

An illustration in a dark, painterly style. Two men are in a room filled with clutter, including a lamp, a clock, and various papers. The man on the left, wearing a suit and tie, holds a large, crumpled white object. The man on the right, also in a suit, is gesturing with his hand. The overall mood is dramatic and somewhat chaotic.

*CLASSICS TO GO*

*ONCE A WEEK*

*A. A. MILNE*

# **ONCE A WEEK**

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# THE HEIR

## I.—HE INTRODUCES HIMSELF

"In less refined circles than ours," I said to Myra, "your behaviour would be described as swank. Really, to judge from the airs you put on, you might be the child's mother."

"He's jealous because he's not an aunt himself. Isn't he, ducksey darling?"

"I do wish you wouldn't keep dragging the baby into the conversation; we can make it go quite well as a duologue. As to being jealous—why, it's absurd. True, I'm not an aunt, but in a very short time I shall be an uncle by marriage, which sounds to me much superior. That is," I added, "if you're still equal to it."

Myra blew me a kiss over the cradle.

"Another thing you've forgotten," I went on, "is that I'm down for a place as a godfather. Archie tells me that it isn't settled yet, but that there's a good deal of talk about it in the clubs. Who's the other going to be? Not Thomas, I suppose? That would be making the thing rather a farce."

"Hasn't Dahlia broken it to you?" said Myra anxiously.

"Simpson?" I asked, in an awed whisper.

Myra nodded. "And, of course, Thomas," she said.

"Heavens! Not three of us? What a jolly crowd we shall be. Thomas can play our best ball. We might——"



"But of course there are only going to be two godfathers," she said, and leant over the cradle again.

I held up my three end fingers. "Thomas," I said, pointing to the smallest, "me," I explained, pointing to the next, "and Simpson, the tall gentleman in glasses. One, two, three."

"Oh, baby," sighed Myra, "what a very slow uncle by marriage you're going to have!"

I stood and gazed at my three fingers for some time.

"I've got it," I said at last, and I pulled down the middle one. "The rumour in the clubs was unauthorized. I don't get a place after all."

"*Don't* say you mind," pleaded Myra. "You see, Dahlia thought that as you were practically one of the family already, an uncle-elect by marriage, and as she didn't want to choose between Thomas and Samuel——"

"Say no more. I was only afraid that she might have something against my moral character. Child," I went on, rising and addressing the unresponsive infant, "England has lost a godfather this day, but the world has gained a—— what? I don't know. I want my tea."

Myra gave the baby a last kiss and got up.

"Can I trust him with you while I go and see about Dahlia?"

"I'm not sure. It depends how I feel. I may change him with some poor baby in the village. Run away, aunt, and leave us men to ourselves. We have several matters to discuss."

When the child and I were alone together, I knelt by his cradle and surveyed his features earnestly. I wanted to see what it was he had to offer Myra which I could not give her. "This," I said to myself, "is the face which has come

between her and me," for it was unfortunately true that I could no longer claim Myra's undivided attention. But the more I looked at him the more mysterious the whole thing became to me.

"Not a bad kid?" said a voice behind me.

I turned and saw Archie.

"Yours, I believe," I said, and I waved him to the cradle.

Archie bent down and tickled the baby's chin, making appropriate noises the while—one of the things a father has to learn to do.

"Who do you think he's like?" he asked proudly.

"The late Mr. Gladstone," I said, after deep thought.

"Wrong. Hallo, here's Dahlia coming out. I hope, for your sake, that the baby's all right. If she finds he's caught measles or anything, you'll get into trouble."

By a stroke of bad luck the child began to cry as soon as he saw the ladies. Myra rushed up to him.

"Poor little darling," she said soothingly. "Did his uncle by marriage frighten him, then?"

"Don't listen to her, Dahlia," I said. "I haven't done anything to him. We were chatting together quite amicably until he suddenly caught sight of Myra and burst into tears."

"He's got a little pain," said Dahlia gently taking him up and patting him.

"I think the trouble is mental," suggested Archie. "He looks to me as if he had something on his conscience. Did he say anything to you about it when you were alone?"

"He didn't say much," I confessed, "but he seemed to be keeping something back. I think he wants a bit of a run, really."

"Poor little lamb," said Dahlia. "There, he's better now, thank you." She looked up at Archie and me. "I don't believe you two love him a bit."

Archie smiled at his wife and went over to the tea-table to pour out. I sat on the grass and tried to analyse my feelings to my nephew by marriage.

"As an acquaintance," I said, "he is charming; I know no one who is better company. If I cannot speak of his more solid qualities, it is only because I do not know him well enough. But to say whether I love him or not is difficult; I could tell you better after our first quarrel. However, there is one thing I must confess. I am rather jealous of him."

"You envy his life of idleness?"

"No, I envy him the amount of attention he gets from Myra. The love she wastes on him which might be better employed on me is a heartrending thing to witness. As her betrothed I should expect to occupy the premier place in her affections, but, really, I sometimes think that if the baby and I both fell into the sea she would jump in and save the baby first."

"Don't talk about his falling into the sea," said Dahlia, with a shudder; "I can't a-bear it."

"I think it will be all right," said Archie, "I was touching wood all the time."

"What a silly godfather he nearly had!" whispered Myra at the cradle. "It quite makes you smile, doesn't it, baby? Oh, Dahlia, he's just like Archie when he smiles!"

"Oh, yes, he's the living image of Archie," said Dahlia confidently.

I looked closely at Archie and then at the baby.

"I should always know them apart," I said at last. "That," and I pointed to the one at the tea-table, "is Archie, and this," and I pointed to the one in the cradle, "is the baby. But then I've such a wonderful memory for faces."

"Baby," said Myra, "I'm afraid you're going to know some very foolish people."

## II.—HE MEETS HIS GODFATHERS

THOMAS and Simpson arrived by the twelve-thirty train, and Myra and I drove down in the wagonette to meet them. Myra handled the ribbons ("handled the ribbons"—we must have that again) while I sat on the box-seat and pointed out any traction-engines and things in the road. I am very good at this.

"I suppose," I said, "there will be some sort of ceremony at the station? The station-master will read an address while his little daughter presents a bouquet of flowers. You don't often get two godfathers travelling by the same train. Look out," I said, as we swung round a corner, "there's an ant coming."

"What did you say? I'm so sorry, but I listen awfully badly when I'm driving."

"As soon as I hit upon anything really good I'll write it down. So far I have been throwing off the merest trifles. When we are married, Myra——"

"Go on; I love that."

"When we are married we shan't be able to afford horses, so we'll keep a couple of bicycles, and you'll be able to hear everything I say. How jolly for you."

"All right," said Myra quietly.

There was no formal ceremony on the platform, but I did not seem to feel the want of it when I saw Simpson stepping from the train with an enormous Teddy-bear under his arm.

"Hallo, dear old chap," he said, "here we are! You're looking at my bear. I quite forgot it until I'd strapped up my bags, so I had to bring it like this. It squeaks," he added, as if that explained it. "Listen," and the piercing roar of the bear resounded through the station.

"Very fine. Hallo, Thomas!"

"Hallo!" said Thomas, and went to look after his luggage.

"I hope he'll like it," Simpson went on. "Its legs move up and down." He put them into several positions, and then squeaked it again. "Jolly, isn't it?"

"Ripping," I agreed. "Who's it for?"

He looked at me in astonishment for a moment.

"My dear old chap, for the baby."

"Oh, I see. That's awfully nice of you. He'll love it." I wondered if Simpson had ever seen a month-old baby. "What's its name?"

"I've been calling it Duncan in the train, but, of course, he will want to choose his own name for it."

"Well, you must talk it over with him to-night after the ladies have gone to bed. How about your luggage? We mustn't keep Myra waiting."



"Hallo, Thomas!" said Myra, as we came out. "Hallo, Samuel! Hooray!"

"Hallo, Myra!" said Thomas. "All right?"

"Myra, this is Duncan," said Simpson, and the shrill roar of the bear rang out once more.

Myra, her mouth firm, but smiles in her eyes, looked down lovingly at him. Sometimes I think that she would like to be Simpson's mother. Perhaps, when we are married, we might adopt him.

"For baby?" she said, stroking it with her whip. "But he won't be allowed to take it into church with him, you know. No, Thomas, I won't have the luggage next to me; I want some one to talk to. You come."

Inside the wagonette Simpson squeaked his bear at intervals, while I tried to prepare him for his coming introduction to his godson. Having known the baby for nearly a week, and being to some extent in Myra's confidence, I felt quite the family man beside Simpson.

"You must try not to be disappointed with his looks," I said. "Anyway, don't let Dahlia think you are. And if you want to do the right thing say that he's just like Archie. Archie doesn't mind this for some reason."

"Is he tall for his age?"

"Samuel, pull yourself together. He isn't tall at all. If he is anything he is long, but how long only those can say who have seen him in his bath. You do realize that he is only a month old?"

"My dear old boy, of course. One can't expect much from him. I suppose he isn't even toddling about yet?"

"No—no. Not actually toddling."

"Well, we can teach him later on. And I'm going to have a lot of fun with him. I shall show him my watch—babies always love that."

There was a sudden laugh from the front, which changed just a little too late into a cough. The fact is I had bet Myra a new golf-ball that Simpson would show the baby his watch within two minutes of meeting him. Of course, it wasn't a certainty yet, but I thought there would be no harm in mentioning the make of ball I preferred. So I changed the conversation subtly to golf.

Amidst loud roars from the bear we drove up to the house and were greeted by Archie.

"Hallo, Thomas! how are you? Hallo, Simpson! Good heavens! I know that face. Introduce me, Samuel."

"This is Duncan. I brought him down for your boy to play with."

"Duncan, of course. The boy will love it. He's tired of me already. He proposes to meet his godfathers at four p.m. precisely. So you'll have nearly three hours to think of something genial to say to him."

We spent the last of the three hours playing tennis, and at four p.m. precisely the introduction took place. By great good luck Duncan was absent; Simpson would have wasted his whole two minutes in making it squeak.

"Baby," said Dahlia, "this is your Uncle Thomas."

"Hallo!" said Thomas, gently kissing the baby's hand. "Good old boy," and he felt for his pipe.

"Baby," said Dahlia, "this is your Uncle Samuel."

As he leant over the child I whipped out my watch and murmured, "Go!" 4 hrs. 1 min. 25 sec. I wished Myra had not taken my "two minutes" so literally, but I felt that the golf-ball was safe.

Simpson looked at the baby as if fascinated, and the baby stared back at him. It was a new experience for both of them.

"He's *just* like Archie," he said at last, remembering my advice. "Only smaller," he added.

4 hrs. 2 min. 7 sec.

"I can see you, baby," he said. "Goo-goo."

Myra came and rested her chin on my shoulder. Silently I pointed to the finishing place on my watch, and she gave a little gurgle of excitement. There was only one minute left.

"I wonder what you're thinking about," said Simpson to the baby. "Is it my glasses you want to play with?"

"Help!" I murmured. "This will never do."

"He just looks and looks. Ah! but his Uncle Samuel knows what baby wants to see." (I squeezed Myra's arm. 4 hrs. 3 mins. 10 secs. There was just time.) "I wonder if it's anything in his uncle's waistcoat?"

"No!" whispered Myra to me in agony. "*Certainly* not."

"He *shall* see it if he wants to," said Simpson soothingly, and put his hand to his waistcoat pocket. I smiled triumphantly at Myra. He had five seconds to get the watch out—plenty of time.

"Bother!" said Simpson. "I left it upstairs."

### III.—HE CHOOSES A NAME

THE afternoon being wet we gathered round the billiard-room fire and went into committee.

"The question before the House," said Archie, "is what shall the baby be called, and why. Dahlia and I have practically decided on his names, but it would amuse us to hear your inferior suggestions and point out how ridiculous they are."

Godfather Simpson looked across in amazement at Godfather Thomas.

"Really, you are taking a good deal upon yourself, Archie," he said coldly. "It is entirely a matter for my colleague and myself to decide whether the ground is fit for—to decide, I should say, what the child is to be called. Unless this is quite understood we shall hand in our resignations."

"We've been giving a lot of thought to it," said Thomas, opening his eyes for a moment. "And our time is valuable." He arranged the cushions at his back and closed his eyes again.

"Well, as a matter of fact, the competition isn't quite closed," said Archie. "Entries can still be received."

"We haven't really decided at all," put in Dahlia gently. "It *is* so difficult."

"In that case," said Samuel, "Thomas and I will continue to act. It is my pleasant duty to inform you that we had a long consultation yesterday, and finally agreed to call him—er—Samuel Thomas."

"Thomas Samuel," said Thomas sleepily.

"How did you think of those names?" I asked. "It must have taken you a tremendous time."

"With a name like Samuel Thomas Mannering," went on Simpson ["Thomas Samuel Mannering," murmured Thomas], "your child might achieve almost anything. In private life you would probably call him Sam."

"Tom," said a tired voice.

"Or, more familiarly, Sammy."

"Tommy," came in a whisper from the sofa.

"What do you think of it?" asked Dahlia.

"I mustn't say," said Archie; "they're my guests. But I'll tell you privately some time."

There was silence for a little, and then a thought occurred to me.

"You know, Archie," I said, "limited as their ideas are, you're rather in their power. Because I was looking through the service in church on Sunday, and there comes a point when the clergyman says to the godfathers, 'Name this child.' Well, there you are, you know. They've got you. You may have fixed on Montmorency Plantagenet, but they've only to say 'Bert,' and the thing is done."

"You all forget," said Myra, coming over to sit on the arm of my chair, "that there's a godmother too. I shall forbid the Berts."

"Well, that makes it worse. You'll have Myra saying 'Montmorency Plantagenet,' and Samuel saying 'Samuel Thomas,' and Thomas saying 'Thomas Samuel.'"

"It will sound rather well," said Archie, singing it over to himself. "Thomas, you take the tenor part, of course: 'Thomas Samuel, Thomas Samuel, Thom-as Sam-u-el.' We must have a rehearsal."

For five minutes Myra, Thomas, and Simpson chanted in harmony, being assisted after the first minute by Archie, who took the alto part of "Solomon Joel." He explained that as this was what he and his wife really wanted the child christened ("Montmorency Plantagenet" being only an invention of the godmother's) it would probably be necessary for him to join in too.

"Stop!" cried Dahlia, when she could bear it no longer; "you'll wake baby."

There was an immediate hush.

"Samuel," said Archie in a whisper, "if you wake the baby I'll kill you."

The question of his name was still not quite settled, and once more we gave ourselves up to thought.

"Seeing that he's the very newest little Rabbit," said Myra, "I do think he might be called after some very great cricketer."

"That was the idea in christening him 'Samuel,'" said Archie.

"Gaukrodger Carkeek Butt Bajana Mannering," I suggested—"something like that?"

"Silly; I meant 'Charles,' after Fry."

"'Schofield,' after Haigh," murmured Thomas.

"'Warren,' after Bardsley, would be more appropriate to a Rabbit," said Simpson, beaming round at us. There was, however, no laughter. We had all just thought of it ourselves.

"The important thing in christening a future first-class cricketer," said Simpson, "is to get the initials right. What could be better than 'W. G.' as a nickname for Grace? But if



'W. G.'s' initials had been 'Z. Z.,' where would you have been?"

"Here," said Archie.

The shock of this reply so upset Simpson that his glasses fell off. He picked them out of the fender and resumed his theme.

"Now, if the baby were christened 'Samuel Thomas' his initials would be 'S. T.,' which are perfect. And the same as Coleridge's."

"Is that Coleridge the wicket-keeper, or the fast bowler?"

Simpson opened his mouth to explain, and then, just in time, decided not to.

"I forgot to say," said Archie, "that anyhow he's going to be called Blair, after his mamma."

"If his name's Blair Mannering," I said at once, "he'll have to write a book. You can't waste a name like that. *The Crimson Spot*, by Blair Mannering. Mr. Blair Mannering, the well-known author of *The Gash*. Our new serial, *The Stain on the Bath Mat*, has been specially written for us by Mr. and Mrs. Blair Mannering. It's simply asking for it."

"Don't talk about his wife yet, please," smiled Dahlia. "Let me have him a little while."

"Well, he can be a writer *and* a cricketer. Why not? There are others. I need only mention my friend, S. Simpson."

"But the darling still wants another name," said Myra. "Let's call him John to-day, and William to-morrow, and Henry the next day, and so on until we find out what suits him best."

"Let's all go upstairs now and call him Samuel," said Samuel.

"Thomas," said Thomas.

We looked at Dahlia. She got up and moved to the door. In single file we followed her on tip-toe to the nursery. The baby was fast asleep.

"Thomas," we all said in a whisper, "Thomas, Thomas."

There was no reply.

"Samuel!"

Dead silence.

"I think," said Dahlia, "we'll call him Peter."

#### IV.—HE IS CHRISTENED

ON the morning of the christening, as I was on my way to the bathroom, I met Simpson coming out of it. There are people who have never seen Simpson in his dressing-gown; people also who have never waited for the sun to rise in glory above the snow-capped peaks of the Alps; who have never stood on Waterloo Bridge and watched St. Paul's come through the mist of an October morning. Well, well, one cannot see everything.

"Hallo, old chap!" he said. "I was just coming to talk to you. I want your advice."

"A glass of hot water the last thing at night," I said, "no sugar or milk, a Turkish bath once a week and plenty of exercise. You'll get it down in no time."

"Don't be an ass. I mean about the christening. I've been to a wedding, of course, but that isn't quite the same thing."

"A moment, while I turn on the tap." I turned it on and came back to him. "Now then, I'm at your service."

"Well, what's the—er—usual costume for a christening?"

"Leave that to the mother," I said. "She'll see that the baby's dressed properly."

"I mean for a godfather."

Dahlia has conveniently placed a sofa outside the bathroom door. I dropped into it and surveyed the dressing-gown thoughtfully.

"Go like that," I said at last.

"What I want to know is whether it's a top-hat affair or not?"

"Have you brought a top-hat?"

"Of course."

"Then you must certainly—— I say! Come out of it, Myra!"

I jumped up from the sofa, but it was too late. She had stolen my bath.

"Well, of all the cheek——"

The door opened and Myra's head appeared round the corner.

"Hush! you'll wake the baby," she said. "Oh, Samuel, what a dream! *Why* haven't I seen it before?"

"You have, Myra. I've often dressed up in it."

"Then I suppose it looks different with a sponge. Because ——"

"Really!" I said as I took hold of Simpson and led him firmly away; "if the baby knew that you carried on like this of a

morning he'd be shocked."

Thomas is always late for breakfast. Simpson on this occasion was delayed by his elaborate toilet. They came in last together, by opposite doors, and stood staring at each other. Simpson wore a frock-coat, dashing double-breasted waistcoat, perfectly creased trousers, and a magnificent cravat; Thomas had on flannels and an old blazer.

"By Jove!" said Archie, seeing Simpson first, "you *are* a——" and then he caught sight of Thomas. "Hul-*lo*!" His eyes went from one to the other, and at last settled on the toast. He went on with his breakfast. "The two noble godfathers," he murmured.

Meanwhile the two godfathers continued to gaze at each other as if fascinated. At last Simpson spoke.

"We can't *both* be right," he said slowly to himself.

Thomas woke up.

"Is it the christening to-day? I quite forgot."

"It is, Thomas. The boat-race is to-morrow."

"Well, I can change afterwards. You don't expect me to wear anything like that?" he said, pointing to Simpson.

"Don't change," said Archie. "Both go as you are. Mick and Mack, the Comedy Duo. Simpson does the talking while Thomas falls over the pews."

Simpson collected his breakfast and sat down next to Myra.

"Am I all right?" he asked her doubtfully.

"Your tie's up at the back of your neck," I said.

"Because if Dahlia would prefer it," he went on, ignoring me, "I could easily wear a plain dark tweed."

"You're beautiful, Samuel," said Myra. "I hope you'll look as nice at my wedding."

"You don't think I shall be mistaken for the father?" he asked anxiously.

"By Peter? Well, that *is* just possible. Perhaps if——"

"I think you're right," said Simpson, and after breakfast he changed into the plain dark tweed.

As the hour approached we began to collect in the hall, Simpson reading the service to himself for the twentieth time.

"Do we have to say anything?" asked Thomas, as he lit his third pipe.

Simpson looked at him in horror.

"Say anything? Of course we do! Haven't you studied it? Here, you'll just have time to read it through."

"Too late now. Better leave it to the inspiration of the moment," I suggested. "Does anybody know if there's a collection, because if so I shall have to go and get some money."

"There will be a collection for the baby afterwards," said Archie. "I hope you've all been saving up."

"Here he comes!" said Simpson, and Peter Blair Mannering came down the stairs with Dahlia and Myra.

"Good morning, everybody," said Dahlia.

"Good morning. Say 'Good morning,' baby."

"He's rather nervous," said Myra. "He says he's never been christened before, and what's it like?"

"I expect he'll be all right with two such handsome godfathers," said Dahlia.

"*Isn't* Mr. Simpson looking well?" said Myra in a society voice. "And do you know, dear, that's the *third* suit I've seen him in to-day."

"Well, are we all ready?"

"You're quite sure about his name?" said Archie to his wife. "This is your last chance, you know. Say the word to Thomas before it's too late."

"I think Peter is rather silly," I said.

"Why Blair?" said Myra. "I ask you."

Dahlia smiled sweetly at us and led the way with P. B. Mannering to the car. We followed ... and Simpson on the seat next the driver read the service to himself for the last time.

"I feel very proud," said Archie as we came out of the church. "I'm not only a father, but my son has a name. And now I needn't call him 'er' any more."

"He *was* a good boy, wasn't he?" said Myra.

"Thomas, say at once that your godson was a good boy."

But Thomas was quiet. He looked years older.

"I've never read the service before," he said. "I didn't quite know what we were in for. It seems that Simpson and I have undertaken a heavy responsibility; we are practically answerable for the child's education. We are supposed to



examine him every few years and find out if he is being taught properly."

"You can bowl to him later on if you like."

"No, no. It means more than that." He turned to Dahlia. "I think," he said, "Simpson and I will walk home. We must begin at once to discuss the lines on which we shall educate our child."

## V.—HE SEES LIFE

THERE was no one in sight. If 'twere done well, 'twere well done quickly. I gripped the perambulator, took a last look round, and then suddenly rushed it across the drive and down a side path, not stopping until we were well concealed from the house. Panting, I dropped into a seat, having knocked several seconds off the quarter-mile record for babies under one.

"Hallo!" said Myra.

"Dash it, are there people everywhere to-day? I can't get a moment to myself. 'O solitude, where——'"

"What are you going to do with baby?"

"Peter and I are going for a walk." My eyes rested on her for more than a moment. She was looking at me over an armful of flowers ... and—well—"You can come too if you like," I said.

"I've got an awful lot to do," she smiled doubtfully.

"Oh, if you'd rather count the washing."

She sat down next to me.

"Where's Dahlia?"

"I don't know. We meant to have left a note for her, but we came away in rather a hurry. '*Back at twelve. Peter.*'"

"*I am quite happy. Pursuit is useless,*" suggested Myra. "Poor Dahlia, she'll be frightened when she sees the perambulator gone."

"My dear, what *could* happen to it? Is this Russia?"

"Oh, what happens to perambulators in Russia?" asked Myra eagerly.

"They spell them differently," I said, after a little thought. "Anyhow, Dahlia's all right."

"Well, I'll just take these flowers in and then I'll come back. If you and Peter will have me?"

"I think so," I said.

Myra went in and left me to my reflections, which were mainly that Peter had the prettiest aunt in England, and that the world was very good. But my pleased and fatuous smile over these thoughts was disturbed by her announcement on her return.

"Dahlia says," she began, "that we may have Peter for an hour, but he must come in at once if he cries."

I got up in disgust.

"You've spoilt my morning," I said.

"Oh, *no!*"

"I had a little secret from Dahlia, or rather Peter and I had a little secret together; at least, you and I and Peter had a secret. Anyhow, it was a secret. And I was feeling very

wicked and happy—Peter and I both were; and we were going to let you feel wicked too. And now Dahlia knows all about the desperate deed we were planning, and, to make it worse, all she says is, 'Certainly! By all means! Only don't get his feet wet.' Peter," I said, as I bent over the sleeping innocent, "we are betrayed."

"Miss Mannering will now relate her experiences," said Myra. "I went into the hall to put down the flowers, and just as I was coming out I saw Dahlia in the corner with a book. And she said, 'Tell your young man——'"

"How vulgar!" I interrupted.

"'Do be careful with my baby.' And I said in great surprise, 'What baby?' And she said, 'He was very kindly running him up and down the drive just now. Peter loves it, but don't let them go on too long or there may be an accident.' And then she gave a few more instructions, and—here we are."

"Peter," I said to the somnolent one, "you can't deceive a woman. Also men are pigs. Wake up, and we will apologize to your aunt for doubting her. Sorry, Myra."

Myra pinned a flower in my coat and forgave me, and we walked off together with the perambulator.

"Peter is seeing a bit of life this morning," I said. "What shall we show him now?"

"Thomas and Samuel are playing golf," said Myra casually.

I looked at her doubtfully.

"Is that quite suitable?"

"I think if we didn't let him stay too long it would be all right. Dahlia wouldn't like him to be overexcited."

"Well, he can't be introduced to the game too early. Come on, Peter." And we pushed into more open country.

The 9-hole course which Simpson planned a year ago is not yet used for the Open Championship, though it is certainly better than it was last summer. But it is short and narrow and dog-legged, and, particularly when Simpson is playing on it, dangerous.

"We are now in the zone of fire," I said. "Samuel's repainted ninepenny may whiz past us at any moment. Perhaps I had better go first." I tied my handkerchief to Myra's sunshade and led the way with the white flag.

A ball came over the barn and rolled towards us, just reaching one of the wheels. I gave a yell.

"Hallo!" bellowed Simpson from behind the barn.

"You're firing on the ambulance," I shouted.

He hurried up, followed leisurely by Thomas.

"I say," he said excitedly, "have I hurt him?"

"You have not even waked him. He has the special gift of—was it Wellington or Napoleon?—that of being able to sleep through the heaviest battle."

"Hallo!" said Thomas. "Good old boy! What's he been learning to-day?" he added, with godfatherly interest.

"We're showing him life to-day. He has come to see Simpson play golf."

"Doesn't he ever sit up?" asked Simpson, looking at him with interest. "I don't see how he's going to see anything if he's always on his back. Unless it were something in the air."

"Don't you ever get the ball in the air?" said Myra innocently.

"What will his Uncle Samuel show him if he does sit up?" I asked. "Let's decide first if it's going to be anything worth watching. Which hole are you for? The third?"

"The eighth. My last shot had a bit of a slice."

"A slice! It had about the whole joint. I doubt," I said to Myra, "if we shall do much good here; let's push on."

But Myra had put down the hood and taken some of the clothes off Peter. Peter stirred slightly. He seemed to know that something was going on. Then suddenly he woke up, just in time to see Simpson miss the ball completely. Instantly he gave a cry.

"Now you've done it," said Myra. "He's got to go in. And I'm afraid he'll go away with quite a wrong idea of the game."

But I was not thinking of the baby. Although I am to be his uncle by marriage I had forgotten him.

"If that's about Simpson's form to-day," I said to Myra, "you and I could still take them on and beat them."

Myra looked up eagerly.

"What about Peter?" she asked; but she didn't ask it very firmly.

"We promised Dahlia to take him in directly he cried," I said. "She'd be very upset if she thought she couldn't trust us. And we've got to go in for our clubs, anyway," I added.

Peter was sleeping peacefully again, but a promise is a promise. After all, we had done a good deal for his education that morning. We had shown him human nature at work, and the position of golf in the universe.

"We'll meet you on the first tee," said Myra to Thomas.

## VI.—HE SLEEPS

"It's sad to think that to-morrow we shall be in London," said Simpson, with a sigh.

"Rotten," agreed Thomas, and took another peach.

There was a moment's silence.

"We shall miss you," I said, after careful thought. I waited in vain for Dahlia to say something, and then added, "You must both come again next year."

"Thank you very much."

"Not at all." I hate these awkward pauses. If my host or hostess doesn't do anything to smooth them over, I always dash in. "It's been delightful to have you," I went on. "Are you sure you can't stay till Wednesday?"

"I'm so sorry," said Dahlia, "but you took me by surprise. I had simply no idea. Are you really going?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Are *you* really staying?" said Archie to me. "Help!"

"What about Peter?" asked Myra. "Isn't he too young to be taken from his godfathers?"

"We've been talking that over," said Simpson, "and I think it will be all right. We've mapped his future out very carefully and we shall unfold it to you when the coffee comes."

"Thomas is doing it with peach-stones," I said. "Have another, and make him a sailor, Thomas," and I passed the plate.



"Sailor indeed," said Dahlia. "He's going to be a soldier."

"It's too late. Thomas has begun another one. Well, he'll have to swallow the stone."

"A trifle hard on the Admiralty," said Archie. "It loses both Thomas and Peter at one gulp. My country, what of thee?"

However, when Thomas had peeled the peach, I cleverly solved the difficulty by taking it on to my plate while he was looking round for the sugar.

"No, no sugar, thanks," I said, and waved it away.

With the coffee and cigars Simpson unfolded his scheme of education for Peter.

"In the first place," he said, "it is important that even as a child he should always be addressed in rational English and not in that ridiculous baby-talk so common with young mothers."

"Oh dear," said Dahlia.

"My good Samuel," I broke in, "this comes well from you. Why, only yesterday I heard you talking to him. I think you called him his nunkey's ickle petsy wetsy lambkin."

"You misunderstood me," said Simpson quickly. "I was talking to *you*."

"Oh!" I said, rather taken aback. "Well—well, I'm not." I lit a cigar. "And I shall be annoyed if you call me so again."

"At the age of four," Simpson went on, "he shall receive his first lesson in cricket. Thomas will bowl to him——"

"I suppose that means that Thomas will have to be asked down here again," said Archie. "Bother! Still, it's not for four years."

"Thomas will bowl to him, Archie will keep wicket, and I shall field."

"And where do I come in?" I asked.

"You come in after Peter. Unless you would rather have your lesson first."

"That's the second time I've been sat on," I said to Myra, "Why is Simpson so unkind to me to-night?"

"I suppose he's jealous because you're staying on another week."

"Probably; still, I don't like it. Could you turn your back on him, do you think, to indicate our heavy displeasure?"

Myra moved her chair round and rested her elbow on the table.

"Go on, Samuel," said Dahlia. "You're lovely to-night. I suppose these are Thomas's ideas as well as your own?"

"His signature is duly appended to them."

"I didn't read 'em all," said Thomas.

"That's very rash of you," said Archie. "You don't know what you mightn't let yourself in for. You may have promised to pay the child threepence a week pocket-money."

"No, there's nothing like that," said Simpson, to Archie's evident disappointment. "Well, then, at the age of ten he goes to a preparatory school."

"Has he learnt to read yet?" asked Dahlia. "I didn't hear anything about it."

"He can read at six. I forgot to say that I am giving him a book which I shall expect him to read aloud to Thomas and

me on his sixth birthday."

"Thomas has got *another* invitation," said Archie. "Dash it!"

"At fourteen he goes to a public school. The final decision as to which public school he goes to will be left to you, but, of course, we shall expect to be consulted on the subject."

"I'll write and tell you what we decide on," said Archie hastily; "there'll be no need for you to come down and be told aloud."

"So far we have not arranged anything for him beyond the age of fourteen. I now propose to read out a few general rules about his upbringing which we must insist on being observed."

"The great question whether Simpson is kicked out of the house to-night, or leaves unobtrusively by the milk train to-morrow morning, is about to be settled," I murmured.

"**RULE ONE.**—He must be brought up to be ambidextrous.' It will be very useful," explained Simpson, "when he fields cover for England."

"Or when he wants to shake hands with two people at once," said Archie.

"**RULE TWO.**—He must be taught from the first to speak French and German fluently.' He'll thank you for that later on when he goes abroad."

"Or when he goes to the National Liberal Club," said Archie.

"**RULE THREE.**—He should be surrounded as far as possible with beautiful things.' Beautiful toys, beautiful wall-paper, beautiful scenery——"

"Beautiful godfathers?" I asked doubtfully.