THAT FLESH IS HEIR TO . . .

OR

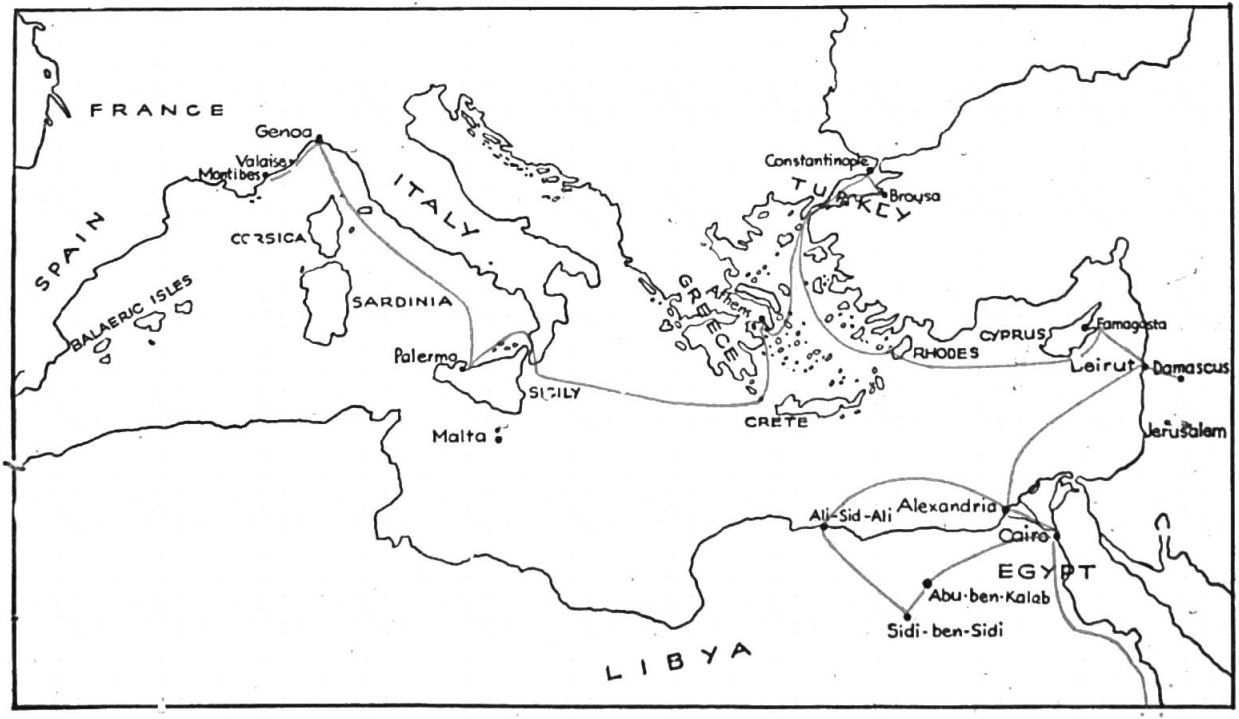
THE HISTORY OF A BACILLUS

". . . Disease, then, represents this struggle for life, and it is in this sense an advantage: for without 'diseases' man would quickly fall victim to the injurious agents which surround him. Man is essentially a potential invalid, since he is a potential battleground in his struggle for existence. Disease is the chance of victory."—Alan Moncrieff, in an article entitled "The Nature of Disease," in the *Nation and Athenæum*, March 16, 1929.

". . . Man may be a potential invalid, but he is not an invalid by choice."—*Ibid.*

I

WHEREAS a man can only die and be born once, the race of microbes suffers a thousand grievous deaths in each human recovery and is born anew, a million times triumphing, in each corpse for which it has hungered, and as I hope to show, planned. But this very wealth, this plethora of energy, makes it hard to compress the birth, the upbringing, the career of a germ within the space of a short story: more difficult, indeed, than to force into the same compass the span and achievements of a human life. There are other reasons, too, that force me to regard the task as a piece of work not lightly to be undertaken. This story is essentially


FRANCE
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Brousa
GREECE
Athens
CRETE
RHODES
CYPRUS
Famagosta
Beirut
Damascus
Jerusalem
Ali-Sid-Ali
Alexandria
Cairo
EGYPT
Abu-ben-Kalab
Sidi-ben-Sidi
LIBYA

one of adventure, and it is not easy, for example, even with the aid of a map, to concentrate so much picturesque geography, so much tragic social-history as it demands, into a few pages. Nevertheless it seemed, in spite of all obstacles, that the experiment was worth attempting, if only because I would fain place my little offering of personal observation as a tribute upon the altar of science.

Yet, being no professor, I am not compelled to take up with this subject a whole volume, however well it might be filled. All that duty imposes on me is to state the story, and to indicate, for the benefit of those who specialize in such things—but who, not having the imaginative-writer's outfit, cannot detect for themselves the connection between these footprints in the sand—its subsequent and certain developments. If one were to write a life of that Count of the Empire under Charlemagne who was the founder of the Este family, it would be well, as throwing light upon his destiny, to indicate that he was the common ancestor of the royal houses of England, Saxony and Ferrara: but it would be obligatory on one neither to prove their descent, nor to write the history of every later member of the family. So, too, I shall not essay to correlate the microbe, which is the invisible but most potent hero of my story, with his obvious descendants, interesting as such a digression would be, nor to dwell upon the more crucial and public stages of that career of conquest which found its culmination in the dengue-fever epidemic that devastated Greece in the autumn of 1928, and in the influenza outbreak of the winter of

1928–9 : a wave which swept across the whole world. That is the business of those who come after, and whose calling lies in such research.

A microbe, I have said, is the hero of the tale which follows : and this necessitates that, when it so suits the author, the hero should be regarded as both singular and plural, as an individual and a tribe, as a great general and a mighty army in one : nor is this all that one is forced to demand of the gentle reader, for, since microbes neither marry nor are given in marriage, the hero is also heroine, is masculine and feminine as well as singular and plural : for such licence I must crave the reader's indulgence, asking him to consider and weigh the difficulties of my task.

So enormous, then, is the subject to be imprisoned within these limits, that one is forced to be ruthless, to prune the Mediterranean cities of their tingling life, their hoarse shouts and shuddering glamour, the desert of its beauty born of solitude, the blue, transparent sea of its dolphins leaping up and down through the waters in segments of circles as though they were swift wheels, revolving partly above and partly below the surface, and of its strange fish that at night carry their own illuminations through the glassy depths. Moreover, apart from the protagonists, who will, whether one wishes it or no, most surely demonstrate their characters, the minor figures—our companions on this odyssey, or the royal victims, the attendant train of diplomats and consuls, the crews of ships and staffs of hotels, who are the dramatis personæ—should as far as possible be puppets, nine-pins to be knocked over at very rhythmic but ever

shorter intervals by the overwhelmingly simple, yet accurate and terrible, machinery invented by our super-germ.

To the working of this engine I now hold the secret. And as, with, it must be confessed, no little pride, I reflect upon this discovery of mine, my mind goes back once more to that dark winter's night of two years ago, and to how little then I expected the curious developments that were so near me.

II

I HURRIED away from the paraphernalia of polite leave-taking, from the clustered top-hats and walking sticks, down the steps gilded by the light of the open door, into the dead November square. Each lamp-post bore aloft a wavering halo of golden drizzle, and the tall, contorted red-brick houses had assumed a tone of purple, until, beneath the uncertain and swinging illumination of this windy month, they seemed but a faint discoloration, an opaque deepening of the night itself. What a charming, rather mysterious woman Mrs. Chitty was, with that indefinable and enigmatic smile and the glowing intensity of her brown eyes! (Fitful and anonymous farewells still pursued me from the gaping mouth of her mansion: cars began to purr, and keen patches of light sped over the muddy wastes of the road.) I hurried, hurried on, for I was not feeling well—rather shivery—and hoped the walk would warm me. . . . Charming woman, but a little mysterious

. . . unusual. How peculiar, for instance, was the composition of her dinner parties: the human ingredients never varied. Why should a woman, whose interests in life were mainly musical, artistic and literary, thus live almost entirely in the company of diplomats, Foreign Office officials and scientists? Even though it might be that this choice imparted to her house an atmosphere distinctive and rather cosmopolitan, what was there in her mind to make her thus yoke the scientist with the diplomat? Yet I enjoyed these gatherings, for the diplomats lisped to one another in undertones or babbled in foreign languages, and thus I was left to listen to the scientists, whose theories one needs must love for their wealth of fantasy, intense but serious.

That night, for some reason, the conversation had mainly turned upon the influenza epidemic of 1918 · a scourge that, it will be remembered, helped to enwrap the final phases of the "Great" War in a blaze of glory—for glory is ever strictly in proportion to the number of dead bodies upon which it is fed, and this particular wave of illness had made the war-casualties appear almost minute. Seven million people, it was roughly calculated, had perished of it in six months. By christening it *Spanish Influenza*, however, instead of bestowing upon it some picturesque, gothic title such as the *Black Death*, the doctors reduced for us both its terror and romance, even if it cannot be pretended that this castanetted euphemism in any way diminished the death-rate or revealed the cause of the pestilence. And, though nine years had now passed since the outbreak, little more light

could be thrown upon its origin. Climatic conditions could not much enter into the matter, for in India, glowing under the tropical heat like an ember, entire communities had been wiped out in a few hours. Mrs. Chitty, who was fond of travelling, had been there when it started, and told us that often by the time the nearest medical aid could be rushed up to some distant village, the cruel, dusty red sunlight glared down on houses in which there was no human movement, no sound, not even a cry.

I had, at the time of this plague, formed about it my own opinion: which was that Nature—who often must be regarded as the Goddess of Reason, a divinity, that is to say, indulging in anthropopathic flights of logic, and only differing in kind from man because of her greater power—had, as she watched the war, very justifiably concluded that since men were so plainly bent on their own extermination, herself had better have her fling and join in the fun. After all, killing people had always been her divine monopoly as well as her chief hobby (thorough good sportsman, Nature!). In England, before a cygnet is killed and eaten, the Royal sanction must be obtained: so, too, Nature expected that before any human being died, before, even, a doctor was allowed to slaughter a patient, her aid and permission should be invoked. It might only be a formality nowadays; but why, she asked herself, should she sit there quietly—especially considering all the new, untried microbes in her possession—and see her prerogative usurped by man, an animal she had never much cared for? Of the many beasts she had created, he was

the only one that had become discontented, then mutinous; had attacked her rights and privileges, attempting to curb her supreme power and to degrade her rank from that of Goddess-Autocrat down to a mere constitutional monarch. Indeed in every direction this pitiable creature had challenged her authority. She had given him a skin of his own for his covering, and he had chosen to wear that of others (often murdering a fellow-beast to get it): she had provided him with plain, simple food to eat, and he had chosen to warm it and burn out of it its virtue; with caves in which to live, and he had built huts and houses; she had given him rain to wash him, and he had collected the water, cooked it and taken unto himself soap! But her little influenza-germ would soon put things to rights, for this latest-evolved pet was house-trained, most flourished exactly in those circumstances man had rebelliously contrived for himself.

Thus, I imagined, had Nature argued and plotted in her own mind. But, since 1918, influenza had periodically returned, and one had been forced to abandon such a theory. Now, in the winter of 1927, a season singularly exempt from this particular evil, as I walked home—feeling rather odd and cold—I was just as much in the dark about its origin as any of our scientists could be. (How icy it was, and my eyes were beginning to ache; a curious sensation as though the eyeballs did not belong to their sockets, square eyeballs in round holes. However, one should never encourage pains by thinking of them, and resolutely I focused my thoughts back again on to

the conversation at dinner.) We had been informed that, ever since the close of the great epidemic, the medical and scientific authorities had kept constant watch for this criminal bacillus, who even now might be moving unidentified among us: for influenza was peculiarly difficult to cope with, in that, upon each new and considerable outbreak, it assumed a fresh disguise. Like Charley Peace, it was able after every crime entirely to alter its outward appearance, while leaving invariably some novel and obscure disease in its wake. Thus the name "influenza" was merely a courtesy-title conferred by popular consent upon an anonymous and dangerous microbe (here Mrs. Chitty had smiled her curious, enigmatic smile), just as the author of the terrible Whitechapel murders had been known far and wide as "Jack the Ripper." Attempts had been made to fix the responsibility for these recent outrages in many quarters, but so far without success. A million germs had been caught and kept under observation for long periods, only, in the end, to demonstrate unmistakably their innocence.

The stories that Professor Chilcott and Dr. Bidham had told us only served to confirm my impression that science had lately grown a little wild, somewhat apt to overlook and overleap the obvious. They admitted that, in their nervous eagerness to solve the problems of this illness, they had kidnapped an enormous quantity of the free field-mice of Great Britain, and were keeping them captive all the winter in order to observe the various infections which they might breed. This, I had thought, was surely going

too far (the dark, furry and whiskered tribe, thus, to its surprise, comfortably installed in winter-quarters, had, as a matter of fact, never since ailed, but had thrived and increased like the seed of Abraham) . . . and, even if it has now been established that pneumonic plague is engendered by starving squirrels in Central Asia, which, in dying of famine, pass on the fleas that live upon them to the black rat; and that, when the black rat, travelling all over the world, dies of the pestilence, the flea then attacks human beings and infects them, yet why attempt to lay the blame for influenza upon the poor little English mouse, a harmless and quite different creature? I had thought myself bound, in fair play, to protest. A suspect tribe, the rodents: and for a little I had tried to arouse pity and interest on their behalf among these icy, calculating hearts by drawing attention to the extraordinary and romantic vicissitudes of fortune which had lately been their lot. Think on the piebald and downy guinea-pig, I had urged, hailing originally from the suffocating forests of South America, brought across all those leagues of ocean to become a pampered pet. I had seen its image lolling or frolicking among roses or exotic flowers, set over the elaborately carved doors of Prince Eugène's winter palace in Vienna. Then, subsequently, it had become the playmate of wealthy children, its ears flopping freely upon the honest English breeze. But, suddenly sinking into poverty and obscurity once more, it now only exists here as a subject for medical experiments, a beast upon which to practise operations not yet made perfect, upon which to test

numberless germs, to be infected, whenever possible, with every disease not yet fully understood, as well as to be inoculated with all the more authentic and recognized microbes of typhoid, malaria, anthrax, paralysis, diphtheria and the like. On the other hand, the common household-rat, long one of the chief enemies of mankind, the Ishmael of the animal-world, outcast and driven from door to door, a creature to whom no law of charity applied, to be killed in any manner possible, poisoned, shot, or burned alive, now found itself enjoying in scientific circles an unexpected popularity. Once on the operating table, and nothing was too good for it. Gland operations and graftings were performed, the only object of which was to prolong its valuable life, and one of biology's chief boasts up to the present was that it had succeeded in extending the lifetime of a male rat to three times the normal span. But my scientist friends had sternly refused to be moved to compassion by any such eloquent expositions of these strange reversals of fortune. Mrs. Chitty had again smiled mysteriously, as though in the possession of some secret happiness or cause for amusement. Perhaps, I was to think in after years, it was because to her, too, it seemed as though the scientists, while indulging in countless fantasies, extravagant as those they played upon mice, rats and guinea-pigs, were inclined to overlook the obvious—had, in fact, overlooked Mrs. Chitty.

They would continually dine in her house, give her all the latest expert information in their possession as to the progress of new crusades against disease. Never

did they entertain the slightest suspicion. . . . It certainly was a very bad attack of influenza from which they were recovering, they would decide, ten or twelve days later—no doubt they had caught the germ in a bus or in the tube—or, perhaps, from one of those horrid, hypocritical little field-mice (that would be a matter worth going into, when they were better, in another week or two)—and then there had been that cold night air—so damp—after Mrs. Chitty's dinner-party. They remembered quite well how chilly they had felt going home after it. Mrs. Chitty! There was a brave woman—nice of her to come and see them like that, with grapes and calves'-foot jelly, in the middle of the infection, and to take such an interest in the children, to play with them in her charming way (poor little mites, what a shame that they should now have influenza, too: and after so many precautions had been taken)—a remarkable, as well as brave, woman. Think of how she had nursed the troops through that really terrible epidemic of 1918! As though guided by some special instinct she had always gone straight to the spot where the death-roll was to be worst—and yet she had never caught it herself, albeit she was a nervous, delicate woman upon whom any effort was a strain. Though never well, she had not broken down, but had stuck to her post. And then, straight to India after that—in the epidemic there, too, where it was ever so much worse.

And when, a few days after the dinner-party, Mrs. Chitty called on me, though my temperature was very high and I was in no mood for seeing most people,

similar emotions of gratitude and respect beset me. She had heard I was ill, she said, and had come to see for herself "how I was getting on." She was really extremely kind, visiting me several times during my convalescence. For a long while I had been growing to like her, and now I more than ever appreciated her character, for I had learnt to estimate at their true worth her many admirable qualities, while, indeed, no one could fail to come under the sway of her charm.

Muriel Chitty was, in fact, all that had been said of her, and much more. She inspired any company, however dull, in which she found herself, with a curious, usually agreeable, feeling of nervous tension, as though something were about to happen. Her beautiful, rather haggard face had the sallow asceticism, her dark, large, slanting eyes, where lingered many an unshed tear, had the fire, her spare figure, the taut and gaunt expressiveness, that distinguishes the saints evoked against bare grey and purple rocks by El Greco. Her clothes, too, were in keeping with this conception: sombre and severe, with an occasional Spanish accent of deep, rich colour. There had gone to her making, one felt, something of the religious bigot, something of the musician, much of the actress. She possessed a subtle but keen sense of humour, and was, when the mood for such frivolity descended upon her, an exceptionally acute mimic. Nevertheless, as one watched her, observed her vehement gestures and flashing eyes, or listened to the earnest and hollow notes of her voice, a voice that was yet altogether persuasive, it was less of Sarah Bernhardt

than of Savonarola that one was reminded, although mimicry was the last, and most genial, vice which one would have imputed to that cavernous-eyed and dreary burn-book. It seemed as though in everything she did there was concealed a religious, if unfathomable, intention. Yet not for a moment was she priggish, redeemed from it by many unexpectedly human frailties. She was, for instance, feminine in an almost extinct, Victorian way. Passionately devoted to all other animals, she hated mice and cried if she saw one. Then she had developed a special technique of dropping and forgetting things, so that they must be picked up or fetched for her by her men friends thus enslaved—for this mechanism was calculated, I apprehend, to deal out either reward or punishment according to the manner in which the request for help was made—and was always a little late for everything. These superficially-clinging characteristics, however, cloaked a will that was Napoleonic in strength and purpose: indeed the dropping and forgetting of things was, perhaps, but one of the means she had devised for getting her own way. It showed her men friends how helpless, how dependent on them she was, and that, in consequence, it was thus cruel to oppose her. Yet all her failings, all her devices, quite genuinely and without her being aware of it, only helped to throw into relief her essential mystery and attraction.

She was, one understood, a rare, very sensitive, and in many ways delightful character. And much there was about her that charmed while it eluded one. Even her worship of diplomats was intriguing—not,

of course, that I am suggesting that there is anything peculiarly bizarre in choosing them as companions, but that she seemed to bear toward them a devotion that was almost fanatical. A party at the Foreign Office, to be received at the top of those marble stairs under the allegorical, monster-patriotic paintings of Mr. Goetze, would be her translation into a temporary, but none the less heavenly, heaven. She was aware of the exact position of every member of His Majesty's Diplomatic Service abroad at any given moment of any day, for her life's supreme interest was in the news of the latest swops, the promotions or occasional degradations. These she followed with the same passionate attention that a schoolboy devotes to the cricket averages of the paladins of his chosen county, or with which a retired official of the Indian Civil Service, now living in England, regards the vagaries of the barometer in his draughty hall. Yes, she was a remarkable and curious woman, I decided. Under her manner, which displayed the identical combination of flaring pride and meek submission that in the animal world distinguishes the camel from other beasts, there was something really interesting, something that matched her obscure and haunting beauty. Further, there was nothing that she did not—or rather could not—comprehend, and, when it pleased her, she was both witty and subtle.

* * * * * *

It was with definite pleasure, therefore, that in the spring of 1928 I heard that Mrs. Chitty was to be of the same party as ourselves. Seven of us had

already decided to travel together and visit various Mediterranean towns. We were to start on a liner, which was setting out for a pleasure cruise: and it had been arranged that where we wished to stay longer than the other passengers, we could wait behind and catch the next boat. The tour we had planned was rather an extensive one and would occupy some two to three months. Our proposed itinerary was Genoa, Palermo, Athens, Constantinople, Rhodes, Cyprus and Beirut. There we were to disembark and visit Damascus and Jerusalem: after which, returning to Beirut, we hoped to catch a boat for Alexandria. We were determined to spend some time in Egypt, seeing everything that it was possible to see. We were to ride on camels out into the desert, and to sail up the Nile on a dahabeeah. From Egypt we were to go by car to Libya, that enormous and fascinating country which has only so recently been opened up, thence return to Italy, visiting the various places of interest that lay on our road back to England. (See Map appended.)

The party in all was to consist of Mrs. Rammond, Frank Lancing, Mrs. Jocelyn, Ruth Marlow, Julian Thackwray, Mrs. Chitty, my brother and myself. This, as it afterwards turned out, was to be the human material for Mrs. Chitty's experiments: but in our innocence at the time it was about Muriel Chitty, rather than the others, that we felt anxious, for though we all knew that she was an expert traveller, she was rather delicate, and we feared that so strenuous and prolonged a tour might fatigue her.

A letter from her, that reached me a few days before

we were to sail, disturbed us still further. In it she said that for some time she had been unwell. She was staying with an old friend—Robert Sutledge, the novelist—at the Riviera. She had not actually remained in bed, she explained, for her host had made so many engagements for her, and she had resolved, whatever happened, not to disappoint him. Fortunately she did not think that he had realized how ill she had been, with a high temperature, and feeling altogether wretched; and, of course, she had not let him observe it. Dreadful headaches she had been afflicted with, but then she had been sad and grieving, for—had I noticed?—the death of Professor Chilcott. Did I remember meeting him? An *extraordinary* coincidence—he had dined with her alone only a week before he died, and he had been quite well then. It had been so sudden, and, naturally, a shock for her, such an old friend—and it seemed so ironical—to die of influenza like that, when the whole of the last years of his wonderful life had been given up to trying to discover its origin, and thus to find a way of rendering humanity immune from its ravages. Yes, that had, of course, upset her. The Riviera was very gay this year, the letter went on, Opera and Ballet, and parties every night. But she wondered, she wrote, whether there would be much illness along the coast this year? (It was an odd question to ask me, I thought, for how was I to know?) But, in any case, ill or well herself, she would join us at Genoa, for she was determined not to fail us.

We met safely, and dined together the night before we were to start. Muriel Chitty looked ill and austere,

I judged, and I felt sorry for her, and worried at the prospect of the constant travelling and sight-seeing (always most exhausting) which was ahead of her. In her eyes, added to their accustomed and rather lovely fanatic fire, I thought there was to be discerned, too, another and unwonted expression (my brother remarked it also); one, as it were, of conscious guilt; the look so often to be observed in the eye of a dog aware that he has transgressed the canine code, but that his sin has not yet been brought home to him—a look that pleads, saying, "I believe *you* know, but *don't* give me away." . . . It was puzzling. . . . She seemed cheerful in herself, and had brought with her a countless number of introductions, and visiting cards with recommendations scribbled on them, from friends in the Foreign Office. Indeed it seemed as though there were at least one or two letters apiece for every Ambassador, Minister, Consul-General and Consul in the Near East, Syria and North Africa; not altogether, the rest of our group secretly agreed, a blessing, for our days were limited in number considering how much there was for us to do in them, and the mere personal delivery of this script must occupy, one would hazard, a solid month of time.

The whole journey, despite its adventures, seems in retrospect to have passed very quickly and in a succession of cinema-like flashes. The next morning we embarked. Genoa, frost-bitten in the early February wind, piled itself up dustily behind us on its terraces, amid the clanking of trams and hooting of trains and liners, and we were soon heading for the undulating serpents of the sea, that here and there

lifted a white-crested, venomous head. Notwithstanding how rough it was, and that the remainder of our party stayed below until we reached Sicily, Mrs. Chitty sat on deck and talked to me. She made of her deck-chair a little nest of her own and everybody else's fur-coats, and in this remained snug and warm—like one of those mice, I thought, for whom the scientists had prepared such comfortable winter-quarters. But our conversation was not in the least monotonous, for she would banish any chance of this by indulging in occasional frantic pantomime. Here all her latent powers of acting found an outlet. She carried with her—and they must always be near her—a great number of large, brightly-coloured, leather hand-trunks, each filled with a different species of railway-ticket and foreign money, for she never believed, she said, in putting all her eggs into one basket. Thus, if by any mischance, she lost the miniature portmanteau which contained her ticket to Damascus, she might still have that which held her ticket to Cairo, or if she lost her Creek money, she would still have Syrian or Egyptian.

First, and as prelude to the play, she would strike an attitude, which at once and most expressively conveyed to all in her neighbourhood the idea that she thought she had lost one of these "little bags." There would be a moment's dramatic, tragic pause: and then a wild scene would ensue. Rugs and rainbow-lined fur-coats would execute mad furlanas and jetas in the air as they were feverishly searched in turn. All the men on deck would soon be bent double or would be crawling on all fours to examine

obscure crannies between the wet and slippery boards, until it looked as if a game of "animal-dumb-crambo" was in progress, or again, taking Mrs. Chitty and one of these figures as a separate group, the detached spectator, if mortal so hardened could exist, was reminded of that moment in the bull-fight when the matador, drawing himself up tautly, waves a flaming scarlet banner, behind which he shelters long, agonizing darts, or his knife ready for the blow, in the very face of the charging bull. But now it might be, there would be a triumphant gesture of discovery, and the miming would cease, for, as suddenly as it had vanished, the "little bag" had materialized once more. She had been sitting on it, it appeared, or it had perhaps been in her hand the whole time, or even inside another "little bag." But this was by no means all her repertory, albeit it was the piece in which she most frequently presented herself. Sometimes, for instance, when in really high spirits, Mrs. Chitty would explode, as though it were a gigantic bomb, a special "little bag," full of letters of introduction and visiting-cards. A miniature snowstorm of whirling white envelopes and squares of cardboard would zigzag up above us on an eddy of salt wind, and for several minutes the whole ship's company, and all the passengers well enough to be out, led by Mrs. Chitty herself, would be running along the deck together, with a frequent rhythmic halting and leaping high up into the air, until, in example of her art, this time they resembled a well-drilled corps-de-ballet under the guidance of its prima-ballerina.

Indeed, so practised did all on board become at

both these games, that the deck appeared to have become the sports-gound on which a number of celebrated athletes were rehearsing for some great occasion. Mrs. Chitty would make the initiatory gesture, equivalent to the revolver-shot that opens such mysteries. Before that, and quite automatically, all the men had crouched down, their bodies thrown forward, ready to start. One . . . Two . . . Three . . . Go! and now they were off! There would be a sound of rushing, a tremendous scuffling and scrambling, as they sped past. But soon the referee would make another familiar gesture and we would await the next event. Whenever, during the course of this story, we are on board ship, the reader must conjure up for himself these constantly recurring pantomimes. They were a feature of our tour.

In the interval of such games as these, Mrs. Chitty would talk to me . . . talk with her face rather close to mine, otherwise, no doubt, the words would have been lost on the disinfectant wind. She dwelt much on her illness at the Villa Sutledge (I wondered, for her eyes glowed as she spoke of it, whether she might not still boast a slight fever?). She had, she said, in spite of that queer attack, enjoyed the visit enormously, though the Riviera did not usually appeal to her. But the garden was delightful, and he was such a wonderful host. Her chief difficulty, really, had been that he was so kind, far *too* kind. She had not taken many frocks with her, for she knew that we would not want her to bring too much luggage on her travels, and, besides, dressmakers were so expensive now, and one had to be careful in these days about money.

(At this point a "little bag" broke open with the tinkling sound of a musical box, and a torrent of Greek drachmas, Turkish piastres, or Syrian silver coins bounced, rolled and spun about the deck. Eventually, and by the united efforts of all in the vicinity, this particular currency was stabilized again, and Mrs. Chitty was able to continue.) About money, careful about money—Oh, yes! she remembered now. She had been going to say—but Robert would insist on carrying her off to royal dinner-parties: and it was so awkward having to attend them without the proper clothes. She was surprised that a genius like Robert cared for that sort of entertainment. Personally, she would much have preferred to sit quietly in the garden—though, of course, it became cold at night—talking to him, or playing the piano—a little Beethoven. . . . Now she *had* enjoyed seeing the Russian dancers at Montibes—but, after all, it was not as though it amused her to meet the Grand Duke Gabriel, the ex-King of Milesia (who couldn't talk in any language, but instead barked like a dog), or the old Duchess of Chester, that guttural Guelph Amazon, however wonderful she might be for her age. . . .

Yet, as she mentioned these royal names, her whole face was illumined . . . and this, again, what could this mean, I wondered. For assuredly, she was no snob. What, then, did this light of pleasure signify? I tried to trace it, by analogy. It might, it seemed to me, have glowed in the face of a burglar after some unprecedentedly large haul, or have played round the stern, ascetic features of a missionary,

who one day to his overwhelming surprise discovers that he has converted an entire tribe of natives, led by the Princes of the Blood—a tribe of which for many years now he had despaired.

We arrived at Palermo in the lime-green early morning. Then the sun came up, first gilding the two horns of the Concha d'Oro. Trucks of oranges and lemons stood near the docks, and the gaudily painted carts, drawn by straining mules, were jingling over the cobbles. We dawdled about: and after luncheon, Mrs. Chitty elaborately organized herself for a call on the Consul, while the remainder of us went up to Monreale. On the way I bought a continental edition of the *Daily Tribune*, and opened it as the tram slowly screamed up a sharp hill through a tunnel of giant red geraniums. At once my eye was caught by a heading:

SERIOUS ILLNESS OF WORLD-FAMED NOVELIST!

CRITICAL CONDITION OF ROBERT SUTLEDGE IN RIVIERA HOME.

«As, an hour or so later, we were still staring up at the vast gold mosaics, subtle and mysterious as Mrs. Chitty, and not unlike her in their personal style, we heard a dramatic, hollow voice, and turned round to find that she had driven up to join us. I broke to her the sad news about her friend, but she showed less surprise and dismay than I had feared. He had looked ill for some time, she said: and she imagined

that his constitution was a very strong one. He did not catch things easily, she knew . . . yes, she was sure of that. Incidentally, she added, the Consul was charming. She wished we had come with her: we should have liked him. . . . He was rather a delicate-looking man (she had taken quite a fancy to him), but he had told her that Palermo was a very healthy place—practically no illness there ever.

For the next few mornings I neglected to buy a paper, and did not indeed see one for several days, since we soon set out on that wonderful journey to the Piraeus. The sun set and rose in Homeric splendour, and the purple shadows of the Greek islands fell down upon us. Mrs. Chitty was very cheerful, appeared to be enjoying herself, I thought. From the Piraeus we drove straight to our hotel in Athens. The city lay white and dusty beneath its primrose-coloured sunshine, even the bare bones up on the hill almost glittered, so strong and pulsing was the light. I tried to persuade her to come with us to the Acropolis, but she declined. She *must* call both on the British Minister and the Consul-General, she said, or Gerry Flitmouse, who had given her the letters, might be offended. He was always rather easily hurt, and snuffled terribly for months if one annoyed him. A dear boy, but delicate.

We walked up the steps that lead to the Acropolis, hot and dazed with the beauty of the light that seemed actually to glow through the tawny marble, and lingered among the huge, broken drums of the overthrown columns that litter the ground about the Parthenon. But, as we approached the great temple,

our attention was drawn away from it by the sound of scampering feet, and we looked round to find a strange procession, a ribald frieze from a Greek vase come to life. It was, in fact, merely the arrival of the "Friends of Greece" off their steamer, the *Dionysus*.

Twice a year these tours are arranged, at very high prices. The boat sets out from London, with a select list of passengers, and its own staff of attendant lecturers on board, for a course of intensive culture. They anchor for a day or two at all the places of Hellenic interest, Sicily, Corfu, the islands, on their way to Athens, and then on to Constantinople and Asia Minor. Never a morning, afternoon or evening passes without at least one instructive lecture. Most of the passengers are rich and ignorant: while others are enthusiasts who have saved up toward this trip for half a lifetime.

As they drew nearer us, the noise increased. First came a running battery of cameras, held by eager, whistling schoolboys under wide grey felt hats; then followed a succession of hatless schoolmasters—some of whom I remembered from Eton—tripping swiftly across the boulders with a curious lurching, lumbering gait as though still dribbling across the football fields: then a famous dean, with two sprained ankles, supported on the arms of numberless admirers; then an esthetic Duchess caught in a cloud of gauze; now again, several deaf clergymen, a rather dingy lecturer, and finally a bevy of rich ladies, while two men wearing sun-helmets, in unspoken opposition to the schoolmasters, wound up the whole thing with

an exotic flourish. To my surprise, Mrs. Chitty, looking very beautiful, with, as it seemed, an expression of religious ecstasy, only softened by her charming smile, stepped out suddenly from the middle of them. It was unlike her, for she detested crowds. . . . But she explained that she could not resist it—there were old friends of hers among them, and soon they would be leaving Athens, moving off toward numberless islands. No doubt the ship was comfortable. But it must be a rough life. . . . There was no doctor on the *Dionysus*, she was told, and not a medical man, not a single one in all those lonely isles which they were about to visit. . . .

Then she took me up to introduce me to Lady Richborough, who exuded a pale, esthetic, clipped muddle-headedness. "Love Athens," she was saying, "delightful place. Like it even more than what's-the-name, you know, Muriel, that place we stopped at—but of course you weren't with us—with the large old buildings on it. And then there was that lovely island too. . . . I shall never forget it—and the Greek Exchange is so good—I never can remember quite how much you get—but such a lot for a pound—better than the French exchange. . . . Do you suppose our own exchange will *ever* be so good?" After which, still pondering the possibilities disclosed by this question, we turned away.

As we left what is perhaps the most venerated skeleton in the world, I heard a delightfully modern sound. A Greek child of about seven, but with, already, an enormous scimitar of a nose, and black eyes that sparkled like new boot-buttons, was shouting,

"*Dily Mile* an *Dily Tribeune* on sile—*Dily Mile* an *Dily Tribeune.*" I bought a paper. On the first page was the photograph of a familiar royal face, an iconic and dignified countenance.

SERIOUS ILLNESS OF GRAND DUKE

I read; and again:

> The Grand Duke Gabriel's countless friends in England, and indeed all over the globe, will hear with full measure of sorrow that he is the victim of a new and obscure disease, which is causing the doctors grave anxiety. In its simpler aspects, it somewhat resembles influenza. Several people in the neighbourhood have recently been attacked by it, but so far there have been few fatal cases, though the illness is not one to be treated lightly.
>
> The Grand Duchess, four nurses, and His Imperial Highness's six physicians-in-ordinary are in constant attendance, day and night. Letters and telegrams of inquiry, many of them from Great Britain, and requests for the latest bulletin of the distinguished patient, arrive without intermission at the door of Nishkynashdom, his palatial Riviera residence. The Grand Duchess, who has been a tower of strength in the sick-room, has helped the doctors in countless ways, though it is not as yet generally known that her Royal Highness has adopted the uniform of a

nurse and has abandoned her proposed exhibition of water colours.

His Imperial Highness, who has been a well-known and popular figure on the Côte d'Azur for half a century, is seventy-eight years of age, and married in 1871 a Princess of Mannheim-Düsseldorf. He is also President of the Mont-Ferrat Golf Club and the Société Anonyme des Agronomes de Nice, the corporation responsible for running the New Casino outside the town.

Further down, in a chat-column, I read:

Hopes are still entertained, Delilah writes me from the Riviera, that Robert Sutledge, England's most famous novelist, will be well enough to come home in two or three weeks' time. It would be little less than a tragedy for his friends were he obliged to abandon his famous annual visit, for which an immense amount of entertaining takes place: but it is, alas, no secret to them that, for the past ten days, he has been very seriously ill.

I drew Mrs. Chitty's attention to the illness of the Grand Duke Gabriel.

"How very odd," she said to me, with a bayonet-like glint in her usually warm eye. "So soon after poor Robert, too. It looks almost as if they must have caught the same germ, doesn't it? Perhaps I had it also. I felt very ill at the time, but wouldn't give up. I've always said, 'If you want people to be

ill, go with them to the Riviera.' By the way, I think I must have had a slight temperature again last night."

The next few days in Athens passed very swiftly and without event, except that Muriel Chitty, who insisted, apparently, on sleeping without a mosquito-net was, in consequence, very badly bitten. It was curious, for usually she was so careful, even fussy about herself; and we had advised her to be on her guard . . . yet she was the only one of us to suffer in this way.

The passage to Constantinople was ideal. We arrived safely, and were duly astonished at the number of bowler-hats: but even that could not destroy our excitement, or the beauty of the setting: the water on every side, and the silhouette of numberless, grey, spider-like domes, very squat under their needle-shaped minarets, that crept over every hill, and crowned the lower ones.

Mrs. Chitty decided that she felt too tired to visit Santa Sofia, and that, instead, she would rest a little and then leave letters for, and call on, the British Representatives. She might, perhaps, meet us afterwards—somewhere in the town—perhaps near the Delphic Serpent. . . . And, indeed, as, later, we looked at it, lost in wonder at its long and marvellous history, a hollow, oracular voice, with all the ecstasy of divination in its tones, woke us from our reveries by exclaiming just behind us:

"Well, here I am. . . . But you none of you look very well . . . I hope you're all right?"

It was Mrs. Chitty, fresh from consular triumphs.

While I was waiting in the hotel before dinner I saw, lying on a table, a new copy of the *Daily Tribune*, just arrived. I opened it.

SUDDEN ILLNESS OF EX-KING BORIS OF MILESIA

was the caption that met my eye.

ALL ENGAGEMENTS CANCELLED.

His Ex-Majesty was suddenly seized with illness after attending, as is his wont, the Friday "Diner Fleuri" at the Hôtel de Bordeaux. His companion, Mlle Donescu, immediately summoned a doctor.

On the next page I read:

SEVERANCE OF LAST LINK WITH GEORGE III.

DEATH OF H.R.H. THE DUCHESS OF CHESTER.

We regret to announce the death of H.R.H. the Duchess of Chester, who passed away peacefully in the presence of her family during the early hours of this morning. The sad event took place in her marine residence, the Villa Britannique. Her Royal Highness, who was in her 92nd year was the last surviving granddaughter of George III, and with her passing, a notable link with the past is forever severed. The Duchess, always one of the most beloved of English princesses, was a wonderful specimen of English grit of the Old School. During the war, though then in her

eighty-first year, she spent several days in the trenches, distributing chocolates to the men, and even in the tightest corners contrived to keep a stiff upper lip. Deservedly popular with all classes, it was Her Royal Highness who popularized the word "Schweinhunds" for the German troops during the war.

It is worth recording, as an instance of this wonderful old lady's undiminished activity and interest in all that pertained to literature up to the last, that only three weeks ago she attended a dinner-party in her honour given by Mr. Robert Sutledge, the novelist (now, unfortunately, himself an invalid). During the evening, Her Royal Highness, who loved everything modern, gave an exhibition of her skill on the saxophone. Accompanied, on the piano, by her Lady-in-Waiting, she played Liszt's "Liebestraume," Mendelssohn's "Spring Song," and ended up, amid great applause, with, "You're the Whitest White I know," and her own rendering of the "Black Bottom." Two days later Her Royal Highness was suddenly taken ill, and the doctors, seeing that the end could not long be delayed, summoned the family.

showed these two paragraphs to Mrs. Chitty, when she came down.

"Quite a coincidence," she observed bitterly. . . .

And these words, it seemed to me, were addressed to myself rather than to my companions; were spoken, moreover, as though she thought they might convey to me an inner significance hidden from others.

"No wonder you were ill, Muriel darling," I heard Mrs. Rammond say to her. "I've always maintained that the Riviera was unhealthy: a perfect death-trap. Think of the microbes there must be hanging about those hotels and villas, not to mention casinos! It's extraordinary, though, this year. Absolutely everybody there seems to be ill."

But at this, though it did not very much differ from the sentiment herself had expressed at Athens only a few days before, Mrs. Chitty suddenly became cross. (Perhaps, one thought, the mosquito-bites were still irritating her, making her sleepless.) She dropped two bags, half an earring and a diamond pendant, and so, for a time, her conversation was lost to me As, however, we emerged from under our various tables, she was saying very decisively, and in a tone of voice which suggested that she considered herself slighted: "Well, all I can tell you is, there was no one ill there before I arrived: no one. I was the first—and probably most of them aren't ill even now. They are a regular pack of old *malades imaginaires*: that's what *they* are. If they were to become really ill, goodness knows what would happen to them!"

Our time at Constantinople fled past us, with little personal to record except that it seemed to me that every day, as she was further removed in hours and miles from home, Mrs. Chitty became ever more feminine—but in a distinctly Victorian, rather than modern, way. It was there, too, and more specially in Brousa, that she first began to parade her ardent love for animals. There were several vociferous and vituperative differences between herself and the

drivers of donkeys. The Turkish language won, for its throaty sounds suggested, even to those who could not understand them, a wealth of obloquy not to be attempted in English or French. But Mrs. Chitty was left with that comforting, unimpeachable serenity which comes to all those who defend dumb brutes.

Borne on by blue, phenariot breezes, that yet hardly ruffled the surface, we visited in turn Rhodes and Cyprus. Here, again, there was little to record. At Rhodes, an island that rises from a sea paved with mediæval stone cannon-balls, we found great activity among the restorers and strippers of ancient buildings, while huge white peonies, like water-lilies, were in bloom under the darkest shade of cedars. Furthermore, as we approached this much-conquered island, we heard an American lady summing up the confusion of our epoch by inquiring of her companion in a plaintive voice, "Tell me, dear, where *used* this to be?"

At Cyprus, on the contrary, we discovered a British island, full of discontented, undersized Levantines, gorged on honest British beef and suet. No building had been restored, but there were hill-stations and topees, and the ponderous red shadow of India brooded over the western hills and streams.

But the journey seemed to suit our health. We all felt peculiarly well—generally a bad omen—and even Mrs. Chitty's mosquito-bites were healing. She liked the place, and while calling on various officials, had met the Anglican Bishop and made great friends with him, she said.

Sailing from Famagusta to Beirut, however, the sea suddenly began to grow rough again: and soon Mrs. Chitty my brother and myself were once more the only members of our party to venture on deck. But, on this occasion, she was not so communicative, seemed lost in her own thoughts. Yet we could not help being impressed, and rather intimidated, by a new and singular manner of looking at one which at this time she developed. It was a steady, unfaltering brown gaze that united the watchfulness of a doctor expectant of symptoms with the frigid, measuring, detached glance of an undertaker: a gaze that one could never afterwards forget.

When, though rarely, she talked, she would tell us of the South of France. Perpetually she reverted to it: to the kindness and subsequent illness of Mr. Sutledge, to the dinner-parties she had attended, the Royal Personages she had met. It was unlike her. César Franck or changes in the Foreign Office would have been more usual, more in style. . . . But no! Back we would go to the Riviera. Really, I said to myself, it was as though she had committed some murder there, among the planted-out and varnished palm-trees, the carefully manicured carnations (each one was stated to be given its own hot-water bottle at night), and must ever return in spirit to haunt the scene of it. She resembled those poisoners, who, though their guilt has passed quite unsuspected at the time, inevitably attract attention and are in the end caught, because they insist on revisiting of their own free will the spot where their evil deed was perpetrated, to inquire, too innocently, of the police

whether anyone had died in the neighbourhood? Or again, one said, she behaved as if, with some atrocious crime on her conscience, she thought that I had guessed her share in it: and so, partly out of bravado, partly because it was a subject that quite genuinely she could never banish from her mind for an instant, and partly moreover to test how much I knew, and to try to trap me into some speech, look, or action which would betray that knowledge, she would, and with a show of indifference, continually persist in talking of the lonely village where it had taken place, boasting how often she had been there and how well she knew it.

At Beirut we had intended only to spend an hour or two, just long enough for Mrs. Chitty to call on the Consul (how *could* it amuse her, I wondered, for she was very tired?) and then to drive on at once to Damascus. Nevertheless, we were delayed a little, for since she was determined to see him personally, in the end we were all invited to tea. The conversation was rather formal: but I heard her ask him in anxious tones whether there was much illness in Syria at this season? None at all, he replied.

In Damascus, on arrival, I bought a copy of the *Daily Tribune*, despatched by air from Paris. There was nothing very new in it. The body of H.R.H. the Duchess of Chester had been carried on board an English battleship, with the customary honours, and was to be conveyed to a final resting-place in her native land. Another column informed us that Ex-King Boris of Milesia was making a plucky fight against an insidious and treacherous foe. He had

now been ill for many days. His pulse was feeble, his temperature high. Robert Sutledge was, it appeared, still in bed: in fact, had experienced a slight relapse, and his friends continued to suffer much anxiety for him. About the condition of H.I.H. the Grand Duke Gabriel there was an ominous silence.

Mrs. Chitty had been somewhat dejected, and had complained of feeling ill in Damascus (though I think she enjoyed seeing the ruins which mark the French occupation of that city): so I did not show her the paper until we were on board the steamer bound for Alexandria. I had feared the news in it would depress her still further, but she took it well, and became quite cheerful.

One morning, while we were on the boat, she turned to me, and with an intensity of emphatic meaning in her voice, asked, "Do you know Valaise?" I replied, no, I didn't. "Well, that's a pity, a great pity," she rejoined. "It's such a lovely little place, on the hills just above Beaulieu. I drove there several times with Robert Sutledge. An old Saracen village; just a cluster of white houses with flattened domes. You'd adore it. . . . But I shouldn't say it was healthy . . . a lot of illness there, I'm sure." And suddenly she laughed, looking at me as though she expected me to join in her cryptic mirth.

It was this significant confidence, as a matter of fact, which finally gave me the clue. We disembarked at Alexandria and, as soon as Mrs. Chitty had left her letters of introduction, proceeded to Cairo. The next morning I remembered to buy a copy of the

Daily Tribune. I opened it and read—right across the top of the paper :

RIVIERA VILLAGE DECIMATED.

OUTBREAK OF MYSTERY DISEASE AT VALAISE,

For a moment all the things that in bad novels are said to happen at such a crisis, happened to me together. I was struck speechless : the print danced before my eyes : my teeth chattered : my hair stood on end : I felt I had an iron band round my forehead : there were icy shivers down my spine : and the very blood in my veins ran cold—for at last I understood. Everything explained itself ; I understood only too well. Mrs. Chitty was no longer a woman, but merely the living vessel that contained a microbe, a versatile master-microbe who never repeated himself. She was the fully-disciplined, loyal slave of this ferocious and tyrannical germ ; the medium for a single-purposed and evil control. She was a person possessed, not, as in the old sense, by a demon, but instead by a bacillus—albeit one of very phenomenal power and completeness. It was thus a physical, not a spiritual possession. The only aim of the governing organism within, and of its innumerable progeny, was to procreate and spread still further. Toward this one purpose, every cough, every movement, every decision that Mrs. Chitty made was calculated : but though to every act she imparted the appearance of free-will, all she did depended, in reality, on the secret wishes and plans of this inner and invisible dictator. Why, her very resolve to join

us on this journey, what was that but another scheme for propagation? For this tour was no ordinary one, but the brave missionary voyage of a militant and proselytizing microbe; a journey equivalent to the first Mediterranean mission of St. Paul.

And of course . . . I realized it now: she was, from this point of view, at once the ideal means of transit, the best possible laboratory for experiment, and a model breeding-ground and nursery for young germs. Delicate enough always to harbour them, she was yet too weak, too thin and nervous, her blood too impoverished, to afford continual sustenance for so mighty and immeasurable a tribe. An imperialist bacillus, ambitious for the future of his race, could find no land that would offer so perfect an upbringing and training-place for the young as did Mrs. Chitty. Just as the sparse diet, hard work and meagre earnings which Nature enforces there, compel the Japanese nation, heaped up on its rocky, barren and picturesque isles, to seek fresh lands for its surplus but very hardy population, so Mrs. Chitty's spare and bony frame, though unable to support the countless progeny of microbes it had raised so frugally, taught them to be all the more self-reliant and courageous. They were forced to find a new outlet for their energy, and became adventurous, crusading, piratical as our forefathers of Queen Elizabeth's reign, would execute with gusto the most daring raids on stronger and more active people, would seize colonies, found an empire. But here all parallels stop short, and the microbes clearly have the advantage of men. For Mrs. Chitty was their magic carpet as well as Motherland. While the

English and the Japanese are forced to emigrate from their emerald isles set in the sapphire sea, are forced to go long journeys by boat, the microbes are conveyed to the very portals of each promised land, not by a ship, but by their own country itself. Think of what that must mean. How little compared with us, will they feel the severance of home-ties! Imagine the interest and change implied for the entire population, if England could travel each year to Canada and India! Mrs. Chitty was truly the land in which to raise a breed of heroes, an imperial race.

Nor need this moving, living Motherland ever fear revolution, be afraid lest her children should turn against or seek to harm her. Even if they attempted it, they could not kill her, for she was not full-blooded enough to kill. Moreover, brought up within her, they cherished a true sentiment of loyalty toward their home and must be aware, withal, that her every thought was for the furtherance of their cause, since she still placed herself at the entire disposal of the governing germ.

And how every idiosyncrasy in her character, every action of hers, notwithstanding that it may have seemed erratic and without purpose at the moment—became clear and rational under this sudden apocalyptic illumination, declared itself beyond doubt as part of the wily and Machiavellian scheming from which the hidden control never ceased, for it worked remorselessly day and night. In the same way that the painted ceilings of certain Italian eighteenth-century churches—such as San Pantaleoni in Venice or Sant' Ignatio in Rome—at first appear to the

stranger as a meaningless muddle of distorted architecture, puffy clouds and inflated goddesses, until he is led to one small circle in the centre of the marble floor, and looking up, is now able to behold the roof opening up like a flower, blossoming into a strange, miraculous, but yet quite logical and lovely world of its own, so, once one had gained the clue to its perspective, the planning and arrangement of Mrs. Chitty's life became quite simple and easily comprehended. For example, if you were a modern-minded, rather hustling germ (a real "go-getter" or "pep-fan" as the American phrase is) who wanted to get about the world a bit, and quicker than Mrs. Chitty could take you, what better instrument could you find for this constant voyaging than a member of His Majesty's Diplomatic or Consular Services? No wonder that Mrs. Chitty loved those that dwell in Foreign Offices and took so lively an interest in every swop and promotion: no wonder that she called on every Minister and every Consul in each town abroad she visited, and, in addition, left on them letters, the envelopes of which she had fastened, sticking down the flap, and thus personally infecting them, with her own tongue! Then, too, I recalled the talk at her dinner-parties—conversations that so often turned on the newest mode of combating, and, if possible, extirpating, the influenza and kindred microbes. And, all the time, these methods, and the experiments that led up to them, things on which science had concentrated so much time and hope, were being explained to one who was not only Mother, home and country to these actual microbes, but, as well, an immense and

living testing-ground for their researches, a laboratory in which they were continually engaged in the most lively counter-experiments.

III

THE position was in all truth serious enough. For several days two members of our party had been ill, though their symptoms differed. Ruth Marlow had a temperature that raced up and down continually, and was forced to live entirely on orange juice. Julian Thackwray complained that he had a headache that nearly blinded him, that he could only see half of the palm-trees and pyramids, that his right arm was quite numb and that he had lost the use of the index finger of his left hand. Obviously, then, the germs were in active and experimental mood, and who could tell what novel and acute diseases they would not leave in their wake after the first alarm had subsided? The doctor, called in, pronounced it to be "only influenza." "Only," indeed!

I took precautions, bought cinnamon, bottles and bottles of it, eucalyptus oil, gargles of every description, quinine, and a thousand disinfectants. And thenceforth it seemed to me that Mrs. Chitty's Theotocopulos-like and lachrymose eye reflected very clearly the new consciousness of her protean master-microbe within that myself was his chief enemy, and that, in so far as I was concerned, he was in for the battle of a lifetime, a fight to a finish. I cannot think that this was conceit, or that I was in any way exaggerating my own importance. No, he was a good sportsman,

and recognized that by nature, as much as now of intention, I was going to be a particularly rare and difficult bag . . . indeed, he had foreseen it long before I had discovered Mrs. Chitty's mission . . . and that was, no doubt, why she had so often sat on deck with me and talked: for to be heard above the winds that, born from its speed, leap and play like dolphins round any ship, it is necessary for those who converse to bring their heads near together; a splendid opportunity for infection.

Meanwhile one must not despair. The news in the paper the day after my revelation a little allayed concern. The account of the progress of the Grand Duke Gabriel was reassuring. I read:

H.I.H. THE GRAND DUKE GABRIEL.

His Imperial Highness's many friends will be relieved to hear that his medical advisers are confident that, should no new complications arise (and, of course, it must be remembered that even now it is impossible to rule out such possibilities; that to estimate the likelihood of such developments, the length of time during which the Royal patient has been ill must always be borne in mind), His Imperial Highness should be out of danger in another two months' time. A week ago he recognized the Grand Duchess for the first time (she was in nurse's uniform), and though still suffering from shock, he was well enough yesterday to be propped up in bed, and to enjoy the broadcasting of his favourite song, Tosti's

"Good-bye." He also received the latest shipping-signals from Rio de Janeiro and Vladivostok. His Imperial Highness is now encouraged to take proper nourishment, and was yesterday ordered half a glass of hot milk with a dash of the national beverage, vodka, in it.

One was glad to see, too, that Robert Sutledge had survived his relapse and was now really "making headway." It was hoped that in another week or two, if he continued to recuperate with the same speed as heretofore, and if the present fine weather held, he might be allowed to sit out in the garden for half an hour.

On the other hand the mystery epidemic at Valaise showed no sign of abating, and the Rockefeller Institute had despatched scientists to study the outbreak on the spot and draw up a report upon it. The remains of H.R.H. the Duchess of Chester, borne on a battleship, escorted by four cruisers, had arrived at Southampton, and there was a description of the Municipal Brass Band playing the "Last Post" as the Death Ship drew in to the harbour of a city hung with funebrial purple.

What was to be done? There was no time to be lost. . . . I determined to confide in Mrs. Rammond and my brother. They were the ones I most wished to save from the holocaust. At first they did not take my discovery very seriously, terming it "ridiculous" and "fantastic." Ruth and Julian were soon able to move about again, and it was now supposed that they had caught a "mere chill." But both of

them protested that they were still desperately ill, and almost paralysed. Mrs. Chitty herself had not been idle. She, too, had achieved a racing temperature but, though she owned that she felt desperate, was determined to see everything, and not to "*give up*": quite a new development on her part, for hitherto she had absented herself from any sight-seeing expeditions and had harboured all her strength for calling on Consuls. But now she cramped tirelessly through the heat, while, in addition, continuing to visit every possible British Representative, diplomatic, consular, military, or naval.

Ruth and Julian seemed well enough to accompany us, and we were just about to start our trip up the Nile in the dahabeeah, when Mrs. Jocelyn and Frank Lancing collapsed, and were taken to the British Hospital. But as soon as we had seen the new invalids comfortably established there and had been assured that they were at present in no actual danger, we thought it best to proceed with our original plan. However, the fate of our two friends depressed the party considerably, and Mrs. Rammond and my brother began to treat more seriously the theory I had advanced to them.

On the dahabeeah the situation became acute. Since Mrs. Chitty now fully recognized in me her microbe's chief antagonist, she sat by me whenever possible . . . and still there were no signs of my ailing. Obviously the new offensive, to the preparation of which her germ had devoted so many anxious months of careful experiment and audacious imagination, was failing, was breaking down. (So it must

have seemed to her.) The microbe was not, after all, invincible: and a bitter sense of disappointment must have swept down on her. Certain it is that under the charm, of which she could not divest herself, fear and hatred could be seen mingling in her poignant glance and that the prolonged and cheerful sound of gargling which ostentatiously issued from my cabin constituted to her ears a most melancholy and distressing music. Perhaps the best thing she could do, she must have thought, was to turn her attention to my brother. But, here again, she was checked and, apparently, crushed. There we sat, under brown awnings that never stirred, and watched each sunset unroll its panorama of coloured-picture-postcard tints; palm-trees, springing lithely, several stalks from one root, camels silhouetting themselves vulgarly against an oily red-yellow sunset —a sunset that had never progressed since the oriental paintings popular during the Second Empire—or else narrow-waisted figures moving through a fertile field in short white tunics and with long, shaven heads, performing against it their second-rate hieroglyphs and bas-reliefs, while the alligators thawed to movement in the sticky yellow water beneath us. . . . But as each sunset died away in cheap flames, and then remained for an instant a stain upon the luminous canopy, faded away, as it were, with the last self-conscious, if well-practised bow, of a famous prima-donna acknowledging her applause, Mrs. Chitty, though not yet giving up hope, became sadder and ever more sad. . . . But, since fortune is so fickle, one who does not admit defeat is never defeated.

Now a change occurred, and Fate unmistakably declared itself for her. The crew suddenly fell ill, and, being natives, unused to any such northern infection, with them it took a much more severe form.

At one moment it looked as if we might have to work the ship back to Cairo ourselves. The invalid members of the crew now lay on the deck, under canopies, with Mrs. Chitty looking after them, while we sweated in the miniature engine-room and were instructed by a survivor or two in their hot and oily trade. We began to grow nervous. Cut off from the outside world as we were, and overwhelmed by the microbe's unexpected and very decisive victory, we could not help wondering what new developments might not be taking place, might not greet us on our somewhat problematic return? But, in sweet content, Mrs. Chitty sat on deck, gently tending the sick, and smiling. It was, indeed, a smile altogether beautiful to behold, a smile of pure, kindly joy, of a spirit uplifted, such, one would have said, as might have lighted up the austere features of Florence Nightingale when, rustling through the wards at night, shading the lamp with her hands, she looked down on all those whom she had saved. And near the surface of the thick yellow water, the alligators, too, bared their sharp teeth in a subtle but appreciative grin, and played and tumbled quite lustily.

The crew behaved, as it turned out, very well, and contrived to get us back to Cairo. There we found the two patients out of hospital. It was true that they were so weak they could scarcely drag themselves

along, so tired that they could see and understand nothing, so poisoned after their illness that even cigarettes were no solace to them, but they were alive: that was the important thing. And as—for it was, naturally enough, at that moment the only thing that interested them—they discussed how possibly, and where, they could have contracted this infection and, without any suspicion of the identity of the link that connected the two things, happened to observe that they had read in the newspapers at the hospital that there was a good deal of this same sort of odd illness on the Riviera, once again I saw a smile, but of a different kind from that we have just described, play quietly round Mrs. Chitty's ascetic and thoughtful countenance. It was the smile that had so often perplexed me in the past; an enigmatic and beautiful curling of the mouth, which seemed as though, after the manner of the Gioconda's, it had been summoned up by the sound of hidden and distant flutes.

For many days I had seen no newspaper, and it was evident, directly I bought one, that in the meantime the situation had developed. For the first item that caught my eye was

MEMORIAL SERVICE AT NICE FOR EX-KING BORIS OF MILESIA.

A memorial service was held yesterday afternoon at the Orthodox Church at Nice for His Majesty, Ex-King Boris of Milesia. Nearly every European Royal House was personally

represented. Among the congregation were the Ex-King and Ex-Queen of Ruritania, with Ex-Crown Prince Danilo, the Ex-King and Ex-Queen of Carolia with Ex-Crown Prince Paul, the Ex-King of. . . .

So another one was gone, I reflected sadly . . . and then looking at the next page I noticed that the four principal Russian dancers of the Opera at Montibes had been taken seriously ill, and that, in consequence, all future performances had been abandoned. Further, the Rockefeller Institute had sent four more specialists to Valaise, the first two having fallen ill, forty-eight hours after their arrival, of the same mysterious disease that was mowing down the villagers. All fountains and streams in the neighbourhood had been sprayed with paraffin on their advice, and the force of the epidemic had a little abated, although isolated cases of this illness had been identified in seven other widely removed mountain villages. H.I.H. The Grand Duke Gabriel was said to be progressing steadily.

We spent a few more days in Cairo. But now the party began to break up. Julian and Ruth fell ill again (she had a slight temperature), and Frank and Mrs. Jocelyn maintained that they were too weak to take any risks. The remaining four of us therefore, set out into the desert alone.

Mrs. Chitty, though we had urged that the fatigue might prove too much for her, had insisted on accompanying us. But, once in the sandy wastes, she began to complain of feeling unwell. Nestling in furs,

again, she went to bed very early each night, while Mrs. Rammond, my brother and myself, wildly caroused on cinnamon beneath stars crystal-bright in their blue firmament; caroused, as it were, with something of the defiant and boisterous recklessness that inspired those rakish Restoration nobles who remained in London during the Great Plague: for such a scourge, it is said, always affects profoundly the moral outlook. "Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die," was the motto engraved on our, as on their, hearts. There, then, we sat on, recklessly quaffing the flowing bowl of quinine, and wantonly sprinkling our cubes of sugar with camphor and eucalyptus, until the early hours of the morning —notwithstanding that the feathers of the palm-trees which lay motionless on the air above us were the only plumes, and the sound of the heavy and inexorable snoring that issued from Mrs. Chitty's tent was the sole and rather menacing music, afforded us for our feasting. Indeed this rhythmic rising and falling announced all too plainly that the germ was still on the march; almost amounted to a solemn declaration of new hostilities.

The days passed, and still we held on. Mrs. Chitty perhaps now felt genuinely ill, for she was again becoming desperate. As we advanced further into the desert, her Victorian helplessness was manifested more and more often. It was no easy matter to find the English or Libyan coins that she scattered in such thoughtless profusion among the golden grains which lay spread round us for hundreds of miles: and many an hour we passed, hot and tired, scratching

and grubbing in the sand like so many animals burrowing, until a miniature sandstorm was raised about us, while Muriel Chitty sat a little way off, continually repining. . . .

The weather, she said, was cold. She had always expected the desert to be hot. She wished she had brought another fur-coat with her (just a little one, like the one I was holding): except that she thought the desert must be full of moths, for, she added with a slightly malicious smile, she continually smelt camphor —she supposed it must be against moths, for it was entirely useless against anything else. . . . The palm-trees were ugly, the sunsets monotonous, the camels lazy—they were always lying down—and greedy; though she had always felt sorry for them hitherto, because they looked so long-legged, round-backed and awkward: and she was sure they were badly treated. She didn't like the faces of the camel-drivers, wouldn't trust them, wouldn't trust them an inch, herself. Perhaps it was as well that one did not understand what they were talking about. For what did all the natives eat? One couldn't eat dates for ever. And then the water—she was sure that the drinking water in the oases was not *reliable*: but she could not drink mineral water because it contained no vitamins. If the Arabs wouldn't mind—and, after all, they couldn't, could they?—she would like to pour a whole lot of disinfectants down the spring. Oh, but she forgot, she hadn't brought any with her. Might she have ours—they would do just as well—? (And only just in time we stopped her: for, with extraordinary skill, agility and presence of mind, she

here made a dash for our row of bottles, gargles and the like—our only safeguard and refuge—intending to empty them down the well). All right, she wouldn't, then. But she was sure that there would be an epidemic one day—still, of course, if *we* didn't worry about that, it didn't matter. . . . The Arabs couldn't care for music, or they wouldn't make those extraordinary noises at the camels. . . . She was *certain*, now, that they treated the camels brutally. It was terrible to see them, they looked so bony and emaciated. Although they were not animals she cared for, she really would like to buy one, if only to get it away from those awful men (terrible faces). The camels looked as if a good graze on green, English grass would do them all the good in the world: but, then, if she bought one, where could she put it? . . . And, besides, perhaps she oughtn't to buy one, really. It would be, after all, an extravagance. She knew the trustees would say that. Carriage was so expensive, too—and taxation was going up all the time (at least she supposed it was, but one couldn't tell, for there were never any letters or newspapers in a place like this). Where could she put it? Of course, she might keep it somewhere here, and have grass sent out to it—but, then, that wouldn't be the same thing, not at all the same. And even that would cost money. And then the desert was so big, that if one did put one somewhere here, one might not be able to find it when it was wanted, for when one had discovered places here, places in which to put things, often one could never find them again. Oh, dear! she believed that after all, she had lost her "little

bag "—the one with her Libyan money in it. Where did she think she had left it? Oh, but she was certain —she knew quite well—she was sure she had put it down, just for a moment—somewhere in the desert. . . .

But now Fortune, turning once more, smiled on Mrs. Chitty, and she smiled back. The tragedy was mounting to its inevitable climax. My brother, in spite of all our carefully thought-out methods of prevention, in spite of cinnamon, camphor and quinine, began to fail for a day or two—and then fell victim. Like a hero he stuck to his post. Even when finally overwhelmed, he refused to acknowledge defeat. Mrs. Chitty was, naturally, the first of us to notice the symptoms. To her it was like watching a race with the prospect of an exciting finish. Her colours were ahead now. Daily she became more worked up. It was certain, too, she must have supposed, that Mrs. Rammond and I would catch it. . . . The desert: the *wonderful*, *wonderful* desert. There was, she reflected, something incredibly beautiful and romantic about it—what glamour! Doughty, and all those slow, eternal camels, and the Arabs, such dignity, and palm-trees and Colonel Lawrence and all that. . . . Wonderful. . . . But Mrs. Rammond and I were without hope and drank cinnamon without end.

In the few, recurrent lucid moments which his illness granted him every day, my brother explained to us the precise nature of the microbe's ravages. The sensation, he told us, was comparable to being knocked on the head and drowned simultaneously. Only for about five minutes a day, just long enough

to realize how sweet life could have been was he permitted to come up to the surface, take a few breaths, and then, once more, he was sent spinning down again into the depths. He could walk, even talk a little —but automatically, as though he were in a trance. For the rest, there was an intense aching in the roots of his hair, shooting pains in the eyes, slight deafness, acute anguish between the vertebræ, pains in the toes, a perfect agony in the lobe of each ear and a sense of partial paralysis in the left hand. This journey was something to which for a whole decade he had eagerly looked forward, as to something transcendent and unattainable, and here he was being whirled through the desert (for at Sidi-ben-Sidi we had met our car) in a state of unconsciousness, or, at best, of semi-consciousness.

Her horse, Mrs. Chitty must have thought, was just rounding Tattenham Corner; but on the contrary, the invalid came to, suddenly after a week, to find himself in the large native city of Abu-ben-Kalab. We were staying in a little white hotel, owned by a Greek. It was very clean, and had a quite pretty garden which, by an extraordinary stroke of luck, was planted with such trees and shrubs as eucalyptus, camphor and castor-oil. Moreover, in one corner of it there even flourished a cinnamon-bush. Out of this shady and restful grey-greenness, aromatic and health-giving breaths were wafted on every slightest, fluttering breeze. From the first moment Mrs. Chitty evinced a particular aversion to this spot, declaring that when she was in a garden, she liked to *feel* she was in one, and not in a chemist's shop.

The town itself was fascinating, I thought. For hours you could wander round the souks—the light falling through the branches that roofed them to dapple and splash the bearded, bartering figures beside the stalls—without feeling a moment's fatigue, so new and alive was the scene. In the public places one could listen to poetry being declaimed, with an accompaniment of gourds and gongs, to an entranced circle of yellow-faced, squatting figures. And sometimes, too, one could hear tall, lank Senegalese minstrels, the colour of black-lead and wearing necklaces of cowrie shells, singing their high-pitched songs, see dancers, belonging to the unknown tribes that inhabit the interior of the continent, whirling round feverishly in a cloud of white dust, or watch the dark mountebanks from distant Marakeesh performing their grotesque and epicene antics. Such was the fascination of the city, strange and varied. But Mrs. Chitty liked it no better than the garden. There was not a Minister in the place—not even a consul; no European shops, no papers (so that it was impossible, she said, to tell what was going on. Everyone in England might have the plague itself, and one would not know about it).

It was a complete transformation. This subtle lady, who at home was intensely cosmopolitan, eschewing English phrases wherever possible, and substituting for them Foreign Office *clichés* in French, German and Italian, was each day becoming more English, more Victorian. As though in an effort to sum up her own tendencies, she asked me one day to go into the town and find her a bottle of Rowland's

Macassar Oil—the very sound of which conjured up in my imagination ottomans, crinolines, double-jointed little parasols edged with black lace, beaded flowers, plush chairs, draped table-legs, soft, sentimental whiskers and curling, pomaded locks. . . . Assuredly this was not the place to choose for such a whimsey. Nor, perhaps, ought one to have encouraged a caprice so exotic in this place and century, unless one was certain (and this was improbable) that it was comparable to the longing for a "dish of apricocks" entertained by Webster's "Duchess of Malfi." However, Mrs. Chitty's eagerness was so pathetic, that, though fully aware of the futility of my errand, I tramped up and down the souks for hours, searching for this strange and ancient elixir. And hereafter at every village, however small, and even if entirely composed of wattle-huts, I was asked to get out and look for it.

At Abu-ben-Kalab, it was, withal, that the ever-increasing feeling of fondness for animals that she paraded reached a point that was unpleasant and even dangerous in its consequences, as much for them as for ourselves.

It cannot, I am afraid, be disputed that the natives of these regions ill-treat their animals, though I do know to what extent this neglect or brutality can be palliated by the fact that there live, not so far away, great numbers of dangerous and disagreeable beasts —lions, tigers, apes and crocodiles—and that the men themselves, or their not far distant ancestors, have suffered cruelly at their paws and teeth. Meanwhile, in the interior of the continent the dusky

brothers of these men—and the brothers of these animals—still wage against one another a grim and endless warfare. This must, if one comes to think of it, alter the human attitude toward other creatures. In England, it is the animal which has to be afraid: all the ferocious creatures of our country, fox, stag and otter, hares, pheasants, rabbits, ordinary field-mice and guinea-pigs, must by now have learnt their lesson. But to ignorant Africans an animal, even a domestic animal living among them, is regarded much as an interned German was regarded in England during the war. Not a word it says is understood, and its every action ought to be regarded with suspicion, as part of a plot: nor would it seem fair, they might urge in conversation with us, to be too kind, too generous with food to these brutes, whose brothers and cousins are killing our relatives and co-religionists the other side of the Atlas.

Mrs. Chitty naturally did not share or indeed comprehend these feelings, so different from our own. Apart from mice, she had no enemies or rivals in the animal-world, and was horrified at the African outlook on brute-beasts. She therefore secretly resolved to buy a few of the worst-treated animals, and undertook a self-appointed pilgrimage of pity round the town, guided and advised by a black and evil interpreter. Unfortunately, as we learnt afterward, whereas she never made an offer for a whole, unmaimed, unscarred and well-fed animal, she was willing to offer comparatively fabulous sums for any halt, maimed, starved, wounded, scarred, or diseased mule or donkey. This was disastrous. Even those

Arabs who had hitherto been kind to their animals, had been governed in this rather by financial than moral principles. A healthy, well-fed brute had been, up till Mrs. Chitty's advent, a paying proposition. But now it was so no longer. Her motives eluded them, and they very logically concluded that here was a mad-millionaire-white-woman with an unhealthy passion for seeing animals suffer. And since their faith taught them that, while both women and animals have no souls, Allah inspires the insane, and because life had taught them that gold was necessary to men, it seemed only right—and certainly good business—to gratify her curious desires. Thus, it appears, all night they would sit up, ill-treating their unfortunate beasts, kicking and beating them, inflicting hellish and ingenious tortures upon them, in order to be able in the morning to extort a good price from her. A suffering mule was now worth ten, twenty times even, a healthy, happy one. Acute speculation in sick animals set in: there were, of course, fluctuations, but, on the whole, it was a steady, rising market. The results were lamentable and heart-rending.

Ignorant of that which had been in progress, we returned to the hotel one day, after an expedition, to find it besieged by a mob of eager, shouting natives, determined to sell Mrs. Chitty their tortured beasts; for it had somehow become known that we were leaving the next morning. Flocks and flocks of suffering and ill-tempered creatures, including a number of gigantic, knock-kneed and macerated camels, and crowds of jostling, bargaining, jabbering, quarrelling

natives, all wrapped in a suffocating cloud of thick, white dust, surrounded the building. The proprietor was at the same time both furious and in a panic. He protested that all the guests were leaving, his business was ruined, and the authorities accused him of attempting to stir up sedition among the natives. Mrs. Chitty began, in her turn, to grow equally angry. (That Rowland's Macassar Oil was unattainable only made matters worse.) Moreover we were forced to speak to her, however gently, about the suffering to dumb animals that her kindness was causing. And personally, though I did not permit myself to tell her so, when I considered how little she allowed the ills of human beings to count with her as against the welfare of her microbe, when I reflected on her indiscriminate massacres in the South of France, her attitude genuinely shocked me.

Nothing we could say would melt that heart. She only grew more resolute, more obstinate. And even if, on this occasion, the very abundance of the sick beasts defeated her, she never subsequently lost a chance of repeating her conduct. Only their price limited her opportunities of well-doing: for each day their cost increased. It is surprising how swiftly news travels in these dark, intuitive lands, and all round Africa spread the legend, ever more exaggerated, of the immensely rich, mad, white woman, with her strange penchant: until in Guinea and the Gold Coast, Dahomey, Ashanti, Benin and the Congo it was rumoured that she was on her way, and the naked, grinning figures dancing round the fire, spared the last missionary, abandoned their cannibal feasts,

in order that they might rush to their kraals and prepare their animals for her coming. It might be, even, that she would give them a string of glass beads, a bottle of whisky or a pocket-knife in exchange! And they set to work with a will. Thus, perhaps, some may consider that in the end she did good: for in the excitement many human beings were saved, though the animals suffered.

As my brother grew stronger, and Mrs. Rammond and myself remained immune, Mrs. Chitty began visibly to pine. Her respect for us had, I think, increased. She would now take the greatest trouble to prevent one from discovering what plans she was maturing, what manoeuvres she had already carried out. Her craving for Macassar continued unabated, but she found out how to make a use of it. Let us assume that, without my knowledge, she had effected some tremendous bargain—a donkey, perhaps so ill that it had died in the night—and that, in her anxiety to dispose of the body, she had reached the conclusion that the best thing for her to do was to have it tied on with the luggage at the back of the car. Before we started, then, she would lament the Macassar famine, and would be so charming (and her charm was ever irresistible), would allow such a wealth of pathos to creep into the hollow but musical tones of her voice, and such a deep well of tears unshed to shine in her eyes, that of my own accord, and without the slightest suspicion of what was on hand, I would volunteer to search the village for the magic Macassar. Tired, hot and footsore, I would limp back to find the car ready, Mrs. Chitty, swathed in

veils and rugs, comfortably enshrined there, and behind it, neatly rolled and folded up on the top of the luggage, a grey and furry carcase.

"I thought we might leave it somewhere on the way," she would urge. "Perhaps, if we could find a pretty spot, you wouldn't mind digging a grave for it? Nothing elaborate, just a plain grave. It's very good exercise, and you don't look too well. They have no proper animal cemeteries here. It's a disgrace!"

We passed a night or two on the way and then arrived—truly it was one of the chief attractions of the whole of our long journey—at Ali-Sid-Ali, that great native city only recently opened up to tourists. Capital, shrine and trading centre in one, it is a place of pilgrimage for all Mohammedan Africa, yet this sanctity is not allowed to interfere with the ever-growing volume of business transacted with Europe. The hotel, too, is a fine and new one, and after so much rough travelling, it was most agreeable to be in such comfortable quarters. But, alas, worry returned with civilization, for we found a telegram waiting for us to announce that our four friends in Cairo were back in hospital, seriously ill.

Though she had brought with her a letter of introduction to the British Consul-General, Mrs. Chitty, to our surprise, for once failed to deliver it in person. She, or rather her microbe, was evidently engaged in devising a different system of tactics. . . . Mrs. Rammond and myself were still in good health, my brother was fully recovered. Such a state of things could not be allowed to go on. Something *must*

be done. Accordingly, she went to bed, immediately evolved one of her racing temperatures, and during several days made brave endeavours to consume our whole stock of medicines. This, doubtless she felt, would put her in a better position for developing her new offensive. But I had a hidden reserve of cinnamon and quinine, and thus she found herself unable to exhaust our supplies. Indeed, I think that so great was the quantity of these drugs which her new scheme of tactics forced her to swallow, that in all truth she began to feel ill. Certainly her temperature touched unprecedented heights. Meanwhile, she had posted her letter of introduction to the Consul-General and had explained in a letter of her own, enclosing it, that she was unwell, most unwell.

The atmosphere of Ali-Sid-Ali at this season was most fanatic. It was the fast of Ramadan, and the Mussulmans could be heard, in every direction, knocking their muffled heads against the marble floors of the Mosques, while the holy dancers gyrated wildly round the street corners. The Muezzin singers were in most formidable, if beautiful, voice: and at night, all night, a sonorous music, a deep, bass chanting that was ominous and extremely impressive, conveyed continually the glory of Allah to every nook of the city, and floated above the flat roofs up in a stream towards his sacred garden.

Mrs. Chitty seemed to gather unto herself some of this surrounding fanaticism. As she sat in her large, airy room, decorated with Saracenic icicles, painted bright red and blue, it was easy to detect in her eye the kindling of a new religious fire. More than ever

did she resemble Savonarola, but there was, too, now more than a touch of the dancing dervish, a suggestion, even, of the Mad Mullah himself. Her voice sounded a note of doom that was menacing and unmistakable.

Her bedroom faced a Mussulman cemetery, and tethered in this was a little white kid which frisked and gambolled so prettily that the children used to come and play with it. But Mrs. Chitty, seeing them hugging it, maintained that they were ill-treating the poor creature, and after much bargaining, succeeded, behind our backs, in buying it.

There was an uproar in the hotel. Every manager and director came and shouted at us, until eventually we understood one of them, who said that only yesterday he had been obliged to ask an English lady to send away her pet pekinese, and that, therefore, he was very sorry, but he must quite definitely refuse to have a goat brought to live in the hotel. No doubt it was usual in Europe, but here people did not understand that sort of thing, he added.

Mrs. Chitty, securely established in bed, refused to give way, and the kid was tethered in the corridor outside. The authorities became yet more frantic. They had heard about the lady before: a guide from Abu-ben-Kalab had told them about her behaviour there. The hotel proprietor in that town, they understood, was in consequence of it a ruined man. Well, she could not repeat that sort of thing in Ali-Sid-Ali. It wouldn't do here, and they weren't going to stand it. . . . Perhaps the police could arrange matters. . . .

It was an *impasse*, a deadlock. We began to fear

race-riots, so intense was the feeling. But, by the greatest good fortune, at this very moment a note was brought round to Mrs. Chitty from Lady McAlister, the wife of the Consul-General. In it she invited the invalid to stay at her house, saying that she and her husband would only be too pleased to nurse and look after any friend of Gerry Flitmouse. Mrs. Chitty at once accepted, scenting new victims for her germ. And then, too, there would be Foreign Office talks and every sort of delight.

When she went to pay her bill, she took the kid down to the desk with her, and, still accompanied by it, walked through the hall with great dignity. She then bore it off in triumph to the McAlisters. Lady McAlister, we heard afterward, was sympathetic: but Sir William, an old gentleman with white corkscrew moustaches, a Vandyke beard, and an eye-glass, drew the line at such a guest, and made his wife explain that it would be difficult to find suitable food for it. Mrs. Chitty now (I thought rather brutally) abandoned the little thing, and sent it back to the cemetery whence it had come. And there, since it was now ownerless, it would quickly have starved to death had we not been informed by the vindictive hotel-manager of its plight and decided to make it a small allowance in perpetuity.

Mrs. Chitty remained in bed for several days, "having a rest," and being waited on and made much of. Soon, however, her interest was aroused by the news that Forling, the explorer, was coming to stay, and she decided to get up to meet him. Lady McAlister kindly asked us to luncheon the same day,

and I thought I had never seen Mrs. Chitty look more beautiful, nor ever had her charm impressed me more.

One of Forling's chief assets, the thing which had perhaps aided this great man in his wonderful career more than anything else, was his remarkable constitution. Moreover, he was, like so many persons of immense achievement, extremely modest: and his only boast was that, though now seventy-three years of age, he could walk as far and do as much as a boy of twenty, and, above all, that he had never spent a single day of his life in bed. Very foolishly (but then, how was he to know?) he mentioned this at luncheon . . . and once more I saw Mrs. Chitty smile her dark, enigmatic smile. At tea-time she had a relapse, and was forced to go to bed again.

Mrs. Rammond, my brother and myself felt that we must return to Cairo in order to look after our four invalids there. We went to Muriel Chitty's bedroom to talk with her. She did not feel well enough to travel, she said, and decided to stay on with the McAlisters. They were very kind, so hospitable, and, besides, she would like to see more of Forling: an exceptional man, that. . . .

We said good-bye to Muriel, but with real regret. It was impossible not to admire, not to be fascinated by her; indeed her faults only accentuated her strange charm and beauty, and the subtle wit and understanding that, though they were not always with her, often came to surprise and please one. . . .

But forty-eight hours afterwards the explorer began to feel unwell. The following morning, just as we were leaving Ali-Sid-Ali, we were told that he

was very seriously ill, and the Consul-General had felt himself compelled to wire to Cairo for a specialist. He was expected to arrive that night by air. Alas, the rest of the story is known. The specialist arrived, but it was too late. Forling had spent his first, and last, day in bed, and the microbe had won a notable victory. . . .

In Cairo, a few days later, I bought a copy of the *Daily Tribune*.

Mr. Robert Sutledge, I read, had been ordered a sea-voyage for three months. One of the Russian dancers was dead. His Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Gabriel had been allowed out in the garden of Nishkynashdom for the first time since his illness. He was said to be looking very frail, and was supported on each side by a hospital nurse. A memorial plaque had been erected to the memory of Ex-King Boris of Milesia in the foyer of the Folies Bergères at Monte Carlo, and a bronze statue, life-size, of H.R.H. the Duchess of Chester had been unveiled on the sea-front at Montibes. . . . The summer was coming on, and the epidemic at Valaise was dying down. . . . That was all. . . . But was it? . . . I read on.

There was, I noticed, a curious outbreak of illness at Palermo and Constantinople. . . . The French General in Command at Damascus had retired, pleading ill-health. The Governor of Rhodes was indisposed. The Anglican Bishop of Cyprus was on his way home after several weeks of illness. At Alexandria our Representative had been granted sick-leave: the Sultan of Libya had abandoned his first levee. . . . Stop press: "Liner *Dionysus* with Friends of Greece

on board in quarantine Gibraltar, owing to mystery outbreak. Notable invalids on board include Lady Richborough and Dean Squirrel."

The future, too, held its sequels. In Greece, dengue fever, which had doubtless been gathering strength for months, broke out as an epidemic in August. It was stated, at the end of September, that there had been 300,000 cases in Athens alone —Athens, where, it will be remembered, Mrs. Chitty had been so badly bitten by mosquitoes. During the winter months of the year a great wave of influenza spread over Europe. But Mrs. Chitty had gone again to the East . . . the unknown East, which is the cradle of the human race, the birthplace of every religion, every mystery, every disease. . . c Who knows what may not again come out of the East, the unchanging East, or what the year may bring ? . . .

* * * * * *

And even as I have sat writing this story, a ghostly influenza, conjured up out of its pages, has attended me, and I have not the strength to pick up my pen. *Absit omen :* let me pray that the reader of it will not be similarly afflicted.