely relieved.

‘They make me feel pretty much that way myself’. She contracted a creditable biceps. Fine arms; these short sleeves displayed them well.

‘Well, as a matter of fact, I think Mrs. Furtwaengler needs it the most. She’s a miserly old body as well as a snob. They say she makes the whole family fast once a week, simply to save on the bills, and she pretends it elevates their souls and bodies or something. And then did you hear about Mann? She let their house to Mann while they went on furlough last year; and when they got back she wrote him a perfect snorter accusing him of having made her house “a place of low repute”, whatever that may mean, and of stealing a frying-pan. She went about telling everybody that Mann was something worse than a thief. As a matter of fact, the “low repute” business arose out of her having found a couple of empty whisky bottles, and of course she’s a prohibition maniac; and she found the frying-pan a few days later put away in a cupboard where it ought to be. She had to climb down a bit because Mann was beginning to make a fuss’.

‘Oh well, we won’t make you fast here, Mr. Podler; we’re both greedy’.

As they moved towards the dining room Mr. Sheepshanks was heard to protest. ‘I can’t see that I’m greedy; I do a fast myself sometimes on Guelpa’s principles; internal cleansing, you know, the secret of longevity and all that. You have to . . .’

‘Oh, Tristram! None of that now, for Heaven’s sake!’ Alba knew that his hobby led him sometimes into technical and too intimate blind alleys.

There was certainly something better for lunch than an ‘harlotrie Shotterell’; the prawns in aspic, the salmon

trout and the Moselle were admirable ; no trace of Dr. Guelpa here.

Mr. Podler, a trifle consciously, took mustard and pepper ; had there been Worcester sauce he would have taken that too, as an act of self-expression. The manly man, especially if he had lived in the Orient, had a taste for hot condiments. To appear virile and efficient was his constant care, the more so because he felt quite often a little diffident about it. Sheepshanks made no bones about his femininity, his slightness and his general ineffectiveness ; yet unaccountably, and in his unobtrusive way, he seemed to be making a pretty good thing out of his cast-offs.

The silence, though a compliment to the quality of the meal, was becoming unduly protracted ; to start the verbal machinery again Alba used one of the usual clichés.

‘Where are you going for the summer—Osakai or Karuizawa ?’

‘Karuizawa ?’ cried Mr. Podler. ‘No thanks ; I’ve been there once. They go the pace a bit too much for me there ; it’s a perfect hot-bed of Futwaenglerism. I did go once and found I was the only person in the hotel, barring the Japanese, who hadn’t a Rev. before his name. I got rather fed up with hearing the daughters of Yankee Nonconformists picking out Moody and Sankey hymns on the harmonium with one finger, so when I saw there was a concert advertised I thought I’d go. Mrs. Schieberman, who teaches music and plays execrably—you know when you ask her to play she vamps the first four bars of Schumann’s Symphonic Variations and then says she’s not in form to-day—well, she said it would be wonderful ; “intellectual music” was how she put it with a sanctimonious expression. So I fought my way up the street through open-air services, dodged an old

lady who was roping in stragglers to the Winnipeg Presbyterian Prayer Meeting, and slipped into the auditorium just feeling right for a little Bac' or something like that. I'm not one of your musical pundits, but now and then I like to hear something good'.

Alba began to look superior, as she prided herself on her musical lore.

'Then, good Lord! I nearly had a fit when I saw the programme. "Rachmaninoff's Prelude, by Sadie Zimmerman; Song, "Mighty lak' a Rose", Mrs. Furtwaengler (of course); Saxophone Solo (Abe Hertz), by the Rev. S. Matsudaira, M.A., Knox College", and so on and so forth, till we got to Hymn No. 436, "There is a door"; address by the Rev. Prof. or the Prof. Rev. Studebaker on "A Silver Lining". "The Concert will be closed with an extempore prayer by Brother Bunz". I crept back to the hotel and had a stiffish whisky, but even then my luck was out. Just as I was beginning to feel a little better, a fat, brazen-looking female in a blue straw poke-bonnet plumped herself down on the other chair at my little table and said, "Sorry to interrupt you, young man, but we all want the Lord, don't we, these hot days?" It was Staff-Colonel Susan Richings of the Salvation Army, oozing Quebec at every pore. For a whole half-hour she enumerated the advantages of attending the grand Concertina Tattoo they were going to give on the Booth centenary, I think it was. I had to promise I'd go simply to get rid of her. Her last words were, "Blessings, young man. But take my advice, and quit that Devil's hooch you've got there". So I took the night train to Osakai, and that's where I'm going next week'.

'So are we', said Tristram in his precise tenor. 'There's no place of worship there more aggressive than a delightfully dreamy Zen monastery. In the old days,

of course, Osakai was troubled with Nichiren's religious revival. I always think Nichiren must have been something like a cross between St. Paul and the late Lord Northcliffe. Do you know, I'm quite convinced that in many ways the Japanese are more civilised than the Americans'.

'Quite possible; but what on earth's Nichiren got to do with it?'

'Well, he was persecuted in the Middle Ages; and then Christians were chopped up by the early Tokugawa Shogunate; but nowadays they're just letting themselves be swamped with every kind of superstition; but then on the other hand philosophy is allowed to have an equally good run for its money. Modern America isn't like that. I expect you remember that affair in Texas a few years ago when a pastor shot a Darwinian in church. (That's what comes of going to places of worship and similar low haunts.) Mechanically the Americans are ahead of us; commercially too, if you like. But intellectually and spiritually they're behind us, and in some ways behind the Japanese. They're somewhere back in the Evangelical period of the early nineteenth century, I should say; you know, the period of *The Way of all Flesh*. I'm speaking of the average American bourgeoisie, or whatever roughly corresponds to it. Our bourgeoisie's bad enough; I think I have a right to say that as an "arty snob"; but theirs is far more regressive.

'Think of the clothes and shapes one sees at Karuizawa; the bovine faces, all bigotry and stupidity. They remind us of the old daguerrotypes of our great-aunts and uncles that we used to be allowed to look at on Sunday afternoons when we were good children. They're the sort of Cow-college Fundamentalist leaven that ferments anti-evolution persecutions in the whole lump'.

‘They’re making martyrs, that’s one thing’.

‘Yes, but, my dear Podler, why make martyrs? Martyrs are a sign of that emotional, anti-classical mode of thought which you rightly abhor. Where reason reigns martyrs become unnecessary’.

‘What about martyrs to science then, Tristram?’
Alba had to shove her oar in.

‘Why, my dear, that’s a newspaper phrase; people who accidentally catch dermatitis through not taking the proper precautions with X-rays are a very different thing from people who are deliberately persecuted by their fellow-men. The Americans have not grown out of the age of faith via “good sense”. Perhaps their history was too short to have an Augustan age, sceptical and mellow, which might have sobered down their hysterics; they pass straight from Cotton Mather and witch-burning to Bryan and prohibition. When they *do* become “scientific” and “modern” in the sense poor old Chesterton used to deprecate—that is, in the sense that science will take the place of belief—even then they’ll be fanatics, and turn science into a new religion. Materialists’ll “beat up” Baptists and prosecute schoolmasters for talking about Adam. I often wonder why they’re so emotional. They have every variety of climate—or do the jazz-rhythms, especially the kind called, I believe, “hotsey-totsey”’—(he pronounced the syllables with disgust) ‘and the fanaticism appear at their wildest in certain climatic belts? Or again, it might be diet; if one trained on hot dog, pumpkin pie, graham flour, ice-cream sundaes’ . . .

‘Oh Tristram, drop it, for Heaven’s sake! Let’s talk about something human for a change. Listen! There’s Inez on high G sharp. Do you think Inez is pretty, Mr. Podler?’

The voice of the Salvaraguan Minister’s wife cleft the

sweltering afternoon and, like it, was extremely tropical and passionate. A Debussy-Verlaine song. Mr. Podler, assailed at once by the question and by the sound that seemed to be the very 'death-cry of starving sex', remained for a moment uncomfortably silent. But Consuls, he remembered, are never rattled; efficient men are slightly cynical.

'Well, I should say beautiful rather than pretty. She's so panther-like, and always has the easy air of being about to seduce one'.

'Diet and climate again', interpolated Sheepshanks exultantly. 'The highly-spiced Latin cuisine which did so much in Southern Europe to exterminate the characteristics of Langobards and Ostro-Goths' . . .

Alba refused to be drawn. 'If I could love a woman—which I very much doubt—(you don't mind my being frank about these things, Mr. Podler? it's so Victorian not to be . . .)'.

Dreadful woman; afraid of being Victorian; how provincial!

' . . . it'd be her. I adore the Latin peoples; they're objectively romantic and subjectively so rational'. She had picked up this piece of nonsense from Schoolmaster Ditchling, who fancied himself as a psychologist and a maker of *mots*. 'Yes, as you say, one feels she could prevail on one any moment of the day'.

Though gazing into space abstractedly, the large dark eyes of Alba Sheepshanks, which, while the effect was natural, appeared to have a cincture of some black collyrium, had not failed to note the transient discomfiture of Mr. Podler. Even the bold remark about Inez that he had dropped as camouflage was, she decided, against him; a more inexperienced person would have incriminated himself less by reticence.

Her hair, deftly shingled, was as curious as her

eyebrows ; strangers, including Mr. Podler, were deluded into the belief that she must use huge quantities of peroxide to maintain that chemical brass colour ; but, as a matter of fact, she used very little. She quite obviously shaved and painted her eyebrows ; who did not ? Her mouth was audaciously reddened, yet she managed not to look nearly as common as one would expect. Indeed, Lord Lulmehay of the Anglo-Catholic Oil Company, when he came East to settle the big Navy contract, was heard, during a lull in the hubbub of the Empire Day garden party, to observe, ' I can't make out why that woman doesn't look like a whore '.

Her self-indulgence, especially in the matter of drink, had begun to tell a little, but a little only, on her figure ; whisky and soda is, for some people, as fattening as oil-cake. There were men who admired her all the more for this ' opulence ', but Mr. Podler certainly preferred, and prided himself on preferring, the litness of that creature of rose, ivory and ebony, Inez Cavara.

Alba left the two men for her afternoon nap—the only way of getting through those torrid post-prandial hours of discomfort and heaviness. Mr. Podler showing symptoms of interest in the Master of Sluis, Tristram soon established the friendliest relations with him over a portfolio of Paul Sandby and other aquatintists, and found him an intelligent fellow.