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DECEMBER 15, 1935

Portrait of Menzies

By HUGH WALPOLE

A new story by one of the great masters of English fiction

THE EVENT that I am about to describe took place several years ago in Polchester and although it may not seem to the outside world very startling, it upset, in one way or another, Polchester society for months after it occurred. Its importance in that town sprang from two causes: one, the interest in the character and appearance of Menzies himself; the other, I am afraid, a certain malicious pleasure in the unhappiness caused to Mrs. Cronin and the check that it implanted on her social career.

Three or four years ago the life of Polchester was apparently quiet and prosperous. How greatly astonished anyone would have been at that time had you hinted to them of the terrible disturbances and riots that were to break the town to pieces in so short a while! There were those in Seatown, no doubt, who knew something of what was going on, and our Mr. Romney, our smartest and most peculiar bachelor, he could have told a story perhaps.

But Menzies has nothing to do with these later troubles. When they occurred his friend and master had died and he himself, being able to bear the associations of Polchester no longer, had moved to London. It was in London that I met him, and I am proud to say that I am now his friend. It was from his own lips that I heard much of this story, but if he reads this he will not recognize himself. But then he never reads magazines; he considers them a very sad waste of time.

At the Christmas of which I am writing, Menzies had been Mr. Ballater's valet, friend and counsellor for some twenty years. Mr. Ballater, who had been born in Polchester and lived there all his life, was, of course, known to everybody. He had ardent friends and defenders, but it must be in general admitted that he was considered a cantankerous, fussy, selfish and ill-mannered old bachelor. We are, however, known truly only to those three or four persons who really love us, and Lionel Ballater's real character was very different from the general estimate of him. I myself knew him very well at one time. I am not trying to describe him as the conventional figure of fiction—a crusty, snappy old bachelor with the heart of gold. So far as I saw him he was neither crusty nor snappy, and his generosities were patent to the eye. He was certainly opinionated, especially on things like politics and sport.

And then his physical appearance may have had something to do with his reputation. He was a little man with a large head and bushy black eyebrows. He was almost incredibly neat in his dress, and his stiff, perfect clothes gave him rather an inhuman appearance. Under the eyebrows he had twinkling, humorous eyes. The lines of his mouth would be severe when he was irritated or displeased. He had undoubtedly a hasty temper, and he could be guilty of almost absurd violence of speech. His heart was exceedingly warm, but with it went a suspicion of human nature, derived, I think, from his old mother, who was once a famous figure in Polchester and was one of the meanest old women God ever made. Lionel was a little old-fashioned in his dress, and wore his ties through a gold ring and carried a little gold fob at his waist. As he walked up the High Street, swinging gently his gold-topped walking stick, and his hat a little cocked on one side of his head, peering out from under his heavy, black eyebrows, you could tell at once that he was a character.

He lived in a little house near the Arden Gate and was attended by a parlor maid, a cook and Menzies. That, of course, was in his prosperous days. Menzies made an almost perfect contrast with his friend and master. To say that he was an

Lady Mary once said that his limbs were "like towers of ivory and his chest a bulwark against all God's enemies."

immense man would perhaps go too far. He was not, I suppose, in actual fact much more than six foot in height; but his limbs were, as Lady Mary once put it, "like towers of ivory and his chest a bulwark against all God's enemies." I myself never liked Lady Mary and always thought her a most affected woman. Menzies was superbly made and knew it, as all men who are admired constantly by the opposite sex for physical reasons must know it. He carried himself magnificently, and had such perfect and beautiful manners that it was said in Polchester that mothers who had young sons growing up would send them to call on Lionel Ballater only in order that they might study the movements of Menzies.

Neither he nor his master was married, nor had they, so far as anyone had ever known, the slightest interest in women. They both frankly despised the other sex, but the odd thing was that, although they stated this on any and every occasion, women found them fascinating. It was said that Menzies had been, in his earlier days, proposed to by one lady or another every week of the year. No one had ever, I think, proposed to Lionel Ballater. He could look very forbidding at the hint of any impertinence, and it was considered a great honor and a great pleasure to be asked to any kind of meal at his little house.

For one thing, the little house was considered lovely. It was arranged with immaculate neatness and precision and filled with delightful old things—furniture, silver, water colors—none of them very valuable in the commercial sense, but all of them good, and right, and English. The house was kept like a museum piece, not a speck of dust anywhere, and it really was something of a pleasure to sit in the little drawing-room with the silver shining, and the water colors gleaming, and the view out of the window over the green to the Cathedral; to hear the rooks, perhaps cawing in the trees beyond, and to speculate as to whether Mrs. Cronin were having a tea party or not, and whether Mrs. Brandon, the archdeacon's wife, had had a new quarrel with Mrs. Carris, her perpetual rival.

Such a friendship existed between Menzies and his master as I have, I think, never seen elsewhere in human life. There was, of course, no spoken or manifested sentiment between them. So far as the outward world could see they kept their places absolutely, and yet you could not be in the house an hour without knowing that the devotion on both sides was absolute.

Also, I do not doubt they each tried the other constantly almost beyond bearing. Menzies, after being twenty years with his master, had become a good deal of a despot. His despotism was always, of course, to his master's good. He knew too thoroughly exactly what Lionel should wear, eat, drink, whom he could trust and not trust, where he should go, and not go; and when he should be generous or hard-hearted. It was one of Menzies' defects that he was perfectly certain that he knew everything about human nature. As a matter of fact he knew very little, because he was absolutely masculine by nature and it is only the man with a good deal of the feminine in his personality who is really subtle in his judgment of other people. He was loyal and devoted to those whom he liked, but woe betide those whom he did not; they could do nothing but ill, poor things. All their actions were suspect, and he had a marvellous capacity for discovering sinister motives behind the most innocent performances.

LIONEL, on his side, as I have already said, was often hasty of temper, and he would say to me when I stayed there that he was sick of Menzies' bossiness and hectoring ways, and that he must get rid of him, pension him off, and so on. That was in Lionel's prosperous days, when his investments brought him in an excellent return and he lived well within his means. His existence was a quiet one, and he asked for nothing more in his life than the little entertainments and gossips and anecdotes of Polchester, the place that he adored. He had many friends, and being, unlike Menzies, considerably friendly by nature, could chat with Lady Mary, or Romney, or Lampieron, or old Canon Ronder by the hour. He collected stamps and was very fond of listening to music on the wireless, and night after night played backgammon with Menzies after dinner. He may be said, up to the age of sixty, to have led one of the happiest lives possible to man.

He had, of course, one or two strong antipathies. By far the strongest was Mrs. Cronin, the wife of Canon Cronin, who lived in a fine house with a splendid garden opposite him on the other side of the Cathedral green. Mrs. Cronin was a lady who, all her life, longed to be liked and never discovered the way to that happy state. She tried everything that she knew, gave lovely parties, complimented everybody and told them unpleasant things about everybody else, but somehow she was unpopular and lonely, poor woman. She never, however, pretended to like Lionel. She knew it was no good; that though she might work her hardest for ever, he would never be her friend.

When Lionel was a little over sixty years of age the slump came, investments went down, and life began financially to be very difficult for him. He rid himself of the little housemaid; and Mrs. Bunting, the cook, who adored him, received graciously lower wages; and Menzies, I suspect, did the same. This financial trouble weighed upon Lionel's spirits very heavily. People with plenty of money always say that money does not matter, and so Lionel had often in his more prosperous days. But money does matter, most abominably; and nothing—not continuous ill health, nor an invidious nature, nor an inability to speak the truth—can burrow into the relations of two intimate people with such devastation as lack of money. This is perhaps especially true in a small town, where everybody knows everything about everybody else. Lionel was an immensely proud man, and although he was not ostentatious he loved his immaculate security. He liked everything to be neat about him, in his finances as well as in everything else. Menzies also had great pride in his master's superior standing, and although he would never admit it, he loved his master so dearly that he wanted him to have everything of the very best.

I realize from what Menzies has told me that the struggle to keep up appearances became very quickly a bitter one. You will say that it is absurd to find tragedy in the situation of an old bachelor, who has neither wife nor children, who in any case will not starve. There are so many people today who positively do not know how their children will be fed next week. The one is, I think, a different tragedy from the other, but in its own world quite as acute.

THE FIRST thing that happened was that the little parties and social entertainments became very infrequent. People in Polchester are no more unkind than people anywhere else, but it is a human characteristic everywhere to feel that one's neighbor's moral qualities are affected by his worldly position. The dinner is a little shabby, the wine ordinary, there is a lack of glow and sparkle, and you leave your friend's house wondering why you had not noticed before that his stories are a little poor and his nature quite astonishingly selfish.

A woman like Lady Mary, a man like Mr. Romney, are especially sensitive to these things. Lady Mary had been a wonder child and discussed philosophy with brilliant men in London at the unnatural age of twelve. But, like many other wonder children, she had flowered too soon, and she was now a loquacious, sharp-voiced woman, squat in figure, restless in her habits and a thundering bore. She was naturally quite unaware of all these things and saw herself the perpetual wonder child, conferring on an obscure, little cathedral town a brilliance of French culture and the breeding of a now swiftly vanishing aristocracy.

It was she who suddenly discovered in these altered circumstances that Lionel was not the man she had always thought him. She went to one of his little dinner parties (and only Lionel and Menzies knew with what effort and care that little dinner had been arranged) and before the evening was over she was whispering in Mr. Romney's ear something about the snows of yesterday, the dullness of the savory and Lionel's old tiresome stories. Menzies knew better than anybody that the dinner had not been a success, and it was after this that the first real trouble between him and his master arose.

On the following morning, when he brought Lionel his tea and asked him whether he would wear the blue or the grey and turned on his bath, he said:

"Not quite so successful a party as we have sometimes had."

Lionel jerked his head on the pillow impatiently, and because he absolutely agreed with Menzies, furiously contradicted him.

"Nonsense. I thought it was a delightful evening."

"Well, Lady Mary didn't. I saw her and that Romney laughing at you in a corner."

Illustrated by H. Eldridge

NOW MENZIES should never have said this, and years afterward he told me that it was one of the real mistakes of his life, which was a great deal for Menzies to admit, but it was simply because he was as deeply hurt as his master that he had to hit out at somebody. And then he disliked Mr. Romney, whose tastes were aesthetic and whose movements were feminine, as cordially as anyone in this world. Romney, who was convinced that he had charm beyond anybody in Polchester, who prided himself with excellent reason on his democratic spirit, used to chaff Menzies and would greet him with:

"Well, my friend; looking as hearty as ever. What a pair of shoulders! I wish I had them."

And this innocent speech contained in it almost everything likely to shock Menzies to the very depths. He did not at all believe in this democracy. He thought people should keep their place. Romney was in one class and he was in another. And then he disliked nothing so much as an allusion to his physical properties. The way a man was made was his own affair, and he felt that for Romney to compliment him on his appearance was as insulting as for himself to compliment Romney on his erudition, which incidentally he did not at all admire.

"All this nonsense about pictures," he would say. "I never heard such stuff. Why, I read in the paper the other day that they paid £10,000 for some fruit on a plate."

Then Romney was fond of working at a little piece of tapestry and sometimes when he came to tea with Lionel he would bring his tapestry with him. This, Menzies thought simply disgraceful.

So the dinner was a failure and they both knew it. And then the little house began to fall to pieces—not so that anyone outside would notice it, but very clearly to the eyes of Lionel and Menzies. First, the back of one of the dining-room chairs broke, and in the old days it would have been sent to London and mended in the most perfect manner, but now that was an expensive thing to do and old Roberts in the High Street was given the job, and of course Roberts did it badly so it was an offense to the eye. Then Lady Mary, on the night of the little party, dropped her cigarette on one of the rugs in the drawing-room. It was a tiny hole that she made, but enough to cause Menzies acute distress. Then something went wrong with the hot-water arrangements. A pipe refused to function, and when Lionel lay in his bath the most amazing gurgles, tremblings and grumblings occurred. In other days this would have been put right at once, but now by some misfortune the local plumber was unable to discover the trouble. He came again and again, bringing with him a bright young lad who infuriated Menzies by his habit of bursting into song so that he could be heard all over the house. But come as often as they might, the rumbles and grumbles still continued. Then Lionel lost his temper.

"Now look here, Menzies. I don't want to be disagreeable, but it does seem to me rather strange that a simple thing like this bath cannot be put right in a day or two. Are we living in a civilized country, or are we not?"

MENZIES instantly took this as a personal affront, just as though Lionel had accused him of gross immorality, or stealing money from his dressing-room table.

"I don't know about civilized," he replied, "but I'm sure I've broken my back over this blasted plumbing."

"Oh, I'm not accusing you personally," Lionel said, although that was exactly what he was doing, "but I should have thought . . ." And then he stopped, for he saw that Menzies was terribly offended, and he was nervous of Menzies' sulks as of practically nothing else in this world. When Menzies sulked the whole house was in dust and ashes. You felt it wherever you went: Menzies' grave countenance, the obstinate set of his shoulders, the stiffening of his back and the hushed way in which he walked, as though he had just lost his nearest and dearest relation, depressed even the household cat so that it neglected its

"It must have been a bit of a sight, me in my butler's clothes running through the snowy street without a hat or coat on."

food and forgot that there were such things as mice behind the pantry sink. Lionel endured a few days of this, and then could stand it no longer. He hated emotional scenes quite as much as Menzies, but something must be done. So he put his hand on Menzies' shoulder and said:

"Are we friends, or are we not?"

Menzies, looking at the wall opposite him as though it contained the secret of perpetual motion, philosopher's stone and all the other unsolved mysteries of creation, answered as he invariably did on such occasions:

"I am sure I do my best, sir, and if I am not considered satisfactory . . ."

Then Lionel said as he always did: "This is absurd. You know that without you I could not get along at all. I am not as young as I was. You are the only friend I can trust. I am sorry if I was tiresome about the plumbing."

And then Menzies replied: "It's quite all right, sir, I'm sure." And there were no more sulks.

BUT NOTHING in life stands still, and Lionel's investments began to flag and falter in a quite terrible fashion. He decided that he must go to London and see about things, and up to London he went. It was that London visit, I think, that really frightened him. His man of affairs, Mr. Pawling, was by nature a pessimist; one of those happy pessimists who luxuriate in forebodings. He did not attempt to make things seem better for Lionel. He drew the very gloomiest picture. In his view the world was going completely to pieces. Look where he would, he could see no light anywhere. His conversation with Lionel was mostly geographical.

"Look at Russia," he said. "Look at America. Look at France. Look at Italy."

"But good heavens," Lionel broke in, "I don't want to look at any of those places. I just want to know how I can manage to have enough to see me through my few remaining years."

"Ah!" said Mr. Pawling, with that irritating implication that he knew so much more of what was really going on than did anyone else. "That's what we all want to know. From all I hear, bad though times are it is nothing to how bad they will be."

Poor Lionel paid one or two visits to his club, and here he discovered an atmosphere of veriest gloom. Clubs were not very cheerful places at that time because the old idea of a club as a happy sanctuary from the female race was dying a violent death. Clubs must change their outlook, must be gay, modern, feminine, or no one would join them any longer. So that all the members of Lionel's club of his own generation were gloomy in the extreme. Lionel, however, had plenty of character, and he returned to Polchester with a forced gaiety and optimism which did not deceive Menzies for a moment.

"Things aren't so bad, Menzies," he said, rubbing his hands. "Pawling seems to think that this trouble is only momentary."

"Judging by the papers," said Menzies, who was by nature an optimist when his friend was pessimistic, but a pessimist in the company of an optimist, "things look very bad, if you ask me."

"And that," thought Lionel, "is a nice reception to get when I am doing my best to be cheerful. What has happened to Menzies?" he asked himself. "He was always such a help, but now he seems to grumble at everything."

And then Mrs. Cronin came in and, as she so often did caused hindrance rather than help.

Mrs. Cronin was a whisperer. The whisperers are people who go about in society whispering things about other people and hoping that they will be popular because of it. For the moment they are very popular indeed. Mrs. Cronin dropped her voice and looked at you with her small but rather beseeching eyes, as though she said: "You are the only friend I have in the world—the only person I trust—and I am going to tell you terrible things about someone we both know. This is my little personal tribute to your honesty and splendid character." The whispered is, of course, always flattered at the moment by the whisperer, but when the whisperer is gone the whispered wonders whether he, too, is the subject of whispering. So it happened that Mrs. Cronin was listened to with eagerness and at the same time deeply distrusted. Now Lionel had a character that, whatever its faults, would admit of no whispering, and when Mrs. Cronin dropped her voice and said:

"Of course I don't believe a word of it—about Mr. Romney, I mean—and I really hardly like to tell you."

Lionel interrupted with a sharp, "Well, then, Mrs. Cronin, I shouldn't. I don't want to hear anything about Romney; in any case he's a friend of mine."

THIS Mrs. Cronin never forgave. She had hoped for a long, long time that Lionel perhaps liked her very much in his heart and now suddenly she saw in a blinding, searing flash that he did not like her at all, and never would. She instantly began to notice numbers of things that were not quite as they should be. She saw, such marvellous eyes had she, the little hole in the rug made by Lady Mary's cigarette; some of the silk on the armchair near the window sadly frayed; and two of the pictures on the walls hanging crookedly. At that same moment Menzies came in, and Mrs. Cronin thought for the hundredth time what a perfectly splendid man he was, how wonderful a servant he must be. And then she wondered whether, as things were not now going so well with poor Lionel, Menzies might not be tempted to leave his service and come to her. Her social ambitions were all-embracing. She wanted to be *the* hostess of Polchester, and if Menzies were her butler it would not be difficult. The thought excited her tremendously. He preceded her downstairs and opened the door for her. She

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Portrait of Menzies

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looked up and said, apparently despairing:

"Oh, Menzies, what I would give to have you in charge of my little household!"

"Yes, madam," said Menzies entirely noncommittally.

"I suppose you don't think—you mightn't perhaps, one day—"

"Yes, madam?" said Menzies interrogatively.

"What I mean is"—and here she broke into a pretty confusion—"if ever you did separate from Mr. Ballater—and of course I know you never would, you are such friends, aren't you? If it ever were to happen, you know where you have a home waiting for you."

"Yes, madam," said Menzies, and closed the door behind her.

He went upstairs again to find his master in a state of almost frenzied indignation. He was walking up and down the room.

"I positively refuse to have that woman in this house again," he said. "You sprang her on me, Menzies. Why didn't you warn me?"

"My fault again," thought Menzies. "Everything's my fault now." So he was at his most maddening, not answering, simply standing there.

"Well, why don't you say something? She's a detestable woman, and the worst gossip in the town."

MENZIES still said nothing. There began in his breast now, as he explained to me much later in his own way, a really terrible struggle between duty and friendship, and that struggle is the subject of this little story. Duty was Menzies' god. It seemed to him that the whole of life rested upon it and everything for good or evil could be explained by it. For example, the French were in financial trouble always, and that was because they did not do their duty; they did not pay their taxes. Mussolini, he understood, had raised Italy from an undutiful country to a dutiful one, and that, in Menzies' opinion, was a splendid thing to have done. He would never hear a word against Mussolini. And so in any and every case his duty insisted that he should do everything possible for his master. But he was now suddenly aware, thinking of the situation, that it was friendship and not duty that had compelled his faithful service. Friendship to Menzies was a very much more uncertain quality than duty. He distrusted friendship and was most suspicious of any emotion. But now friendship seemed suddenly to be removed. His master was blaming him for everything, from plumbing to Mrs. Cronin. He couldn't do right. His master had withdrawn his friendship from him, and if it had not been for duty Menzies would have gone away and found service elsewhere.

"Yes, sir," he told me in after years, looking back to this the most emotional crisis of his life, "I felt as though I had lost something terribly precious, if you understand me. While I had it, it was sort of ordinary, but as soon as I hadn't got it I saw that it hadn't been ordinary at all. I was very unhappy, sir, to tell you the truth, and nervous. Well, you wouldn't believe it; nervous as a kitten. If I'd take a tray in my hands, ten to one I'd drop it. If I was sitting in a chair I'd jump suddenly as though someone were going to murder me. And sleep—well, when I tell you I wasn't sleeping proper I'm telling you something, for I don't suppose there's a better sleeper in the whole of this country, nor a sounder. Anyway, I couldn't understand myself, sir. There wasn't anything exactly you could put your hand on. It was only that I felt sure something terrible was going to happen. I was miserable, to tell you the truth, and so was Mr. Ballater. We were both miserable and yet didn't like to say a

word to one another. I suppose that's the kind of thing that makes the English what they are.

"Well, not sleeping, not eating very much, always jumping and starting, always expecting to be pulled up short for anything, I took refuge in silence. That's what I've always done my life through. If anyone's a bit tiresome I say to myself, 'Well, you shut up. Don't speak a word and you can't go wrong.' But of course my silences were what got on Mr. Ballater's nerves worse than anything. He called it dourness, and when we were joking together, as we used to do before all this, he would say, 'Now, none of your dourness, Menzies,' and I liked to hear him. It was pleasing and friendly. But now he said nothing at all, and soon it got so that we simply weren't speaking to one another and very unhappy we were, I can tell you."

I am quite sure that they were, and that refuge in silence was the worst possible thing for both of them. It was bound to end in a terrible scene. And so it did. A week or two before Christmas (Menzies has described all this incident to me so vividly that I can see every movement of it) a dreadful outburst occurred. The nerves of both men were fearfully on edge. Now I can sympathize with poor old Lionel, alone in that house, his finances confusingly bad, and Menzies, the one friend and stay and comfort of his life, going about with his splendid shoulders eloquently rebellious and his face like that of one of the Puritans in a late Restoration comedy. How he must have suffered, and how Menzies must have suffered, too.

WELL, the storm burst. Lionel complained of his supper. Menzies admitted to me that Mrs. Bunting, the cook, although an excellent woman, was unable to give her cooking very much variety. In the more prosperous times she had let herself go, but now she felt that for the sake of her master she must be economical, with the result that she discovered a sauce of some kind that made everything she cooked taste exactly the same. So Lionel, poor man, complained. In his favorite chair, the backgammon board laid out ready for play, Lionel looked at Menzies and said:

"Before we start, I wish you would say something to Mrs. Bunting. I don't want to complain, but the food is so confounded monotonous that soon I shan't be able to eat anything. I shall starve to death."

"Yes, sir," said Menzies.

"Don't say, 'Yes, sir,' like that. It may not matter to you that I should starve to death, but to myself it is important. We may be poor in this house, but that's no reason whatever that our minute steak should taste exactly the same as a veal cutlet."

"I am sorry, sir," said Menzies, staring into the wall opposite him. "Mrs. Bunting does her best. Things aren't so easy for her as they were."

"No," said Lionel. "That's right, Menzies; taunt me with my poverty."

"As to taunting, sir—" said Menzies.

"Oh, for lord's sake," cried Lionel, jumping up, "can't you drop this sanctimonious air, Menzies? We've had weeks and weeks of it. You look as though you were taking the plate round for collection in church."

Menzies also rose.

"If I fail to give satisfaction . . ." he said.

"Can't you finish your sentences? Can't you talk like a human being? Are you a human being?"

"So far as I know, sir," said Menzies.

"Well, I doubt it. You were one once. I don't know what's happened to you. I should have thought that now, when things aren't too good, would be the very time when you'd try to cheer me up a bit—be a little jolly."

"Jolly, sir?" said Menzies.

"Yes. Try not to repeat every word I say, will you, Menzies?"

"The fact is, sir," said Menzies, turning away from the wall and looking his friend in the face for the first time, "that there's nothing I can do that's right. It's been like that for ever so long. It started with that bath; and it's gone on until I am condemned for Mrs. Bunting's cooking."

"Condemned!" cried Lionel furiously. "That's an absurd word to use."

"Condemned it is, sir," said Menzies. "I feel like a blasted criminal in the dock, and I won't stand it no longer (his negatives, as I learned later, came exceedingly frequent when he was agitated). No, that I won't, sir. I've endured enough. I'm no slave. I'm a free-born Englishman."

"Scotsman," said Lionel.

And that was the last and final taunt.

"Yes, and I'm proud of being Scotch," Menzies cried, suddenly, after all these weeks of cold and chill, an excited, eloquent human being, "and I won't have anyone saying to me that Scotland isn't every bit as good as England is."

"I never said—" said Lionel.

"Oh, yes you did, sir, excuse me for contradicting you. You've insulted Scotland, sir, and that's a thing no Scotsman can stand. You can say what you will about me, but about my country, no! It's clear that I've given dissatisfaction for some time now, and the best thing I can do is for us to separate."

"Very well then," said Lionel. "If you wish it."

"I leave in the morning, sir," said Menzies.

"Very well," said Lionel.

And Menzies, head erect, left the room.

THE ASTONISHING thing was that Menzies did leave next morning. You would have supposed that a night of consideration on both their parts would have decided them that whatever else happened they could not separate. Menzies did not sleep a wink that night, but nevertheless, miserable and wretched, he felt it was his duty to go. Like Frederick in "The Pirates of Penzance," duty might insist that he should wound to the heart his very best friend, and if duty ordered that, so it must be. So after breakfast he left, carrying his bag in his hand and looking the picture, I am sure, of offended dignity.

"Didn't you say good-by to one another?" I asked him afterward.

"Oh, yes, sir. Mr. Ballater was having his breakfast. All he said was, 'It isn't kind of you, Menzies.' And it was not," Menzies added. "I never did a worse thing in my life."

But he was even then to do a worse thing, for on that same morning he arranged with Mrs. Cronin to go to her as butler. Now that was a terrible crime in my opinion, and if Menzies had had any imagination he would never have done it. But he had no imagination. He simply saw the things in front of his nose, and at that moment right in front of his nose was Mrs. Cronin. I am sure myself that underneath, deep down, there was that hysterical wish to hurt the person one loves in order to prove one's love. That sounds feminine, but men in their affairs are often more feminine than women are, and anyway this desire to wound one's friends is universal among human beings. So, from a friend's house, he rang up Mrs. Cronin and said that he was free.

That same evening he was established in the Cronin's house. Her happiness and delight must have been almost pathetic to witness, for she had secured the one man in Polchester who was able to make her the social success she ached to be. She would also be the centre for many weeks to come of excited gossip, for the fact that Menzies had left Mr. Ballater after all those years must have been *the* social event of the first importance in Polchester, and I can imagine all the talk, the running to and fro, the little shrill screams of Romney and the caustic, rather cheap epigrams of Lady Mary as she absentmindedly scratched her nose—one of her less pleasing habits. In any case there Menzies was, and the next step in the story was the sending out of invitations to a marvellous Christmas party at Mrs. Cronin's house.

MENZIES has told me that it was duty that now carried him through.

"I suppose, sir," he said, "I never was so unhappy in the whole of my life as during those weeks. I realized in the course of them

what friendship is. In my opinion, sir, it's a very rare thing, and I am told if you read the Ancients they have many wise and true things to say about friendship."

"They certainly have," I commented.

"Well, I don't suppose things have changed from those old days. You only make a real friend once or twice in the course of your whole life, and I knew while I was at Mrs. Cronin's that I'd never make a friend like Mr. Ballater again. To tell you the truth, sir, it was all I could do not to run across and see how he was getting on. It seemed extremely strange not to be hearing his voice, and worst of all I knew I had done wrong—terrible wrong. But duty upheld me. Friendship, you might say, was gone. Duty took her place, though whether she was feminine or not, sir, I can't rightly say. Anyway I worked like a dog those weeks as never before nor since, thankful that I'd my duty to do and sitting hard on my emotions, if you understand me, sir. And yet you may think it funny, I never had poor Mr. Ballater out of my mind, not one moment. He'd told me to go and I'd gone, and the Scotch are proud people, if you know what I mean, sir. But do what I would, I'd be thinking of him. You might call it an obsession if you like, sir, and I know from what I learned afterward that he was thinking of me. It was only natural after our being together so many years.

"And then Mrs. Cronin, sir, I couldn't like her, I really couldn't. She was one of those women sweet on top and sour inside, and she could change from one mood to another like lightning. Of course she was a highly strung lady, and this party she was giving was to be *the* thing of her life. All the same you never saw nobody so hysterical as she could be. Her voice would reach up ever so high and then would give a little crack, which made her sound very foolish, I must say. Happily she was frightened of me or I would have left after twenty-four hours. I had the whip hand of her. To tell you the truth, I was so unhappy I'd have had the whip hand of anybody. There's nothing makes you top dog like being so miserable you don't care a dam what happens. And then I worked; how I worked; how we all worked! The whole of Polchester society was coming to this party and I must say she'd got grand ideas of what a party should be.

"I found myself taking a sort of professional pride in it. The cook she had was terribly stupid, although she could cook well, and the girls under her weren't no better. The place was at sixes and sevens when I wasn't there. But I've got a gift for organization, like so many of the Scotch. I had them all in their proper places. We were to have some 300 guests altogether and a marvellous dinner, with a great Christmas tree, and she'd engaged some special singers from London. Then there was to be dancing and games of all sorts. Within a week of the event all Polchester was talking about it and about nothing else, and I can tell you I was getting some credit, too. They were all saying that, 'if it weren't for Menzies Mrs. Cronin's party would be a terrible failure,' and most of them of course were hoping it would be.

"In the meantime I can't explain to you, sir, how strange it was hearing nothing from Mr. Ballater. As the time wore on I more and more expected just a word from him of some kind. I used to ask myself what I'd do if he was to ask me, because I knew quite well once I was back in that house I'd be too weak to leave him again. And then what about my duty to Mrs. Cronin? So in a kind of way I was glad he didn't send me a message, and in another way I was sorry. For the first time in my life I wasn't sleeping properly nor eating my food as I should. It was altogether a bad business.

THE NIGHT of the party arrived. Mr. Ballater had, I knew, been invited, and the one thing I was thinking all the time was, would he come? And if he did come what would he say to me? It was lovely Christmas weather. As you know, we don't often have snow down in those parts and sometimes Christmas is as warm as summer

is in the North. This time it was real Christmas, with a sprinkle of snow on the ground and a sharp bright frost. Although I say it as shouldn't, things were arranged to perfection. Everything depended on myself. That cook, though, she would manage well enough if she hadn't responsibility, but as I've said she'd lose her head as soon as look at you.

"As the time approached I found that thinking of Mr. Ballater was disturbing my clarity of mind. So I says to myself, 'Menzies, you do your duty. Keep your emotions down.' But I hadn't been sleeping very well, as I've said, and was more easily upset than was normal. And then Mrs. Cronin—I can only tell you, sir—she was like a twittering fowl. Would she leave me alone? No, she would not, but was at my elbow every other second, saying: Have you got this, Menzies? Have you remembered that? Until at last I turned round to her, and speaking very emphatically indeed, said:

" 'You leave me alone, Mrs. Cronin, otherwise I can't be accountable for what will happen.'

"Well, the guests began to arrive and the dinner was all ready to be served up, and I had them arranged in the kitchen like a general with his army. It was that night, I suppose, I learned what a gift for arranging I really had, and it was that night that was responsible for all the work I've had in London since. Anyway, there we were, everything like clockwork, and the under-housemaid comes to me and says:

" 'Mr. Menzies, you're wanted on the telephone.'

" 'Telephone?' I says, 'I can't come to the telephone now.'

" 'I think it's from the place you were at last,' the girl says.

"Well, I went. Duty told me I should not. Friendship said, 'Go.'

" 'What is it?' I said very sharp.

"It was Mrs. Bunting. In a fine state she was. Said Mr. Ballater had nearly died that afternoon. The doctor had been there, and just gone. He was a little better, but very serious, lying there as weak as a baby, and the only thing he wanted was to see me.

" 'To see me?' I said.

" 'Yes, Mr. Menzies,' she answered, and I can hear her voice now. 'He said to me, "Do you think Menzies would come just for five minutes?" '

" 'Well, I'm terribly busy,' I answered, and shut down the telephone.

NOW of all times, did you ever hear anything like it? I knew well enough that to leave Mrs. Cronin at that moment meant ruin to her dinner party. It mightn't have been so bad if the cook had been a different sort of woman, but as it was there'd have been chaos—positively chaos—once I left the house. They'd just served the grapefruit and the soup was next, and there they all stood waiting for orders, and there I stood looking at them.

" 'What's the matter, Mr. Menzies,' said the rather cheeky parlourmaid. 'Seen a ghost?' *Continued on page 40*

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"Well, in a kind of way I had. I stood there in a sort of stupor while the biggest fight of my life was going on inside me.

" 'He's asked for you, Menzies,' Friendship said. 'He's lying there weak as a baby.'

" 'Mrs. Cronin is paying you your wages,' Duty said. 'You've never not done your duty yet, Menzies.'

"And still I stood looking at the lot of them, quite stupid, unable to move.

" 'All right, get on with it,' I remember telling them. And everything went splendidly. It seemed as though I had them all kind of hypnotized and as though they'd go wrong unless I was there. And what a dinner party it was! The biggest social event Polchester had had for years; and so many of them upstairs disliking their hostess, if you understand me, and wondering if there would be something to criticize.

" 'Go ahead, Menzies,' said Duty.

"For a quarter of an hour I went about my work, and then in a flash Duty was killed. I stood at the top of those stairs unable to see anything but Mr. Ballater, lying there in bed, weak as a baby, asking for me, and I went straight out of the front door just as I was and ran. Looking back now, it must have been a bit of a sight, me in my butler's clothes running through the snowy street without a hat or coat on. And I wonder I didn't catch my death. But Mrs. Bunting opened the door and I ran upstairs and outside his room pulled myself together —composed myself, if you understand me, sir—and walked quietly in.

"All he said was, in a voice so feeble I could hardly hear him: 'My mistake, Menzies, I shouldn't have lost my temper.'

"And all I said was: 'Not at all, sir, I'm afraid I must have been a bit hasty.'

"And then I smoothed his pillows and for a moment we exchanged a grip of the hand, and his hand was so hot and his grip so feeble that after that Mrs. Cronin might have gone to hell and fried there for all I would have bothered. And from that moment until two years later when he died, I didn't leave him. He was in bed, as you know, sir, most of that time and he was the best gentleman God ever made."

THAT WAS Menzies' account, and a very honest one, too. Socially the event had its importance in Polchester's history, but Mrs. Cronin's dinner party was a catastrophe. I cannot remember now all the details, although Lady Mary and Romney told me the whole story with a gusto and enthusiasm that did both their characters credit. It was the talk of the place for many a day. How the cook had hysterics in the kitchen, swallowed half a bottle of brandy and collapsed in the pantry. How the food was ruined and the guests became quite insulting until they were so sorry for poor Mrs. Cronin that they all tried to tell her that it didn't matter.

The great important fact, from which Mrs. Cronin never really recovered, was that Menzies had deserted her in the middle of his duty—Menzies, personification of absolute rectitude and stern morality. What a woman she must be if even Menzies could not stand her! Altogether it was, for poor Mrs. Cronin, as complete a tragedy as you could see. So there it is, a little piece of social history and an example of what friendship often means, and does with the apparently most unemotional of God's creatures.