EDEN PHILLPOTTS (1862–) *has been compared to Thomas Hardy, whose Wessex novels those of Phillpotts resemble in the realism with which country lives are described. His play, "The Farmers' Wife," is one of the most successful repertory pieces of our era. His work covers a wide range, embracing novel and short story, realistic portrayal and fantastic sketch. In "The Iron Pineapple" he combines humour and tragedy.*

THE IRON PINEAPPLE

IT will comfort me to write it. It comforted me to tell my wife, but that consolation vanished when she refused to believe the story and proposed to send for a medical man.

There may be scientific people who could explain what happened to me; there may be names for the state, and it is possible that others have suffered similarly, and done equally amazing things, but in my humble position of life one has no time for works on morbid psychology or its therapeutics, and I prefer to explain all differently and directly. I choose rather to assert that it pleased Providence to select me on a unique occasion for its own profound purposes.

That is how I explain it now, but to be the weapon of Providence in a great matter is not a part that any sane small shopkeeper would choose, and none will ever know the extent of my sufferings while the secret forces that control our destinies had their terrible way with me; none will ever fathom my awful woes and fears as I tottered on the brink of downright madness; none will ever look into the unutterable chasm that for a season yawned between me and my fellow-creatures.

I was cut off from them; I lived a hideous life apart. No human eye penetrated those dark fastnesses of the spirit where I wandered, lost; no friendly voice sounded for me; no sympathy nor understanding came to my side and heartened me to conquer the appalling tribulation.

Doubtless, in some measure, the fault was my own. There were not a few who respected me, and would have done all they might to help me. My wife—what man ever had better? She was always ready, and her gentle tact paved a way for me

through many a neurotic storm and morbid ecstasy, but the secret thing, the obsession of my life, was hidden from her. For shame I hid it; even to her I could not confess its nature and the profound and shattering effect it had upon my self-control and my self-respect.

The nature of this curse will best appear in the course of my narrative. John Noy is my name, and I dwell in the Cornish haven of Bude. Hither from Holsworthy I came, twenty years ago, but the prosperity that has of late burst in a grateful shower over Bude, converting it from an obscure hamlet to a prosperous resort, was not shared by me.

I keep a small grocery store, and sell fruit and vegetables also; while to eke out my modest means I control a branch of the post office, and so add little to my income, but much to my daily labours; for the paltry remuneration of one pound one shilling a month is all that accrues to me for my service in this great department of the State.

I had hoped that in the rising districts of Flexbury, where new houses were springing up like mushrooms, and often with little more than a mushroom's stability, the post office might have opened a way to increased custom, and added to the importance and popularity of my little business. But it never did so. Occasional notepaper and sealing-wax I disposed of, but no respectable augmentation of my own trade could be chronicled as a result of the post office, while, in holiday time, the work proved—and still proves—too much for one head and one pair of hands. Then my clever wife comes to my assistance; and, even so, our accounts do not always balance.

Of course, Bude is not what it was when first I wedded Mabel Polglaze and took my shop. Now an enormous summer population pours upon us annually, and the golf-links swarm with men and women, who pursue that sport from dawn till evening; and the wide sands of the shore are covered with children who, in their picturesque attire, are scattered there, like pink and blue, yellow and white flower-petals blowing over the sands when the tide is out.

I never had any children; and it was a grief to my wife, but a secret joy to me—not because I do not love them, but because, after marriage, my infatuation dawned upon me, and I quickly felt that to hand on such mysterious traits of character would be criminal in the opinion of any conscientious soul.

The cloud ascended by slow degrees upon my clear horizon, and not until it had assumed some quality of sinister significance did I give it much thought. Indeed, in its earliest

manifestation, I took pride in it; and my wife, even from our betrothal, was wont to compliment me upon a certain quality of mind often associated with ultimate prosperity and worldly success.

"Noy," she said to me on one occasion, "your grasp of details is the most remarkable thing about you. You'll fasten on a thing like a dog on a bone, and nought will shake you off it. Whether 'tis sardines, or dried fruits, or spring vegetables, or a new tea, 'twill grip your mind in a most amazing way, and you'll let everything else slip by, and just go for that one object, and keep it in the front of your thoughts, and live on it, like food. And a very fine quality in a grocer; and many a time you've pushed a line and made the public take a new thing. But what's queer about it, in my judgment, is that, so often as not, you'll put all your heart and soul into some stupid little matter, like a new mouse-trap or new vermin-killer, that don't pay for the trouble. You'll give just so much thought to a penwiper or bottle-washer, not worth sixpence, as you will to a new drink or new food, or some big thing that might mean good money, and plenty of it."

There she hit the nail on the head. I had a way to take some particular matter into my mind, as the hedge-sparrow takes the cuckoo's egg into her nest, and then, when the thing hatched out, all else had to go down before it, and for a season I was a man of one idea, and only one. Had those ideas been important; had I conceived brilliant plans for Bude, or even for myself, none could have quarrelled with this power of concentration, or suspected that any infirmity of mind lurked behind it, but, as my wife too faithfully pointed out, I was prone to expend my rich stores of nervous energy upon the most trifling and insignificant matters.

Once I caught a grasshopper in our little garden, and for two years I had no mind to anything but grasshoppers. I purchased works on entomology which I could ill afford; I collected grasshoppers, and spent long hours in studying their manners and customs; I tamed a grasshopper, and finally acquired a knowledge of these insects that has probably never been equalled in the history of the world.

I fought this down with my wife's help, but it was the beginning of worse things; and after she had lost her temper, and expressed her opinion of such puerilities in good set terms, I grew afraid, and began to conceal my mind from her. Then I found that, unconsciously, my frankness in all matters of the soul with Mabel had helped to keep me straight,

and been a shield between me and the horrid idiosyncrasies of my nature.

The descent to hell was easy and, after barriers were once raised between my aberration and her common sense, the former grew by leaps and bounds. A change came over my horrid interests. Formerly it was some comestible or contrivance in my shop that had fixed my attention and chained my energies, to the loss of more important things; for the grasshoppers arrived, as it were, before their time, and for many years after I had struggled free of their influence I suffered no similar lapse. But, having once adopted the practice of simulation with Mabel, having once withheld from her the secrets of my heart, the deterioration proceeded apace: I ceased to be vitally interested in my shop; I wandered afield, and fastened on subjects and objects altogether outside my own life. These I brought into the very heart of my own mystery, and welcomed and worshipped. They were unconceivably trivial: in that lay the growing horror.

To give an example: I remembered how for a time one monument in the churchyard arrested and absorbed my receptive faculties. Many nameless dead, victims of the sea, sleep their last sleep in our green churchyard upon the hill, and here, above a ship's company drowned long since at the haven mouth, there stands with a certain propriety the figure-head of their wrecked vessel. As it advanced before them in life, hanging above the ocean and leaping to the wave, so now in death the image keeps guard above their pillows, and stands, tall and white, among the lesser monuments of the mortuary. So it has stood for nearly fifty years, and promises long to continue, for it is preserved carefully and guarded against destruction.

This wooden image of the ill-fated *Bencoolan* exercised a most dreadful fascination over me; and I cannot tell now how often I visited it, touched it, and poured out my futile thoughts as an offering to it. The figure of the Asiatic chieftain became to me an incubus and exercised a mesmeric power of attraction under which for a season I suffered helplessly. Indeed, I only escaped by abandoning the Church of England and joining the sect of the Primitive Wesleyans. I avoided the church and the grave of the drowned men; I struggled against the horrible attraction of the figure-head. At night I woke and sweated and fought to keep in my couch, and I locked my arms through the bedstead that I might not be torn away to that solemn effigy above the graves.

The Primitive Wesleyans had a chapel within ten minutes' walk of my shop. It was new ; the foundation-stone had been laid but two years before by that famous Wesleyan philanthropist, financier, and friend of man, Bolsover Barbellion. The building, in the last and most debased form of architecture ever sprung from a mean mind, dominated Flexbury, and stood, a mass of hideous stone and baleful brick, above the pitiful rows of new dwelling-houses. But it saved me from the figure-head of the *Bencoolan*, and for a time the ministrations of the Primitive Wesleyans soothed my soul, and offered peace through the channels of religious novelty. I owe them much, and gladly record my debt.

Instances as grim as the foregoing might be cited, but I hasten to the climax of the tragedy and the events that preceded it. My wife, after a lengthened period, during which too surely we had drifted apart in sympathy and mutual understanding, took me to task, and her acerbity, while well enough deserved, none the less caused me a wide measure of astonishment. Never had she struck this note until this hour.

" Why the mischief can't you turn your attention to keeping a roof over our heads ? " she asked. " Trade's never been worse, and you'll lose the post office afore another summer if you make any more mistakes. And here's things happening in the world that might make angels weep. Look at yesterday's paper—all of them benevolent societies come down like a pack of cards, and that saint of God, as we thought—that Bolsover Barbellion—turns out to be a limb of Satan instead. And your own sister ruined, and widows and orphans face to face with the workhouse from one end of England to the other ! And the scoundrel himself has vanished like the dew upon the fleece, as well he may do. And there's another coal strike, the like of which was never knowed, and there's a murder to Plymouth, and talk of war with Germany, and God knows what beside ! Yet you—you can live in this world as if you was no more than a sheep or a cow, and pour out your wits in secret on some twopenny-halfpenny thing that you be too ashamed even to speak about. Yes ; you can, and you do. I know you—if not me, who should ? I hear you a-tossing like a ship in a storm of a night, and you won't let me comfort you no more. And life's hell to a woman placed like me, and I don't say how much longer I'm going to stand it ! How do I know what's in your mind ? How can I help you and comfort you if I'm kept outside in the dark ? All I can tell is that you're mad on something, for you're always out now—

always walking up and down on the cliffs as if you was a sentry or a coastguard. And some fine day you'll fall over, and that'll be a nice scandal; for there's no smoke without fire, and of course they'll whisper 'twas me that drove you to it."

Thus she ran on, and I made no attempt to stay the torrent. My last infatuation differed widely from all others, for it was human; and had it been a woman, by evil chance, doubtless my home had crashed down under it, for Mrs. Noy was not of the type that tolerates any largeness of view in matters of sex. But a man had for three months exercised an unconscious control upon me—a large, bearded, able-bodied artist, who devoted his attention to our cliff scenery, and who painted pictures in the open air on Bude sands.

I never spoke to him. He was not even aware that he had an interested spectator, but from the day I first looked over the low cliffs near the cricket-ground, and saw the top of the painter's hat, I was lost, and became concentrated upon the man. He dominated my thoughts, and I felt ill at ease on the days that I did not see him. I made no effort to learn his name or ascertain where he lodged, but I speculated deeply concerning him and the value of his art, and the workings of his mind and his ambitions and hopes and fears. He had an interesting face and a large voice, and rejoiced to watch the children playing on the beach. He painted ill—so, at least, I thought.

It seemed to me that he was an impressionist, and I felt aversion from that school, being ignorant of its principles. Once he left his seat among the rocks to walk beside the sea awhile, and I emerged from the cliff above, whence I had been watching him, and descended and looked at his picture. Something urged me to sit on his campstool, and I did so. He turned, saw me, and approached. But the tide was out, and he had to walk nearly a quarter of a mile to his easel. I hastened away and hid from him, and watched him exhibit no small surprise when he returned. He examined his picture closely to see that I had not meddled with it.

From that day I conceived a violent dislike to the artist, and this emotion increased to loathing; then waxed from that until it grew into an acute and homicidal hatred. Why such an awful passion should have wakened in me against this harmless painter it was impossible to understand.

I had never hated man or mouse until that moment; and now, full-fledged, insistent, tigerish, there awoke within me an antagonism one would have supposed impossible to so mild

a mannered man. I fought it as I had never fought any previous obsession; I told myself that rather than do any violence to a fellow-creature I would destroy my own body. Time and again, tramping the cliffs to peep down upon the unconscious painter beneath, I urged myself to take a false step, and do even as my wife had predicted that I might do. To escape from this fiendish premonition, to die and be at peace, grew an ever-increasing temptation. But I lacked physical courage; I could not kill myself. I would have endured any mental torment rather than do so.

I met the painter face to face sometimes, and a demon might have felt his anti-human passion grow weak before the man's kind, good-natured face, great brown beard, laughing brown eyes, and sonorous, genial voice, but my antipathy only increased. It was, so far as I could analyze, quite without motive—a mere destructive instinct that made me tremble to batter and crush out of living this fellow-soul.

I determined to consult a medical man, but hesitated to do so for fear that he would insist upon my incarceration. I was not mad—save in the particular of my passing infatuations; and, as all the others until now had persisted only for a season, I wept on my knees and prayed to Heaven through long night watches that this awful and crowning trial might also pass from me, and give place to hallucinations less terrific and less fraught with peril to my fellow-creatures.

As if in answer to this prayer there came sudden and astounding relief; my aberrations changed their direction; for a season I forgot the painter as though he had never been born, and every hope, desire, and mental energy became concentrated on the humblest and most insignificant object it is possible to mention. It was the lowest depth that I had reached.

On rising ground, not far distant from my shop, were being erected certain new dwelling-houses, and one of these had always pleased me, because it stood as an oasis in the dreary desert of mean buildings rising round about. It was designed in the Italian style, and possessed a distinction, beauty, and reserve foreign to the neighbourhood of Bude and the architectural spirit of the district. An outer wall encompassed this dwelling, and light metal-work ran along the top of it.

To my horror I discovered that a conventional chain was to be erected, and, at intervals of ten feet, the chain was supported by metal pillars crowned with cast-iron pineapples. Why a pleasing building should thus be spoiled by a piece of

gratuitous vulgarity I could not understand. But speculation swiftly ceased, for suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, as such ebullitions always came, there burst upon me a frantic lust for one of these same abortions in iron! My soul poured out upon a metal pineapple; and no general hunger or distributed desire for the vile things took hold upon me, but I found my life's energy focussed and concentrated upon the third pineapple on the north side of the railing. For the rest I entertained no attachment; I even disliked them; but the third on the northern side exercised an absolute mastery.

If one may quote a familiar jest in connection with so abhorrent a circumstance, I felt, concerning this hideous piece of cast-iron, that I should not be happy until I got it. Naked roads stretched about this new house. They ran through fields, presently to be built upon, and they were usually deserted, as they led no whither. I was able, therefore, to haunt the iron pineapple, to stroke it, gloat over it, and gratify in some sort my abnormal desire toward it without exciting attention. Indeed, the cunning of actual lunacy marked each new downfall, and, with the exception of Mabel, no human creature as yet had suspected my infirmity.

The pineapple swiftly became an all-absorbing passion, and I fought against its fascination without avail. The desire for possession made this experience especially difficult, because as a rule the attractive object always drew me to be with it, whereas, in this case, there came a frantic longing to have the pineapple with me. I must have thought of the rubbish as a sentient being; I must have exaggerated it into a creature that could feel and sorrow and understand. On wet nights I conceived that the iron pineapple might suffer cold; on hot days I feared that it was enduring discomfort from the summer sun! From the ease and peace of my bed, I pictured the pineapple perched on its lonely pedestal in outer darkness. When there raged a thunderstorm, I feared that the lightning would strike the pineapple and destroy it for ever.

Then an overwhelming determination to secure the pineapple quite possessed me. Therefore I stole it by night. At an hour when a waning moon silvered that rising district of empty houses and unbounded roads, I set forth, crept into the shadow of the Italian dwelling, and, after working with a file for half an hour, won the valueless treasure. Once, during my operations, a policeman passed upon his beat; and I hid in the porch hard by and wondered what the man would have done had he discovered the postmaster and provision merchant,

John Noy, thus occupied between the morning hours of two and three.

To a sleeping wife I returned, and the pineapple was concealed in a drawer that contained my Sunday clothes.

The mass of metal weighed two pounds, and for a week I racked my brains to find fresh hiding-places for it. Now I concealed it under the earth in my garden; now I hid it in the shop; now I took it about with me, wrapped up in a parcel.

The trash was never out of my mind. Moreover, a reward of one guinea had been offered for discovery of the person responsible for its disappearance. The owner of the Italian villa himself brought a printed advertisement to me containing the promise. I stuck it up against my shop window with two blue wafers, and soothed him. He was much annoyed, and declared that a fool capable of such wilful and aimless destruction should be captured and locked up for the benefit of the community. How cordially I agreed with him! And all the while I looked down at a sack of dried peas at his feet, in which the iron pineapple was hidden.

And now the psychology of the mental situation took a turn, and my last two phases of infatuation ran into each other, as one line of rails merges into the next. The iron pineapple and the artist were inextricably mingled in my distracted mind. The one I loved, the other I hated; and I told myself that not until these two concrete ideas had come together and completed their diverse destinies might my own soul hope for any sort of peace.

So Providence set my brain to the task of fulfilling its inscrutable designs while I, ignorant of that supernatural purpose, merely looked into the darkness of my own heart and cowered before the lurid phantom of madness that I seemed to see advancing upon me from within it. I believed myself now definitely insane, but I was powerless to save the situation; indeed, an instinct far stronger than that of self-preservation held me in absolute subjection.

I walked on the cliffs and in the lonely lanes, and babbled my problem to the seagulls and the wayside flowers. By night I submitted it to the stars of heaven. In sleep I uttered it aloud, as my wife testified too surely on an occasion of my waking.

We slept with a night-lamp, and on suddenly returning to consciousness I perceived Mabel sitting up and regarding my prostrate form in dismay. The extremity of concern marked

her features. I recollect how the shadow of her head (decorated with curling-pins, or some other metal contrivances which hung from it, glittering in the mild beam of the night-light) was thrown enormous upon the ceiling, in an outline that suggested the map of the continent of Africa.

"Holy angels!" she began. "What's the matter with you now? You've been babbling like something out of a child's fairy book—like that there *Alice in Wonderland* Mrs. Hussey lent you, and you thought was funny, and I couldn't for the life of me laugh over. You keep on: 'The pineapple and the painter; the painter and the pineapple, and quantities of sand!' And if I'm going mad, you'd better tell me so; and if I'm not, then, sure as quarter-day, you are. It can't go on. No woman could stand it!"

I strove to lead her mind into other channels. I explained that I wanted my signboard repainted, and that I proposed to buy a few West Indian pines from time to time to add to the attractions of our fruit department. We then discussed the advent of my only sister—an elderly spinster ruined by the recent collapse of certain benevolent societies. Between a home under my roof and the union workhouse there was literally no choice for her, and, ill as I could afford to support her, my sense of duty left me no alternative but to do so.

It fell out, however, that the forthcoming day was to witness greater matters than the arrival of Susan Noy at Bude. Of late the terrific problem of how to bring the loved pineapple and the hated painter together had made me more than usually inattentive to business. I wandered much, and chiefly by the sea it was that I passed my time. At low tide I walked upon the sands, or sat and brooded among the gaunt rocks, where purple mussels grew in clusters like grapes. At high tide I tramped the cliffs, and reclining upon them, watched the ships pass by on the horizon of the ocean; or gazed where Lundy, like a blue cloud, arose from the waves.

Here I was in the company of elemental things, and from them alone at this season did my tortured spirit win any sort of hope. The breaking billows and the broad pathway of light that fell upon them at sunset; the dark faces of the rocks, that watched from under beetling brows for the coming storm; the passage of wine-coloured cloud shadows on the sea; the anthem of the great west wind, that made the precipice his cymbal and the crag his harp—these things alone brought a measure of peace to my soul. But calm it wholly they could not; solve the grotesque problem, that haunted me like a

presence, they could not. I lived only to know how the iron pineapple and the cliff painter should be brought together into one idea—indivisible, corporate, compact.

It was fitting that the problem of a lunatic should be solved by a madman. For mad I most certainly was upon this day—one of God's chosen, to work His will through the dark machinery of a temporary mental alienation, a man deliberately robbed of his reason through certain terrific moments that the Everlasting Will might be manifested upon earth to the vindication of His all-watchfulness and justice!

The hour was after noon, the day one in late August, and I walked out upon the cliffs at a moment when general exodus from shore began; for the luncheon-time approached, and a long line of children, mothers, and nursemaids began to drift away inland from the pleasures of the beach. At one o'clock cliffs and shore were alike deserted for a season, and a pedestrian might also cross the links with safety. The golfers had ceased from troubling.

Now, upon a high cliff north of the bathing-places I wandered, weighted literally, as well as mentally, by my eternal problem. For in my breast-pocket, bulging and dragging me forward at a more acute angle than usual, was the iron pineapple. Why, I know not. But often now I carried it with me, and, when hidden from gaze of man, would display it as though study of the actual object was likely to help my deliberations.

To-day, at the cliff-edge, I dragged it out, and laid it down where the short turf was already becoming seared under August suns. A dwarf betony, with purple bloom, grew at my elbow, and cushions of pink thrift, their blossoms now reduced to mere empty, silver tufts, clung close at hand on the cliff-faces. One crow's-feather, fallen on the grass, moved two yards away as the wind touched it, and the sun flashed upon its shining black plume; upon the downs a red sheep or two browsed on the sweet, close herbage. Inland rose the low hills, with their stunted trees and grey church towers ascending above them.

I was as lonely as man might be. The world had been deserted that our holiday folk might eat; and I realized to the full at this moment how entirely had Bude become a pleasure-resort, how absolutely it depended for prosperity upon those who, when their hours of respite came, hastened to North Cornwall for change of air and a place to play in. Not until the eye passed far south to the breakwater and lock

and little canal running therefrom, not until it marked the ketches lying there, did one perceive any human enterprises other than those devoted to amusement and relaxation

The iron pineapple stood upon the turf at my hand. The lump of iron was polished to brightness by constant handling, and it flashed back the sunshine from the planes of the cone.

For a long time I stared at it, and revolved my fatuous problem. Then suddenly, from far below on the beach, there arose the sound of a human voice singing a song. It was a mellow, juicy voice; it was a mellow, juicy song. The first I recognized quickly enough; the second I had never heard before. To this day I cannot say whence came the words or tune, but they served well enough to express the singer's present contentment.

To sing such a pæan of joy with such infinite relish and abandonment proved beyond possibility of doubt that the lonely creature below me was happy, hopeful, and contented with his life and its possibilities. "He must," said I, "have sold one of his strange pictures at a good profit to himself, or he must have chanced on a kindred spirit, and met a heart that beats with his, an eye that sees with him. Life for him has surely brought some fresh beauty or joy, interest or fair promise, else he could not thus warble from his very soul with such bird-like content!" Needless to add that it was my big, brown-bearded artist who sang while he painted below.

I crept on my breast to the stark edge of the cliff, and looked down at him. He sat immediately beneath me, and I had leisure to note the curious perspective of his figure thus seen from high above his head. He wore a great grey wide-awake, and, beneath it, strangely foreshortened, bulged his big body squatted on a camp-stool. His legs did not appear; they were tucked under him. But his arms were visible. One hand held a palette and brushes; the other, the brush with which he was engaged. He accentuated the metre of his music by touches of paint on the drawing before him.

Then it seemed that the necessary inspiration struck me like a blow. Here were painter and pineapple in juxtaposition. They had approached each other more nearly than had ever happened until that moment. Only some two hundred feet of vertical space separated them. And I felt that these two entities—the one precious in my esteem, and the other evil—must now conjoin and complete their predestined state in contact each with other.

It was at this moment that my own volition left me, and a Thing-not-myself took the helm of my life, and steered me forward. With a power of resolution very different from that possessed by my own, with a decision and grip and masculine vigour remote from my vacillation and fickleness, my brain determined, and my hand leapt to obey the order. The crisis swept me like a storm. I felt as a watcher, chained and gagged, yet free to mark the action of another close at hand. I took the iron pineapple, held it perpendicularly above the head of the happy songster below, steadied my arm, that no tremor should deflect the missile, and dropped it.

The metal fell two hundred feet or more, and struck the exact centre of the grey hat beneath me. I heard the sound of impact—a dull thud muffled by the felt of the hat. But the consequences were terrific. Lightning had not destroyed the happy songster more instantly or more absolutely. His arms shot forth, his song was strangled in his head; his big body gave a convulsive jerk in every limb, and he fell forward upon his easel, and brought it to the ground beneath him.

From the moment that he crashed face down into the sand and shingle he remained motionless. In his hands were still the palette and single brush; his legs were drawn up stiffly in the attitude of a man swimming; as I watched, the blood began to well out of his head and run away into the ground. The iron pineapple had fallen forward, and was now a foot in front of him in the middle of his picture.

I descended to see what I had done. I felt a consciousness of immense relief and satisfaction. I was free—I was sane! The cloud had lifted from my spirit. I knew by an overwhelming conviction that henceforth and for ever I should find myself as other men.

I hastened down the cliff, stood on the deserted shore, and approached the fallen painter. It was not until my foot trampled the blood-stained sand at his ear that I began to apprehend the force of the thing that I had committed. The pathos exhibited by the figure of this stricken wretch impressed itself upon me. He was stout and elderly—older than I had guessed. Yet he had been singing of the joys of love; he had chanted the charm of a lady called "Julia" when my iron pineapple descended, as the bolt of Jove from the sky, and struck him into senseless clay. His beard stuck out at a ridiculous angle from beneath his prone face, and my sense of decency led me to touch him, move him, and bestow his corpse in a manner more orderly.

I determined to turn him over, straighten out his legs, and not leave him thus, humped up on his belly like a frog that a wheel had crushed in the night.

But my purpose was frustrated, and that happened which cast me into an untold abyss of horror, and sent me flying as one demented from my murdered man. I touched his beard, and the whole mass of it came off in my hand! This incident, while less terrible indeed than other things that happened, yet sufficed to upset my jubilant brain. Its quality of unexpectedness may have caused my revulsion. I cannot say; but whereas I faced the dead without a tremor, and prepared reverently to bestow his palpitating dust, so that no feeling of the indecent or grotesque should grate upon the minds of his discoverers, now this outrageous and bizarre surrender of his beard at a touch struck upon me like the departing shadow of the madness I had dropped away for ever with the dropping of the stolen metal. I shivered, and I screamed aloud. My voice echoed along the cliff-face and climbed it, rang over the rocks, and floated seaward, where the broad foam-belts broke upon the shore. But none heard me save a hawk hovering aloft; none saw my frenzied act as I flung the great mass of hair from me and ran away.

Once, in that retreat, I turned and saw the hair, like some living, amorphous monster—a creature of the deep sea and darkness rather than of earth and light—creeping over the level sands after me. And then, indeed, I shrieked amain, and sped for the cliffs and climbed a gully with such haste that my knees and knuckles were dripping blood before I reached the downs. Once there, I looked below in time to see the mass of hair caught up by the wind and blown afar into the sea.

That night I regained my peace, returned home, and slept as I had not slept for many years.

On the following day a West Country journal contained the following item of news:

> "An occurrence fraught with the profoundest horror is reported from the holiday resort of Bude, and a spot associated with innocent pleasure, the happiness of children, and the rest and recuperation of jaded men of business, has suddenly become the sinister focus of an extraordinary and inexplicable crime. For the past six months a gentleman, named Walter Grant, has been residing in Victoria Road, at No. 9. The unfortunate artist—for such was his calling—devoted his attention to cliff scenery, and spent

most of his time on Bude sands or in the immediate neighbourhood. And here he has mysteriously perished."

The crime was then recorded, and the theory advanced that an iron pineapple found beside the dead man was responsible for his destruction. The fact that he had gone to paint with a beard, and been discovered a clean-shaven corpse was also noted. It was added that the man had displayed a kindly and courteous nature, and become popular among the few who had made his acquaintance. Inquiry established the fact that he was quite unknown in art circles, and that he had proposed to leave Bude on the Saturday that followed his death.

The incident of the recent robbery of the iron pineapple, and this, its sensational reappearance, also served to make exciting " copy " for the papers ; but a discovery which cast these trifles into the shade was destined next morning to fill not only our local journals. Then the English-speaking world discovered to its amazement that Bolsover Barbellion, the runaway rascal responsible for such widespread misery among the poor and needy, had been traced and discovered on the eve of his flight from England, and on the day after his flight from life. Not only the beard, but also the hair of the slain artist were discovered to be false, and investigations among his private papers established his identity beyond doubt.

A woman also came forward to testify it—a person named Julia Dalby. She and he were to have left England in a steamer from Plymouth on the Saturday after his departure from Bude, and she alone in the whole world knew his secret hiding-place. Their passages were already secured in the name of Mr. and Mrs. Grant, and they were about to sail for South America.

Not one shadow of suspicion ever fell upon me, but while my health was enormously improved, and my mind continued clear, my conscience was ill at ease, and the fact that my wife simply refused to credit the truth did not serve to lessen my unrest. A week after the actual event I visited our minister, and designed to place the facts before him and invite his criticism and direction, but on the occasion of our meeting he was so much concerned about a private anxiety that I delayed my confession. He had determined that the corner-stone of our chapel must be extracted, for he held that no good would attend ministrations from a place of worship whose foundation had been laid by one of the greatest rascals

recorded in modern history. The architect, however, demurred to this proposal, and submitted that to erase the inscription on the foundation-stone would surely meet the case. In grappling with this problem I forgot my own purpose of confession, and never more returned to it.

And to-day, sane and balanced of mind, I walk in the world of men and fear not the gaze of any fellow-creature. My life has taken a turn for the better; prosperity promises; the future never looked so fair. Above all, my mental balance is once more normal, and I enjoy a reputation for sound judgment and trustworthiness that brings my lesser neighbours to me in many of their difficulties.

And now I state the case against myself impartially and in print. I place myself without reserve at the mercy of man, and incidentally unravel a mystery that has puzzled the most astute intellects of our criminal service.

My theory—that for a fearful period I was the tool in Higher Hands, cannot, at least, be disproved, and I do not believe that any jury of my fellow-countrymen will condemn me to suffer for the part I played in the destruction of a most notorious enemy of society. Indeed, any earthly punishment would be an anticlimax and a jest at this hour. Nothing that wit of man might devise could put me again to the tortures of the days that are gone; or do more than reflect phantasmally the horror of the past.