

## XV

*In a Country Churchyard, and afterwards; of Friends: how they take your Time while they live, and then die, upsetting your Evening's Work; and what Buck Klinker saw in the Scriptorium at 2 a. m.*

QUEED was caught, like many another rationalist before him, by the stirring beauty of the burial service of the English church.

Fifi's funeral was in the country, at a little church set down in a beautiful grove which reminds all visitors of the saying about God's first temples. Near here Mrs. Paynter was born and spent her girlhood; here Fifi, before her last illness, had come every Sabbath morning to the Sunday-school; here lay the little strip of God's acre that the now childless widow called her own. You come by the new electric line, one of those high-speed suburban roads which, all over the country, are doing so much to persuade city people back to the land. The cars are steam-road size. Two of them had been provided for the mourners, and there was no room to spare; for the Paynter family connection was large, and it seemed that little Fifi had many friends.

From Stop 11, where the little station is, your course is by the woodland path; past the little springhouse, over the tiny rustic bridge, and so on up the shady slope to the cluster of ancient pines. In the grove stood carriages; buggy horses reined to the tall trees; even that abomination around a church, the motor of the vandals. In the walk through the woods, Queed found himself side by side with a fat, scarlet-faced man, who wore a vest with brass buttons and immediately began talking to him like a lifelong friend. He was a motorman on the suburban line, it seemed, and had known Fifi very well.

"No, sir, I would n't believe it when my wife seen it in the paper and called it out to me, an' I says there's some mistake, you can be sure, and she says no, here it is in the paper, you can read it for y'self. But I would n't believe it till I went by the house on the way to my run, and there was the crape on the door. An' I tell you, suh, I could n't a felt worse if 't was one o' my own kids. Why, it seems like only the other morning she skipped onto my car, laughin' and sayin', 'How are you to-day, Mr. Barnes?' Why she and me been buddies for nigh three years, and she took my 9.30 north car every Sunday morning, rain or shine, just as reg'lar, and was the only one I ever let stand out on my platform, bein' strictly agin all rules, and my old partner Hornheim was fired for allowin' it, it ain't six months since. But what could I do when she asked me, *please, Mr. Barnes*, with that sweet face o' hers, and her rememberin' me every Christmas that came along just like I was her Pa. . . ."

The motorman talked too much, but he proved useful in finding seats up near the front, where, being fat, he took up considerably more than his share of room.

Unless Tim had taken him to the Cathedral once, twenty years ago, it was the first time that Queed had ever been inside a church. He had read Renan at fourteen, finally discarding all religious beliefs in the same year. Approximately Spencer's First Cause satisfied his reason, though he meant to buttress Spencer's contention in its weakest place and carry it deeper than Spencer did. But in fact, the exact limits he should assign to religious beliefs as an evolutionary function were still indeterminate in his system. He, like all cosmic philosophers, found this the most baffling and elusive of all his problems. Meantime, here in this little country church, he was to witness the supreme rite of the supreme religious belief. There was some compensation for his enforced attendance in that thought. He looked about him with genuine and candid interest. The hush, the dim light, the rows upon rows of sober-faced people, seemed to him properly impressive. He was struck by the wealth



of flowers massed all over the chancel, and wondered if that was its regular state. The pulpit and the lectern; the altar, which he easily identified; the stained-glass windows with their obviously symbolic pictures; the bronze pipes of the little organ; the unvested choir, whose function he vaguely made out — over all these his intelligent eye swept, curiously; and lastly it went out of the open window and lost itself in the quiet sunny woods outside.

Strange and full of wonder. This incredible instinct for adoration — this invincible insistence in believing, in defiance of all reason, that man was not born to die as the flesh dies. What, after all, was the full significance of this unique phenomenon?

*I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. . . .*

A loud resonant voice suddenly cut the hush with these words and immediately they were all standing. Queed was among the first to rise; the movement was like a reflex action. For there was something in the thrilling timbre of that voice that seemed to pull him to his feet regardless of his will; something, in fact, that impelled him to crane his neck around and peer down the dim aisle to discover immediately who was the author of it.

His eye fell on a young man advancing, clad in white robes the like of which he had never seen, and wearing the look of the morning upon his face. In his hands he bore an open book, but he did not glance at it. His head was thrown back; his eyes seemed fastened on something outside and beyond the church; and he rolled out the victorious words as though he would stake all that he held dearest in this world that their prophecy was true.

*Whom I shall see for myself, and MINE eyes shall behold, and not another. . . .*

But behind the young man rolled a little stand on wheels, on which lay a long box banked in flowers; and though the little Doctor had never been at a funeral before, and never in the presence of death, he knew that here must lie the

mortal remains of his little friend, Fifi. From this point onward Queed's interest in the service became, so to say, less purely scientific.

There was some antiphonal reciting, and then a long selection which the young man in robes read with the same voice of solemn triumph. It is doubtful if anybody in the church followed him with the fascinated attention of the young evolutionist. Soon the organ rumbled, and the little choir, standing, broke into song.

For all the Saints who from their labors rest . . .

Saints! Well, well, was it imaginable that they thought of Fifi that way *already*? Why, it was only three weeks ago that he had sent her the roses and she . . .

A black-gloved hand, holding an open book, descended out of the dim space behind him. It came to him, as by an inspiration, that the book was being offered for his use in some mysterious connection. He grasped it gingerly, and his friend the motorman, jabbing at the text with a scarlet hand, whispered raucously: "'S what they're singin'." But the singers had traveled far before the young man was able to find and follow them.

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,  
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,  
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.

The girls in the choir sang on, untroubled by a doubt:—

But lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day;  
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;  
The King of glory passes on His way.

They marched outside following the flower-banked casket into the little cemetery, and Queed stood with bared head like the others, watching the committal of dust unto dust. In the forefront of the mournful gathering, nearest the grave's edge, there stood three women heavily swathed in black. Through all the rite now, suppressed sobbing ran like a motif. Soon fell upon all ears the saddest of all



sounds, the pitiless thud of the first earth upon the stiff lid. On the other side of the irregular circle, Queed saw the coarse red motorman; tears were rolling down his fat cheeks; but never noticing them he was singing loudly, far off the key, from the book the black-gloved hand had given Queed. The hymn they were singing now also spoke surely and naturally of the saints. The same proud note, the young man observed, ran through the service from beginning to end. Hymn and prayer and reading all confidently assumed that Fifi was dead only to this mortal eye, but in another world, open to all those gathered about the grave for their seeking, she lived in some marvelously changed form — her body being made *like unto his own glorious body*. . . .

In the homeward-bound car, Queed fully recaptured his poise, and redirected his thoughts into rational channels.

The doctrine of the immortality of the soul had not a rational leg to stand on. The anima, or spirit, being merely the product of certain elements combined in life, was wiped out when those elements dissolved their union in death. It was the flame of a candle blown out. Yet with what unbelievable persistence this doctrine had survived through history. Science had annihilated it again and again, but these people resolutely stopped their ears to science. They could not answer science with argument, so they had answered her with the axe and the stake; and they were still capable of doing that whenever they thought it desirable. Strange spectacle! What was the "conflict between Religion and Science" but man's desperate struggle against his own reason? Benjamin Kidd had that right at any rate.

Yet did these people really believe their doctrine of the saved body and the saved soul? They said they did, but did they? If they believed it surely, as they believed that this night would be followed by a new day, if they believed it passionately as they believed that money is the great earthly good, then certainly the biggest of their worldly affairs would be less than a grain of sand by the sea against the everlasting glories that awaited them. Yet . . . look

at them all about him in the car, these people who told themselves that they had started Fifi on the way to be a saint, in which state they expected to remeet her. Did they so regard their worldly affairs? By to-morrow they would be at each other's throats, squabbling, cheating, slandering, lying, fighting desperately to gain some ephemeral advantage — all under the eye of the magnificent guerdon they pretended to believe in and knew they were jeopardizing by such acts. No, it was pure self-hypnosis. Weak man demanded offsets for his earthly woes, and he had concocted them in a world of his own imagining. That was the history of man's religions; the concoction of other worldly offsets for worldly woes. In their heart of hearts, all knew that they were concoctions, and the haruspices laughed when they met each other.

Supper was early at Mrs. Paynter's, as though to atone for the tardiness of yesterday. The boarders dispatched it not without recurring cheerfulness, broken now and again by fits of decorous silence. You could see that by to-morrow, or it might be next day, the house would be back in its normal swing again.

Mr. Queed withdrew to his little chamber. He trod the steps softly for once, and perhaps this was why, as he passed Mrs. Paynter's room, his usually engrossed ear caught the sound of weeping, quiet but unrestrained, ceaseless, racking weeping, running on evermore, the weeping of Rachel for her children, who would not be comforted.

The little Doctor shut the door of the Scriptorium and lit the gas. So far, his custom; but here his whim and his wont parted. Instead of seating himself at his table, where the bound *Post* for January-March, 1902, awaited his exploration, he laid himself down on his tiny bed.

If he were to die to-night, who would weep for him like that?

The thought had come unbidden to his mind and stuck in his metaphysics like a burr. Now he remembered that the question was not entirely a new one. Fifi had once asked



him who would be sorry if he died, and had answered herself by saying that she would. However, Fifi was dead, and therefore released from her promise.

Yes, Fifi was dead. He would never help her with her algebra again. The thought filled him with vague, unaccountable regrets. He felt that he would willingly take twenty minutes a night from the wrecked Schedule to have her come back, but unfortunately there was no way of arranging that now. He remembered the night he had sent Fifi out of the dining-room for coughing, and the remembrance made him distinctly uncomfortable. He rather wished that he had told Fifi he was sorry about that, but it was too late now. Still he had told her that he was her friend; he was glad to remember that. But here, from a new point of view, was the trouble about having friends. They took your time while they lived, and then they went off and died and upset your evening's work.

Clearly, Fifi left behind many sorrowful friends, as shown by her remarkable funeral. If he himself were to die, Tim and Murphy Queed would probably feel sorrowful, but they would hardly come to the funeral. For one thing, Tim could not come because of his duties on the force, and Murphy, for all he knew, was undergoing incarceration. About the only person he could think of as a probable attendant at his graveside was William Klinker. Yes, Buck would certainly be there, though it was asking a good deal to expect him to weep. A funeral consisting of only one person would look rather odd to those who were familiar with such crowded churches as that he had seen to-day. People passing by would nudge each other and say that the dead must have led an eccentric life, indeed, to be so alone at the end. . . . Come to think of it, though, there would n't be any funeral. He had nothing to do with those most interesting but clearly barbaric rites. Of course his body would be cremated by directions in the will. The operation would be private, attracting no attention from anybody. Buck would make the arrangements. He tried to picture Buck weeping near the incinerator, and failed.

Then there was his father, whom, in twenty-four years' sharing of the world together, he had never met. The man's behavior was odd, to say the least. From the world's point of view he had declined to own his son. For such an unusual breach of custom, there must be some adequate explanation, and the circumstances all pointed one way. This was that his mother (whom his boyhood had pictured as a woman of distinction who had eloped with somebody far beneath her) had failed to marry his father. The persistent mystery about his birth had always made him skeptical of Tim's statement that he had been present at the marriage. But he rarely thought of the matter at all now. The moral responsibility was none of his; and as for a name, Queed was as good as any other. X or Y was a good enough name for a real man, whose life could demonstrate his utter independence of the labels so carefully pasted upon him by environment and circumstance.

Still, if he were to die, he felt that his father, if yet alive, should come forward and weep for him, even as Mrs. Paynter was weeping for Fifi down in the Second Front. He should stand out like a man and take from Buck's hand the solemn ceremonies of cremation. He tried to picture his father weeping near the incinerator, and failed, partly owing to the mistiness surrounding that gentleman's bodily appearance. He felt that his father was dodging his just responsibilities. For the first time in his life he perceived that, under certain circumstances, it might be an advantage to have some definite individual to whom you can point and say: "There goes my father."

As it was, it all came down to him and Buck. He and Buck were alone in the world together. He rather clung to the thought of Buck, and instantly caught himself at it. Very well; let him take it that way then. Take Buck as a symbol of the world, of those friendships which played such certain havoc with a man's Schedule. Was he glad that he had Buck or was he not?

The little Doctor lay on his back in the glare thinking



things out. The gas in his eyes was an annoyance, but he did not realize it, and so did not get up, as another man would have done, and put it out.

Certainly it was an extraordinary thing that the only critics he had ever had in his life had all three attacked his theory of living at precisely the same point. They had all three urged him to get in touch with his environment. He himself could unanswerably demonstrate that in such degree as he succeeded in isolating himself from his environment — at least until his great work was done — in just that degree would his life be successful. But these three seemed to declare, with the confidence of those who state an axiom, that in just that degree was his life a failure. Of course they could not demonstrate their contention as he could demonstrate his, but the absence of reasoning did not appear to shake their assurance in the smallest. Here then was another apparent conflict of instinct with reason: their instinct with his reason. Perhaps he might have dismissed the whole thing as merely their religion, but that his father, with that mysterious letter of counsel, was among them. He did not picture his father as a religious man. Besides, Fifi, asked point-blank if that was her religion, had denied, assuring him, singularly enough, that it was only common-sense.

And among them, among all the people that had touched him in this new life, there was no denying that he had had some curiously unsettling experiences.

He had been ready to turn the pages of the book of life for Fifi, an infant at his knee, and all at once Fifi had taken the book from his hands and read aloud, in a language which was quite new to him, a lecture on his own shortcomings. There was no denying that her question about his notions on altruism had given him an odd, arresting glimpse of himself from a new peak. He had set out in his pride to punish Mr. Pat, and Mr. Pat had severely punished him, revealing him humiliatingly to himself as a physical incompetent. He had dismissed Buck Klinker as a faintly

amusing brother to the ox, and now Buck Klinker was giving him valuable advice about his editorial work, to say nothing of jerking him by the ears toward physical competency. He had thought to honor the *Post* by contributing of his wisdom to it, and the *Post* had replied by contemptuously kicking him out. He had laughed at Colonel Cowles's editorials, and now he was staying out of bed of nights slavishly struggling to imitate them. He had meant to give Miss Weyland some expert advice some day about the running of her department, and suddenly she had turned about and stamped him as an all-around failure, meet not for reverence, but the laughter and pity of men.

So far as he knew, nobody in the world admired him. They might admire his work, but him personally they felt sorry for or despised. Few even admired his work. The *Post* had given him satisfactory proof of that. Conant, Willoughby, and Smathers would admire it — yes, wish to the Lord that they had written it. But would that fill his cup to overflowing? By the way, had not Fifi asked him that very question, too — whether he would consider a life of that sort a successful life? Well — would he? Or could it imaginably be said that Fifi, rather, had had a successful life, as evidenced by her profoundly interesting funeral?

Was it possible that a great authority on human society could make himself an even greater authority by personally assuming a part in the society which he theoretically administered? Was it possible that he was missing some factor of large importance by his addiction to isolation and a schedule?

In short, was it conceivable that he had it all wrong from the beginning, as the young lady Charles Weyland had said?

The little Doctor lay still on his bed and his precious minutes slipped into hours. . . . If he finished his book at twenty-seven, what would he do with the rest of his life? Besides defending it from possible criticism, besides expounding and amplifying it a little further as need seemed to be, there would be no more work for him to do. Supreme



essence of philosophy, history, and all science as it was, it was the final word of human wisdom. You might say that with it the work of the world was done. How then should he spend the remaining thirty or forty years of his life? As matters stood now he had, so to say, twenty years start on himself. Through the peculiar circumstances of his life, he had reached a point in his reading and study at twenty-four which another man could not hope to reach before he was forty-five or fifty. Other men had done daily work for a livelihood, and had only their evenings for their heart's desire. Spencer was a civil engineer. Mill was a clerk in an India house. Comte taught mathematics. But he, in all his life, had not averaged an hour a week's enforced distraction: all had gone to his own work. You might say that he was entitled to a heavy arrears in this direction. If he liked, he could idle for ten years, twenty years, and still be more than abreast of his age.

And as it was, he could not pretend that he had kept the faith, that he was inviolably holding his Schedule unspotted from the world. No, he himself had outraged and deflowered the Schedule. Klinker's Exercises and the *Post* were deliberate impieties. And he could not say that they had the sanction of his reason. The exercises had only a partial sanction; the *Post* no sanction at all. Both were but sops to wounded pride. Here, then, was a pretty situation: he, the triumphant rationalist, the toy of utterly irrational impulses — of an utterly irrational instinct. And this new impulse tugging at his inside, driving him to heed the irrational advice of his critics — what could it be but part and parcel of the same mysterious but apparently deep-seated instinct? And what was the real significance of this instinct, and what in the name of Jerusalem was the matter with him anyway?

He was twenty-four years old, without upbringing, and utterly alone in the world. He had raised himself, body and soul, out of printed books, and about all the education he

ever had was half an hour's biting talk from Charles Weyland. Of course he did not recognize his denied youth when it rose and fell upon him, but he did recognize that his assailant was doughty. He locked arms with it and together they fell into undreamed depths.

Buck Klinker, returning from some stag devilry at the hour of two A. M., and attracted to the Scriptorium by the light under the door, found the little Doctor pacing the floor in his stocking feet, with the gas blazing and the shade up as high as it would go. He halted in his marchings to stare at Buck with wild unrecognition, and his face looked so white and fierce that honest Buck, like the good friend he was, only said, "Well — good-night, Doc," and unobtrusively withdrew.