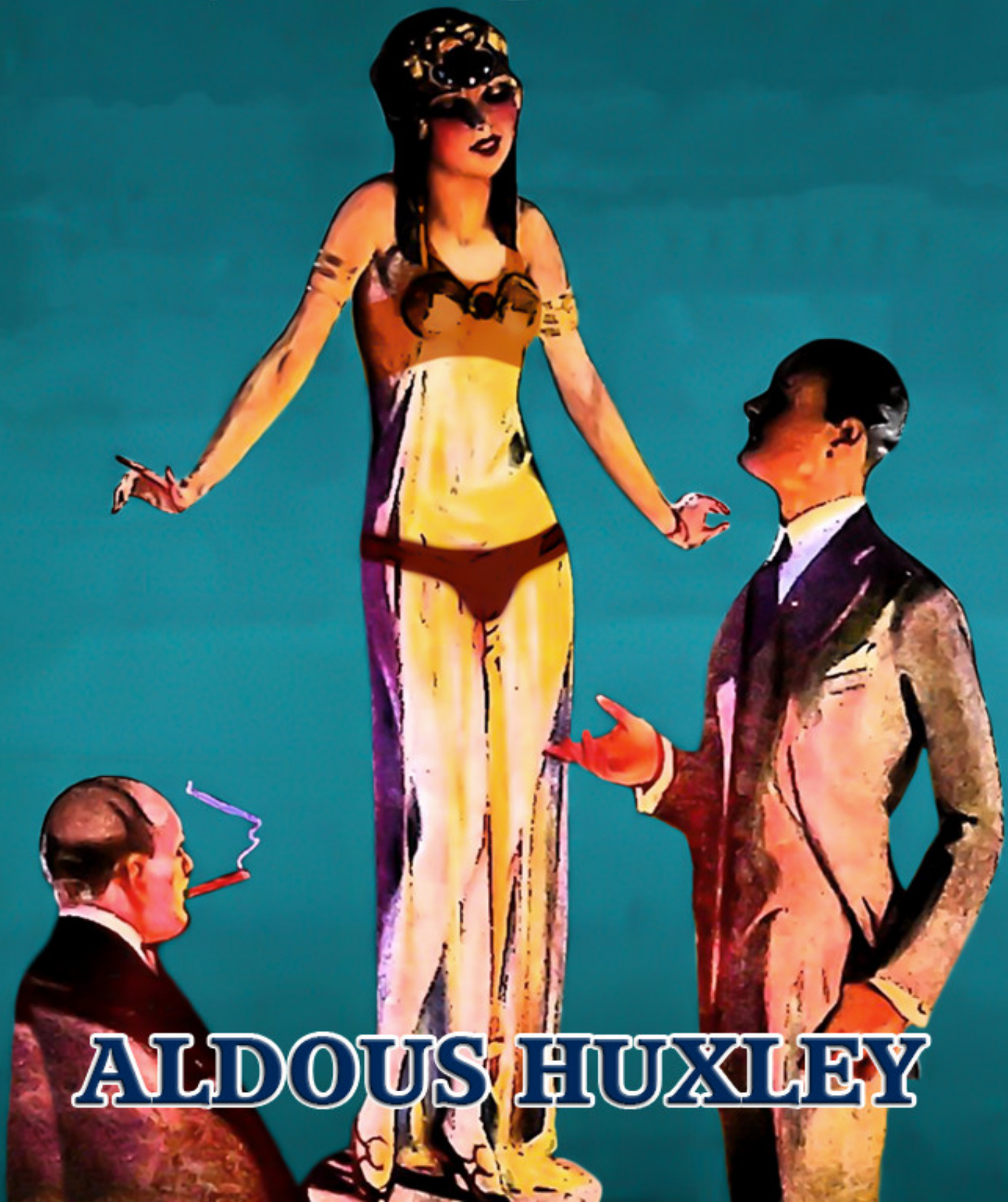
CLASSICS TO GO

ANTIC HAY



ALDOUS HUXLEY

Antic Hay

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CHAPTER I

Gumbril, Theodore Gumbril Junior, B.A. Oxon., sat in his oaken stall on the north side of the School Chapel and wondered, as he listened through the uneasy silence of half a thousand schoolboys to the First Lesson, pondered, as he looked up at the vast window opposite, all blue and jaundiced and bloody with nineteenth-century glass, speculated in his rapid and rambling way about the existence and the nature of God.

Standing in front of the spread brass eagle and fortified in his convictions by the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy (for this first Sunday of term was the Fifth after Easter), the Reverend Pelvey could speak of these things with an enviable certainty. “Hear, O Israel,” he was booming out over the top of the portentous Book: “the Lord our God is one Lord.”

One Lord; Mr. Pelvey knew; he had studied theology. But if theology and theosophy, then why not theography and theometry, why not theognomy, theotrophy, theotomy, theogamy? Why not theophysics and theo-chemistry? Why not that ingenious toy, the theotrope or wheel of gods? Why not a monumental theodrome?

In the great window opposite, young David stood like a cock, crowing on the dunghill of a tumbled giant. From the middle of Goliath’s forehead there issued, like a narwhal’s budding horn, a curious excrescence. Was it the embedded pebble? Or perhaps the giant’s married life?

“... with all thine heart,” declaimed the Reverend Pelvey, “and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”

No, but seriously, Gumbril reminded himself, the problem was very troublesome indeed. God as a sense of warmth about the heart, God as exultation, God as tears in the eyes, God as a rush of power or thought—that was all right. But God as truth, God as 2 + 2 = 4—that wasn't so clearly all right. Was there any chance of their being the same? Were there bridges to join the two worlds? And could it be that the Reverend Pelvey, M.A., fog-horning away from behind the imperial bird, could it be that he had an answer and a clue? That was hardly believable. Particularly if one knew Mr. Pelvey personally. And Gumbril did.

"And these words which I command thee this day," retorted Mr. Pelvey, "shall be in thine heart."

Or in the heart, or in the head? Reply, Mr. Pelvey, reply. Gumbril jumped between the horns of the dilemma and voted for other organs.

"And thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Diligently to thy children.... Gumbril remembered his own childhood; they had not been very diligently taught to him. 'Beetles, black beetles'—his father had a really passionate feeling about the clergy. Mumbojumbery was another of his favourite words. An atheist and an anti-clerical of the strict old school he was. Not that, in any case, he gave himself much time to think about these things; he was too busy being an unsuccessful architect. As for Gumbril's mother, her diligence had not been dogmatic. She had just been diligently good, that was all. Good; good? It was a word people only used nowadays with a kind of deprecating humorousness. Good. Beyond good and evil? We are all that nowadays. Or merely below them, like earwigs? I glory in the name of earwig. Gumbril made a mental gesture and inwardly declaimed. But good in any case, there was no

getting out of that, good she had been. Not nice, not merely *molto simpatica*—how charmingly and effectively these foreign tags assist one in the great task of calling a spade by some other name!—but good. You felt the active radiance of her goodness when you were near her.... And that feeling, was that less real and valid than two plus two?

The Reverend Pelvey had nothing to reply. He was reading with a holy gusto of “houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not.”

She had been good and she had died when he was still a boy; died—but he hadn’t been told that till much later—of creeping and devouring pain. Malignant disease—oh, *caro nome*!

“Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God,” said Mr. Pelvey.

Even when the ulcers are benign; thou shalt fear. He had travelled up from school to see her, just before she died. He hadn’t known that she was going to die, but when he entered her room, when he saw her lying so weakly in the bed, he had suddenly begun to cry, uncontrollably. All the fortitude, the laughter even, had been hers. And she had spoken to him. A few words only; but they had contained all the wisdom he needed to live by. She had told him what he was, and what he should try to be, and how to be it. And crying, still crying, he had promised that he would try.

“And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes,” said Mr. Pelvey, “for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.”

And had he kept his promise, Gumbril wondered, had he preserved himself alive?

“Here endeth the First Lesson.” Mr. Pelvey retreated from the eagle, and the organ presaged the coming *Te Deum*.

Gumbril hoisted himself to his feet; the folds of his B.A. gown billowed nobly about him as he rose. He sighed and

shook his head with the gesture of one who tries to shake off a fly or an importunate thought. When the time came for singing, he sang. On the opposite side of the chapel two boys were grinning and whispering to one another behind their lifted Prayer Books. Gumbril frowned at them ferociously. The two boys caught his eye and their faces at once took on an expression of sickly piety; they began to sing with unction. They were two ugly, stupid-looking louts, who ought to have been apprenticed years ago to some useful trade. Instead of which they were wasting their own and their teacher's and their more intelligent comrades' time in trying, quite vainly, to acquire an elegant literary education. The minds of dogs, Gumbril reflected, do not benefit by being treated as though they were the minds of men.

"O Lord, have mercy upon us: have mercy upon us."

Gumbril shrugged his shoulders and looked round the chapel at the faces of the boys. Lord, indeed, have mercy upon us! He was disturbed to find the sentiment echoed on a somewhat different note in the Second Lesson, which was drawn from the twenty-third chapter of St. Luke. "Father, forgive them," said Mr. Pelvey in his unvaryingly juicy voice; "for they know not what they do." Ah, but suppose one did know what one was doing? suppose one knew only too well? And of course one always did know. One was not a fool.

But this was all nonsense, all nonsense. One must think of something better than this. What a comfort it would be, for example, if one could bring air cushions into chapel! These polished oaken stalls were devilishly hard; they were meant for stout and lusty pedagogues, not for bony starvelings like himself. An air cushion, a delicious pneu.

"Here endeth," boomed Mr. Pelvey, closing his book on the back of the German eagle.

As if by magic, Dr. Jolly was ready at the organ with the *Benedictus*. It was positively a relief to stand again; this oak was adamantine. But air cushions, alas, would be too bad an example for the boys. Hardy young Spartans! it was an essential part of their education that they should listen to the word of revelation without pneumatic easement. No, air cushions wouldn’t do. The real remedy, it suddenly flashed across his mind, would be trousers with pneumatic seats. For all occasions; not merely for churchgoing.

The organ blew a thin Puritan-preacher’s note through one of its hundred nostrils. “I believe....” With a noise like the breaking of a wave, five hundred turned towards the East. The view of David and Goliath was exchanged for a Crucifixion in the grand manner of eighteen hundred and sixty. “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” No, no, Gumbril preferred to look at the grooved stonework rushing smoothly up on either side of the great east window towards the vaulted roof; preferred to reflect, like the dutiful son of an architect he was, that Perpendicular at its best—and its best is its largest—is the finest sort of English Gothic. At its worst and smallest, as in most of the colleges of Oxford, it is mean, petty, and, but for a certain picturesqueness, almost wholly disgusting. He felt like a lecturer: next slide, please. “And the life everlasting. Amen.” Like an oboe, Mr. Pelvey intoned: “The Lord be with you.”

For prayer, Gumbril reflected, there would be Dunlop knees. Still, in the days when he had made a habit of praying, they hadn’t been necessary. “Our Father....” The words were the same as they were in the old days; but Mr. Pelvey’s method of reciting them made them sound rather different. Her dresses, when he had leaned his forehead against her knee to say those words—those words, good Lord! that Mr. Pelvey was oboeing out of existence—were always black in the evenings, and of silk, and smelt of orris

root. And when she was dying, she had said to him: “Remember the Parable of the Sower, and the seeds that fell in shallow ground.” No, no. Amen, decidedly. “O Lord, show thy mercy upon us,” chanted oboe Pelvey, and Gumbril trombone responded, profoundly and grotesquely: “And grant us thy salvation.” No, the knees were obviously less important, except for people like revivalists and housemaids, than the seat. Sedentary are commoner than genuflectory professions. One would introduce little flat rubber bladders between two layers of cloth. At the upper end, hidden when one wore a coat, would be a tube with a valve: like a hollow tail. Blow it up—and there would be perfect comfort even for the boniest, even on rock. How did the Greeks stand marble benches in their theatres?

The moment had now come for the Hymn. This being the first Sunday of the Summer term, they sang that special hymn, written by the Headmaster, with music by Dr. Jolly, on purpose to be sung on the first Sundays of terms. The organ quietly sketched out the tune. Simple it was, uplifting and manly.

One, two, three, four; one, two THREE—4.
One, two-and three-and four-and; One, two THREE—4.
ONE—2, THREE—4; ONE—2—3—4,
and-ONE—2, THREE—4; ONE—2—3—4.
One, two-and three, four; One, two THREE—4.

Five hundred flawed adolescent voices took it up. For good example’s sake, Gumbril opened and closed his mouth; noiselessly, however. It was only at the third verse that he gave rein to his uncertain baritone. He particularly liked the third verse; it marked, in his opinion, the Headmaster’s highest poetical achievement.

(*f*) For slack hands and (*dim.*) idle minds
(*mf*) Mischief still the Tempter finds.
(*ff*) Keep him captive in his lair.

At this point Dr. Jolly enriched his tune with a thick accompaniment in the lower registers, artfully designed to symbolize the depth, the gloom and general repulsiveness of the Tempter’s home.

(*ff*) Keep him captive in his lair.
(*f*) Work will bind him. (*dim.*) Work is (*pp*) prayer.

Work, thought Gumbril, work. Lord, how passionately he disliked work! Let Austin have his swink to him reserved! Ah, if only one had work of one’s own, proper work, decent work —not forced upon one by the griping of one’s belly! Amen! Dr. Jolly blew the two sumptuous jets of reverence into the air; Gumbril accompanied them with all his heart. Amen, indeed.

Gumbril sat down again. It might be convenient, he thought, to have the tail so long that one could blow up one’s trousers while one actually had them on. In which case, it would have to be coiled round the waist like a belt; or looped up, perhaps, and fastened to a clip on one’s braces.

“The nineteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, part of the thirty-fourth verse.” The Headmaster’s loud, harsh voice broke violently out from the pulpit. “All with one voice for the space of about two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”

Gumbril composed himself as comfortably as he could on his oaken seat. It was going to be one of the Headmaster’s real swingeing sermons. Great is Diana. And Venus? Ah, these seats, these seats!

Gumbril did not attend evening chapel. He stayed at home in his lodgings to correct the sixty-three Holiday Task Papers which had fallen to his share. They lay, thick piles of them, on the floor beside his chair: sixty-three answers to ten questions about the Italian Risorgimento. The Risorgimento, of all subjects! It had been one of the Headmaster’s

caprices. He had called a special master's meeting at the end of last term to tell them all about the Risorgimento. It was his latest discovery.

"The Risorgimento, gentlemen, is the most important event in modern European history." And he had banged the table; he had looked defiantly round the room in search of contradictors.

But nobody had contradicted him. Nobody ever did; they all knew better. For the Headmaster was as fierce as he was capricious. He was for ever discovering something new. Two terms ago it had been singeing; after the hair-cut and before the shampoo, there must be singeing.

"The hair, gentlemen, is a tube. If you cut it and leave the end unsealed, the water will get in and rot the tube. Hence the importance of singeing, gentlemen. Singeing seals the tube. I shall address the boys about it after chapel to-morrow morning; and I trust that all house-masters"—and he had glared around him from under his savage eyebrows—"will see that their boys get themselves regularly singed after cutting."

For weeks afterwards every boy trailed behind him a faint and nauseating whiff of burning, as though he were fresh from hell. And now it was the Risorgimento. One of these days, Gumbril reflected, it would be birth control, or the decimal system, or rational dress.

He picked up the nearest batch of papers. The printed questions were pinned to the topmost of them.

"Give a brief account of the character and career of Pope Pius IX, *with dates wherever possible*."

Gumbril leaned back in his chair and thought of his own character, with dates. 1896: the first serious and conscious and deliberate lie. Did you break that vase, Theodore? No, mother. It lay on his conscience for nearly a month, eating deeper and deeper. Then he had confessed the truth. Or

rather he had not confessed; that was too difficult. He led the conversation, very subtly, as he thought, round through the non-malleability of glass, through breakages in general, to this particular broken vase; he practically forced his mother to repeat her question. And then, with a burst of tears, he had answered, yes. It had always been difficult for him to say things directly, point-blank. His mother had told him, when she was dying.... No, no; not that.

In 1898 or 1899—oh, these dates!—he had made a pact with his little cousin, Molly, that she should let him see her with no clothes on, if he would do the same by her. She had fulfilled her part of the bargain; but he, overwhelmed at the last moment by a passion of modesty, had broken his promise.

Then, when he was about twelve and still at his preparatory school, in 1902 or 1903 he had done badly in his exams., on purpose; he had been frightened of Sadler, who was in the same form, and wanted to get the prize. Sadler was stronger than he was, and had a genius for persecution. He had done so badly that his mother was unhappy; and it was impossible for him to explain.

In 1906 he had fallen in love for the first time—ah, much more violently than ever since—with a boy of his own age. Platonic it had been and profound. He had done badly that term, too; not on purpose, but because he had spent so much time helping young Vickers with his work. Vickers was really very stupid. The next term he had ‘come out’—*Staphylococcus pyogenes* is a lover of growing adolescence—with spots and boils all over his face and neck. Gumbril’s affection ceased as suddenly as it had begun. He finished that term, he remembered, with a second prize.

But it was time to be thinking seriously of Pio Nono. With a sigh of disgusted weariness, Gumbril looked at his papers. What had Falarope Major to say of the Pontiff? “Pius IX was called Ferretti. He was a liberal before he was a Pope. A

kindly man of less than average intelligence, he thought that all difficulties could be settled by a little goodwill, a few reforms and a political amnesty. He wrote several encyclicals and a syllabus." Gumbril admired the phrase about less than average intelligence; Falarope Major should have at least one mark for having learnt it so well by heart. He turned to the next paper. Higgs was of opinion that "Pius the Ninth was a good but stupid man, who thought he could settle the Risorgimento with a few reforms and a political armistice." Beddoes was severer. "Pius IX was a bad man, who said that he was infallible, which showed he had a less than average intelligence." Sopwith Minor shared the general opinion about Pio's intelligence, and displayed a great familiarity with the wrong dates. Clegg-Weller was voluminous and informative. "Pius IX was not so clever as his prime minister, Cardinal Antonelli. When he came to the tiara he was a liberal, and Metternich said he had never reckoned on a liberal pope. He then became a conservative. He was kindly, but not intelligent, and he thought Garibaldi and Cavour would be content with a few reforms and an amnesty." At the top of Garstang's paper was written: "I have had measles all the holidays, so have been unable to read more than the first thirty pages of the book. Pope Pius IX does not come into these pages, of the contents of which I will proceed to give the following précis." And the précis duly followed. Gumbril would have liked to give him full marks. But the business-like answer of Appleyard called him back to a better sense of his duty. "Pius IX became Pope in 1846 and died in 1878. He was a kindly man, but his intelligence was below the…."

Gumbril laid the paper down and shut his eyes. No, this was really impossible. Definitely, it couldn't go on, it could not go on. There were thirteen weeks in the summer term, there would be thirteen in the autumn and eleven or twelve in the spring; and then another summer of thirteen, and so

it would go on for ever. For ever. It wouldn’t do. He would go away and live uncomfortably on his three hundred. Or, no, he would go away and he would make money—that was more like it—money on a large scale, easily; he would be free and he would live. For the first time, he would live. Behind his closed eyes, he saw himself living.

Over the plushy floors of some vast and ignoble Ritz slowly he walked, at ease, with confidence: over the plushy floors and there, at the end of a long vista, there was Myra Viveash, waiting, this time, for him; coming forward impatiently to meet him, his abject lover now, not the cool, free, laughing mistress who had lent herself contemptuously once to his pathetic and silent importunity and then, after a day, withdrawn the gift again. Over the plushy floors to dine. Not that he was in love with Myra any longer: but revenge is sweet.

He sat in his own house. The Chinese statues looked out from the niches; the Maillols passionately meditated, slept, and were more than alive. The Goyas hung on the walls, there was a Boucher in the bathroom; and when he entered with his guests, what a Piazzetta exploded above the dining-room mantelpiece! Over the ancient wine they talked together, and he knew everything they knew and more; he gave, he inspired, it was the others who assimilated and were enriched. After dinner there were Mozart quartets; he opened his portfolios and showed his Daumiers, his Tiepolos, his Canaletto sketches, his drawings by Picasso and Lewis, and the purity of his naked Ingres. And later, talking of Odalisques, there were orgies without fatigue or disgust, and the women were pictures and lust in action, art.

Over the empty plains forty horses impelled him towards Mantua: rubadub—adubadub, with the silencer out. Towards the most romantic city in all the world.

When he spoke to women—how easily and insolently he spoke now!—they listened and laughed and looked at him

sideways and dropped their eyelids over the admission, the invitation, of their glance. With Phyllis once he had sat, for how long? in a warm and moonless darkness, saying nothing, risking no gesture. And in the end they had parted, reluctantly and still in silence. Phyllis now was with him once again in the summer night; but this time he spoke, now softly, now in the angry breathless whisper of desire, he reached out and took her, and she was naked in his arms. All chance encounters, all plotted opportunities recurred; he knew, now, how to live, how to take advantage of them.

Over the empty plains towards Mantua, towards Mantua, he slid along at ease, free and alone. He explored the horrors of Roman society; visited Athens and Seville. To Unamuno and Papini he conversed familiarly in their own tongues. He understood perfectly and without effort the quantum theory. To his friend Shearwater he gave half a million for physiological research. He visited Schoenberg and persuaded him to write still better music. He exhibited to the politicians the full extent of their stupidity and their wickedness; he set them working for the salvation, not the destruction, of humanity. Once in the past when he had been called upon to make a public speech, he had felt so nervous that he was sick; the thousands who listened to him now bent like wheat under the wind of his eloquence. But it was only by the way and occasionally that he troubled himself to move them. He found it easy now to come to terms with every one he met, to understand all points of view, to identify himself with even the most unfamiliar spirit. And he knew how everybody lived, and what it was like to be a mill girl, a dustman, an engine-driver, a Jew, an Anglican bishop, a confidence-trickster. Accustomed as he was to being swindled and imposed upon without protest, he now knew the art of being brutal. He was just dressing down that insolent porter at the Continental, who had complained that ten francs wasn’t enough (and had got, as

a matter of historic fact, another five in addition), when his landlady gave a knock, opened the door and said: “Dinner’s ready, Mr. Gumbril.”

Feeling a little ashamed at having been interrupted in what was, after all, one of the ignobler and more trivial occupations of his new life, Gumbril went down to his fatty chop and green peas. It was the first meal to be eaten under the new dispensation; he ate it, for all that it was unhappily indistinguishable from the meals of the past, with elation and a certain solemnity, as though he were partaking of a sacrament. He felt buoyant with the thought that at last, at last, he was doing something about life.

When the chop was eaten, he went upstairs and, after filling two suit-cases and a Gladstone bag with the most valued of his possessions, addressed himself to the task of writing to the Headmaster. He might have gone away, of course, without writing. But it would be nobler, more in keeping, he felt, with his new life, to leave a justification behind—or rather not a justification, a denouncement. He picked up his pen and denounced.

CHAPTER II

Gumbril senior occupied a tall, narrow-shouldered and rachitic house in a little obscure square not far from Paddington. There were five floors, and a basement with beetles, and nearly a hundred stairs, which shook when any one ran too rudely down them. It was a prematurely old and decaying house in a decaying quarter. The square in which it stood was steadily coming down in the world. The houses which a few years ago had all been occupied by respectable families, were now split up into squalid little maisonnettes, and from the neighbouring slums, which along with most other unpleasant things the old bourgeois families had been able to ignore, invading bands of children came to sport on the once sacred pavements.

Mr. Gumbril was almost the last survivor of the old inhabitants. He liked his house, and he liked his square. Social decadence had not affected the fourteen plane trees which adorned its little garden, and the gambols of the dirty children did not disturb the starlings who came, evening by evening in summer-time, to roost in their branches.

On fine evenings he used to sit out on his balcony waiting for the coming of the birds. And just at sunset, when the sky was most golden, there would be a twittering overhead, and the black, innumerable flocks of starlings would come sweeping across on the way from their daily haunts to their roosting-places, chosen so capriciously among the tree-planted squares and gardens of the city and so tenaciously retained, year after year, to the exclusion of every other place. Why his fourteen plane trees should have been chosen, Mr. Gumbril could never imagine. There were plenty of larger and more umbrageous gardens all round; but they

remained birdless, while every evening, from the larger flocks, a faithful legion detached itself to settle clamorously among his trees. They sat and chattered till the sun went down and twilight was past, with intervals every now and then of silence that fell suddenly and inexplicably on all the birds at once, lasted through a few seconds of thrilling suspense, to end as suddenly and senselessly in an outburst of the same loud and simultaneous conversation.

The starlings were Mr. Gumbril's most affectionately cherished friends; sitting out on his balcony to watch and listen to them, he had caught at the shut of treacherous evenings many colds and chills on the liver, he had laid up for himself many painful hours of rheumatism. These little accidents did nothing, however, to damp his affection for the birds; and still on every evening that could possibly be called fine, he was always to be seen in the twilight, sitting on the balcony, gazing up, round-spectacled and rapt, at the fourteen plane trees. The breezes stirred in his grey hair, tossing it up in long, light wisps that fell across his forehead and over his spectacles; and then he would shake his head impatiently, and the bony hand would be freed for a moment from its unceasing combing and clutching of the sparse grey beard to push back the strayed tendrils, to smooth and reduce to order the whole ruffled head. The birds chattered on, the hand went back to its clutching and combing; once more the wind blew; darkness came down, and the gas lamps round the square lit up the outer leaves of the plane trees, touched the privet bushes inside the railings with an emerald light; behind them was impenetrable night; instead of shorn grass and bedded geraniums there was mystery, there were endless depths. And the birds at last were silent.

Mr. Gumbril would get up from his iron chair, stretch his arms and his stiff cold legs and go in through the French

window to work. The birds were his diversion; when they were silent, it was time to think of serious matters.

To-night, however, he was not working; for always on Sunday evenings his old friend Porteous came to dine and talk. Breaking in unexpectedly at midnight, Gumbril Junior found them sitting in front of the gas fire in his father's study.

"My dear fellow, what on earth are you doing here?" Gumbril Senior jumped up excitedly at his son's entrance. The light silky hair floated up with the movement, turned for a moment into a silver aureole, then subsided again. Mr. Porteous stayed where he was, calm, solid and undishevelled as a seated pillar-box. He wore a monocle on a black ribbon, a black stock tie that revealed above its double folds a quarter of an inch of stiff white collar, a double-breasted black coat, a pair of pale checked trousers and patent leather boots with cloth tops. Mr. Porteous was very particular about his appearance. Meeting him casually for the first time, one would not have guessed that Mr. Porteous was an expert on Late Latin poetry; and he did not mean that you should guess. Thin-limbed, bent and agile in his loose, crumpled clothes, Gumbril Senior had the air, beside Mr. Porteous, of a strangely animated scarecrow.

"What on earth?" the old gentleman repeated his question.

Gumbril Junior shrugged his shoulders. "I was bored, I decided to cease being a schoolmaster." He spoke with a fine airy assumption of carelessness. "How are you, Mr. Porteous?"

"Thank you, invariably well."

"Well, well," said Gumbril Senior, sitting down again, "I must say I'm not surprised. I'm only surprised that you stood it, not being a born pedagogue, for as long as you did. What ever induced you to think of turning usher, I can't

imagine.” He looked at his son first through his spectacles, then over the top of them; the motives of the boy’s conduct revealed themselves to neither vision.

“What else was there for me to do?” asked Gumbril Junior, pulling up a chair towards the fire. “You gave me a pedagogue’s education and washed your hands of me. No opportunities, no openings. I had no alternative. And now you reproach me.”

Mr. Gumbril made an impatient gesture. “You’re talking nonsense,” he said. “The only point of the kind of education you had is this, it gives a young man leisure to find out what he’s interested in. You apparently weren’t sufficiently interested in anything——”

“I am interested in everything,” interrupted Gumbril Junior.

“Which comes to the same thing,” said his father parenthetically, “as being interested in nothing.” And he went on from the point at which he had been interrupted. “You weren’t sufficiently interested in anything to want to devote yourself to it. That was why you sought the last refuge of feeble minds with classical educations, you became a schoolmaster.”

“Come, come,” said Mr. Porteous. “I do a little teaching myself; I must stand up for the profession.”

Gumbril Senior let go his beard and brushed back the hair that the wind of his own vehemence had brought tumbling into his eyes. “I don’t denigrate the profession,” he said. “Not at all. It would be an excellent profession if every one who went into it were as much interested in teaching as you are in your job, Porteous, or I in mine. It’s these undecided creatures like Theodore, who ruin it by drifting in. Until all teachers are geniuses and enthusiasts, nobody will learn anything, except what they teach themselves.”

“Still,” said Mr. Porteous, “I wish I hadn’t had to learn so much by myself. I wasted a lot of time finding out how to set to work and where to discover what I wanted.”

Gumbril Junior was lighting his pipe. “I have come to the conclusion,” he said, speaking in little jerks between each suck of the flame into the bowl, “that most people ... ought never ... to be taught anything at all.” He threw away the match. “Lord have mercy upon us, they’re dogs. What’s the use of teaching them anything except to behave well, to work and obey. Facts, theories, the truth about the universe—what good are those to them? Teach them to understand—why, it only confuses them; makes them lose hold of the simple real appearance. Not more than one in a hundred can get any good out of a scientific or literary education.”

“And you’re one of the ones?” asked his father.

“That goes without saying,” Gumbril Junior replied.

“I think you mayn’t be so far wrong,” said Mr. Porteous. “When I think of my own children, for example....” he sighed, “I thought they’d be interested in the things that interested me; they don’t seem to be interested in anything but behaving like little apes—not very anthropoid ones either, for that matter. At my eldest boy’s age I used to sit up most of the night reading Latin texts. He sits up—or rather stands, reels, trots up—dancing and drinking. Do you remember St. Bernard? ‘Vigilet tota nocte luxuriosus non solum patienter’ (the ascetic and the scholar only watch patiently); ‘sed et libenter, ut suam expleat voluptatem.’ What the wise man does out of a sense of duty, the fool does for fun. And I’ve tried very hard to make him like Latin.”

“Well in any case,” said Gumbril Junior, “you didn’t try to feed him on history. That’s the real unforgivable sin. And that’s what I’ve been doing, up till this evening—encouraging boys of fifteen and sixteen to specialize in

history, hours and hours a week, making them read bad writers' generalizations about subjects on which only our ignorance allows us to generalize; teaching them to reproduce these generalizations in horrid little 'Essays' of their own; rotting their minds, in fact, with a diet of soft vagueness; scandalous it was. If these creatures are to be taught anything, it should be something hard and definite. Latin—that's excellent. Mathematics, physical science. Let them read history for amusement, certainly. But for Heaven's sake don't make it the staple of education!" Gumbril Junior spoke with the greatest earnestness, as though he were an inspector of schools, making a report. It was a subject on which, at the moment, he felt very profoundly; he felt profoundly on all subjects while he was talking about them. "I wrote a long letter to the Headmaster about the teaching of history this evening," he added. "It's most important." He shook his head thoughtfully, "Most important."

"Hora novissima, tempora pessimma sunt, vigilemus," said Mr. Porteous, in the words of St. Peter Damianus.

"Very true," Gumbril Senior applauded. "And talking about bad times, Theodore, what do you propose to do now, may I ask?"

"I mean to begin by making some money."

Gumbril Senior put his hands on his knees, bent forward and laughed, "Ha, ha, ha!" He had a profound bell-like laugh that was like the croaking of a very large and melodious frog. "You won't," he said, and shook his head till the hair fell into his eyes. "You won't," and he laughed again.

"To make money," said Mr. Porteous, "one must be really interested in money."

"And he's not," said Gumbril Senior. "None of us are."

"When I was still uncommonly hard up," Mr. Porteous continued, "we used to lodge in the same house with a

Russian Jew, who was a furrier. That man was interested in money, if you like. It was a passion, an enthusiasm, an ideal. He could have led a comfortable, easy life, and still have made enough to put by something for his old age. But for his high abstract ideal of money he suffered more than Michelangelo ever suffered for his art. He used to work nineteen hours a day, and the other five he slept, lying under his bench, in the dirt, breathing into his lungs the stink and the broken hairs. He is now very rich indeed and does nothing with his money, doesn't want to do anything, doesn't know what one does do with it. He desires neither power nor pleasure. His desire for lucre is purely disinterested. He reminds me of Browning's 'Grammarian.' I have a great admiration for him."

Mr. Porteous's own passion had been for the poems of Notker Balbulus and St. Bernard. It had taken him nearly twenty years to get himself and his family out of the house where the Russian furrier used to lodge. But Notker was worth it, he used to say; Notker was worth even the weariness and the pallor of a wife who worked beyond her strength, even the shabbiness of ill-dressed and none too well-fed children. He had readjusted his monocle and gone on. But there had been occasions when it needed more than the monocle and the careful, distinguished clothes to keep up his *morale*. Still, those times were over now; Notker had brought him at last a kind of fame—even, indirectly, a certain small prosperity.

Gumbril Senior turned once more towards his son. "And how do you propose," he asked, "to make this money?"

Gumbril Junior explained. He had thought it all out in the cab on the way from the station. "It came to me this morning," he said, "in chapel, during service."

"Monstrous," put in Gumbril Senior, with a genuine indignation, "monstrous these mediæval survivals in schools! Chapel, indeed!"

“It came,” Gumbril Junior went on, “like an apocalypse, suddenly, like a divine inspiration. A grand and luminous idea came to me—the idea of Gumbril’s Patent Small-Clothes.”

“And what are Gumbril’s Patent Small-Clothes?”

“A boon to those whose occupation is sedentary”; Gumbril Junior had already composed his prospectus and his first advertisements: “a comfort to all travellers, civilization’s substitute for steatopygism, indispensable to first-nighters, the concert-goers’ friend, the....”

“Lectulus Dei floridus,” intoned Mr. Porteous.

> “Gazophylacium Ecclesiæ,
> Cithara benesonans Dei,
> Cymbalum jubilationis Christi,
> Promptuarium mysteriorum fidei, ora pro nobis.

Your small-clothes sound to me very like one of my old litanies, Theodore.”

“We want scientific descriptions, not litanies,” said Gumbril Senior. “What *are* Gumbril’s Patent Small-Clothes?”

“Scientifically, then,” said Gumbril Junior, “my Patent Small-Clothes may be described as trousers with a pneumatic seat, inflateable by means of a tube fitted with a valve; the whole constructed of stout seamless red rubber, enclosed between two layers of cloth.”

“I must say,” said Gumbril Senior on a tone of somewhat grudging approbation, “I have heard of worse inventions. You are too stout, Porteous, to be able to appreciate the idea. We Gumbrils are all a bony lot.”

“When I have taken out a patent for my invention,” his son went on, very business-like and cool, “I shall either sell it to some capitalist, or I shall exploit it commercially myself. In either case, I shall make money, which is more, I may say, than you or any other Gumbril have ever done.”

“Quite right,” said Gumbril Senior, “quite right”; and he laughed very cheerfully. “And nor will you. You can be grateful to your intolerable Aunt Flo for having left you that three hundred a year. You’ll need it. But if you really want a capitalist,” he went on, “I have exactly the man for you. He’s a man who has a mania for buying Tudor houses and making them more Tudor than they are. I’ve pulled half a dozen of the wretched things to pieces and put them together again differently for him.”

“He doesn’t sound much good to me,” said his son.

“Ah, but that’s only his vice. Only his amusement. His business,” Gumbril Senior hesitated.

“Well, what is his business?”

“Well, it seems to be everything. Patent medicine, trade newspapers, bankrupt tobacconist’s stock—he’s talked to me about those and heaps more. He seems to flit like a butterfly in search of honey, or rather money.”

“And he makes it?”

“Well, he pays my fees and he buys more Tudor houses, and he gives me luncheons at the Ritz. That’s all I know.”

“Well, there’s no harm in trying.”

“I’ll write to him,” said Gumbril Senior. “His name is Boldero. He’ll either laugh at your idea or take it and give you nothing for it. Still,” he looked at his son over the top of his spectacles, “if by any conceivable chance you ever should become rich; if, if, if….” And he emphasized the remoteness of the conditional by raising his eyebrows a little higher, by throwing out his hands in a dubious gesture a little farther at every repetition of the word, “if—why, then I’ve got exactly the thing for you. Look at this really delightful little idea I had this afternoon.” He put his hand in his coat pocket and after some sorting and sifting produced a sheet of squared paper on which was roughly drawn the elevation of a house. “For any one with eight or ten

thousand to spend, this would be—this would be....” Gumbril Senior smoothed his hair and hesitated, searching for something strong enough to say of his little idea. “Well, this would be much too good for most of the greasy devils who do have eight or ten thousand to spend.”

He passed the sheet to Gumbril Junior, who held it out so that both Mr. Porteous and himself could look at it. Gumbril Senior got up from his chair and, standing behind them, leant over to elucidate and explain.

“You see the idea,” he said, anxious lest they should fail to understand. “A central block of three stories, with low wings of only one, ending in pavilions with a second floor. And the flat roofs of the wings are used as gardens—you see?—protected from the north by a wall. In the east wing there is the kitchen and the garage, with the maids’ rooms in the pavilion at the end. The west is a library, and it has an arcaded loggia along the front. And instead of a solid superstructure corresponding to the maids’ rooms, there’s a pergola with brick piers. You see? And in the main block there’s a Spanish sort of balcony along the whole length at first-floor level; that gives a good horizontal line. And you get the perpendiculars with coigns and raised panels. And the roof’s hidden by a balustrade, and there are balustrades along the open sides of the roof gardens on the wings. All in brick it is. This is the garden front; the entrance front will be admirable too. Do you like it?”

Gumbril Junior nodded. “Very much,” he said.

His father sighed and taking the sketch put it back in his pocket. “You must hurry up with your ten thousand,” he said. “And you Porteous, and you. I’ve been waiting so long to build your splendid house.”

Laughing, Mr. Porteous got up from his chair. “And long, dear Gumbril,” he said, “may you continue to wait. For my splendid house won’t be built this side of New Jerusalem,

and you must go on living a long time yet. A long, long time," Mr. Porteous repeated; and carefully he buttoned up his double-breasted coat, carefully, as though he were adjusting an instrument of precision, he took out and replaced his monocle. Then, very erect and neat, very soldierly and pillar-boxical, he marched towards the door. "You've kept me very late to-night," he said. "Unconscionably late."

The front door closed heavily behind Mr. Porteous's departure. Gumbril Senior came upstairs again into the big room on the first floor smoothing down his hair, which the impetuosity of his ascent had once more disarranged.

"That's a good fellow," he said of his departed guest, "a splendid fellow."

"I always admire the monocle," said Gumbril Junior irrelevantly. But his father turned the irrelevance into relevance.

"He couldn't have come through without it, I believe. It was a symbol, a proud flag. Poverty's squalid, not fine at all. The monocle made a kind of difference, you understand. I'm always so enormously thankful I had a little money. I couldn't have stuck it without. It needs strength, more strength than I've got." He clutched his beard close under the chin and remained for a moment pensively silent. "The advantage of Porteous's line of business," he went on at last, reflectively, "is that it can be carried on by oneself, without collaboration. There's no need to appeal to any one outside oneself, or to have any dealings with other people at all, if one doesn't want to. That's so deplorable about architecture. There's no privacy, so to speak; always this horrible jostling with clients and builders and contractors and people, before one can get anything done. It's really revolting. I'm not good at people. Most of them I don't like at all, not at all," Mr. Gumbril repeated with vehemence. "I don't deal with them very well; it isn't my business. My

business is architecture. But I don’t often get a chance of practising it. Not properly.”

Gumbril Senior smiled rather sadly. “Still,” he said, “I can do something. I have my talent, I have my imagination. They can’t take those from me. Come and see what I’ve been doing lately.”

He led the way out of the room and mounted, two steps at a time, towards a higher floor. He opened the door of what should have been, in a well-ordered house, the Best Bedroom, and slipped into the darkness.

“Don’t rush in,” he called back to his son, “for God’s sake don’t rush in. You’ll smash something. Wait till I’ve turned on the light. It’s so like these asinine electricians to have hidden the switch behind the door like this.” Gumbril Junior heard him fumbling in the darkness; there was suddenly light. He stepped in.

The only furniture in the room consisted of a couple of long trestle tables. On these, on the mantelpiece and all over the floor, were scattered confusedly, like the elements of a jumbled city, a vast collection of architectural models. There were cathedrals, there were town halls, universities, public libraries, there were three or four elegant little sky-scrapers, there were blocks of offices, huge warehouses, factories, and finally dozens of magnificent country mansions, complete with their terraced gardens, their noble flights of steps, their fountains and ornamental waters and grandly bridged canals, their little rococo pavilions and garden houses.

“Aren’t they beautiful?” Gumbril Senior turned enthusiastically towards his son. His long grey hair floated wispily about his head, his spectacles flashed, and behind them his eyes shone with emotion.

“Beautiful,” Gumbril Junior agreed.

“When you’re really rich,” said his father, “I’ll build you one of these.” And he pointed to a little village of Chatsworths clustering, at one end of a long table, round the dome of a vaster and austerer St. Peter’s. “Look at this one, for example.” He picked his way nimbly across the room, seized the little electric reading-lamp that stood between a railway station and a baptistery on the mantelpiece, and was back again in an instant, trailing behind him a long flex that, as it tautened out, twitched one of the crowning pinnacles off the top of a sky-scraper near the fireplace. “Look,” he repeated, “look.” He switched on the current, and moving the lamp back and forth, up and down in front of the miniature palace. “See the beauty of the light and shade,” he said. “There, underneath the great, ponderous cornice, isn’t that fine? And look how splendidly the pilasters carry up the vertical lines. And then the solidity of it, the size, the immense, impending bleakness of it!” He threw up his arms, he turned his eyes upwards as though standing overwhelmed at the foot of some huge precipitous façade. The lights and shadows vacillated wildly through all the city of palaces and domes as he brandished the lamp in ecstasy above his head.

“And then,” he had suddenly stooped down, he was peering and pointing once more into the details of his palace, “then there’s the doorway—all florid and rich with carving. How magnificently and surprisingly it flowers out of the bare walls! Like the colossal writing of Darius, like the figures graven in the bald face of the precipice over Behistun—unexpected and beautiful and human, human in the surrounding emptiness.”

Gumbril Senior brushed back his hair and turned, smiling, to look at his son over the top of his spectacles.

“Very fine,” Gumbril Junior nodded to him. “But isn’t the wall a little too blank? You seem to allow very few windows in this vast palazzo.”

“True,” his father replied, “very true.” He sighed. “I’m afraid this design would hardly do for England. It’s meant for a place where there’s some sun—where you do your best to keep the light out, instead of letting it in, as you have to do here. Windows are the curse of architecture in this country. Your walls have to be like sieves, all holes, it’s heart-breaking. If you wanted me to build you this house, you’d have to live in Barbados or somewhere like that.”

“There’s nothing I should like better,” said Gumbril Junior.

“Another great advantage of sunny countries,” Gumbril Senior pursued, “is that one can really live like an aristocrat, in privacy, by oneself. No need to look out on the dirty world or to let the dirty world look in on you. Here’s this great house, for example, looking out on the world through a few dark portholes and a single cavernous doorway. But look inside.” He held his lamp above the courtyard that was at the heart of the palace. Gumbril Junior leaned and looked, like his father. “All the life looks inwards—into a lovely courtyard, a more than Spanish *patio*. Look there at the treble tiers of arcades, the vaulted cloisters for your cool peripatetic meditations, the central Triton spouting white water into a marble pool, the mosaic work on the floor and flowering up the walls, brilliant against the white stucco. And there’s the archway that leads out into the gardens. And now you must come and have a look at the garden front.”

He walked round with his lamp to the other side of the table. There was suddenly a crash; the wire had twitched a cathedral from off the table. It lay on the floor in disastrous ruin as though shattered by some appalling cataclysm.

“Hell and death!” said Gumbril Senior in an outburst of Elizabethan fury. He put down the lamp and ran to see how irreparable the disaster had been. “They’re so horribly expensive, these models,” he explained, as he bent over the ruins. Tenderly he picked up the pieces and replaced them