



## VII

*T*HAT Sunday morning upon which Inez, in an expiatory mood, was attending Mass at the convent of the Flaming Heart, brought to Alba a crapulous headache and a deplorable temper. To Tristram, who, while fitting an ice-bag to her temples, intimated that he was invited that day to tea and dinner without her, she replied, 'Well, for the Lord's sake go and let me have a little peace.'

As soon as he was gone she would take several tablets of Calmotin, or perhaps something stronger; smoking, with a throat like the proverbial 'bottom of a parrot's cage', was out of the question.

Below her left breast the feverish labour of her heart might be observed; she lay nude on the tumbled bed so that the eternal sea-breeze that stirred into cool babbling the lacquer-red glass bells at the window might soothe unimpeded her tortured body.

By three o'clock, after an artificial sleep, she knew she would recover sufficiently to be seen in public. She hoped that someone amusing would call; meanwhile, there were eight repulsive hours to be disposed of. She crept to the window in time to see her husband, on his way to the harbour, pass a tall orange poster on which the word 'Vocadlo' screamed in the crudest cobalt; the advertisement, no doubt, of some exhibition which that ridiculous woman intended to make of herself. With a sigh she turned toward the medicine-chest.

At one spot in Osakai Bay, that glorious curve of sand

and pine-trees, the soft limestone crops out ; and here, with the aid of a small mole, something of a harbour had been contrived that sheltered, not merely the fishing boats, whose sun-blackened negroid crews squatted about on the quay in white loin-cloths and enormous conical straw hats, but a fleet of coquettish centre-board yachts, all white paint and brass fittings, the property of the members of the Osakai Sailing Club. Fore-and-aft rigged, and stouter than the cedar-built half-rater of the Thames, they would have looked clumsy tacking up some willow-flanked reach near Staines, or set in a peristyle of Lombardy poplars, guarding a marigold-spangled temenos near Bablock Hythe ; but in the stern male winds of the Pacific they were as flimsy and capricious as schoolgirls at a flower show ; to gybe in any one of them meant a sousing, but certain craft of the number enjoyed an even worse reputation. Thus, the *Samo-thrace*, better known as *Stammering Sam*, might be relied on to get into stays at any critical moment, while the keel of the flagitious *Cerf Volant*, irreverently re-christened *The Bumboat* by Mr. Miles, her proprietor, was almost as frequently visible above water as her snowy wings. The truth was that the original boats of this class had been built years ago, shortly after the Meiji Restoration, to the specifications of an old sea-captain who, together with his friends, had a passion for yacht-racing ; wonderful, sea-worthy little craft, that would stand anything short of a typhoon. As these decayed—and they out-lasted the good old man—they were replaced with tolerable accuracy by local carpenters who preferred, nevertheless, to work by the light of nature rather than ‘ ad amussim ’ ; slight faults in construction appeared which, like ‘ drift ’ in a language, increased with each succeeding generation of boats ; so that by the time under review (Captain Evan Jones, R.N., Atlantean

Naval Attaché, being now Commodore) only four out of the twelve retained an all-round reliability. The *Pegasus*, over-weighted in the bows, developed an alarming tendency to nose-dive before a strong following wind; the *Gypaëte* sailed better without than with her kerchief of a jib; the *Lamia* sat on her stern with her bows all in the air, whence her agnomen of *The Duck*. The whole fleet 'now danced and sparkled frivolously at their moorings under the mole, while the fresh pea-green morning ripples slapped familiarly at free-board and stern.

Thither were bent the feet of Messrs. Kurrie-Lewer, Miles, Sheepshanks, Pinkney, Pullborough, McGonigle and others, including not a few ladies eager to take advantage of the south-easterly breeze. A race was fixed for 10.30—it had been postponed the previous afternoon out of deference to a turtle. This animal, a large specimen, had come ashore yesterday an hour before the ten-minute gun, and was immediately purchased by the rich and attractive Mrs. Nagaoka, who, according to immemorial custom, placed before it two quarts of saké of which it rapidly disposed, painted her name in pink enamel on its shell, and having thus assured for herself long life and good fortune, launched it once more upon the deep. At her earnest entreaty that the return of the turtle, now, as the malicious hastened to point out, like Alba, somewhat elevated, not to say buffy, to its native depths might in no way be impeded, Commodore Jones gallantly proposed that the race should take place on Sunday morning, there being no missionaries at Osakai. To signify her gratitude Mrs. Nagaoka offered a special prize in the shape of a silver turtle whose tail, when pressed, released a carillon so insistent and continuous that no servant could ignore it.

It was wise to postpone the event for this handsome

gift alone ; but besides, as Mr. McGonigle waggishly declared several times (often to the same person) he had noticed, coeincident wi' the turrle's departure, a varra severe ground-swell sic as had no' been experienced in the Oorient since an unsuspecting young shairk, as yet unvaired in the wuckedness o' the waurrud, having inadvairently conshoomed a well-puckled old rubber planterr off Singapoorr, had caused a tidal wave as he expired in a' th' aagonies of alcoholic poisoning.

Mr. Sheepshanks' boat, the *Caccubioni*, suffered from an unnaturally large mainsail, which rendered her practically unmanageable when it blew at all, and Mr. Sheepshanks could not swim. But those boats had at least the grace to float when capsized, and anyone but a fool could jump clear of the sail. Moreover, Mr. Sheepshanks had a queer flair for sailing not unrelated, perhaps, to his queer flair for bric-à-brac. When the wind happened to be just exactly right, which happened, McGonigle would bray, 'Whenevver a blue mune fell in the Greek Kaalends', he could make the *Caccubioni* romp in first by at least six minutes.

Mr. Podler, discovering his friend to be no tyro, had consented this day to act as crew, that is, to manipulate jib and centre-board ; there was no danger of an accident at present in this moderate and stable Sabbath breeze.

As they met on the frail wooden staithe that ran out from the mole into the very heart of the assemblage of ships, Podler regarded his timid-visaged little skipper with the soft brown tuft and moustaches, which recalled to him the plumage of young partridges, but which had incited Mrs. Moses Walker to say that he was 'so Christ-like', and the gold-rimmed pince-nez, a conscious remnant of Edwardian days, curiously, even wonderingly. In all justice it must be said that his attitude was

now purged of rancour. Somehow it was impossible to blame little Tristram ; nothing was ever really his fault. But Podler was deeply perplexed at the ironic turn taken by events, whereby this man, so neutral, so unobtrusive, so patently designed for the quasi-monastic life of a museum assistant, holding precariously even on to the affections of his own wife, should be flung into the arms (for this he believed to have occurred) of a beauty ' de luxe ', while he, ' attractive as a rule, surely, in his rather brusque, sullen way to women, should have met with two, negative indeed, but definite repulses on the same day. He was clearly the more suitable person of the two to have been craning over Mrs. Miles's chair beneath the wistful lantern. That he had not done so was the penalty of having allowed things to drift. Go early and often to the attack, that should be his motto in future. But the strange part of the thing was that this policy actually favoured some people—Tristram, for example. Appetencies, appetencies ; they got to work in spite of the quiescence of conscious endeavour. Mysterious things ; but surely Tristram's (just look at the man) could not be stronger than his ? Yet in the unconscious plane you never knew. Or was there anything, after all, in the cant phrase, ' A special Providence ' ? He hoped not. Better the ridiculous rantings of W. E. Henley about one's head being bloody but unbowed (he thought of M. Fabre's as falling within the former category) than having to trust to celestial caprices, with no say in the matter. M. Fabre's triumphant air had been highly offensive yesterday morning. That blue umbrella. . . .

The blocks chirruped as, he at the main and Sheepshanks at the peak halyard, the *Caccubioni's* dazzling mainsail danced galvanically up the mast, spasm by spasm. Mrs. Nagaoka, with a camera, stood, mothlike and wayward, at the end of the mole beside the Havarian

Ambassador, official starter of the race, and Mrs. Smith-Ditchling who, had she been cleverer, would have masked her naïve delight at being seen in such good company.

The excitement of manoeuvring for positions at the starting-buoy drove cares and speculations from Mr. Podler's brain. He was forced to admire the dexterous calculations that Tristram was evidently making to be through the pirouetting throng and on the line as soon as the last gun went. They crept up almost dead into the wind, the rush and surge of the cloven water diminishing to a steady lap-lap at the glistening bows. Pop!

'Ten seconds!' cried the Ambassador through his megaphone, which gave him the appearance of a trumpet-faced sea monster, 'neun, eight, seven, sechs, five, four, tree, two, VON!' Again the revolver popped, and the whole fleet swung jauntily over for their long tack out to sea, the turning point being a flagged buoy at the opposite flanking salient of the bay. Did I say a'il? No, one, the *Duck*, captained by Ensign Pullborough, was left waltzing in a grave ecstasy ten yards behind the starting-buoy, while the blisteringly unsabbatical language of the young officer suggested to Mrs. Nagaoka that she might spend an instructive morning at home with her dictionary—and she thought she knew English! Mrs. Smith-Ditchling, inwardly scandalised, found it chic to ejaculate, 'Poor little boy! Du armes Kind!' But the Bavarian Ambassador, no less a mystic than a 'ladies' man, looked down his nose. Beauty! Well might Croce call it the expression of an intuition of reality; but this blinding white apocalypse of eager sails lured one on further and further away from accepted reality (as the Ambassador accepted it, if not as Croce, it was the ultimate self-identification with the

Universal) into a company of spirits issuing jubilant from celestial portals. Heaven's carnival! A *bal masqué* of saints. But as he moved away from the ever-diminishing flash of seraphic wings and pondered upon the confusion of thought prevailing in the world of Aesthetic, he murmured, 'We need a philosophic academy'.

Mrs. Ditchling, utterly at sea, did her best to look serious and sympathetic. She reflected with satisfaction that she had given up her place as crew in her husband's boat to Lady Negge, who would be giving dances next autumn as soon as Sir Thomas returned from the Tariff Commission at Peking.

Mr. Sheepshanks did not win the musical turtle, which fell to Professor McGonigle, ably supported by Malvina Bugbird who, in return for her services, stipulated that he should take her out cruising all that afternoon. She wanted to study the sea carefully ('the graph-like paraboloids of the waves, as Derek watched them, seemed to assume inhuman and at the same time perturbingly fleshly contours'), to describe with accuracy the parts of a ship, to make convincing the atmosphere that was to surround Commander Derek Sarras, who was, in the fourteenth chapter of her novel, to be exhausted mentally, physically, financially, by a harpy at San Paulo; but this process was at the same time to prove his ultimate salvation by straightening out all his complexes. Malvina was anxious to avoid all such pitfalls of inaccuracy as had damaged the reputation of Ouida, or even caught Miss Sinclair when, in *Tas:er Jevons*, she made Woolwich Arsenal defeat East Kent on Blackheath football ground by two goals to a try. No; in *From the Outer Sea* the bowsprit should not get mixed with the rudder sometimes. She had prudently modelled her sex psychology on that of Mr. Lawrence, with the happiest results, except that, perhaps out of

deference to her spiritual master, the word 'loins' recurred a little too frequently. 'What on earth', McGonigle had asked loudly when Mr. Ditchling was also present, 'do you want to make your novel sound like a pork butcher's shop for?'

But she knew she was right, and that McGonigle was a backwoodsman who liked Henry James; and went boldly along her way repeating daily the formula, 'The young intelligentsia writer is correct and efficient, passionate, audacious, but not romantic; wise and witty rather than clever and epigrammatic, following James Joyce rather than Aldous Huxley'.

Mr. Ditchling, always the little gentleman, handed, tenderly and gallantly, the twelve stone of Lady Negge from his boat. He was wearing a blazer whose garish vertical stripes must pass for the colours of the Authentics Cricket Club, but which he had actually won as champion basket-ball player at the Basingstoke Training College for Teachers. His accent was acquired through intelligent contact with some public school officers in the Army Service Corps, his manners largely from a South German friend of Toni's, who had assured him that to kiss the hands of ladies in drawing-rooms was 'sehr schick'. Mr. Ditchling kissed with the greatest regularity.

'P'raps I might bring it round to your place some time?' he was saying in tones of extreme candour.

McGonigle nudged Malvina. 'Listen to Ditchling calgung for invitations as usual, the chlorotic little slyboots'.

'Oh, please don't bother, Mr. Ditchling; I'll send my servant round for it. It's *so tiresome* to have to move about in this hot weather unless one's positively *got* to, isn't it?'

'Lord cheers, Malvina, shrieks of silence'.



As usual, a small crowd of Japanese had collected at the quay-side to stare, unblinking, at the outrageous and noisy antics of the foreign devils. A few middle-schoolboys would pause in their play, which consisted of exchange of spit with some little girls, to shout 'Goot-o-bye!' A wrinkled old dame, exceeding bald and still possessed of one or two black-dyed teeth, signs of respectability in a bygone age, scrutinised Yoshiko and Noriko Takamatsu, the dear little things, and deplored the immodesty flaunted about by modern Japanese girls, who took to short skirts, flimsy frilled knickers and flesh-coloured silk stockings. After all, the Ronins of the Keio era were quite right and sternly ethical when, if a pair of them chanced upon a lonely, unarmed foreigner, they carved him up before he had time to grunt. Judging from the serenity of her ancient face, one would never have suspected her to be pouring out such chauvinistic sentiments into the ear of her daughter, a stout, squat woman with tails of slatternly hair wisping from her nape, girt up for the laundry so as to display the appalling red flannel 'koshimaki' which takes the place of the Western pantaloons, while she suckled a two-year old boy. One or two flies settled inquisitively on her vast greenish bosom.

Unnoticing, the foreigners passed slowly to lunch, conversational particles emanating corona-wise.

'Yon felly wi' the purrple whuskerrs. . . .'

'I don't know what it is, but that man makes me shudder; he has the "entkleiden" look. To have him dancing round me—eueugh! . . .'

'Oh, Mister MacGonigle! You *do* make me laugh. . . .'

'We used to call him the seven-leagu'd candlestick. . . .'

'Yes, the *Argus* is bossed by a pack of Yanks and Yids; no wonder they turn out such ghastly tripe. . . .'

The sound-rings broke, intersected, narrowed like pressed honeycomb cells to an infinity of teasing angles, the whole complexity warped landwards by the wind.

The Takai Hotel absorbed much of the party, including McGonigle, whom Malvina wished to stand a lunch. So exhilarating to entertain men to lunch; the emancipation, the camaraderie—*la Garçonne*. ‘Have a cigar, *dó*. *I’m* going to. Brandy or Kummel?’

Kittenishly she patted his shoulder to indicate a short cut.

