

## CHAPTER V

### THE DEVIOS PURSUIT

SUCH were the opening phases of the friendship of Mr. Parham and Sir Bussy Woodcock. It was destined to last nearly six years. The two men attracted and repelled each other in about equal measure, and in that perhaps lay the sustaining interest of their association. In its more general form in Mr. Parham's mind, the relationship was a struggle to subdue this mysteriously able, lucky adventurer to the Parham conception of the universe, to involve him in political affairs and advise and direct him when these affairs became perplexing, to build him up into a great and central figure (with a twin star) in the story of the Empire and the world. In its more special aspect the relationship was to be one of financial support for Mr. Parham and the group of writers and university teachers he would gather round him, to steer the world—as it had always been steered. When the history of the next half-century came to be written people would say, "There was the finger of Parham," or, "He was one of Parham's Young Men." But how difficult it was to lead this financial rhinoceros, as Mr. Parham, in the secrecy of his own thoughts, would sometimes style his friend, towards any definite conception of a rôle

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and a policy outside the now almost automatic process of buying up everything and selling it for more.

At times the creature seemed quite haphazard, a reckless spendthrift who could gain more than he spent. He would say, "Gaw! I'm going to have a lark," and one had either to drop out of the world about him or hang on to him into the oddest and strangest of places.

There were phases of passionate resentment in Mr. Parham's experience, but then again there were phases of clear and reasonable hope. Sir Bussy would suddenly talk about political parties with a knowledge, a shrewdness that amazed his friend. "Fun to push 'em all over," he would say. And once or twice he talked of Rothermere, Beaverbrook, Burnham, Riddell, with curiosity and something like envy. Late at night on each occasion it was, other people, people one suspected, were present, and Mr. Parham could not bring him to the point of a proposal.

Then off went everything like dead leaves before a gale, a vast hired yacht to the Baltic, to Maine, Newfoundland, and the Saint Lawrence River, and the strangest people packed aboard. Or Mr. Parham found himself surveying the Mediterranean from a Nice hotel of which Sir Bussy had taken a floor for Christmas. Once or twice he would come most unexpectedly to his Mentor, so full of purpose in his eyes, that Mr. Parham felt the moment had come. Once he took him suddenly, just they two, to see Stravin-

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sky's *Noces* at Monte Carlo and once in London a similar humility of approach precluded a visit to hear the Lener Quartette.

"Pleasant," said Sir Bussy, coming away. "Pleasant sounds. It cleans and soothes. And more. It's—" his poor untrained mind, all destitute of classical precedents, sought for an image—"it's like putting your head down a rabbit hole and hearing a fairy world going on. A world neither here nor there. Is there anything more to it than that?"

"Oh!" said Mr. Parham, as though he cried to God; "windows upon heaven!"

"Gaw!"

"We went there—we went there *sailcloth*. It turned us to silk."

"Well—*did* it? It sounds as if it was telling you something, but does it tell you anything? This music. It gets excited and joyous, for no reason, just as you get excited and joyous in dreams; it's sad and tender—about nothing. They're burying a dead beetle in fairyland. It stirs up appropriate memories. Your mind runs along according to the rhythm. But all to no effect. It doesn't give you anything real. It doesn't let you out. Just a finer sort of smoking," said Sir Bussy.

Mr. Parham shrugged his shoulders. No good to get this savage books on "How to Listen to Music." He did listen, and this was what he made of it.

But one sentence lingered in Mr. Parham's mind: "It doesn't," said Sir Bussy, "*let you out.*"

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Did he want to be let out of this gracious, splendid world of ours, built foursquare on the pillars of history, with its honours, its precedences, its mighty traditions? Could he mean that?

Mr. Parham was reminded of another scene when Sir Bussy had betrayed very much that same thought. They were recrossing the Atlantic to the Azores after visiting Newfoundland. The night was gloriously calm and warm. Before turning in Mr. Parham, who had been flirting rather audaciously with one of the pretty young women who adorned Sir Bussy's parties so abundantly, came out on the promenade deck to cool his nerves and recall some lines of Horace that had somehow got bent in his memory and would return to him only in a queerly distorted form. He had had a moment of daring, and the young thing had pretended fright and gone to bed. Fun—and essentially innocent.

At the rail Mr. Parham discovered his host, black and exceedingly little against the enormous deep blue sky.

"Phosphorescence?" asked Mr. Parham in an encouraging tenor.

Sir Bussy did not seem to hear. His hands were deep in his trouser pockets. "Gaw," he said. "Look at all this wet—under that *ghastly* moon!"

At times his attitudes took Mr. Parham's breath away. One might think the moon had just appeared, that it had no established position, that it was not Diana and Astarte, Isis and a thousand

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sweet and lovely things.

"Curious," this strange creature went on. "We're half outside the world here. We are. We're actually on a bulge, Parham. That way you go down a curve to America, and *that* way you go down a curve to your old Europe—and all that frowsty old art and history of yours."

"It was 'frowsty old Europe,' as you call it, sent this yacht up here."

"No fear! it got away."

"It can't stay here. It has to go back."

"This time," said Sir Bussy after a pause.

He stared for a moment or so at the moon with, if anything, an increasing distaste, made a gesture of his hand as if to dismiss it, and then, slowly and meditatively, went below, taking no further notice of Mr. Parham.

But Mr. Parham remained.

What was it this extravagant little monster wanted, in this quite admirable world? Why trouble one's mind about a man who could show ingratitude for that gracious orb of pale caressing light? It fell upon the world like the silver and gossamer robes of an Indian harem. It caressed and provoked the luminosities that flashed and flickered in the water. It stirred with an infinite gentleness. It incited to delicately sensuous adventure.

Mr. Parham pushed his yachting cap back from his forehead in a very doggish manner, thrust his hands into the pockets of his immaculate ducks and paced the deck, half hoping to hear a rustle

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or a giggle that would have confessed that earlier retreat insincere. But she really had turned in, and it was only when Mr. Parham had done likewise that he began to think over Sir Bussy and his ocean of "wet—under that *ghastly* moon." . . .

But this work, it is well to remind ourselves and the reader, is the story of a metapsychic séance and its stupendous consequences, and our interest in these two contrasted characters must not let it become a chronicle of the travels and excursions of Sir Bussy and Mr. Parham. They went once in a multitudinous party to Henley, and twice they visited Oxford together to get the flavour. How Mr. Parham's fellow-dons fell over each other to get on good terms with Sir Bussy, and how Mr. Parham despised them! But bringing Sir Bussy down made a real difference to Mr. Parham's standing in Oxford. For a time Sir Bussy trifled with the Turf. The large strange parties he assembled at the Hangar and at Buntincombe and Carfex House perpetually renewed Mr. Parham's amazement that he should know so many different sorts of people and such queer people and be at such pains to entertain them and so tolerant of some of the things they did. They got up to all sorts of things, and he let them. It seemed to Mr. Parham he was chiefly curious to know what they got out of what they got up to. Several times they discussed it together.

"Not a horse on the Turf," said Sir Bussy, "is being run absolutely straight."

"But surely——"

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"Honourable men there, certainly. They keep the rules because there'd be no fun in it if they didn't. It would just go to pieces, and nobody wants it to go to pieces. But do you think they run a horse all out to win every time? Nobody dreams of such a thing."

"You mean that every horse is pulled?"

"No. No. *No.* But it isn't allowed to strain itself unduly at the beginning. That's quite a different thing.

Mr. Parham's face expressed his comprehension of the point. Poor human nature!

"Why do you bother about it?"

"My father the cab driver used to drive broken-down racehorses," he said, "and was always backing Certs. It interfered with my education. I've always wanted to see this end of it. And I inherit an immense instinct for human weakness from my mother."

"But it's costly?"

"Not a bit of it," said Sir Bussy, with a sigh. "I seem always to see what they are up to. Before they see I see it. I make money on the Turf. I *always* make money."

His face seemed to accuse the universe, and Mr. Parham made a sympathetic noise.

When Mr. Parham went to Newmarket or a race meeting with Sir Bussy he saw to it that his own costume was exactly right. At Ascot he would be in a silky grey morning coat and white spatter-dashes and a grey top hat with a black band; the most sporting figure there he was; and when they

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went to Henley he was in perfect flannels and an Old Arvonian blazer, not a new one but one a little faded and grubby and with one patch of tar. He was a perfect yachtsman on yachts, and at Cannes he never failed to have that just-left-the-tennis-round-the-corner touch, which is the proper touch for Cannes. His was one of those rare figures that could wear plus fours with distinction. His sweaters were chosen with care, for even a chameleon can be correct. Never did he disfigure a party; often, indeed, he would pull one together and define its place and purpose.

The yachtsman ensemble was the hardest to preserve because Mr. Parham had more than an average disposition towards seasickness. There he differed from Sir Bussy, who was the better pleased the rougher the water and the smaller the boat. "I can't help it," said Sir Bussy. "It's the law of my nature. What I get I keep."

But if Mr. Parham's reactions were prompt they were cheerful. "Nelson," he would say, after his time of crisis. "He would be sick for two or three days every time he went to sea. That consoles me. The spirit indeed is unwilling but the flesh is weak."

Sir Bussy seemed to appreciate that.

By thus falling into line with things, by refusing to be that social misfit, the intractable and untidy don, Mr. Parham avoided any appearance of parasitism in his relations with Sir Bussy and kept his own self-respect unimpaired. He was "*right there*"; he was not an intrusion. He had



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never dressed well before, though he had often wanted to do so, and this care for his costume made rather serious inroads upon his modest capital, but he kept his aim steadily in view. If one is to edit a weekly that will sway the world one must surely look man of the world enough to do it. And there came a phase in his relations with Sir Bussy when he had to play the rôle of a man of the world all he knew how.

It has to be told, though for some reasons it would be pleasanter to omit it. But it is necessary to illuminate the factors of antagonism and strife within this strange association with its mutual scrutiny, its masked and hidden criticisms.

Perhaps—if the reader is young . . .

Yet even the young reader may want to know.

Let us admit that this next section, though illuminating, is not absolutely essential to the understanding of the story. It is not improper, it is not coarse, but frankly—it envisages something—shall we call it “Eighteenth Century”?—in Mr. Parham’s morals. If it is not an essential part of the story it is at any rate very necessary to our portrait of Mr. Parham.