

Edward Frederic Benson

Queen Lucia

Chapter ONE

Though the sun was hot on this July morning Mrs Lucas preferred to cover the half-mile that lay between the station and her house on her own brisk feet, and sent on her maid and her luggage in the fly that her husband had ordered to meet her. After those four hours in the train a short walk would be pleasant, but, though she veiled it from her conscious mind, another motive, sub-consciously engineered, prompted her action. It would, of course, be universally known to all her friends in Riseholme that she was arriving today by the 12.26, and at that hour the village street would be sure to be full of them. They would see the fly with luggage draw up at the door of The Hurst, and nobody except her maid would get out.

That would be an interesting thing for them: it would cause one of those little thrills of pleasant excitement and conjectural exercise which supplied Riseholme with its emotional daily bread. They would all wonder what had happened to her, whether she had been taken ill at the very last moment before leaving town and with her well-known fortitude and consideration for the feelings of others, had sent her

maid on to assure her husband that he need not be anxious. That would clearly be Mrs Quantock's suggestion, for Mrs Quantock's mind, devoted as it was now to the study of Christian Science, and the determination to deny the existence of pain, disease and death as regards herself, was always full of the gloomiest views as regards her friends, and on the slightest excuse, pictured that they, poor blind things, were suffering from false claims. Indeed, given that the fly had already arrived at The Hurst, and that its arrival had at this moment been seen by or reported to Daisy Quantock, the chances were vastly in favour of that lady's having already started in to give Mrs Lucas absent treatment. Very likely Georgie Pillson had also seen the anticlimax of the fly's arrival, but he would hazard a much more probable though erroneous solution of her absence. He would certainly guess that she had sent on her maid with her luggage to the station in order to take a seat for her, while she herself, oblivious of the passage of time, was spending her last half hour in contemplation of the Italian masterpieces at the National Gallery, or the Greek bronzes at the British Museum. Certainly she would not be at the Royal Academy, for the culture of Riseholme, led by herself, rejected as valueless all artistic efforts later than the death of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and a great deal of what went before. Her husband with his firm grasp of the obvious, on the other hand, would be disappointingly

capable even before her maid confirmed his conjecture, of concluding that she had merely walked from the station.

The motive, then, that made her send her cab on, though subconsciously generated, soon penetrated into her consciousness, and these guesses at what other people would think when they saw it arrive without her, sprang from the dramatic element that formed so large a part of her mentality, and made her always take, as by right divine, the leading part in the histrionic entertainments with which the cultured of Riseholme beguiled or rather strenuously occupied such moments as could be spared from their studies of art and literature, and their social engagements. Indeed she did not usually stop at taking the leading part, but, if possible, doubled another character with it, as well as being stage-manager and adapter, if not designer of scenery. Whatever she did-and really she did an incredible deal-she did it with all the might of her dramatic perception, did it in fact with such earnestness that she had no time to have an eye to the gallery at all, she simply contemplated herself and her own vigorous accomplishment. When she played the piano as she frequently did, (reserving an hour for practice every day), she cared not in the smallest degree for what anybody who passed down the road outside her house might be thinking of the roulades that poured from her open window: she was simply Emmeline Lucas,

absorbed in glorious Bach or dainty Scarletti, or noble Beethoven. The latter perhaps was her favorite composer, and many were the evenings when with lights quenched and only the soft effulgence of the moon pouring in through the uncurtained windows, she sat with her profile, cameo-like (or like perhaps to the head on a postage stamp) against the dark oak walls of her music-room, and entranced herself and her listeners, if there were people to dinner, with the exquisite pathos of the first movement of the Moonlight Sonata. Devotedly as she worshipped the Master, whose picture hung above her Steinway Grand, she could never bring herself to believe that the two succeeding movements were on the same sublime level as the first, and besides they „went“ very much faster. But she had seriously thought, as she came down in the train today and planned her fresh activities at home of trying to master them, so that she could get through their intricacies with tolerable accuracy. Until then, she would assuredly stop at the end of the first movement in these moonlit seances, and say that the other two were more like morning and afternoon. Then with a sigh she would softly shut the piano lid, and perhaps wiping a little genuine moisture from her eyes, would turn on the electric light and taking up a book from the table, in which a paper-knife marked the extent of her penetration, say:

„Georgie, you must really promise me to read this

life of Antonino Caporelli the moment I have finished it. I never understood the rise of the Venetian School before. As I read I can smell the salt tide creeping up over the lagoon, and see the campanile of dear Torcello.“

And Georgie would put down the tambour on which he was working his copy of an Italian cope and sigh too.

„You are too wonderful!“ he would say. „How do you find time for everything?“

She rejoined with the apophthegm that made the rounds of Riseholme next day.

„My dear, it is just busy people that have time for everything.“

It might be thought that even such activities as have here been indicated would be enough to occupy anyone so busily that he would positively not have time for more, but such was far from being the case with Mrs Lucas. Just as the painter Rubens amused himself with being the ambassador to the Court of St. James-a sufficient career in itself for most busy men-so Mrs Lucas amused herself, in the intervals of her pursuit of Art for Art's sake, with being not only an ambassador but a monarch. Riseholme might perhaps according to the crude materialism of maps, be included in the kingdom of Great Britain, but in a more real and inward sense it formed a complete kingdom of its own, and its queen was undoubtedly Mrs Lucas, who ruled it with a

secure autocracy pleasant to contemplate at a time when thrones were toppling, and imperial crowns whirling like dead leaves down the autumn winds. The ruler of Riseholme, happier than he of Russia, had no need to fear the finger of Bolshevism writing on the wall, for there was not in the whole of that vat which seethed so pleasantly with culture, one bubble of revolutionary ferment. Here there was neither poverty nor discontent nor muttered menace of any upheaval: Mrs Lucas, busy and serene, worked harder than any of her subjects, and exercised an autocratic control over a nominal democracy.

Something of the consciousness of her sovereignty was in her mind, as she turned the last hot corner of the road and came in sight of the village street that constituted her kingdom. Indeed it belonged to her, as treasure trove belongs to the Crown, for it was she who had been the first to begin the transformation of this remote Elizabethan village into the palace of culture that was now reared on the spot where ten years ago an agricultural population had led bovine and unilluminated lives in their cottages of grey stone or brick and timber. Before that, while her husband was amassing a fortune, comfortable in amount and respectable in origin, at the Bar, she had merely held up a small dim lamp of culture in Onslow Gardens. But both her ambition and his had been to bask and be busy in artistic realms of their own when the materialistic

needs were provided for by sound investments, and so when there were the requisite thousands of pounds in secure securities she had easily persuaded him to buy three of these cottages that stood together in a low two-storied block. Then, by judicious removal of partition-walls, she had, with the aid of a sympathetic architect, transmuted them into a most comfortable dwelling, subsequently building on to them a new wing, that ran at right angles at the back, which was, if anything, a shade more inexorably Elizabethan than the stem onto which it was grafted, for here was situated the famous smoking-parlour, with rushes on the floor, and a dresser ranged with pewter tankards, and leaded lattice-windows of glass so antique that it was practically impossible to see out of them. It had a huge open fireplace framed in oak-beams with a seat on each side of the iron-backed hearth within the chimney, and a genuine spit hung over the middle of the fire. Here, though in the rest of the house she had for the sake of convenience allowed the installation of electric light, there was no such concession made, and sconces on the walls held dim iron lamps, so that only those of the most acute vision were able to read. Even then reading was difficult, for the book-stand on the table contained nothing but a few crabbed black-letter volumes dating from not later than the early seventeenth century, and you had to be in a frantically Elizabethan frame of mind to be at ease there. But Mrs Lucas often spent some of

her rare leisure moments in the smoking-parlour, playing on the virginal that stood in the window, or kippering herself in the fumes of the wood-fire as with streaming eyes she deciphered an Elzevir Horace rather late for inclusion under the rule, but an undoubted bargain.

The house stood at the end of the village that was nearest the station, and thus, when the panorama of her kingdom opened before her, she had but a few steps further to go. A yew-hedge, bought entire from a neighboring farm, and transplanted with solid lumps of earth and indignant snails around its roots, separated the small oblong of garden from the road, and cast monstrous shadows of the shapes into which it was cut, across the little lawns inside. Here, as was only right and proper, there was not a flower to be found save such as were mentioned in the plays of Shakespeare; indeed it was called Shakespeare's garden, and the bed that ran below the windows of the dining room was Ophelia's border, for it consisted solely of those flowers which that distraught maiden distributed to her friends when she should have been in a lunatic asylum. Mrs Lucas often reflected how lucky it was that such institutions were unknown in Elizabeth's day, or that, if known, Shakespeare artistically ignored their existence. Pansies, naturally, formed the chief decoration-though there were some very flourishing plants of rue. Mrs Lucas always wore a little bunch of them when in

flower, to inspire her thoughts, and found them wonderfully efficacious. Round the sundial, which was set in the middle of one of the squares of grass between which a path of broken paving-stone led to the front door, was a circular border, now, in July, sadly vacant, for it harboured only the spring-flowers enumerated by Perdita. But the first day every year when Perdita's border put forth its earliest blossom was a delicious anniversary, and the news of it spread like wild-fire through Mrs Lucas's kingdom, and her subjects were very joyful, and came to salute the violet or daffodil, or whatever it was.

The three cottages dexterously transformed into The Hurst, presented a charmingly irregular and picturesque front. Two were of the grey stone of the district and the middle one, to the door of which led the paved path, of brick and timber; latticed windows with stone mullions gave little light to the room within, and certain new windows had been added; these could be detected by the observant eye for they had a markedly older appearance than the rest. The front-door, similarly, seemed as if it must have been made years before the house, the fact being that the one which Mrs Lucas had found there was too dilapidated to be of the slightest service in keeping out wind or wet or undesired callers. She had therefore caused to be constructed an even older one made from the oak-planks of a dismantled barn, and had it studded

with large iron nails of antique pattern made by the village blacksmith. He had arranged some of them to look as if they spelled A.D. 1603. Over the door hung an inn-sign, and into the space where once the sign had swung was now inserted a lantern, in which was ensconced, well hidden from view by its patinated glass sides, an electric light. This was one of the necessary concessions to modern convenience, for no lamp nurtured on oil would pierce those genuinely opaque panes, and illuminate the path to the gate. Better to have an electric light than cause your guests to plunge into Perdita's border. By the side of this fortress-door hung a heavy iron bell-pull, ending in a mermaid. When first Mrs Lucas had that installed, it was a bell-pull in the sense that an extremely athletic man could, if he used both hands and planted his feet firmly, cause it to move, so that a huge bronze bell swung in the servants' passage and eventually gave tongue (if the athlete continued pulling) with vibrations so sonorous that the white-wash from the ceiling fell down in flakes. She had therefore made another concession to the frailty of the present generation and the inconveniences of having whitewash falling into salads and puddings on their way to the dining room, and now at the back of the mermaid's tail was a potent little bone button, coloured black and practically invisible, and thus the bell-pull had been converted into an electric bell-push. In this way visitors could make their advent known

without violent exertion, the mermaid lost no visible whit of her Elizabethan virginity, and the spirit of Shakespeare wandering in his garden would not notice any anachronism. He could not in fact, for there was none to notice.

Though Mrs Lucas's parents had bestowed the name of Emmeline on her, it was not to be wondered at that she was always known among the more intimate of her subjects as Lucia, pronounced, of course, in the Italian mode-La Lucia, the wife of Lucas; and it was as „Lucia mia“ that her husband hailed her as he met her at the door of The Hurst.

He had been watching for her arrival from the panes of the parlour while he meditated upon one of the little prose poems which formed so delectable a contribution to the culture of Riseholme, for though, as had been hinted, he had in practical life a firm grasp of the obvious, there were windows in his soul which looked out onto vague and ethereal prospects which so far from being obvious were only dimly intelligible. In form these odes were cast in the loose rhythms of Walt Whitman, but their smooth suavity and their contents bore no resemblance whatever to the productions of that barbaric bard, whose works were quite unknown in Riseholme. Already a couple of volumes of these prose-poems had been published, not of course in the hard business-like establishment of London, but at „Ye Sign of ye Daffodil,“ on the village green, where type

was set up by hand, and very little, but that of the best, was printed. The press had only been recently started at Mr Lucas's expense, but it had put forth a reprint of Shakespeare's sonnets already, as well as his own poems. They were printed in blunt type on thick yellowish paper, the edges of which seemed as if they had been cut by the forefinger of an impatient reader, so ragged and irregular were they, and they were bound in vellum, the titles of these two slim flowers of poetry, „Flotsam“ and „Jetsam,“ were printed in black letter type and the covers were further adorned with a sort of embossed seal and with antique looking tapes so that you could tie it all up with two bows when you had finished with Mr Lucas's „Flotsam“ for the time being, and turned to untie the „Jetsam.“

Today the prose-poem of „Loneliness“ had not been getting on very well, and Philip Lucas was glad to hear the click of the garden-gate, which showed that his loneliness was over for the present, and looking up he saw his wife's figure waveringly presented to his eyes through the twisted and knotty glass of the parlour window, which had taken so long to collect, but which now completely replaced the plain, commonplace unrefracting stuff which was there before. He jumped up with an alacrity remarkable in so solid and well-furnished a person, and had thrown open the nail-studded front-door before Lucia had traversed the path of broken paving-stones, for she had lingered for a

sad moment at Perdita's empty border.

„*Lucia mia!*“ he exclaimed. „*Ben arrivata!* So you walked from the station?“

„*Si, Peppino, mio caro,*“ she said. „*Sta bene?*“

He kissed her and relapsed into Shakespeare's tongue, for their Italian, though firm and perfect as far as it went, could not be considered as going far, and was useless for conversational purposes, unless they merely wanted to greet each other, or to know the time. But it was interesting to talk Italian, however little way it went.

„*Molto bene,*“ said he, „and it's delightful to have you home again. And how was London?“ he asked in the sort of tone in which he might have enquired after the health of a poor relation, who was not likely to recover. She smiled rather sadly.

„Terrifically busy about nothing,“ she said. „All this fortnight I have scarcely had a moment to myself. Lunches, dinners, parties of all kinds; I could not go to half the gatherings I was bidden to. Dear good South Kensington! Chelsea too!“

„*Carissima,* when London does manage to catch you, it is no wonder it makes the most of you,“ he said. „You mustn't blame London for that.“

„No, dear, I don't. Everyone was tremendously kind and hospitable; they all did their best. If I blame anyone, I blame myself. But I think this Riseholme life with its finish and its exquisiteness spoils one for other

places. London is like a railway-junction: it has no true life of its own. There is no delicacy, no appreciation of fine shades. Individualism has no existence there; everyone gabbles together, gabbles and gobbles: am not I naughty? If there is a concert in a private house-you know my views about music and the impossibility of hearing music at all if you are stuck in the middle of a row of people-even then, the moment it is over you are whisked away to supper, or somebody wants to have a few words. There is always a crowd, there is always food, you cannot be alone, and it is only in loneliness, as Goethe says, that your perceptions put forth their flowers. No one in London has time to listen: they are all thinking about who is there and who isn't there, and what is the next thing. The exquisite present, as you put it in one of your poems, has no existence there: it is always the feverish future.“

„Delicious phrase! I should have stolen that gem for my poor poems, if you had discovered it before.“

She was too much used to this incense to do more than sniff it in unconsciously, and she went on with her tremendous indictment.

„It isn't that I find fault with London for being so busy,“ she said with strict impartiality, „for if being busy was a crime, I am sure there are few of us here who would escape hanging. But take my life here, or yours for that matter. Well, mine if you like. Often and often I am alone from breakfast till lunch-time, but in

those hours I get through more that is worth doing than London gets through in a day and a night. I have an hour at my music not looking about and wondering who my neighbours are, but learning, studying, drinking in divine melody. Then I have my letters to write, and you know what that means, and I still have time for an hour's reading so that when you come to tell me lunch is ready, you will find that I have been wandering through Venetian churches or sitting in that little dark room at Weimar, or was it Leipsic? How would those same hours have passed in London?

„Sitting perhaps for half an hour in the Park, with dearest Aggie pointing out to me, with thrills of breathless excitement, a woman who was in the divorce court, or a coroneted bankrupt. Then she would drag me off to some terrible private view full of the same people all staring at and gabbling to each other, or looking at pictures that made poor me gasp and shudder. No, I am thankful to be back at my own sweet Riseholme again. I can work and think here.“

She looked round the panelled entrance-hall with a glow of warm content at being at home again that quite eclipsed the mere physical heat produced by her walk from the station. Wherever her eyes fell, those sharp dark eyes that resembled buttons covered with shiny American cloth, they saw nothing that jarred, as so much in London jarred. There were bright brass jugs on the window sill, a bowl of pot-pourri on the black

table in the centre, an oak settee by the open fireplace, a couple of Persian rugs on the polished floor. The room had its quaintness, too, such as she had alluded to in her memorable essay read before the Riseholme Literary Society, called „Humour in Furniture,“ and a brass milkcan served as a receptacle for sticks and umbrellas. Equally quaint was the dish of highly realistic stone fruit that stood beside the pot-pourri and the furry Japanese spider that sprawled in a silk web over the window.

Such was the fearful verisimilitude of this that Lucia's new housemaid had once fled from her duties in the early morning, to seek the assistance of the gardener in killing it. The dish of stone fruit had scored a similar success, for once she had said to Georgie Pillson, „Ah, my gardener has sent in some early apples and pears, won't you take one home with you?“ It was not till the weight of the pear (he swiftly selected the largest) betrayed the joke that he had any notion that they were not real ones. But then Georgie had had his revenge, for waiting his opportunity he had inserted a real pear among those stony specimens and again passing through with Lucia, he picked it out, and with lips drawn back had snapped at it with all the force of his jaws. For the moment she had felt quite faint at the thought of his teeth crashing into fragments... These humorous touches were altered from time to time; the spider for instance might be taken down and replaced

by a china canary in a Chippendale cage, and the selection of the entrance hall for those whimsicalities was intentional, for guests found something to smile at, as they took off their cloaks and entered the drawing room with a topic on their lips, something light, something amusing about what they had seen. For the gong similarly was sometimes substituted a set of bells that had once decked the collar of the leading horse in a waggoner's team somewhere in Flanders; in fact when Lucia was at home there was often a new little quaintness for quite a sequence of days, and she had held out hopes to the Literary Society that perhaps some day, when she was not so rushed, she would jot down material for a sequel to her essay, or write another covering a rather larger field on „The Gambits of Conversation Derived from Furniture.“

On the table there was a pile of letters waiting for Mrs Lucas, for yesterday's post had not been forwarded her, for fear of its missing her-London postmen were probably very careless and untrustworthy-and she gave a little cry of dismay as she saw the volume of her correspondence.

„But I shall be very naughty,“ she said „and not look at one of them till after lunch. Take them away, *Caro*, and promise me to lock them up till then, and not give them me however much I beg. Then I will get into the saddle again, such a dear saddle, too, and tackle them. I shall have a stroll in the garden till the bell

rings. What is it that Nietzsche says about the necessity to *mediterraneanize* yourself every now and then? I must *Riseholme* myself.“

Peppino remembered the quotation, which had occurred in a review of some work of that celebrated author, where Lucia had also seen it, and went back, with the force of contrast to aid him, to his prose-poem of „Loneliness,“ while his wife went through the smoking-parlour into the garden, in order to soak herself once more in the cultured atmosphere.

In this garden behind the house there was no attempt to construct a Shakespearian plot, for, as she so rightly observed, Shakespeare, who loved flowers so well, would wish her to enjoy every conceivable horticultural treasure. But furniture played a prominent part in the place, and there were statues and sundials and stone-seats scattered about with almost too profuse a hand. Mottos also were in great evidence, and while a sundial reminded you that „*Tempus fugit*,» an enticing resting-place somewhat bewilderingly bade you to „Bide a wee.“ But then again the rustic seat in the pleached alley of laburnums had carved on its back, „Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,“ so that, meditating on Keats, you could bide a wee with a clear conscience. Indeed so copious was the wealth of familiar and stimulating quotations that one of her subjects had once said that to stroll in Lucia's garden was not only to enjoy her lovely flowers, but to spend a

simultaneous half hour with the best authors. There was a dovecote of course, but since the cats always killed the doves, Mrs Lucas had put up round the desecrated home several pigeons of Copenhagen china, which were both imperishable as regards cats, and also carried out the suggestion of humour in furniture. The humour had attained the highest point of felicity when Peppino concealed a mechanical nightingale in a bush, which sang „Jug-jug“ in the most realistic manner when you pulled a string. Georgie had not yet seen the Copenhagen pigeons, or being rather short-sighted thought they were real. Then, oh then, Peppino pulled the string, and for quite a long time Georgie listened entranced to their melodious cooings. That served him out for his „trap“ about the real pear introduced among the stone specimens. For in spite of the rarefied atmosphere of culture at Riseholme, Riseholme knew how to „*desipere in loco*,“ and its strenuous culture was often refreshed by these light refined touches.

Mrs Lucas walked quickly and decisively up and down the paths as she waited for the summons to lunch, for the activity of her mind reacted on her body, making her brisk in movement. On each side of her forehead were hard neat undulations of black hair that concealed the tips of her ears. She had laid aside her London hat, and carried a red cotton Contadina's umbrella, which threw a rosy glow onto the oval of her thin face and its colourless complexion. She bore the

weight of her forty years extremely lightly, and but for the droop of skin at the corners of her mouth, she might have passed as a much younger woman. Her face was otherwise unlined and bore no trace of the ravages of emotional living, which both ages and softens. Certainly there was nothing soft about her, and very little of the signs of age, and it would have been reasonable to conjecture that twenty years later she would look but little older than she did today. For such emotions as she was victim of were the sterile and ageless emotions of art; such desires as beset her were not connected with her affections, but her ambitions. Dynasty she had none, for she was childless, and thus her ambitions were limited to the permanence and security of her own throne as queen of Riseholme. She really asked nothing more of life than the continuance of such harvests as she had so plenteously reaped for these last ten years. As long as she directed the life of Riseholme, took the lead in its culture and entertainment, and was the undisputed fountain-head of all its inspirations, and from time to time refreshed her memory as to the utter inferiority of London she wanted nothing more. But to secure that she dedicated all that she had of ease, leisure and income. Being practically indefatigable the loss of ease and leisure troubled her but little and being in extremely comfortable circumstances, she had no need to economise in her hospitalities. She might easily look

forward to enjoying an unchanging middle-aged activity, while generations of youth withered round her, and no star, remotely rising, had as yet threatened to dim her unrivalled effulgence. Though essentially autocratic, her subjects were allowed and even encouraged to develop their own minds on their own lines, provided always that those lines met at the junction where she was station-master. With regard to religion finally, it may be briefly said that she believed in God in much the same way as she believed in Australia, for she had no doubt whatever as to the existence of either, and she went to church on Sunday in much the same spirit as she would look at a kangaroo in the Zoological Gardens, for kangaroos come from Australia.

A low wall separated the far end of her garden from the meadow outside; beyond that lay the stream which flowed into the Avon, and it often seemed wonderful to her that the water which wimpled by would (unless a cow happened to drink it) soon be stealing along past the church at Stratford where Shakespeare lay. Peppino had written a very moving little prose-poem about it, for she had royally presented him with the idea, and had suggested a beautiful analogy between the earthly dew that refreshed the grasses, and was drawn up into the fire of the Sun, and Thought the spiritual dew that refreshed the mind and thereafter, rather vaguely, was drawn up into the

Full-Orbed Soul of the World.

At that moment Lucia's eye was attracted by an apparition on the road which lay adjacent to the further side of the happy stream which flowed into the Avon. There was no mistaking the identity of the stout figure of Mrs Quantock with its short steps and its gesticulations, but why in the name of wonder should that Christian Scientist be walking with the draped and turbaned figure of a man with a tropical complexion and a black beard? His robe of saffron yellow with a violently green girdle was hitched up for ease in walking, and unless he had chocolate coloured stockings on, Mrs Lucas saw human legs of the same shade. Next moment that debatable point was set at rest for she caught sight of short pink socks in red slippers. Even as she looked Mrs Quantock saw her (for owing to Christian Science she had recaptured the quick vision of youth) and waggled her hand and kissed it, and evidently called her companion's attention, for the next moment he was salaaming to her in some stately Oriental manner. There was nothing to be done for the moment except return these salutations, as she could not yell an aside to Mrs Quantock, screaming out „Who is that Indian“? for if Mrs Quantock heard the Indian would hear too, but as soon as she could, she turned back towards the house again, and when once the lilac bushes were between her and the road she walked with more than her usual speed, in order to learn with the

shortest possible delay from Peppino who this fresh subject of hers could be. She knew there were some Indian princes in London; perhaps it was one of them, in which case it would be necessary to read up Benares or Delhi in the Encyclopaedia without loss of time.

Chapter TWO

As she traversed the smoking-parlour the cheerful sounds that had once tinkled from the collar of a Flemish horse chimed through the house, and simultaneously she became aware that there would be *macaroni au gratin* for lunch, which was very dear and remembering of Peppino. But before setting fork to her piled-up plate, she had to question him, for her mental craving for information was far keener than her appetite for food.

„*Caro*, who is an Indian,“ she said, „whom I saw just now with Daisy Quantock? They were the other side of il piccolo Avon.“

Peppino had already begun his macaroni and must pause to shovel the outlying strings of it into his mouth. But the haste with which he did so was sufficient guaranty for his eagerness to reply as soon as it was humanly possible to do so.

„Indian, my dear?“ he asked with the greatest interest.

„Yes; turban and burnous and calves and

slippers," she said rather impatiently, for what was the good of Peppino having remained in Riseholme if he could not give her precise and certain information on local news when she returned. His prose-poems were all very well, but as prince-consort he had other duties of state which must not be neglected for the calls of Art.

This slight asperity on her part seemed to sharpen his wits.

„Really, I don't know for certain, Lucia," he said, „for I have not set my eyes on him. But putting two and two together, I might make a guess.“

„Two and two make four," she said with that irony for which she was feared and famous. „Now for your guess. I hope it is equally accurate.“

„Well, as I told you in one of my letters," said he, „Mrs Quantock showed signs of being a little off with Christian Science. She had a cold, and though she recited the True Statement of Being just as frequently as before, her cold got no better. But when I saw her on Tuesday last, unless it was Wednesday, no, it couldn't have been Wednesday, so it must have been Tuesday-“

„Whenever it was then," interrupted his wife, brilliantly summing up his indecision.

„Yes; whenever it was, as you say, on that occasion Mrs Quantock was very full of some Indian philosophy which made you quite well at once. What did she call it now? Yoga! Yes, that was it!“

„And then?“ asked Lucia.

„Well, it appears you must have a teacher in Yoga or else you may injure yourself. You have to breathe deeply and say 'Om'“-

„Say what?“

„Om. I understand the ejaculation to be Om. And there are very curious physical exercises; you have to hold your ear with one hand and your toes with the other, and you may strain yourself unless you do it properly. That was the general gist of it.“

„And shall we come to the Indian soon?“ said Lucia.

„*Carissima*, you have come to him already. I suggest that Mrs Quantock has applied for a teacher and got him. *Ecco!*»

Mrs Lucas wore a heavily corrugated forehead at this news. Peppino had a wonderful *flair* in explaining unusual circumstances in the life of Riseholme and his conjectures were generally correct. But if he was right in this instance, it struck Lucia as being a very irregular thing that anyone should have imported a mystical Indian into Riseholme without consulting her. It is true that she had been away, but still there was the medium of the post.

„*Ecco* indeed!“ she said. „It puts me in rather a difficult position, for I must send out my invitations to my garden-party today, and I really don't know whether I ought to be officially aware of this man's existence or

not. I can't write to Daisy Quantock and say 'Pray bring your black friend Om or whatever his name proves to be, and on the other hand, if he is the sort of person whom one would be sorry to miss, I should not like to have passed over him.'

„After all, my dear, you have only been back in Riseholme half an hour,“ said her husband. „It would have been difficult for Mrs Quantock to have told you yet.“

Her face cleared.

„Perhaps Daisy has written to me about him,“ she said. „I may find a full account of it all when I open my letters.“

„Depend upon it you will. She would hardly have been so wanting in proper feeling as not to have told you. I think, too, that her visitor must only have just arrived, or I should have been sure to see him about somewhere.“

She rose.

„Well, we will see,“ she said. „Now I shall be very busy all afternoon, but by tea-time I shall be ready to see anyone who calls. Give me my letters, *Caro*, and I will find out if Daisy has written to me.“

She turned them over as she went to her room, and there among them was a bulky envelope addressed in Mrs Quantock's great sprawling hand, which looked at first sight so large and legible, but on closer examination turned out to be so baffling. You had to

hold it at some distance off to make anything out of it, and look at it in an abstracted general manner much as you would look at a view. Treated thus, scattered words began to leap into being, and when you had got a sufficiency of these, like glimpses of the country seen by flashes of lightning, you could hope to get a collective idea of it all. The procedure led to the most promising results as Mrs Lucas sat with the sheets at arm's length, occasionally altering the range to try the effect of a different focus. „Benares“ blinked at her, also „Brahmin“; also „highest caste“; „extraordinary sanctity,“ and „Guru.“ And when the meaning of this latter was ascertained from the article on „Yoga“ in her Encyclopaedia, she progressed very swiftly towards a complete comprehension of the letter.

When fully pieced together it was certainly enough to rivet her whole attention, and make her leave unopened the rest of the correspondence, for such a prelude to adventure had seldom sounded in Riseholme. It appeared, even as her husband had told her at lunch, that Mrs Quantock found her cold too obstinate for all the precepts of Mrs Eddy; the True Statement of Being, however often repeated, only seemed to inflame it further, and one day, when confined to the house, she had taken a book „quite at random“ from the shelves in her library, under, she supposed, the influence of some interior compulsion. This then was clearly a „leading.“

Mrs Lucas paused a moment as she pieced

together these first sentences. She seemed to remember that Mrs Quantock had experienced a similar leading when first she took up Christian Science. It was a leading from the sight of a new church off Sloane Street that day; Mrs Quantock had entered (she scarcely knew why) and had found herself in a Testimony Meeting, where witness after witness declared the miraculous healings they had experienced. One had had a cough, another cancer, another a fractured bone, but all had been cured by the blessed truths conveyed in the Gospel according to Mrs Eddy. However, her memories on this subject were not to the point now; she burned to arrive at the story of the new leading.

Well, the book that Mrs Quantock had taken down in obedience to the last leading proved to be a little handbook of Oriental Philosophies, and it opened, „all of its own accord,“ at a chapter called Yoga. Instantly she perceived, as by the unclosing of an inward eye, that Yoga was what she wanted and she instantly wrote to the address from which this book was issued asking for any guidance on the subject. She had read in „Oriental Philosophies“ that for the successful practice of Yoga, it was necessary to have a teacher, and did they know of any teacher who could give her instruction? A wonderful answer came to that, for two days afterwards her maid came to her and said that an Indian gentleman would like to see her. He was ushered in, and with a profound obeisance said: „Beloved lady,

I am the teacher you asked for; I am your Guru. Peace be to this house! Om!“

Mrs Lucas had by this time got her view of Mrs Quantock's letter into perfect focus, and she read on without missing a word. „Is it not wonderful, dearest Lucia,“ it ran, „that my desire for light should have been so instantly answered? And yet my Guru tells me that it always happens so. I was sent to him, and he was sent to me, just like that! He had been expecting some call when my letter asking for guidance came, and he started at once because he knew he was sent. Fancy! I don't even know his name, and his religion forbids him to tell it me. He is just my Guru, my guide, and he is going to be with me as long as he knows I need him to show me the True Path. He has the spare bedroom and the little room adjoining where he meditates and does Postures and Pranyama which is breathing. If you persevere in them under instruction, you have perfect health and youth, and my cold is gone already. He is a Brahmin of the very highest caste, indeed caste means nothing to him any longer, just as a Baronet and an Honourable must seem about the same thing to the King. He comes from Benares where he used to meditate all day by the Ganges, and I can see for myself that he is a person of the most extraordinary sanctity. But he can meditate just as well in my little room, for he says he was never in any house that had such a wonderful atmosphere. He has no money at all which is

so beautiful of him, and looked so pained and disappointed when I asked him if I might not give him some. He doesn't even know how he got here from London; he doesn't think he came by train, so perhaps he was wafted here in some astral manner. He looked so bewildered too when I said the word 'money,' and evidently he had to think what it was, because it is so long since it has meant anything to him. So if he wants anything, I have told him to go into any shop and ask that it shall be put down to me. He has often been without food or sleep for days together when he is meditating. Just think!

„Shall I bring him to see you, or will you come here? He wants to meet you, because he feels you have a beautiful soul and may help him in that way, as well as his helping you. I am helping him too he says, which seems more wonderful than I can believe. Send me a line as soon as you get back. Tante salute!

„Your own,

„*DAISY.*“

The voluminous sheets had taken long in reading and Mrs Lucas folded them up slowly and thoughtfully. She felt that she had to make a swift decision that called into play all her mental powers. On the one hand it was „up to her“ to return a frigid reply, conveying, without making any bones about the matter, that she

had no interest in nameless Gurus who might or might not be Brahmins from Benares and presented themselves at Daisy's doors in a penniless condition without clear knowledge whether they had come by train or not. In favour of such prudent measures was the truly Athenian character of Daisy's mind, for she was always enquiring into „some new thing,“ which was the secret of life when first discovered, and got speedily relegated to the dust-heap. But against such a course was the undoubted fact that Daisy did occasionally get hold of somebody who subsequently proved to be of interest, and Lucia would never forget to her dying day the advent in Riseholme of a little Welsh attorney, in whom Daisy had discovered a wonderful mentality. Lucia had refused to extend her queenly hospitality to him, or to recognise his existence in any way during the fortnight when he stayed with Daisy, and she was naturally very much annoyed to find him in a prominent position in the Government not many years later. Indeed she had snubbed him so markedly on his first appearance at Riseholme that he had refused on subsequent visits to come to her house at all, though he several times visited Mrs Quantock again, and told her all sorts of political secrets (so she said) which she would not divulge for anything in the world. There must never be a repetition of so fatal an error.

Another thing inclined the wavering balance. She distinctly wanted some fresh element at her court, that

should make Riseholme know that she was in residence again. August would soon be here with its languors and absence of stimulus, when it was really rather difficult in the drowsy windless weather to keep the flag of culture flying strongly from her own palace. The Guru had already said that he felt sure she had a beautiful soul, and- The outline of the scheme flashed upon her. She would have Yoga evenings in the hot August weather, at which, as the heat of the day abated, graceful groups should assemble among the mottos in the garden and listen to high talk on spiritual subjects. They would adjourn to delicious moonlit suppers in the pergola, or if the moon was indisposed-she could not be expected to regulate the affairs of the moon as well as of Riseholme-there would be dim seances and sandwiches in the smoking-parlour. The humorous furniture should be put in cupboards, and as they drifted towards the front hall again, when the clocks struck an unexpectedly late hour, little whispered colloquies of „How wonderful he was tonight“ would be heard, and there would be faraway looks and sighs, and the notings down of the titles of books that conducted the pilgrim on the Way. Perhaps as they softly assembled for departure, a little music would be suggested to round off the evening, and she saw herself putting down the soft pedal as people rustled into their places, for the first movement of the „Moonlight Sonata.“ Then at the end there would be silence, and she would get up with a

sigh, and someone would say „Lucia mia“! and somebody else „Heavenly Music,“ and perhaps the Guru would say „Beloved lady,“ as he had *apparently* said to poor Daisy Quantock. Flowers, music, addresses from the Guru, soft partings, sense of refreshment... With the memory of the Welsh attorney in her mind, it seemed clearly wiser to annex rather than to repudiate the Guru. She seized a pen and drew a pile of postcards towards her, on the top of which was printed her name and address.

„Too wonderful,“ she wrote, „pray bring him yourself to my little garden-party on Friday. There will be only a few. Let me know if he wants a quiet room ready for him.“

All this had taken time, and she had but scribbled a dozen postcards to friends bidding them come to her garden party on Friday, when tea was announced. These invitations had the mystic word „Hightum“ written at the bottom left hand corner, which conveyed to the enlightened recipient what sort of party it was to be, and denoted the standard of dress. For one of Lucia's quaint ideas was to divide dresses into three classes, „Hightum,“ „Tightum“ and „Scrub.“ „Hightum“ was your very best dress, the smartest and newest of all, and when „Hightum“ was written on a card of invitation, it implied that the party was a very resplendent one. „Tightum“ similarly indicated a moderately smart party, „Scrub“ carried its own

significance on the surface. These terms applied to men's dress as well and as regards evening parties: a dinner party „Hightum“ would indicate a white tie and a tail coat; a dinner party „Tightum“ a black tie and a short coat, and a dinner „Scrub“ would mean morning clothes.

With tea was announced also the advent of Georgie Pillson who was her gentleman-in-waiting when she was at home, and her watch-dog when she was not. In order to save subsequent disappointment, it may be at once stated that there never has been, was, or ever would be the smallest approach to a flirtation between them. Neither of them, she with her forty respectable years and he with his blameless forty-five years, had ever flirted, with anybody at all. But it was one of the polite and pleasant fictions of Riseholme that Georgie was passionately attached to her and that it was for her sake that he had settled in Riseholme now some seven years ago, and that for her sake he remained still unmarried. She never, to do her justice, had affirmed anything of the sort, but it is a fact that sometimes when Georgie's name came up in conversation, her eyes wore that „far-away“ look that only the masterpieces of art could otherwise call up, and she would sigh and murmur „Dear Georgie“! and change the subject, with the tact that characterized her. In fact their mutual relations were among the most Beautiful Things of Riseholme, and hardly less beautiful was Peppino's

attitude towards it all. That large hearted man trusted them both, and his trust was perfectly justified. Georgie was in and out of the house all day, chiefly in; and not only did scandal never rear its hissing head, but it positively had not a head to hiss with, or a foot to stand on. On his side again Georgie had never said that he was in love with her (nor would it have been true if he had), but by his complete silence on the subject coupled with his constancy he seemed to admit the truth of this bloodless idyll. They talked and walked and read the masterpieces of literature and played duets on the piano together. Sometimes (for he was the more brilliant performer, though as he said „terribly lazy about practising,“ for which she scolded him) he would gently slap the back of her hand, if she played a wrong note, and say „Naughty!“ And she would reply in baby language „Me vewy sowwy! Oo naughty too to hurt Lucia!“ That was the utmost extent of their carnal familiarities, and with bright eyes fixed on the music they would break into peals of girlish laughter, until the beauty of the music sobered them again.

Georgie (he was Georgie or Mr Georgie, never Pillson to the whole of Riseholme) was not an obtrusively masculine sort of person. Such masculinity as he was possessed of was boyish rather than adult, and the most important ingredients in his nature were womanish. He had, in common with the rest of Riseholme, strong artistic tastes, and in addition to

playing the piano, made charming little water-colour sketches, many of which he framed at his own expense and gave to friends, with slightly sentimental titles, neatly printed in gilt letters on the mount. „Golden Autumn Woodland,“ „Bleak December,“ „Yellow Daffodils,“ „Roses of Summer“ were perhaps his most notable series, and these he had given to Lucia, on the occasion of four successive birthdays. He did portraits as well in pastel; these were of two types, elderly ladies in lace caps with a row of pearls, and boys in cricket shirts with their sleeves rolled up. He was not very good at eyes, so his sitters always were looking down, but he was excellent at smiles, and the old ladies smiled patiently and sweetly, and the boys gaily. But his finest accomplishment was needlework and his house was full of the creations of his needle, wool-work curtains, petit-point chair seats, and silk embroideries framed and glazed. Next to Lucia he was the hardest worked inhabitant of Riseholme but not being so strong as the Queen, he had often to go away for little rests by the sea-side. Travelling by train fussed him a good deal, for he might not be able to get a corner seat, or somebody with a pipe or a baby might get into his carriage, or the porter might be rough with his luggage, so he always went in his car to some neighbouring watering-place where they knew him. Dicky, his handsome young chauffeur, drove him, and by Dicky's side sat Foljambe, his very pretty parlour-maid who valetted him. If Dicky

took the wrong turn his master called „Naughty boy“ through the tube, and Foljambe smiled respectfully. For the month of August, his two plain strapping sisters (Hermione and Ursula alas!) always came to stay with him. They liked pigs and dogs and otter-hunting and mutton-chops, and were rather a discordant element in Riseholme. But Georgie had a kind heart, and never even debated whether he should ask Hermy and Ursy or not, though he had to do a great deal of tidying up after they had gone.

There was always a playful touch between the meetings of these two when either of them had been away from Riseholme that very prettily concealed the depth of Georgie's supposed devotion, and when she came out into the garden where her Cavalier and her husband were waiting for their tea under the pergola, Georgie jumped up very nimbly and took a few chassee-ing steps towards her with both hands outstretched in welcome. She caught at his humour, made him a curtsy, and next moment they were treading a little improvised minuet together with hands held high, and pointed toes. Georgie had very small feet, and it was a really elegant toe that he pointed, encased in cloth-topped boots. He had on a suit of fresh white flannels and over his shoulders, for fear of the evening air being chilly after this hot day, he had a little cape of a military cut, like those in which young ladies at music-halls enact the part of colonels. He had a

straw-hat on, with a blue riband, a pink shirt and a red tie, rather loose and billowy. His face was pink and round, with blue eyes, a short nose and very red lips. An almost complete absence of eyebrow was made up for by a firm little brown moustache clipped very short, and brushed upwards at its extremities. Contrary to expectation he was quite tall and fitted very neatly into his clothes.

The dance came to an end with a low curtsy on Lucia's part, an obeisance hat in hand from Georgie (this exposure shewing a crop of hair grown on one side of his head and brushed smoothly over the top until it joined the hair on the other side) and a clapping of the hands from Peppino.

„Bravo, bravo,“ he cried from the tea-table. „Capital!“

Mrs Lucas blew him a kiss in acknowledgment of this compliment and smiled on her partner. „*Amico!*» she said. „It is nice to see you again. How goes it?“

„*Va bene,*“ said Georgie to show he could talk Italian too. „*Va very bene* now that you've come back.“

„*Grazie!* Now tell us all the news. We'll have a good gossip.“

Georgie's face beamed with a „solemn gladness“ at the word, like a drunkard's when brandy is mentioned.

„Where shall we begin?“ he said. „Such a lot to tell you. I think we must begin with a great bit of news.

Something really mysterious.“

Lucia smiled inwardly. She felt that she knew for dead certain what the mysterious news was, and also that she knew far more about it than Georgie. This superiority she completely concealed. Nobody could have guessed it.

„*Presto, presto!*» she said. „You excite me.“

„Yesterday morning I was in Rush's,“ said Georgie, „seeing about some *Creme de menthe*, which ought to have been sent the day before. Rush is very negligent sometimes-and I was just saying a sharp word about it, when suddenly I saw that Rush was not attending at all, but was looking at something behind my back, and so I looked round. Guess!“

„Don't be tantalising, *amico*,“ said she. „How can I guess? A pink elephant with blue spots!“

„No, guess again!“

„A red Indian in full war paint.“

„Certainly not! Guess again,“ said Georgie, with a little sigh of relief. (It would have been awful if she had guessed.) At this moment Peppino suddenly became aware that Lucia had guessed and was up to some game.

„Give me your hand, Georgie,“ she said, „and look at me. I'm going to read your thoughts. Think of what you saw when you turned round.“

She took his hand and pressed it to her forehead, closing her eyes.

„But I do seem to see an Indian,“ she said. „Ah, not red Indian, other Indian. And-and he has slippers on and brown stockings-no, not brown stockings; it's legs. And there's a beard, and a turban.“

She gave a sigh.

„That's all I can see,“ she said.

„My dear, you're marvellous,“ said he. „You're quite right.“

A slight bubbling sound came from Peppino, and Georgie began to suspect.

„I believe you've seen him!“ he said. „How tarsome you are...“

When they had all laughed a great deal, and Georgie had been assured that Lucia really, word of honour, had no idea what happened next, the narrative was resumed.

„So there stood the Indian, bowing and salaaming most politely and when Rush had promised me he would send my *Creme de menthe* that very morning, I just looked through a wine list for a moment, and the Indian with quantities more bows came up to the counter and said, 'If you will have the great goodness to give me a little brandy bottle.' So Rush gave it him, and instead of paying for it, what do you think he said? Guess.“

Mrs Lucas rose with the air of Lady Macbeth and pointed her finger at Georgie.

„He said 'Put it down to Mrs Quantock's

account," she hissed.

Of course the explanation came now, and Lucia told the two men the contents of Mrs Quantock's letter. With that her cards were on the table, and though the fact of the Brahmin from Benares was news to Georgie, he had got many interesting things to tell her, for his house adjoined Mrs Quantock's and there were plenty of things which Mrs Quantock had not mentioned in her letter, so that Georgie was soon in the position of informant again. His windows overlooked Mrs Quantock's garden, and since he could not keep his eyes shut all day, it followed that the happenings there were quite common property. Indeed that was a general rule in Riseholme: anyone in an adjoining property could say, „What an exciting game of lawn-tennis you had this afternoon!“ having followed it from his bedroom. That was part of the charm of Riseholme; it was as if it contained just one happy family with common interests and pursuits. What happened in the house was a more private matter, and Mrs Quantock, for instance, would never look from the rising ground at the end of her garden into Georgie's dining-room or, if she did she would never tell anyone how many places were laid at table on that particular day when she had asked if he could give her lunch, and he had replied that to his great regret his table was full. But nobody could help seeing into gardens from back windows: the „view“ belonged to everybody.

Georgie had had wonderful views.

„That very day,“ he said, „soon after lunch, I was looking for a letter I thought I had left in my bedroom, and happening to glance out, I saw the Indian sitting under Mrs Quantock's pear-tree. He was swaying a little backwards and forwards.“

„The brandy!“ said Lucia excitedly. „He has his meals in his own room.“

„No, *amica*, it was not the brandy. In fact I don't suppose the brandy had gone to Mrs Quantock's then, for he did not take it from Rush's, but asked that it should be sent...“ He paused a moment-„Or did he take it away? I declare I can't remember. But anyhow when he swayed backwards and forwards, he wasn't drunk, for presently he stood on one leg, and crooked the other behind it, and remained there with his hands up, as if he was praying, for quite a long time without swaying at all. So he couldn't have been tipsy. And then he sat down again, and took off his slippers, and held his toes with one hand, while his legs were quite straight out, and put his other hand round behind his head, and grasped his other ear with it. I tried to do it on my bedroom floor, but I couldn't get near it. Then he sat up again and called 'Chela! Chela!' and Mrs Quantock came running out.“

„Why did he say 'Chela'?“ asked Lucia.

„I wondered too. But I knew I had some clue to it, so I looked through some books by Rudyard Kipling,

and found that Chela meant 'Disciple.' What you have told me just now about 'Guru' being 'teacher,' seems to piece the whole thing together.“

„And what did Daisy do?“ asked Mrs Lucas breathlessly.

„She sat down too, and put her legs out straight in front of her like the Guru, and tried to hold the toe of her shoe in her fingers, and naturally she couldn't get within yards of it. I got nearer than she did. And he said, 'Beloved lady, not too far at first.“

„So you could hear too,“ said Lucia.

„Naturally, for my window was open, and as you know Mrs Quantock's pear-tree is quite close to the house. And then he told her to stop up one nostril with her finger and inhale through the other, and then hold her breath, while he counted six. Then she breathed it all out again, and started with the other side. She repeated that several times and he was very much pleased with her. Then she said, 'It is quite wonderful; I feel so light and vigorous.“

„It would be very wonderful indeed if dear Daisy felt light,“ remarked Lucia. „What next?“

„Then they sat and swayed backwards and forwards again and muttered something that sounded like Pom!“

„That would be 'Om', and then?“

„I couldn't wait any longer for I had some letters to write.“

She smiled at him.

„I shall give you another cup of tea to reward you for your report,“ she said. „It has all been most interesting. Tell me again about the breathing in and holding your breath.“

Georgie did so, and illustrated in his own person what had happened. Next moment Lucia was imitating him, and Peppino came round in order to get a better view of what Georgie was doing. Then they all sat, inhaling through one nostril, holding their breath, and then expelling it again.

„Very interesting,“ said Lucia at the end. „Upon my word, it does give one a sort of feeling of vigour and lightness. I wonder if there is something in it.“

Chapter THREE

Though „The Hurst“ was, as befitted its Chatelaine, the most Elizabethanly complete abode in Riseholme, the rest of the village in its due degree, fell very little short of perfection. It had but its one street some half mile in length but that street was a gem of mediaeval domestic architecture. For the most part the houses that lined it were blocks of contiguous cottages, which had been converted either singly or by twos and threes into dwellings containing the comforts demanded by the twentieth century, but externally they preserved the antiquity which, though it might be restored or

supplemented by bathrooms or other conveniences, presented a truly Elizabethan appearance. There were, of course, accretions such as old inn signs above front-doors and old bell-pulls at their sides, but the doors were uniformly of inconveniently low stature, roofs were of stone slabs or old brick, in which a suspiciously abundant crop of antirrhinums and stone crops had anchored themselves, and there was hardly a garden that did not contain a path of old paving-stones, a mulberry-tree and some yews cut into shape.

Nothing in the place was more blatantly mediaeval than the village green, across which Georgie took his tripping steps after leaving the presence of his queen. Round it stood a row of great elms, and in its centre was the ducking-pond, according to Riseholme tradition, though perhaps in less classical villages it might have passed merely for a duck-pond. But in Riseholme it would have been rank heresy to dream, even in the most pessimistic moments, of its being anything but a ducking-pond. Close by it stood a pair of stocks, about which there was no doubt whatever, for Mr Lucas had purchased them from a neighbouring iconoclastic village, where they were going to be broken up, and, after having them repaired, had presented them to the village-green, and chosen their site close to the ducking pond. Round the green were grouped the shops of the village, slightly apart from the residential street, and at the far end of it was that

undoubtedly Elizabethan hostelry, the Ambermere Arms, full to overflowing of ancient tables and bible-boxes, and fire-dogs and fire-backs, and bottles and chests and settles. These were purchased in large quantities by the American tourists who swarmed there during the summer months, at a high profit to the nimble proprietor, who thereupon purchased fresh antiquities to take their places. The Ambermere Arms in fact was the antique furniture shop of the place, and did a thriving trade, for it was much more interesting to buy objects out of a real old Elizabethan inn, than out of a shop.

Georgie had put his smart military cape over his arm for his walk, and at intervals applied his slim forefinger to one nostril, while he breathed in through the other, continuing the practice which he had observed going on in Mrs Quantock's garden. Though it made him a little dizzy, it certainly produced a sort of lightness, but soon he remembered the letter from Mrs Quantock which Lucia had read out, warning her that these exercises ought to be taken under instruction, and so desisted. He was going to deliver Lucia's answer at Mrs Quantock's house, and with a view to possibly meeting the Guru, and being introduced to him, he said over to himself „Guru, Guru, Guru“ instead of doing deep breathing, in order to accustom himself to the unusual syllables.

It would, of course, have been very strange and

un-Riseholme-like to have gone to a friend's door, even though the errand was so impersonal a one as bearing somebody else's note, without enquiring whether the friend was in, and being instantly admitted if she was, and as a matter of fact, Georgie caught a glimpse, when the knocker was answered (Mrs Quantock did not have a bell at all), through the open door of the hall, of Mrs Quantock standing in the middle of the lawn on one leg. Naturally, therefore, he ran out into the garden without any further formality. She looked like a little round fat stork, whose legs had not grown, but who preserved the habits of her kind.

„Dear lady, I've brought a note for you,“ he said, „it's from Lucia.“

The other leg went down, and she turned on him the wide firm smile that she had learned in the vanished days of Christian Science.

„Om,“ said Mrs Quantock, expelling the remainder of her breath. „Thank you, my dear Georgie. It's extraordinary what Yoga has done for me already. Cold quite gone. If ever you feel out of sorts, or depressed or cross you can cure yourself at once. I've got a visitor staying with me.“

„Have you indeed?“ asked Georgie, without alluding to the thrilling excitements which had trodden so close on each other's heels since yesterday morning when he had seen the Guru in Rush's shop.

„Yes; and as you've just come from dear Lucia's

perhaps she may have said something to you about him, for I wrote to her about him. He's a Guru of extraordinary sanctity from Benares, and he's teaching me the Way. You shall see him too, unless he's meditating. I will call to him; if he's meditating he won't hear me, so we shan't be interrupting him. He wouldn't hear a railway accident if he was meditating.“

She turned round towards the house.

„Guru, dear!“ she called.

There was a moment's pause, and the Indian's face appeared at a window.

„Beloved lady!“ he said.

„Guru dear, I want to introduce a friend of mine to you,“ she said. „This is Mr Pillson, and when you know him a little better you will call him Georgie.“

„Beloved lady, I know him very well indeed. I see into his clear white soul. Peace be unto you, my friend.“

„Isn't he marvellous? Fancy!“ said Mrs Quantock, in an aside.

Georgie raised his hat very politely.

„How do you do?“ he said. (After his quiet practice he would have said „How do you do Guru?“ but it rhymed in a ridiculous manner and his red lips could not frame the word.)

„I am always well,“ said the Guru, „I am always young and well because I follow the Way.“

„Sixty at least he tells me,“ said Mrs Quantock in

a hissing aside, probably audible across the channel, „and he thinks more, but the years make no difference to him. He is like a boy. Call him 'Guru.'“

„Guru, —» began Georgie.

„Yes, my friend.“

„I am very glad you are well,“ said Georgie wildly. He was greatly impressed, but much embarrassed. Also it was so hard to talk at a second-story window with any sense of ease, especially when you had to address a total stranger of extraordinary sanctity from Benares.

Luckily Mrs Quantock came to the assistance of his embarrassment.

„Guru dear, are you coming down to see us?“ she asked.

„Beloved lady, no!“ said the level voice. „It is laid on me to wait here. It is the time of calm and prayer when it is good to be alone. I will come down when the guides bid me. But teach our dear friend what I have taught you. Surely before long I will grasp his earthly hand, but not now. Peace! Peace! and Light!“

„Have you got some Guides as well?“ asked Georgie when the Guru disappeared from the window. „And are they Indians too?“

„Oh, those are his spiritual guides,“ said Mrs Quantock, „He sees them and talks to them, but they are not in the body.“

She gave a happy sigh.

„I never have felt anything like it,“ she said. „He has brought such an atmosphere into the house that even Robert feels it, and doesn't mind being turned out of his dressing-room. There, he has shut the window. Isn't it all marvellous?“

Georgie had not seen anything particularly marvellous yet, except the phenomenon of Mrs Quantock standing on one leg in the middle of the lawn, but presumably her emotion communicated itself to him by the subtle infection of the spirit.

„And what does he do?“ he asked.

„My dear, it is not what he does, but what he is,“ said she. „Why, even my little bald account of him to Lucia has made her ask him to her garden-party. Of course I can't tell whether he will go or not. He seems so very much-how shall I say it? — so very much sent to Me. But I shall of course ask him whether he will consent. Trances and meditation all day! And in the intervals such serenity and sweetness. You know, for instance, how tiresome Robert is about his food. Well, last night the mutton, I am bound to say, was a little underdone, and Robert was beginning to throw it about his plate in the way he has. Well, my Guru got up and just said, 'Show me the way to kitchen'-he leaves out little words sometimes, because they don't matter-and I took him down, and he said 'Peace!' He told me to leave him there, and in ten minutes he was up again with a little plate of curry and rice and what had been

underdone mutton, and you never ate anything so good. Robert had most of it and I had the rest, and my Guru was so pleased at seeing Robert pleased. He said Robert had a pure white soul, just like you, only I wasn't to tell him, because for him the Way ordained that he must find it out for himself. And today before lunch again, the Guru went down in the kitchen, and my cook told me he only took a pinch of pepper and a tomato and a little bit of mutton fat and a sardine and a bit of cheese, and he brought up a dish that you never saw equalled. Delicious! I shouldn't a bit wonder if Robert began breathing-exercises soon. There is one that makes you lean and young and exercises the liver.“

This sounded very entrancing.

„Can't you teach me that?“ asked Georgie eagerly. He had been rather distressed about his increasing plumpness for a year past, and about his increasing age for longer than that. As for his liver he always had to be careful.

She shook her head.

„You cannot practise it except under tuition from an expert,“ she said.

Georgie rapidly considered what Hermy's and Ursy's comments would be if, when they arrived tomorrow, he was found doing exercises under the tuition of a Guru. Hermy, when she was not otter-hunting, could be very sarcastic, and he had a clear month of Hermy in front of him, without any

otter-hunting, which, so she had informed him, was not possible in August. This was mysterious to Georgie, because it did not seem likely that all otters died in August, and a fresh brood came in like caterpillars. If Hermy was here in October, she would otter-hunt all morning and snore all afternoon, and be in the best of tempers, but the August visit required more careful steering. Yet the prospect of being lean and young and internally untroubled was wonderfully tempting.

„But couldn't he be my Guru as well?“ he asked.

Quite suddenly and by some demoniac possession, a desire that had been only intermittently present in Mrs Quantock's consciousness took full possession of her, a red revolutionary insurgence hoisted its banner. Why with this stupendous novelty in the shape of a Guru shouldn't she lead and direct Riseholme instead of Lucia? She had long wondered why darling Lucia should be Queen of Riseholme, and had, by momentary illumination, seen herself thus equipped as far more capable of exercising supremacy. After all, everybody in Riseholme knew Lucia's old tune by now, and was in his secret consciousness quite aware that she did not play the second and third movements of the Moonlight Sonata, simply because they „went faster,“ however much she might cloak the omission by saying that they resembled eleven o'clock in the morning and 3 p.m. And Mrs Quantock had often suspected that she did not read one quarter of the books

she talked about, and that she got up subjects in the Encyclopaedia, in order to make a brave show that covered essential ignorance. Certainly she spent a good deal of money over entertaining, but Robert had lately made twenty times daily what Lucia spent annually, over Roumanian oils. As for her acting, had she not completely forgotten her words as Lady Macbeth in the middle of the sleep-walking scene?

But here was Lucia, as proved by her note, and her A. D. C. Georgie, wildly interested in the Guru. Mrs Quantock conjectured that Lucia's plan was to launch the Guru at her August parties, as her own discovery. He would be a novelty, and it would be Lucia who gave Om-parties and breathing-parties and standing-on-one-leg parties, while she herself, Daisy Quantock, would be bidden to these as a humble guest, and Lucia would get all the credit, and, as likely as not, invite the discoverer, the inventress, just now and then. Mrs Quantock's Guru would become Lucia's Guru and all Riseholme would flock hungrily for light and leading to The Hurst. She had written to Lucia in all sincerity, hoping that she would extend the hospitality of her garden-parties to the Guru, but now the very warmth of Lucia's reply caused her to suspect this ulterior motive. She had been too precipitate, too rash, too ill-advised, too sudden, as Lucia would say. She ought to have known that Lucia, with her August parties coming on, would have jumped at a Guru, and

withheld him for her own parties, taking the wind out of Lucia's August sails. Lucia had already suborned Georgie to leave this note, and begin to filch the Guru away. Mrs Quantock saw it all now, and clearly this was not to be borne. Before she answered, she steeled herself with the triumph she had once scored in the matter of the Welsh attorney.

„Dear Georgie,“ she said, „no one would be more delighted than I if my Guru consented to take you as a pupil. But you can't tell what he will do, as he said to me today, apropos of myself, 'I cannot come unless I'm sent.' Was not that wonderful? He knew at once he had been sent to me.“

By this time Georgie was quite determined to have the Guru. The measure of his determination may be gauged from the fact that he forgot all about Lucia's garden-party.

„But he called me his friend,“ he said. „He told me I had a clean white soul.“

„Yes; but that is his attitude towards everybody,“ said Mrs Quantock.

„His religion makes it impossible for him to think ill of anybody.“

„But he didn't say that to Rush,“ cried Georgie, „when he asked for some brandy, to be put down to you.“

Mrs Quantock's expression changed for a moment, but that moment was too short for Georgie to

notice it. Her face instantly cleared again.

„Naturally he cannot go about saying that sort of thing,“ she observed.

„Common people-he is of the highest caste-would not understand him.“

Georgie made the direct appeal.

„Please ask him to teach me,“ he said.

For a moment Mrs Quantock did not answer, but cocked her head sideways in the direction of the pear-tree where a thrush was singing. It fluted a couple of repeated phrases and then was silent again.

Mrs Quantock gave a great smile to the pear-tree.

„Thank you, little brother,“ she said.

She turned to Georgie again.

„That comes out of St. Francis,“ she said, „but Yoga embraces all that is true in every religion. Well, I will ask my Guru whether he will take you as a pupil, but I can't answer for what he will say.“

„What does he-what does he charge for his lesson?“ asked Georgie.

The Christian Science smile illuminated her face again.

„The word 'money' never passes his lips,“ she said. „I don't think he really knows what it means. He proposed to sit on the green with a beggar's bowl but of course I would not permit that, and for the present I just give him all he wants. No doubt when he goes away, which I hope will not be for many weeks yet, though no

one can tell when he will have another call, I shall slip something suitably generous into his hand, but I don't think about that. Must you be going? Good night, dear Georgie. Peace! Om!“

His last backward glance as he went out of the front door revealed her standing on one leg again, just as he had seen her first. He remembered a print of a fakir at Benares, standing in that attitude; and if the stream that flowed into the Avon could be combined with the Ganges, and the garden into the burning ghaut, and the swooping swallows into the kites, and the neat parlour-maid who showed him out, into a Brahmin, and the Chinese gong that was so prominent an object in the hall into a piece of Benares brassware, he could almost have fancied himself as standing on the brink of the sacred river. The marigolds in the garden required no transmutation...

Georgie had quite „to pull himself together,“ as he stepped round Mrs Quantock's mulberry tree, and ten paces later round his own, before he could recapture his normal evening mood, on those occasions when he was going to dine alone. Usually these evenings were very pleasant and much occupied, for they did not occur very often in this whirl of Riseholme life, and it was not more than once a week that he spent a solitary evening, and then, if he got tired of his own company, there were half a dozen houses, easy of access where he could betake himself in his military cloak, and spend a

post-prandial hour. But oftener than not when these occasions occurred, he would be quite busy at home, dusting a little china, and rearranging ornaments on his shelves, and, after putting his rings and handkerchief in the candle-bracket of the piano, spending a serious hour (with the soft pedal down, for fear of irritating Robert) in reading his share of such duets as he would be likely to be called upon to play with Lucia during the next day or two. Though he read music much better than she did, he used to „go over“ the part alone first, and let it be understood that he had not seen it before. But then he was sure that she had done precisely the same, so they started fair. Such things whiled away very pleasantly the hours till eleven, when he went to bed, and it was seldom that he had to set out Patience-cards to tide him over the slow minutes.

But every now and then-and tonight was one of those occasions-there occurred evenings when he never went out to dinner even if he was asked, because he „was busy indoors.“ They occurred about once a month (these evenings that he was „busy indoors“)-and even an invitation from Lucia would not succeed in disturbing them. Ages ago Riseholme had decided what made Georgie „busy indoors“ once a month, and so none of his friends chatted about the nature of his engagements to anyone else, simply because everybody else knew. His business indoors, in fact, was a perfect secret, from having been public property for so long.

June had been a very busy time, not „indoors,“ but with other engagements, and as Georgie went up to his bedroom, having been told by Foljambe that the hair-dresser was waiting for him, and had been waiting „this last ten minutes,“ he glanced at his hair in the Cromwellian mirror that hung on the stairs, and was quite aware that it was time he submitted himself to Mr Holroyd's ministrations. There was certainly an undergrowth of grey hair visible beneath his chestnut crop, that should have been attended to at least a fortnight ago. Also there was a growing thinness in the locks that crossed his head; Mr Holroyd had attended to that before, and had suggested a certain remedy, not in the least inconvenient, unless Georgie proposed to be athletic without a cap, in a high wind, and even then not necessarily so. But as he had no intention of being athletic anywhere, with or without a cap, he determined as he went up the stairs that he would follow Mr Holroyd's advice. Mr Holroyd's procedure, without this added formula, entailed sitting „till it dried,“ and after that he would have dinner, and then Mr Holroyd would begin again. He was a very clever person with regard to the face and the hands and the feet. Georgie had been conscious of walking a little lamely lately; he had been even more conscious of the need of hot towels on his face and the „tap-tap“ of Mr Holroyd's fingers, and the stretchings of Mr Holroyd's thumb across rather slack surfaces of cheek and chin. In the interval between the

hair and the face, Mr Holroyd should have a good supper downstairs with Foljambe and the cook. And tomorrow morning, when he met Hermy and Ursy, Georgie would be just as spick and span and young as ever, if not more so.

Georgie (happy innocent!) was completely unaware that the whole of Riseholme knew that the smooth chestnut locks which covered the top of his head, were trained like the tendrils of a grapevine from the roots, and flowed like a river over a bare head, and consequently when Mr Holroyd explained the proposed innovation, a little central wig, the edges of which would mingle in the most natural manner with his own hair, it seemed to Georgie that nobody would know the difference. In addition he would be spared those risky moments when he had to take off his hat to a friend in a high wind, for there was always the danger of his hair blowing away from the top of his head, and hanging down, like the tresses of a Rhine-maiden over one shoulder. So Mr Holroyd was commissioned to put that little affair in hand at once, and when the greyness had been attended to, and Georgie had had his dinner, there came hot towels and tappings on his face, and other ministrations. All was done about half past ten, and when he came downstairs again for a short practice at the bass part of Beethoven's fifth symphony, ingeniously arranged for two performers on the piano, he looked with sincere satisfaction at his rosy face in

the Cromwellian mirror, and his shoes felt quite comfortable again, and his nails shone like pink stars, as his hands dashed wildly about the piano in the quicker passages. But all the time the thought of the Guru next door, under whose tuition he might be able to regain his youth without recourse to those expensive subterfuges (for the price of the undetectable *toupet* astonished him) rang in his head with a melody more haunting than Beethoven's. What he would have liked best of all would have been to have the Guru all to himself, so that he should remain perpetually young, while all the rest of Riseholme, including Hermy and Ursy, grew old. Then, indeed, he would be king of the place, instead of serving the interests of its queen.

He rose with a little sigh, and after adjusting the strip of flannel over the keys, shut his piano and busied himself for a little with a soft duster over his cabinet of bibelots which not even Foljambe was allowed to touch. It was generally understood that he had inherited them, though the inheritance had chiefly passed to him through the medium of curiosity shops, and there were several pieces of considerable value among them. There were a gold Louis XVI snuff box, a miniature by Karl Huth, a silver toy porringer of the time of Queen Anne, a piece of Bow china, an enamelled cigarette case by Faberge. But tonight his handling of them was not so dainty and delicate as usual, and he actually dropped the porringer on the floor as he was dusting it, for his

mind still occupied itself with the Guru and the practices that led to permanent youth. How quick Lucia had been to snap him up for her garden-party. Yet perhaps she would not get him, for he might say he was not sent. But surely he would be sent to Georgie, whom he knew, the moment he set eyes on him to have a clean white soul...

The clock struck eleven, and, as usual on warm nights Georgie opened the glass door into his garden and drew in a breath of the night air. There was a slip of moon in the sky which he most punctiliously saluted, wondering (though he did not seriously believe in its superstition) how Lucia could be so foolhardy as to cut the new moon. She had seen it yesterday, she told him, in London, and had taken no notice whatever of it... The heavens were quickly peppered with pretty stars, which Georgie after his busy interesting day enjoyed looking at, though if he had had the arrangement of them, he would certainly have put them into more definite patterns. Among them was a very red planet, and Georgie with recollections of his classical education, easily remembered that Mars, the God of War, was symbolized in the heavens by a red star. Could that mean anything to peaceful Riseholme? Was internal warfare, were revolutionary movements possible in so serene a realm?

Chapter FOUR

Pink irascible Robert, prone to throw his food about his plate, if it did not commend itself to him, felt in an extremely good natured mood that same night after dinner, for the Guru had again made a visit to the kitchen with the result that instead of a slab of pale dead codfish being put before him after he had eaten some tepid soup, there appeared a delicious little fish-curry. The Guru had behaved with great tact; he had seen the storm gathering on poor Robert's face, as he sipped the cool effete concoction and put down his spoon again with a splash in his soup plate, and thereupon had bowed and smiled and scurried away to the kitchen to intercept the next abomination. Then returning with the little curry he explained that it was entirely for Robert, since those who sought the Way did not indulge in hot sharp foods, and so he had gobbled it up to the very last morsel.

In consequence when the Guru salaamed very humbly, and said that with gracious permission of beloved lady and kind master he would go and meditate in his room, and had shambled away in his red slippers, the discussion which Robert had felt himself obliged to open with his wife, on the subject of having an unknown Indian staying with them for an indefinite period, was opened in a much more amicable key than it would have been on a slice of codfish.

„Well, now, about this Golliwog-haha-I should say Guru, my dear,“ he began, „what's going to happen?“

Daisy Quantock drew in her breath sharply and winced at this irreverence, but quickly remembered that she must always be sending out messages of love, north, east, south, and west. So she sent a rather spiky one in the direction of her husband who was sitting due east, so that it probably got to him at once, and smiled the particular hard firm smile which was an heirloom inherited from her last rule of life.

„No one knows,“ she said brightly. „Even the Guides can't tell where and when a Guru may be called.“

„Then do you propose he should stop here till he's called somewhere else?“

She continued smiling.

„I don't propose anything,“ she said. „It's not in my hands.“

Under the calming influence of the fish curry, Robert remained still placid.

„He's a first-rate cook anyhow,“ he said. „Can't you engage him as that? Call to the kitchen, you know.“

„Darling!“ said Mrs Quantock, sending out more love. But she had a quick temper, and indeed the two were outpoured together, like hot and cold taps turned on in a bath. The pellucid stream of love served to keep her temper moderately cool.

„Well, ask him,“ suggested Mr Quantock, „as you say, you never can tell where a Guru may be called. Give him forty pounds a year and beer money.“

„Beer!“ began Mrs Quantock, when she suddenly remembered Georgie's story about Rush and the Guru and the brandy-bottle, and stopped.

„Yes, dear, I said 'beer,“ remarked Robert a little irritably, „and in any case I insist that you dismiss your present cook. You only took her because she was a Christian Scientist, and you've left that little sheep-fold now. You used to talk about false claims I remember. Well her claim to be a cook is the falsest I ever heard of. I'd sooner take my chance with an itinerant organ grinder. But that fish-curry tonight and that other thing last night, that's what I mean by good eating.“

The thought even of good food always calmed Robert's savage breast; it blew upon him as the wind on an AEolian harp hung in the trees, evoking faint sweet sounds.

„I'm sure, my dear,“ he said, „that I shall be willing to fall in with any pleasant arrangement about your Guru, but it really isn't unreasonable in me to ask what sort of arrangement you propose. I haven't a word to say against him, especially when he goes to the kitchen; I only want to know if he is going to stop here a night or two or a year or two. Talk to him about it tomorrow with my love. I wonder if he can make bisque soup.“

Daisy Quantock carried quite a quantity of material for reflection upstairs with her, then she went to bed, pausing a moment opposite the Guru's door, from inside of which came sounds of breathing so deep that it sounded almost like snoring. But she seemed to detect a timbre of spirituality about it which convinced her that he was holding high communion with the Guides. It was round him that her thoughts centred, he was the tree through the branches of which they scampered chattering.

Her first and main interest in him was sheer Guruism, for she was one of those intensely happy people who pass through life in ecstatic pursuit of some idea which those who do not share it call a fad. Well might poor Robert remember the devastation of his home when Daisy, after the perusal of a little pamphlet which she picked up on a book-stall called „The Uric Acid Monthly,“ came to the shattering conclusion that her buxom frame consisted almost entirely of waste-products which must be eliminated. For a greedy man the situation was frankly intolerable, for when he continued his ordinary diet (this was before the cursed advent of the Christian Science cook) she kept pointing to his well-furnished plate, and told him that every atom of that beef or mutton and potatoes, turned from the moment he swallowed it into chromogens and toxins, and that his apparent appetite was merely the result of fermentation. For herself her platter was an

abominable mess of cheese and protein-powder and apples and salad-oil, while round her, like saucers of specimen seeds were ranged little piles of nuts and pine-branches, which supplied body-building material, and which she weighed out with scrupulous accuracy, in accordance with the directions of the „Uric Acid Monthly.“ Tea and coffee were taboo, since they flooded the blood with purins, and the kitchen boiler rumbled day and night to supply the rivers of boiling water with which (taken in sips) she inundated her system. Strange gaunt females used to come down from London, with small parcels full of tough food that tasted of travelling-bags and contained so much nutrition that a port-manteau full of it would furnish the daily rations of any army. Luckily even her iron constitution could not stand the strain of such ideal living for long, and her growing anaemia threatened to undermine a constitution seriously impaired by the precepts of perfect health. A course of beef-steaks and other substantial viands loaded with uric acid restored her to her former vigour.

Thus reinforced, she plunged with the same energy as she had devoted to repelling uric acid into the embrace of Christian Science. The inhumanity of that sect towards both herself and others took complete possession of her, and when her husband complained on a bitter January morning that his smoking-room was like an icehouse, because the housemaid had forgotten

to light the fire, she had no touch of pity for him, since she knew that there was no such thing as cold or heat or pain, and therefore you could not feel cold. But now, since, according to the new creed, such things as uric acid, chromogens and purins had no existence, she could safely indulge in decent viands again. But her unhappy husband was not a real gainer in this respect, for while he ate, she tirelessly discoursed to him on the new creed, and asked him to recite with her the True Statement of Being. And on the top of that she dismissed the admirable cook, and engaged the miscreant from whom he suffered still, though Christian Science, which had allowed her cold to make so long a false claim on her, had followed the uric-acid fad into the limbo of her discarded beliefs.

But now once more she had temporarily discovered the secret of life in the teachings of the Guru, and it was, as has been mentioned, sheer Guruism that constituted the main attraction of the new creed. That then being taken for granted, she turned her mind to certain side-issues, which to a true Riseholmite were of entrancing interest. She felt a strong suspicion that Lucia contemplated annexing her Guru altogether, for otherwise she would not have returned so enthusiastic a response to her note, nor have sent Georgie to deliver it, nor have professed so violent an interest in the Guru. What then was the correctly diabolical policy to pursue? Should Daisy Quantock

refuse to take him to Mrs Lucas altogether, with a message of regret that he did not feel himself sent? Even if she did this, did she feel herself strong enough to throw down the gauntlet (in the shape of the Guru) and, using him as the attraction, challenge darling Lucia to mutual combat, in order to decide who should be the leader of all that was advanced and cultured in Riseholme society? Still following that ramification of this policy, should she bribe Georgie over to her own revolutionary camp, by promising him instruction from the Guru? Or following a less dashing line, should she take darling Lucia and Georgie into the charmed circle, and while retaining her own right of treasure trove, yet share it with them in some inner ring, dispensing the Guru to them, if they were good, in small doses?

Mrs Quantock's mind resembled in its workings the manoeuvres of a moth distracted by the glory of several bright lights. It dashed at one, got slightly singed, and forgetting all about that turned its attention to the second, and the third, taking headers into each in turn, without deciding which, on the whole, was the most enchanting of those luminaries. So, in order to curb the exuberance of these frenzied excursions she got a half sheet of paper, and noted down the alternatives that she must choose from.

„(I) Shall I keep him entirely to myself?

„(II) Shall I run him for all he is worth, and leave out L?

„(III) Shall I get G on my side?

„(IV) Shall I give L and G bits?“

She paused a moment: then remembering that he had voluntarily helped her very pretty housemaid to make the beds that morning, saying that his business (like the Prince of Wales's) was to serve, she added:

„(V) Shall I ask him to be my cook?“

For a few seconds the brightness of her eager interest was dimmed as the unworthy suspicion occurred to her that perhaps the prettiness of her housemaid had something to do with his usefulness in the bedrooms, but she instantly dismissed it. There was the bottle of brandy, too, which he had ordered from Rush's. When she had begged him to order anything he wanted and cause it to be put down to her account, she had not actually contemplated brandy. Then remembering that one of the most necessary conditions for progress in Yoga, was that the disciple should have complete confidence in the Guru, she chased that also out of her mind. But still, even when the lines of all possible policies were written down, she could come to no decision, and putting her paper by her bed, decided to sleep over it. The rhythmical sounds of hallowed breathing came steadily from next door, and she murmured „Om, Om,“ in time with them.

The hours of the morning between breakfast and lunch were the time which the inhabitants of Riseholme chiefly devoted to spying on each other. They went

about from shop to shop on household businesses, occasionally making purchases which they carried away with them in little paper parcels with convenient loops of string, but the real object of these excursions was to see what everybody else was doing, and learn what fresh interests had sprung up like mushrooms during the night. Georgie would be matching silks at the draper's, and very naturally he would carry them from the obscurity of the interior to the door in order to be certain about the shades, and keep his eye on the comings and goings in the street, and very naturally Mr Lucas on his way to the market gardener's to enquire whether he had yet received the bulbs from Holland, would tell him that Lucia had received the piano-arrangement of the Mozart trio. Georgie for his part would mention that Hermy and Ursy were expected that evening, and Peppino enriched by this item would „toddle on,“ as his phrase went, to meet and exchange confidences with the next spy. He had noticed incidentally that Georgie carried a small oblong box with hard corners, which, perfectly correctly, he conjectured to be cigarettes for Hermy and Ursy, since Georgie never smoked.

„Well, I must be toddling on,“ he said, after identifying Georgie's box of cigarettes, and being rather puzzled by a bulge in Georgie's pocket. „You'll be looking in some time this morning, perhaps.“

Georgie had not been quite sure that he would

(for he was very busy owing to the arrival of his sisters, and the necessity of going to Mr Holroyd's, in order that that artist might accurately match the shade of his hair with a view to the expensive toupet), but the mention of the arrival of the Mozart now decided him. He intended anyhow before he went home for lunch to stroll past The Hurst, and see if he did not hear-to adopt a mixed metaphor-the sound of the diligent practice of that classical morsel going on inside. Probably the soft pedal would be down, but he had marvellously acute hearing, and he would be very much surprised if he did not hear the recognisable chords, and even more surprised if, when they came to practise the piece together, Lucia did not give him to understand that she was reading it for the first time. He had already got a copy, and had practised his part last night, but then he was in the superior position of not having a husband who would inadvertently tell on him! Meantime it was of the first importance to get that particular shade of purple silk that had none of that „tarsome“ magenta-tint in it. Meantime also, it was of even greater importance to observe the movements of Riseholme.

Just opposite was the village green, and as nobody was quite close to him Georgie put on his spectacles, which he could whisk off in a moment. It was these which formed that bulge in his pocket which Peppino had noticed, but the fact of his using spectacles at all was a secret that would have to be profoundly