
Kipps
H. G. Wells

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# BOOK ONE. THE MAKING OF KIPPS

# Chapter 1. The little Shop at New Romney

**1**

Until he was nearly arrived at manhood, it did not become clear to Kipps how it was that he had come into the care of an aunt and uncle instead of having a father and mother like other little boys. He had vague memories of a somewhere else, a dim room, a window looking down on white buildings, and of a some one else who talked to forgotten people and who was his mother. He could not recall her features very distinctly, but he remembered with extreme definition a white dress she wore, with a pattern of little sprigs of flowers and little bows upon it, and a girdle of straight-ribbed white ribbon about the waist. Linked with this, he knew not how, were clouded half-obliterated recollections of scenes in which there was weeping, weeping in which he was inscrutably moved to join. Some terrible tall man with a loud voice played a part in these scenes, and, either before or after them, there were impressions of looking for interminable periods out of the window of railway trains in the company of these two people.

He knew, though he could not remember that he had ever been told, that a certain faded wistful face that looked at him from a plush and gilt framed daguerreotype above the mantel of the 'sitting-room' was the face of his mother. But that knowledge did not touch his dim memories with any elucidation. In that photograph she was a girlish figure, leaning against a photographer's stile, and with all the self-conscious shrinking natural to that position. She had curly hair and a face far younger and prettier than any other mother in his experience. She swung a Dolly Varden hat by the string, and looked with obedient, respectful eyes on the photographer-gentleman who had commanded the pose. She was very slight and pretty. But the phantom mother that haunted his memory so elusively was not like that, though he could not remember how she differed.

Perhaps she was older or a little less shrinking, or, it may be, only dressed in a different way . . . It is clear she handed him over to his aunt and uncle at New Romney with explicit directions and a certain endowment. One gathers she had something of that fine sense of social distinctions that subsequently played so large a part in Kipps' career. He was not to go to a 'Common' school, she provided, but to a certain seminary in Hastings, that was not only a 'middle-class academy' with mortar-boards and every evidence of a higher social tone, but also remarkably cheap. She seems to have been animated by the desire to do her best for Kipps even at a certain sacrifice of herself, as though Kipps were in some way a superior sort of person. She sent pocket-money to him from time to time for a year or more after Hastings had begun for him, but her face he never saw in the days of his lucid memory.

His aunt and uncle were already high on the hill of life when first he came to them. They had married for comfort in the evening or, at any rate, in the late afternoon of their days. They were at first no more then vague figures in the background of proximate realities, such realities as familiar chairs and tables, quiet to ride and drive, the newel of the staircase, kitchen furniture, pieces of firewood, the boiler tap, old newspapers, the cat, the High Street, the back-yard and the flat fields that are always so near in that little town. He knew all the stones in the yard individually, the creeper in the corner, the dust-bin and the mossy wall, better than many men know the faces of their wives. There was a corner under the ironing-board which, by means of a shawl, could be made, under propitious gods, a very decent cubby-house, a corner that served him for several years as the indisputable hub of the world, and the stringy places in the carpet, the knots upon the dresser, and the several corners of the rag hearthrug his uncle had made, became essential parts of his mental foundations. The shop he did not know so thoroughly; it was a forbidden region to him, yet somehow he managed to know it very well.

His aunt and uncle were, as it were, the immediate gods of this world, and, like the gods of the world of old, occasionally descended right into it, with arbitrary injunctions and disproportionate punishments. And, unhappily, one rose to their Olympian level at meals. Then one had to say one's 'grace,' hold one's spoon and fork in mad, unnatural ways called 'properly,' and refrain from eating even nice, sweet things 'too fast.' If he 'gobbled' there was trouble, and at the slightest abandon with knife, fork, and spoon his aunt rapped his knuckles, albeit his uncle always finished up his gravy with his knife. Sometimes, moreover, his uncle would come pipe in hand out of a sedentary remoteness in the most disconcerting way when a little boy was doing the most natural and attractive things, with 'Drat and drabbit that young rascal! What's he a-doing of now?' and his aunt would appear at door or window to interrupt interesting conversation with children who were upon unknown grounds considered 'low' and undesirable, and call him in. The pleasantest little noises, however softly you did them, drumming on tea-trays, trumpeting your fists, whistling on keys, ringing chimes with a couple of pails, or playing tunes on the window-panes, brought down the gods in anger. Yet what noise is fainter than your finger on the window — gently done? Sometimes, however, these gods gave him broken toys out of the shop, and then one loved them better — for the shop they kept was, among other things, a toy-shop. (The other things included books to read and books to give away, and local photographs; it had some pretentions to be a china-shop and the fascia spoke of glass; it was also a stationer's shop with a touch of haberdashery about it, and in the windows and odd corners were mats and terra-cotta dishes and milking-stools for painting, and there was a hint of picture-frames, and

firescreens, and fishing-tackle, and air-guns and bathing-suits, and tents — various things, indeed, but all cruelly attractive to a small boy's fingers.) Once his aunt gave him a trumpet if he would promise faithfully not to blow it, and afterwards took it away again. And his aunt made him say his catechism, and something she certainly called the 'Colic for the Day,' every Sunday in the year.

As the two grew old as he grew up, and as his impression of them modified insensibly from year to year, it seemed to him at last that they had always been as they were when in his adolescent days his impression of things grew fixed; his aunt he thought of as always lean, rather worried looking, and prone to a certain obliquity of cap, and his uncle massive, many chinned, and careless about his buttons. They neither visited nor received visitors. They were always very suspicious about their neighbours and other people generally; they feared the 'low' and they hated and despised the 'stuck up' and so they 'kept themselves to themselves,' according to the English ideal. Consequently Little Kipps had no playmates, except through the sin of disobedience. By inherent nature he had a sociable disposition. When he was in the High Street he made a point of saying 'Hallo!' to passing cyclists, and he would put his tongue out at the Quodling children whenever their nursemaid was not looking. And he began a friendship with Sid Pornick, the son of the haberdasher next door, that, with wide intermissions, was destined to last his lifetime through.

Pornick, the haberdasher, I may say at once, was, according to old Kipps, a 'blaring jackass'; he was a teetotaller, a 'nyar, nyar, 'imsinging Methodis',' and altogether distasteful and detrimental, he and his together, to true Kipps ideals so far as little Kipps could gather them. This Pornick certainly possessed an enormous voice, and he annoyed old Kipps greatly by calling 'You — Arn' and 'Siddee' up and down his house. He annoyed old Kipps by private choral services on Sunday, all his family, 'nyar, nyar'ing; and by mushroom culture, by behaving as though the pilaster between the two shops was common property, by making a noise of hammering in the afternoon when old Kipps wished to be quiet after his midday meal, by going up and down uncarpeted stairs in his boots, by having a black beard, by attempting to be friendly, and by — all that sort of thing. In fact, he annoyed old Kipps. He annoyed him especially with his shop-door mat. Old Kipps never beat his mat, preferring to let sleeping dust lie, and seeking a motive for a foolish proceeding, he held that Pornick waited until there was a suitable wind in order that the dust disengaged in that operation might defile his neighbour's shop. These issues would frequently develop into loud and vehement quarrels, and on one occasion came so near to violence as to be subsequently described by Pornick (who read his newspaper) as a 'Disgraceful Frackass.' On that occasion he certainly went into his own shop with extreme celerity.

But it was through one of these quarrels that the friendship of little Kipps and Sid Pornick came about. The two small boys found themselves one day looking through the gate at the doctor's goats together; they exchanged a few contradictions about which goat could fight which, and then young Kipps was moved to remark that Sid's father was a 'blaring jackess.' Sid said he wasn't, and Kipps repeated that he was, and quoted his authority. Then Sid, flying off at a tangent rather alarmingly, said he could fight young Kipps with one hand, an assertion young Kipps with a secret want of confidence denied. There were some vain repetitions, and the incident might have ended there, but happily a sporting butcher boy chanced on the controversy at this stage, and insisted upon seeing fair play.

The two small boys, under his pressing encouragement, did at last button up their jackets, square, and fight an edifying drawn battle until it seemed good to the butcher boy to go on with Mrs. Holyer's mutton. Then, according to his directions and under his experienced stage management, they shook hands and made it up. Subsequently a little tear-stained, perhaps, but flushed with the butcher boy's approval ('tough little kids'), and with cold stones down their necks as he advised, they sat side by side on the doctor's gate, projecting very much behind, staunching an honourable bloodshed, and expressing respect for one another. Each had a bloody nose and a black eye — three days later they matched to a shade — neither had given in, and, though this was tacit, neither wanted any more.

It was an excellent beginning. After this first encounter the attributes of their parents and their own relative value in battle never rose between them, and if anything was wanted to complete the warmth of their regard it was found in a joint dislike of the eldest Quodling. The eldest Quodling lisped, had a silly sort of straw hat and a large pink face (all covered over with self-satisfaction), and he went to the National school with a green-baize bag — a contemptible thing to do. They called him names and threw stones at him, and when he replied by threatenings ('Look 'ere, young Art Kipth, you better thtoppit!') they were moved to attack, and put him to fight.

And after that they broke the head of Ann Pornick's doll, so that she went home weeping loudly — a wicked and endearing proceeding. Sid was whacked, but, as he explained, he wore a newspaper tactically adjusted during the transaction, and really it didn't hurt him at all . . . And Mrs. Pornick put her head out of the shop door suddenly and threatened Kipps as he passed.

**2**

'Cavendish Academy,' the school that had won the limited choice of Kipps' vanished mother, was established in a battered private house in the part of Hastings remotest from the sea; it was called an Academy for Young Gentlemen, and many of the young gentlemen had parents in

‘India’ and other unverifiable places. Others were the sons of credulous widows, anxious, as Kipps’ mother had been, to get something a little ‘superior’ to a board school education as cheaply as possible, and others, again, were sent to demonstrate the dignity of their parents and guardians. And of course there were boys from France.

Its ‘principal’ was a lean, long creature of indifferent digestion and temper, who proclaimed himself on a gilt-lettered board in his front area, George Garden Woodrow, F.S.Sc., letters indicating that he had paid certain guineas for a bogus diploma. A bleak, white-washed outhouse constituted his schoolroom, and the scholastic quality of its carved and worn desks and forms was enhanced by a slippery blackboard and two large, yellow, out-of-date maps — one of Africa and the other of Wiltshire — that he had picked up cheap at a sale. There were other maps and globes in his study, where he interviewed inquiring parents, but these his pupils never saw. And in a glass cupboard in the passage were several shillings-worth of test-tubes and chemicals, a tripod, a glass retort, and a damaged Bunsen burner, manifesting that the ‘Scientific laboratory’ mentioned in the prospectus was no idle boast.

This prospectus, which was in dignified but incorrect English, laid particular stress on the sound preparation for a commercial career given in the Academy, but the army, navy, and civil service were glanced at in an ambiguous sentence. There was something vague in the prospectus about ‘examinational successes’— though Woodrow, of course, disapproved of ‘cram’— and a declaration that the curriculum included ‘art,’ ‘modern foreign languages,’ and ‘a sound technical and scientific training.’ Then came insistence upon the ‘moral well-being’ of the pupils, and an emphatic boast of the excellence of the religious instruction, ‘so often neglected nowadays even in schools of wide repute.’

‘That’s bound to fetch ’em,’ Mr. Woodrow had remarked when he drew up the prospectus. And in conjunction with the mortar-boards it certainly did. Attention was directed to the ‘motherly’ care of Mrs. Woodrow, in reality a small, partially effaced woman with a plaintive face and a mind above cookery, and the prospectus concluded with a phrase intentionally vague, ‘Fare unrestricted, and our own milk and produce.’

The memories Kipps carried from that school into afterlife were set in an atmosphere of stuffiness and mental muddle, and included countless pictures of sitting on creaking forms, bored and idle; of blot licking and the taste of ink; of torn books with covers that set one’s teeth on edge; of the slimy surface of the laboured slates; of furtive marble-playing, whispered story-telling, and of pinches, blows, and a thousand such petty annoyances being perpetually ‘passed on’ according to the custom of the place; of standing up in class and being hit suddenly and

unreasonably for imaginary misbehaviour; of Mr. Woodrow's raving days, when a scarcely sane injustice prevailed; of the cold vacuity of the hour of preparation before the bread-and-butter breakfast; and of horrible headaches and queer, unprecedented internal feelings, resulting from Mrs. Woodrow's motherly rather than intelligent cookery. There were dreary walks when the boys marched two by two, all dressed in the mortar-board caps that so impressed the widowed mothers; there were dismal half-holidays when the weather was wet, and the spirit of evil temper and evil imagination had the pent boys to work its will on; there were unfair, dishonourable fights, and miserable defeats and victories; there was bullying and being bullied. A coward boy Kipps particularly afflicted, until at last he was goaded to revolt by incessant persecution, and smote Kipps to tolerance with whirling fists. There were memories of sleeping three in a bed; of the dense, leathery smell of the school-room when one returned thither after ten minutes' play; of a playground of mud and incidental sharp flints. And there was much furtive foul language.

'Our Sundays are our happiest days,' was one of Woodrow's formulae with the inquiring parent, but Kipps was not called in evidence. They were to him terrible gaps of inanity, no work, no play, a dreary expanse of time with the mystery of church twice and plum-duff once in the middle. The afternoon was given up to furtive relaxations, among which 'Torture Chamber' games with the less agreeable weaker boys figured. It was from the difference between this day and common days that Kipps derived his first definite conceptions of the nature of God and Heaven. His instinct was to evade any closer acquaintance as long as he could.

The solid work varied, according to the prevailing mood of Mr. Woodrow. Sometimes that was a despondent lethargy, copy-books were distributed or sums were 'set,' or the great mystery of book-keeping was declared in being, and beneath these superficial activities lengthy conversations and interminable guessing games with marbles went on, while Mr. Woodrow sat inanimate at his desk, heedless of school affairs, staring in front of him at unseen things. At times his face was utterly inane; at times it had an expression of stagnant amazement, as if he saw before his eyes with pitiless clearness the dishonour and mischief of his being . . .

At other times the F.S.Sc., roused himself to action, and would stand up a wavering class and teach it, goading it with bitter mockery and blows through a chapter of Ahn's 'First French Course'; or, 'France and the French,' or a dialogue about a traveller's washing or the parts of an opera house. His own knowledge of French had been obtained years ago in another English private school, and he had refreshed it by occasional weeks of loafing and mean adventure in Dieppe. He would sometimes in their lessons hit upon some reminiscence of these brighter days, and

then he would laugh inexplicably and repeat French phrases of an unfamiliar type.

Among the commoner exercises he prescribed the learning of long passages of poetry from a ‘Potry Book,’ which he would delegate an elder boy to ‘hear’ and there was reading aloud from the Holy Bible, verse by verse — it was none of your ‘godless’ schools! — so that you counted the verses up to your turn and then gave yourself to conversation; and sometimes one read from a cheap History of this land. They did, as Kipps reported, ‘loads of catechism.’ Also there was much learning of geographical names and lists, and sometimes Woodrow, in an outbreak of energy, would see these names were actually found in a map. And once, just once, there was a chemistry lesson — a lesson of indescribable excitement — glass things of the strangest shape, a smell like bad eggs, something bubbling in something, a smash and stench, and Mr. Woodrow saying quite distinctly — they threshed it out in the dormitory afterwards —‘Damn!’ Followed by the whole school being kept in, with extraordinary severities, for an hour . . .

But interspersed with the memories of this gray routine were certain patches of brilliant colour, the Holidays, his holidays, which, in spite of the feud between their seniors, he spent as much as possible with Sid Pornick, the son of the irascible black-bearded haberdasher next door. They seemed to be memories of a different world. There were glorious days of ‘mucking about’ along the beach, the siege of unresisting Martello towers, the incessant interest of the mystery and motion of windmills, the windy excursions with boarded feet over the yielding shingle to Dungeness lighthouse — Sid Pornick and he far adrift from reality, smugglers and armed men from the moment they left Great Stone behind them — wanderings in the hedgeless, reedy marsh, long excursions reaching even to Hythe, where the machine-guns of the Empire are for ever whirling and tapping, and to Rye and Winchelsea perched like dream-cities on their little hills. The sky in these memories was the blazing hemisphere of the marsh heaven in summer, or its wintry tumult of sky and sea; and there were wrecks, real wrecks, in it (near Dymchurch pitched high and blackened and rotting were the ribs of a fishing smack, flung aside like an empty basket when the sea had devoured its crew), and there was bathing all naked in the sea, bathing to one’s armpits, and even trying to swim in the warm sea-water (spite of his aunt’s prohibition) and (with her indulgence) the rare eating of dinner from a paper parcel miles away from home. Cake and cold ground-rice puddin’ with plums it used to be — there is no better food at all. And for the background, in the place of Woodrow’s mean and fretting rule, were his aunt’s spare but frequently quite amiable figure — for though she insisted on his repeating the English Church catechism every Sunday, she had an easy way over dinners that one wanted to take

abroad — and his uncle, corpulent and irascible, but sedentary and easily escaped. And freedom!

The holidays were, indeed, very different from school. They were free, they were spacious, and though he never knew it in these words — they had an element of beauty. In his memory of his boyhood they shone like strips of stained-glass window in a dreary waste of scholastic wall, they grew brighter and brighter as they grew remoter. There came a time at last and moods when he could look back to them with a feeling akin to tears.

The last of these windows was the brightest, and instead of the kaleidoscopic effect of its predecessors its glory was a single figure. For in the last of his holidays before the Moloch of Retail Trade got hold of him, Kipps made his first tentative essays at the mysterious shrine of Love. Very tentative they were, for he had become a boy of subdued passions, and potential rather than actual affectionateness.

And the object of these first stirrings of the great desire was no other than Ann Pornick, the head of whose doll he and Sid had broken long ago, and rejoiced over long ago, in the days when he had yet to learn the meaning of a heart.

**3**

Negotiations were already on foot to make Kipps into a draper before he discovered the lights that lurked in Ann Pornick's eyes. School was over, absolutely over, and it was chiefly present to him that he was never to go to school again. It was high summer. The 'breaking up' of school had been hilarious; and the excellent maxim, 'Last Day's Pay Day,' had been observed by him with a scrupulous attention to his honour. He had punched the heads of all his enemies, wrung wrists and kicked shins; he had distributed all his unfinished copy-books, all his school books, his collection of marbles, and his mortar-board cap among such as loved him; and he had secretly written in obscure pages of their books 'remember Art Kipps.' He had also split the anaemic Woodrow's cane, carved his own name deeply in several places about the premises, and broken the scullery window. He had told everybody so often that he was to learn to be a sea captain, that he had come almost to believe the thing himself. And now he was home, and school was at an end for him for evermore.

He was up before six on the day of his return, and out in the hot sunlight of the yard. He set himself to whistle a peculiarly penetrating arrangement of three notes, supposed by the boys of the Hastings Academy and himself and Sid Pornick, for no earthly reason whatever, to be the original Huron war-cry. As he did this he feigned not to be doing it, because of the hatred between his uncle and the Pornicks, but to be examining with respect and admiration a new wing of the dustbin recently erected by his uncle — a pretence that would not have deceived a nestling tom-tit.

Presently there came a familiar echo from the Pornick hunting-ground. Then Kipps began to sing, ‘Ar pars eight tra-la, in the lane be’ind the church.’ To which an unseen person answered, ‘Ar pars eight it is, in the lane be’ind the church.’ The ‘tra-la’ was considered to render the sentence incomprehensible to the uninitiated. In order to conceal their operations still more securely, both parties to this duet then gave vent to a vocalisation of the Huron war-cry again, and after a lingering repetition of the last and shrillest note, dispersed severally, as became boys in the enjoyment of holidays, to light the house fires for the day.
Half-past eight found Kipps sitting on the sunlit gate at the top of the long lane that runs towards the sea, clashing his boots in a slow rhythm, and whistling with great violence all that he knew of an excruciatingly pathetic air. There appeared along by the churchyard wall a girl in a short frock, brown-haired, quick-coloured, and with dark blue eyes. She had grown so that she was a little taller than Kipps, and her colour had improved. He scarcely remembered her, so changed was she since last holidays — if, indeed, he had seen her during his last holidays, a thing he could not clearly recollect.
Some vague emotion arose at the sight of her. He stopped whistling and regarded her, oddly tongue-tied. ‘He can’t come,’ said Ann, advancing boldly. ‘Not yet.’
‘What — not Sid?’
‘No. Father’s made him dust all his boxes again.’
‘What for?’
‘I dunno. Father’s in a stew’s morning.’
‘Oh!’
Pause. Kipps looked at her, and then was unable to look at her again. She regarded him with interest. ‘You left school?’ she remarked, after a pause.
‘Yes.’
‘So’s Sid.’
The conversation languished. Ann put her hands on the top of the gate, and began a stationary hopping, a sort of ineffectual gymnastic experiment.
‘Can you run?’ she said presently. ‘Run you any day,’ said Kipps. ‘Gimme a start?’
‘Where for?’ said Kipps.
Ann considered, and indicated a tree. She walked towards it and turned. ‘Gimme to here?’ she called. Kipps, standing now and touching the gate, smiled to express conscious superiority. ‘Farther!’ he said.
‘Here?’
‘Bit more!’ said Kipps; and then, repenting of his magnanimity, said ‘Orf!’ suddenly, and so recovered his lost concession.
They arrived abreast at the tree, flushed and out of breath. ‘Tie!’ said Ann, throwing her hair back from her face with her hand. ‘I won,’

panted Kipps. They disputed firmly, but quite politely. ‘Run it again then,’ said Kipps.’ I don’t mind.’
They returned towards the gate.
‘You don’t run bad,’ said Kipps, temperately, expressing sincere admiration. ‘I’m pretty good, you know.’ Ann sent her hair back by an expert toss of the head. ‘You give me a start,’ she allowed.
They became aware of Sid approaching them. ‘You better look out, young Ann’, said Sid, with that irreverent want of sympathy usual in brothers. ‘You have been out nearly ‘arf-‘our. Nothing ain’t been done upstairs. Father said he didn’t know where you was, but when he did he’d warm y’r young ear.’
Ann prepared to go.
‘How about that race?’ asked Kipps.
‘Lor!’ cried Sid, quite shocked. ‘You ain’t been racing her!’
Ann swung herself round the end to the gate with her eyes on Kipps, and then turned away suddenly and ran off down the lane. Kipps’ eyes tried to go after her, and came back to Sid’s.
‘I give her a lot of start,’ said Kipps apologetically. ‘It wasn’t a proper race.’ And so the subject was dismissed. But Kipps was distrait for some seconds perhaps, and the mischief had begun in him.

**4**

They proceeded to the question of how two accomplished Hurons might most satisfactorily spend the morning. Manifestly their line lay straight along the lane to the sea. ‘There’s a new wreck,’ said Sid, ‘and my! — don’t it stink just!’
‘Stink?’
‘Fair make you sick. It’s rotten wheat.’
They fell to talking of wrecks, and so came to ironclads and wars and such-like manly matters. Half-way to the wreck Kipps made a casual, irrelevant remark.
‘Your sister ain’t a bad sort,’ he said off-handedly.
‘I clout her a lot,’ said Sidney modestly; and, after a pause, the talk reverted to more suitable topics.
The new wreck was full of rotting grain, and stank abominably, even as Sid had said. This was excellent. They had it all to themselves. They took possession of it in force, at Sid’s suggestion, and had speedily to defend it against enormous numbers of imaginary ‘natives,’ who were at last driven off by loud shouts of bang bang, and vigorous thrusting and shoving of sticks. Then, also at Sid’s direction, they sailed with it into the midst of a combined French, German, and Russian fleet, demolishing the combination unassisted, and having descended to the beach, clambered up the side and cut out their own vessel in brilliant style; they underwent a magnificent shipwreck (with vocalised thunder) and floated ‘waterlogged’— so Sid insisted — upon an exhausted sea.

These things drove Ann out of mind for a time. But at last, as they drifted without food or water upon a stagnant ocean, haggard-eyed, chins between their hands, looking in vain for a sail, she came to mind again abruptly.
'It's rather nice 'aving sisters,' remarked one perishing mariner.
Sid turned round and regarded him thoughtfully.
'Not it!' he said.
'No?'
'Not a bit of it.'
He grinned confidentially. 'Know too much,' he said, and afterwards, 'get out of things.'
He resumed his gloomy scrutiny of the hopeless horizon. Presently he fell spitting jerkily between his teeth, as he had read was the way with such ripe manhood as chews its quid.
'Sisters,' he said, 'is rot. That's what sisters are. Girls, if you like, but sisters — No!'
'But ain't sisters girls?'
'N-eaow!' said Sid, with unspeakable scorn; and Kipps answered, 'Of course, I didn't mean — I wasn't thinking of that.'
'You got a girl?' asked Sid, spitting very cleverly again.
Kipps admitted his deficiency. He felt compunction.
'You don't know who my girl is, Art Kipps, I bet.'
'Who is, then?' asked Kipps, still chiefly occupied by his own poverty.
'Ah!'
Kipps let a moment elapse before he did his duty. 'Tell us!' Sid eyed him and hesitated.
'Secret?' he said.
'Secret.'
'Dying solemn?'
'Dying solemn!' Kipps' self-concentration passed into curiosity.
Sid administered a terrible oath.
Sid adhered lovingly to his facts. 'It begins with a Nem,' he said, doling it out parsimoniously. 'M-A-U-D,' he spelt, with a stern eye on Kipps. 'C-H-A-R-T-E-R-I-S.'
Now, Maud Charteris was a young person of eighteen and the daughter of the vicar of St. Bavon's — besides which, she had a bicycle — so that as her name unfolded, the face of Kipps lengthened with respect. 'Get out,' he gasped incredulously. 'She ain't your girl, Sid Pornick.'
'She is!' answered Sid stoutly.
'What — truth?'
'Truth.'
Kipps scrutinised his face. 'Reely?'
Sid touched wood, whistled, and repeated a binding doggerel with great solemnity.

Kipps still struggled with the amazing new light on the world about him. ‘D’you mean — she knows?’
Sid flushed deeply, and his aspect became stern and gloomy. He resumed his wistful scrutiny of the sunlit sea. ‘I’d die for that girl, Art Kipps,’ he said presently; and Kipps did not press a question he felt to be ill-timed. I’d do anything she asked me to do,’ said Sid; ‘just anything. If she was to ask me to chuck myself into the sea.’ He met Kipps’ eye. ‘I would,’ he said.
They were pensive for a space, and then Sid began to discourse in fragments of Love, a theme upon which Kipps had already in a furtive way meditated a little, but which, apart from badinage, he had never yet heard talked about in the light of day. Of course, many and various aspects of life had come to light in the muffled exchange of knowledge that went on under the shadow of Woodrow, but this of Sentimental Love was not among them. Sid, who was a boy with an imagination, having once broached this topic, opened his heart, or, at any rate, a new chamber of his heart, to Kipps, and found no fault with Kipps for a lack of return. He produced a thumbed novelette that had played a part in his sentimental awakening; he proffered it to Kipps, and confessed there was a character in it, a baronet, singularly like himself. This baronet was a person of volcanic passions, which he concealed beneath a demeanour of ‘icy cynicism.’ The utmost expression he permitted himself was to grit his teeth, and, now his attention was called to it, Kipps remarked that Sid also had a habit of gritting his teeth, and, indeed, had had all the morning. They read for a time, and presently Sid talked again. The conception of love, Sid made evident, was compact of devotion and much spirited fighting and a touch of mystery, but through all that cloud of talk there floated before Kipps a face that was flushed and hair that was tossed aside.
So they budded, sitting on the blackening old wreck in which men had lived and died, looking out to sea, talking of that other sea upon which they must presently embark.
They ceased to talk, and Sid read; but Kipps, falling behind with the reading, and not wishing to admit that he read slowlier than Sid, whose education was of the inferior Elementary School brand, lapsed into meditation.
‘I would like to ‘ave a girl,’ said Kipps.
‘I mean just to talk to, and all that —’
A floating sack distracted them at last from this obscure topic. They abandoned the wreck, and followed the new interest a mile along the beach, bombarding it with stones until it came to land. They had inclined to a view that it would contain romantic mysteries, but it was simply an ill-preserved kitten — too much even for them. And at last they were drawn dinner-ward, and went home hungry and pensive side by side.

**5**

But Kipps' imagination had been warmed by that talk of love, and in the afternoon when he saw Ann Pornick in the High Street and said 'Hallo!' it was a different 'hallo' from that of their previous intercourse. And when they had passed they both looked back and caught each other doing so. Yes, he did want a girl badly —

Afterwards he was distracted by a traction engine going through the town, and his aunt had got some sprats for supper. When he was in bed, however, sentiment came upon him again in a torrent quite abruptly and abundantly, and he put his head under the pillow and whispered very softly, 'I love Ann Pornick,' as a sort of supplementary devotion. In his subsequent dreams he ran races with Ann, and they lived in a wreck together, and always her face was flushed and her hair about her face. They just lived in a wreck and ran races, and were very, very fond of one another. And their favourite food was rock chocolate, dates, such as one buys off barrows, and sprats — fried sprats —

In the morning he could hear Ann singing in the scullery next door. He listened to her for some time, and it was clear to him that he must put things before her.

Towards dusk that evening they chanced on one another out by the gate by the church, but though there was much in his mind, it stopped there with a resolute shyness until he and Ann were out of breath catching cockchafers and were sitting on that gate of theirs again. Ann sat up upon the gate, dark against vast masses of flaming crimson and darkling purple, and her eyes looked at Kipps from a shadowed face. There came a stillness between them, and quite abruptly he was moved to tell his love.

'Ann,' he said, 'I do like you. I wish you was my girl ' . . . 'I say, Ann. Will you be my girl?'

Ann made no pretence of astonishment. She weighed the proposal for a moment with her eyes on Kipps. 'If you like, Artie,' she said lightly. 'I don't mind if I am.'

'All right,' said Kipps, breathless with excitement, 'then you are.'

'All right,' said Ann.

Something seemed to fall between them, they no longer looked openly at one another. 'Lor!' cried Ann, suddenly, 'see that one!' and jumped down and darted after a cockchafer that had boomed within a yard of her face. And with that they were girl and boy again . . .

They avoided their new relationship painfully.

They did not recur to it for several days, though they met twice. Both felt that there remained something before this great experience was to be regarded as complete; but there was an infinite diffidence about the next step. Kipps talked in fragments of all sorts of matters, telling particularly of the great things that were being done to make a man and a draper of him; how he had two new pairs of trousers and a black coat

and four new shirts. And all the while his imagination was urging him to that unknown next step, and when he was alone and in the dark he became even an enterprising wooer. It became evident to him that it would be nice to take Ann by the hand; even the decorous novelettes Sid affected egged him on to that greater nearness of intimacy.

Then a great idea came to him, in a paragraph called 'Lover's Tokens' that he read in a torn fragment of Tit–Bits. It fell in to the measure of his courage — a divided sixpence! He secured his aunt's best scissors, fished a sixpence out of his jejune tin money-box, and jabbed his finger in a varied series of attempts to get it in half. When they met again the sixpence was still undivided. He had not intended to mention the matter to her at that stage, but it came up spontaneously. He endeavoured to explain the theory of broken sixpences and his unexpected failure to break one.

'But what you break it for?' said Ann. 'It's no good if it's broke.'

'It's a Token,' said Kipps.

'Like —?'

'Oh, you keep half and I keep half, and when we're sep'rated, you look at your half and I look at mine — see? Then we think of each other.'

'Oh!' said Ann, and appeared to assimilate this information.

'Only, I can't get it in 'arf nohow,' said Kipps.

They discussed this difficulty for some time without illumination. Then Ann had a happy thought.

'Tell you what,' she said, starting away from him abruptly and laying a hand on his arm, 'you let me 'ave it, Artie. I know where father keeps his file.'

Kipps handed her the sixpence, and they came upon a pause. 'I'll easy do it,' said Ann.

In considering the sixpence side by side, his head had come near her cheek. Quite abruptly he was moved to take his next step into the unknown mysteries of love. 'Ann,' he said, and gulped at his temerity, 'I do love you. Straight. I'd do anything for you, Ann. Reely — I would.'

He paused for breath. She answered nothing, but she was no doubt enjoying herself. He came yet closer to her, his shoulder touched hers.

'Ann, I wish you'd —'

He stopped.

'What?' said Ann.

'Ann — lemme kiss you.'

Things seemed to hang for a space; his tone, the drop of his courage made the thing incredible as he spoke. Kipps was not of that bold order of wooers who impose conditions.

Ann perceived that she was not prepared for kissing after all. Kissing, she said, was silly, and when Kipps would have displayed a belated enterprise she flung away from him. He essayed argument. He stood afar off as it were — the better part of a yard — and said she might let him

kiss her, and then that he didn't see what good it was for her to be his girl if he couldn't kiss her . . .
She repeated that kissing was silly. A certain estrangement took them homeward. They arrived in the dusky High Street not exactly together, and not exactly apart, but straggling. They had not kissed, but all the guilt of kissing was between them. When Kipps saw the portly contours of his uncle standing dimly in the shop doorway his footsteps faltered, and the space between our young couple increased. Above, the window over Pornick's shop was open, and Mrs. Pornick was visible, taking the air. Kipps assumed an expression of extreme innocence. He found himself face to face with his uncle's advanced outposts of waistcoat buttons.
'Where ye bin, my boy?'
'Bin for a walk, uncle.'
'Not along of that brat of Pornick's?'
'Along of who?'
'That gell'— indicating Ann with his pipe. 'Oh, no, uncle!'— very faintly.
'Run in, my boy.' Old Kipps stood aside, with an oblique glance upward, and his nephew brushed clumsily by him and vanished out of sight of the street into the vague obscurity of the little shop. The door closed behind old Kipps with a nervous jangle of its bell, and he set himself to light the single oil-lamp that illuminated his shop at nights. It was an operation requiring care and watching, or else it flared and 'smelt.' Often it smelt after all. Kipps, for some reason, found the dusky living-room with his aunt in it too populous for his feelings, and went upstairs.
'That brat of Pornick's!' It seemed to him that a horrible catastrophe had occurred. He felt he had identified himself inextricably with his uncle and cut himself off from her for ever by saying 'Oh, no!' At supper he was so visibly depressed that his aunt asked him if he wasn't feeling well. Under this imminent threat of medicine he assumed an unnatural cheerfulness . . .
He lay awake for nearly half an hour that night, groaning because things had all gone wrong, because Ann wouldn't let him kiss her, and because his uncle had called her a brat. It seemed to Kipps almost as though he himself had called her a brat . . .
There came an interval during which Ann was altogether inaccessible. One, two, three days passed and he did not see her. Sid he met several times; they went fishing and twice they bathed, but though Sid lent and received back two further love stories, they talked no more of love. They kept themselves in accord, however, agreeing that the most flagrantly sentimental story was 'proper.' Kipps was always wanting to speak of Ann, and never daring to do so. He saw her on Sunday evening going off to chapel. She was more beautiful than ever in her Sunday clothes, but she pretended not to see him because her mother was with her. But he thought she pretended not to see him because she had given him up for

ever. Brat! — who could be expected ever to forgive that? He abandoned himself to despair, he ceased even to haunt the places where she might be found . . .
With paralysing unexpectedness came the end.
Mr. Shalford, the draper at Folkestone to whom he was to be bound apprentice, had expressed a wish to 'shape the lad a bit' before the autumn sale. Kipps became aware that his box was being packed, and gathered the full truth of things on the evening before his departure. He became feverishly eager to see Ann just once more. He made silly and needless excuses to go out into the yard, he walked three times across the street without any excuse at all to look up at the Pornick windows. Still she was hidden. He grew desperate. It was within half an hour of his departure that he came on Sid.
'Hallo!' he said, 'I'm orf!'
'Business?'
'Yes.'
Pause.
'I say, Sid. You going 'ome?'
'Straight now.'
'D'you mind —. Ask Ann about that.'
'About what?'
'She'll know.'
And Sid said he would. But even that, it seemed, failed to evoke Ann.
At last the Folkestone bus rumbled up, and he ascended. His aunt stood in the doorway to see him off. His uncle assisted with the box and portmanteau. Only furtively could he glance up at the Pornick windows and still it seemed Ann hardened her heart against him. 'Get up!' said the driver, and the hoofs began to clatter. No — she would not come out even to see him off. The bus was in motion, and old Kipps was going back into his shop. Kipps stared in front of him, assuring himself that he did not care.
He heard a door slam, and instantly craned out his neck to look back. He knew that slam so well. Behold! out of the haberdasher's door a small, untidy figure in homely pink print had shot resolutely into the road and was sprinting in pursuit. In a dozen seconds she was abreast of the bus. At the sight of her Kipps' heart began to beat very quickly, but he made no immediate motion of recognition.
'Artie!' she cried breathlessly. 'Artie! Artie! You know! I got that!'
The bus was already quickening its pace and leaving her behind again, when Kipps realised what 'that' meant. He became animated, he gasped, and gathered his courage together and mumbled an incoherent request to the driver to 'stop jest a jiff for sunthin'. The driver grunted, as the disparity of their years demanded, and then the bus had pulled up and Ann was below.

She leapt up upon the wheel. Kipps looked down into Ann's face, and it was foreshortened and resolute. He met her eyes just for one second as their hands touched. He was not a reader of eyes. Something passed quickly from hand to hand, something that the driver, alert at the corner of his eye, was not allowed to see. Kipps hadn't a word to say, and all she said was, 'I done it, 'smorning.' It was like a blank space in which something pregnant should have been written and wasn't. Then she dropped down, and the bus moved forward.

After the lapse of about ten seconds, it occurred to him to stand and wave his new bowler hat at her over the corner of the bus top, and to shout hoarsely, 'Goo'-bye, Ann! Don' forget me — while I'm away!'

She stood in the road looking after him, and presently she waved her hand.

He remained standing unstably, his bright, flushed face looking back at her and his hair fluffing in the wind, and he waved his hat until at last the bend of the road hid her from his eyes. Then he turned about and sat down, and presently he began to put the half-sixpence he held clenched in his hand into his trouser-pocket. He looked sideways at the driver to judge how much he had seen.

Then he fell a-thinking. He resolved that, come what might, when he came back to New Romney at Christmas, he would, by hook or by crook, kiss Ann.

Then everything would be perfect and right, and he would be perfectly happy.

## Chapter 2. The Emporium

**1**

When Kipps left New Romney, with a small yellow tin box, a still smaller portmanteau, a new umbrella, and a keepsake half-sixpence, to become a draper, he was a youngster of fourteen, thin, with whimsical drakes'-tails at the pole of his head, smallish features, and eyes that were sometimes very light and sometimes very dark, gifts those of his birth; and by the nature of his training he was indistinct in his speech, confused in his mind, and retreating in his manners. Inexorable fate had appointed him to serve his country in commerce, and the same national bias towards private enterprise and leaving bad alone, which had left his general education to Mr. Woodrow, now indentured him firmly into the hands of Mr. Shalford of the Folkestone Drapery Bazaar. Apprenticeship is still the recognised English way to the distributing branch of the social service. If Mr. Kipps had been so unfortunate as to have been born a German he might have been educated in an elaborate and costly special school ('over-educated — crammed up'— old Kipps) to fit him for his end — such being their pedagogic way.

He might — But why make unpatriotic reflections in a novel? There was nothing pedagogic about Mr. Shalford.

He was an irascible, energetic little man with hairy hands, for the most part under his coat-tails, a long, shiny, bald head, a pointed aquiline nose a little askew, and a neatly trimmed beard. He walked lightly and with a confident jerk, and he was given to humming. He had added to exceptional business 'push,' bankruptcy under the old dispensation, and judicious matrimony. His establishment was now one of the most considerable in Folkestone, and he insisted on every inch of frontage by alternate stripes of green and yellow down the house over the shops. His shops were numbered 3, 5, and 7 on the street, and on his bill-heads 3 to 7. He encountered the abashed and awe-stricken Kipps with the praises of his System and himself. He spread himself out behind his desk with a grip on the lapel of his coat, and made Kipps a sort of speech. 'We expect y'r to work, y'r know, and we expect y'r to study our interests,' explained Mr. Shalford, in the regal and commercial plural.

'Our System here is the best system y'r could have. I made it, and I ought to know. I began at the very bottom of the ladder when I was fourteen, and there isn't a step in it I don't know. Not a step. Mr. Booch in the desk will give y'r the card of rules and fines. Jest wait a minute.' He pretended to be busy with some dusty memoranda under a paper-weight, while Kipps stood in a sort of paralysis of awe regarding his new master's oval baldness. 'Two thous'n three forty-seven pounds,' whispered Mr. Shalford audibly, feigning forgetfulness of Kipps. Clearly a place of great transactions!

Mr. Shalford rose, and, handing Kipps a blotting-pad and an inkpot to carry, mere symbols of servitude, for he made no use of them, emerged into a counting-house where three clerks had been feverishly busy ever since his door-handle had turned. 'Booch,' said Mr. Shalford, "ave y'r copy of the Rules?' and a downtrodden, shabby little old man, with a ruler in one hand and a quill pen in his mouth, silently held out a small book with green and yellow covers, mainly devoted, as Kipps presently discovered, to a voracious system of Fines. He became acutely aware that his hands were full and that everybody was staring at him. He hesitated a moment before putting the inkpot down to free a hand.
'Mustn't fumble like that,' said Mr. Shalford as Kipps pocketed the Rules. 'Won't do here. Come along, come along,' cocked his coat-tails high, as a lady might hold up her dress, and led the way into the shop.
A vast, interminable place it seemed to Kipps, with unending shining counters and innumerable faultlessly dressed young men and, presently, Houri-like young women staring at him. Here there was a long vista of gloves dangling from overhead rods, there ribbons and baby linen. A short young lady in black mittens was making out the account of a customer, and was clearly confused in her addition by Shalford's eagle eye.
A thick-set young man with a bald head and a round very wise face, who was profoundly absorbed in adjusting all the empty chairs down the counter to absolutely equal distances, awoke out of his preoccupation and answered respectfully to a few Napoleonic and quite unnecessary remarks from his employer. Kipps was told that this young man's name was Mr. Buggins, and that he was to do whatever Mr. Buggins told him to do.
They came round a corner into a new smell, which was destined to be the smell of Kipps' life for many years, the vague, distinctive smell of Manchester goods. A fat man with a large nose jumped — actually jumped — at their appearance, and began to fold a pattern of damask in front of him exactly like an automaton that is suddenly set going.
'Carshot, see to this boy tomorrow,' said the master. 'See he don't fumble. Smart'n 'imup.'
'Yussir,' said Carshot fatly, glanced at Kipps, and resumed his pattern-folding with extreme zeal.
'Whatever Mr. Carshot says y'r to do, ye do,' said Mr. Shalford, trotting onward; and Carshot blew out his face with an appearance of relief.
They crossed a large room full of the strangest things Kipps had ever seen. Lady-like figures, surmounted by black, wooden knobs in the place of the refined heads one might have reasonably expected stood about with a lifelike air of conscious fashion. 'Costume Room,' said Shalford.
Two voices engaged in some sort of argument —'I can assure you, Miss Mergle, you are entirely mistaken — entirely, in supposing I should do anything so unwomanly,'— sank abruptly, and they discovered two

young ladies, taller and fairer than any of the other young ladies, and with black trains to their dresses, who were engaged in writing at a little table. Whatever they told him to do Kipps gathered he was to do. He was also, he understood, to do whatever Carshot and Booch told him to do. And there were also Buggins and Mr. Shalford. And not to forget or fumble!

They descended into a cellar called The Warehouse, and Kipps had an optical illusion of errand-boys fighting. Some aerial voice said 'Teddy!' and the illusion passed. He looked again, and saw quite clearly that they were packing parcels, and always would be, and that the last thing in the world that they would or could possibly do was to fight. Yet he gathered from the remarks Mr. Shalford addressed to their busy backs that they had been fighting — no doubt at some past period of their lives.

Emerging in the shop again among a litter of toys and what are called 'fancy articles,' Shalford withdrew a hand from beneath his coat-tails to indicate an overhead change carrier. He entered into elaborate calculations to show how many minutes in one year were saved thereby, and lost himself among the figures. 'Seven turns eight seven nine — was it? Or seven eight nine? Now, now! Why, when I was a boy your age I c'd do a sum like that as soon as hear it. We'll soon get y'r into better shape than that. Make you Fishent. Well, y'r must take my word it comes to pounds and pounds saved in the year — pounds and pounds. System! System everywhere. Fishency.' He went on murmuring 'Fishency' and 'System' at intervals for some time. They passed into a yard, and Mr. Shalford waved his hand to his three delivery vans, all striped green and yellow —'uniform — green, yell'r — System.' All over the premises were pinned absurd little cards, 'This door locked after 7.30. By order, Edwin Shalford,' and the like.

Mr. Shalford always wrote 'By Order,' though it conveyed no earthly meaning to him. He was one of those people who collect technicalities upon them as the Reduvius bug collects dirt. He was the sort of man who is not only ignorant but absolutely incapable of English. When he wanted to say he had a sixpenny-ha'penny longcloth to sell, he put it thus to startled customers: 'Can DO you one six half, if y'like.' He always omitted pronouns and articles and so forth; it seemed to him the very essence of the efficiently business-like. His only preposition was 'as' or the compound 'as per.' He abbreviated every word he could; he would have considered himself the laughingstock of Wood Street if he had chanced to spell socks in any way but 'sox.' But, on the other hand, if he saved words here he wasted them there; he never acknowledged an order that was not an esteemed favour, nor sent a pattern without begging to submit it. He never stipulated for so many months' credit, but bought in November 'as Jan.' It was not only words he abbreviated in his London communications. In paying his wholesalers his 'System' admitted of a constant error in the discount of a penny or twopence,