The Man Who Disliked Cats

P. G. Wodehouse

It was Harold who first made us acquainted, when I was dining one night at the Cafe Britannique, in Soho. It is a peculiarity of the Cafe Britannique that you will always find flies there, even in winter. Snow was falling that night as I turned in at the door, but, glancing about me, I noticed several of the old faces. My old acquaintance, Percy the bluebottle, looking wonderfully fit despite his years, was doing deep breathing exercises on a mutton cutlet, and was too busy to do more than pause for a moment to nod at me; but his cousin, Harold, always active, sighted me and bustled up to do the honours.

He had finished his game of touch-last with my right ear, and was circling slowly in the air while he thought out other ways of entertaining me, when there was a rush of air, a swish of napkin, and no more Harold.

I turned to thank my preserver, whose table adjoined mine. He was a Frenchman, a melancholy-looking man. He had the appearance of one who has searched for the leak in life's gas-pipe with a lighted candle; of one whom the clenched fist of Fate has smitten beneath the temperamental third waistcoat-button.

He waved my thanks aside. 'It was a bagatelle,' he said. We became friendly. He moved to my table, and we fraternized over our coffee.

Suddenly he became agitated. He kicked at something on the floor. His eyes gleamed angrily.

'Ps-s-st!' he hissed. 'Va-t'en!'

I looked round the corner of the table, and perceived the restaurant cat in dignified retreat.

'You do not like cats?' I said.

'I 'ate all animals, monsieur. Cats especially.' He frowned. He seemed to hesitate.

'I will tell you my story,' he said. 'You will sympathize. You have a sympathetic face. It is the story of a man's tragedy. It is the story of a blighted life. It is the story of a woman who would not forgive. It is the story--'

'I've got an appointment at eleven,' I said.

He nodded absently, drew at his cigarette, and began:

I have conceived my ’atred of animals, monsieur, many years ago in Paris. Animals are to me a symbol for the lost dreams of youth, for ambitions foiled, for artistic impulses cruelly stifled. You are astonished. You ask why I say these things. I shall tell you.

I am in Paris, young, ardent, artistic. I wish to paint pictures. I ’ave the genius, the ent’usiasm. I wish to be disciple of the great Bouguereau. But no. I am dependent for support upon an uncle. He is rich. He is proprietor of the great Hotel Jules Priaulx. My name is also Priaulx. He is not sympathetic. I say, ’Uncle, I ’ave the genius, the ent’usiasm. Permit me to paint.’ He shakes his head. He say, ‘I will give you position in my hotel, and you shall earn your living.’ What choice? I weep, but I kill my dreams, and I become cashier at my uncle’s hotel at a salary of thirty-five francs a week. I, the artist, become a machine for the changing of money at dam bad salary. What would you? What choice? I am dependent. I go to the hotel, and there I learn to ’ate all animals. Cats especially.

I will tell you the reason. My uncle’s hotel is fashionable hotel. Rich Americans, rich Maharajahs, rich people of every nation come to my uncle’s hotel. They come, and with them they have brought their pets. Monsieur, it was the existence of a nightmare. Wherever I have looked there are animals. Listen. There is an Indian prince. He has with him two dromedaries. There is also one other Indian prince. With him is a giraffe. The giraffe drink every day one dozen best champagne to keep his coat good. I, the artist, have my bock, and my coat is not good. There is a guest with a young lion. There is a guest with an alligator. But especially there is a cat. He is fat. His name is Alexander. He belongs to an American woman. She is fat. She exhibits him to me. He is wrapped in a silk and fur creation like an opera cloak. Every day she exhibits him. It is ’Alexander this’ and ’Alexander that’, till I ’ate Alexander very much. I ’ate all the animals, but especially Alexander.

And so, monsieur, it goes on, day by day, in this hotel that is a Zoological Garden. And every day I ’ate the animals the more. But especially Alexander.

We artists, monsieur, we are martyrs to our nerves. It became insupportable, this thing. Each day it became more insupportable. At night I dream of all the animals, one by one--the giraffe, the two dromedaries, the young lion, the alligator, and Alexander. Especially Alexander. You have ’eard of men who cannot endure the society of a cat--how they cry out and jump in the air if a cat is among those present. *Hein*? Your Lord Roberts? Precisely, monsieur. I have read so much. Listen, then. I am become by degrees almost like ’im. I do not cry out and jump in the air when I see the cat Alexander, but I grind my teeth and I ’ate ’im.

Yes, I am the sleeping volcano, and one morning, monsieur, I have suffered the eruption. It

is like this. I shall tell you.

Not only at that time am I the martyr to nerves, but also to toothache. That morning I 'ave 'ad the toothache very bad. I 'ave been in pain the most terrible. I groan as I add up the figures in my book.

As I groan I 'ear a voice.

'Say good morning to M. Priaulx, Alexander.' Conceive my emotions, monsieur, when this fat, beastly cat is placed before me upon my desk!

It put the cover upon it. No, that is not the phrase. The lid. It put the lid upon it. All my smothered 'atred of the animal burst forth. I could no longer conceal my 'atred.

I rose. I was terrible. I seized 'im by the tail. I flung him--I did not know where. I did not care. Not then. Afterwards, yes, but not then.

Your Longfellow has a poem. 'I shot an arrow into the air. It fell to earth, I know not where.' And then he has found it. The arrow in the 'eart of a friend. Am I right? Also was that the tragedy with me. I flung the cat Alexander. My uncle, on whom I am dependent, is passing at the moment. He has received the cat in the middle of his face.

My companion, with the artist's instinct for the 'curtain', paused. He looked round the brightly-lit restaurant. From every side arose the clatter of knife and fork, and the clear, sharp note of those who drank soup. In a distant corner a small waiter with a large voice was calling the cook names through the speaking-tube. It was a cheerful scene, but it brought no cheer to my companion. He sighed heavily and resumed:

I 'urry over that painful scene. There is blooming row. My uncle is 'ot-tempered man. The cat is 'eavy cat. I 'ave thrown 'im very hard, for my nerves and my toothache and my 'atred 'ave given me the giant's strength. Alone is this enough to enrage my 'ot-tempered uncle. I am there in his hotel, you will understand, as cashier, not as cat-thrower. And now, besides all this, I have insulted valuable patron. She 'ave left the hotel that day.

There are no doubts in my mind as to the outcome. With certainty I await my conge. *And after painful scene I get it. I am to go. At once. He 'ave assured the angry American woman that I go at once.*

He has called me into his private office. 'Jean,' he has said to me, at the end of other things, 'you are a fool, dolt, no-good imbecile. I give you good place in my hotel, and you spend

your time flinging cats. I will 'ave no more of you. But even now I cannot forget that you are my dear brother's child. I will now give you one thousand francs and never see you again.'

I have thanked him, for to me it is wealth. Not before have I ever had one thousand francs of my own.

I go out of the hotel. I go to a cafe *and order a bock. I smoke a cigarette. It is necessary that I think out plans. Shall I with my one thousand francs rent a studio in the Quarter and commence my life as artist? No. I have still the genius, the ent'usiasm, but I have not the training. To train myself to paint pictures I must study long, and even one thousand francs will not last for ever. Then what shall I do? I do not know. I order one other bock, and smoke more cigarettes, but still I do not know.*

And then I say to myself, 'I will go back to my uncle, and plead with him. I will seize favourable opportunity. I will approach him after dinner when he is in good temper. But for that I must be close at hand. I must be--what's your expression?--"Johnny-on-the-spot".'

My mind is made up. I have my plan.

I have gone back to my uncle's hotel, and I have engaged not too expensive bedroom. My uncle does not know. He still is in his private office. I secure my room.

I dine cheaply that night, but I go to theatre and also to supper after the theatre, for have I not my thousand francs? It is late when I reach my bedroom.

I go to bed. I go to sleep.

But I do not sleep long. I am awakened by a voice.

It is a voice that says, 'Move and I shoot! Move and I shoot!' I lie still. I do not move. I am courageous, but I am unarmed.

And the voice says again, 'Move and I shoot!' Is it robbers? Is it some marauder who has made his way to my room to plunder me?

I do not know. Per'aps I think yes.

'Who are you?' I have asked.

There is no answer.

I take my courage in my 'ands. I leap from my bed. I dash for the door. No pistol has been fire. I have reached the passage, and have shouted for assistance.

Hotel officials run up. Doors open. 'What is it?' voices cry.

'There is in my room an armed robber,' I assure them.

And then I have found--no, I am mistaken. My door, you will understand, is open. And as I have said these words, a large green parrot comes 'opping out. My assassin is nothing but a green parrot.

'Move and I shoot!' it has said to those gathered in the corridor. It then has bitten me in the 'and and passed on.

I am chagrined, monsieur. But only for a moment. Then I forget my chagrin. For a voice from a door that 'as opened says with joy, 'It is my Polly, which I 'ave this evening lost I'

I turn. I gasp for admiration. It is a beautiful lady in a pink dressing-gown which 'ave spoken these words.

She has looked at me. I 'ave looked at her. I forget everything but that she is adorable. I forget those who stand by. I forget that the parrot has bitten me in the 'and. I forget even that I am standing there in pyjamas, with on my feet nothing. I can only gaze at her and worship.

I have found words.

'Mademoiselle,' I have said, 'I am rejoiced that I have been the means of restoring to you your bird.'

She has thanked me with her eyes, and then with words also. I am bewitched. She is divine. I care not that my feet are cold. I could wish to stand there talking all night.

She has given a cry of dismay.

'Your 'and! It is wounded!'

I look at my 'and. Yes, it is bleeding, where the bird 'ave bitten it.

'Tchut, mademoiselle,' I have said. 'It is a bagatelle.'

But no. She is distressed. She is what your poet Scott 'ave said, a ministering angel thou. She 'ave torn her 'andkerchief and is binding up my wound. I am enchanted. Such beauty! Such kindness! 'Ardly can I resist to fall on my knees before 'er and declare my passion.

We are twin souls. She has thanked me again. She has scolded the parrot. She has smiled upon me as she retires to her room. It is enough. Nothing is said, but I am a man of sensibility and discernment, and I understand that she will not be offended if I seek to renew our friendship on a more suitable occasion.

The doors shut. The guests have returned to bed, the hotel servants to their duties. And I go back to my room. But not to sleep. It is very late, but I do not sleep. I lie awake and think of 'er.

You will conceive, Monsieur, with what mixed feelings I descend next morning. On the one 'and, I must keep the sharp look-out for my uncle, for 'im I must avoid till he shall have--what do you say in your idiom? Yes, I have it--simmered down and tucked in his shirt. On the other 'and, I must watch for my lady of the parrot. I count the minutes till we shall meet again.

I avoid my uncle with success, and I see 'er about the hour of dejeuner. *She is talking to old gentleman. I have bowed. She have smiled and motioned me to approach.*

'Father,' she has said, 'this is the gentleman who caught Polly.'

We have shaken hands. He is indulgent papa. He has smiled and thanked me also. We have confided to each other our names. He is English. He owns much land in England. He has been staying in Paris. He is rich. His name is 'Enderson. He addresses his daughter, and call her Marion. In my 'eart I also call her Marion. You will perceive that I am, as you say, pretty far gone.

The hour of dejeuner *has arrived. I entreat them to be my guests. I can run to it, you understand, for there are still in my pockets plenty of my uncle's francs. They consent. I am in 'eaven.*

All is well. Our friendship has progressed with marvellous speed. The old gentleman and I are swiftly the dear old pals. I 'ave confided to 'im my dreams of artistic fame, and he has told me 'ow much he dislikes your Lloyd George. He has mentioned that he and Miss Marion depart for London that day. I am desolate. My face tumbles. He has observed my despair. He has invited me to visit them in London.

Imagine my chagrin. To visit them in London is the one thing I desire to do. But how? I accept gratefully, but I ask myself how it is to be done? I am poor blighter with no

profession and nine 'undred francs. He 'as taken it for granted that I am wealthy.

What shall I do? I spend the afternoon trying to form a plan. And then I am resolved. I will go to my uncle and say: 'Uncle, I have the magnificent chance to marry the daughter of wealthy English landowner. Already I 'ave her gratitude. Soon--for I am young, 'andsome, debonair--I shall 'ave her love. Give me one more chance, uncle. Be decent old buck, and put up the money for this affair.'

These words I have resolved to say to my uncle.

I go back to the hotel. I enter his private office. I reveal no secret when I say that he is not cordial.

'Ten thousand devils!' he has cried. 'What do you here?'

I 'asten to tell him all, and plead with him to be decent old buck. He does not believe.

Who is he? he asks. This English landowner? How did I meet him? And where?

I tell him. He is amazed.

'You 'ad the infernal impudence to take room in my hotel?' he has cried.

I am crafty. I am diplomat.

'Where else, dear uncle?' I say. 'In all Paris there is no such 'ome from 'ome. The cuisine--marvellous! The beds--of rose-leaves! The attendance--superb! If only for one night, I have said to myself, I must stay in this of all hotels.'

I 'ave--what do you say?--touched the spot.

'In what you say,' he has said, more calmly, 'there is certainly something. It is a good hotel, this of mine!'

The only hotel, I have assured him. The Meurice? Chut! *I snap my fingers. The Ritz? Bah! Once again I snap my fingers. 'In all Paris there is no hotel like this.'*

He 'as simmered down. His shirt is tucked in. 'Tell me again this plan of yours, Jean.'

When I leave 'im we have come to an understanding. It is agreed between us that I am to 'ave one last chance. He will not spoil this promising ship for the 'a'porth of tar. He will give me money for my purpose. But he has said, as we part, if I fail, his 'ands shall be

washed of me. He cannot now forget that I am his dear brother's child; but if I fail to accomplish the conquest of the divine Miss Marion, he thinks he will be able to.

It is well. A week later I follow the 'Endersons to London.

For the next few days, monsieur, I am in Paradise. My 'ost has much nice 'ouse in Eaton Square. He is rich, popular. There is much society. And I--I have the succes fou. *I am young, 'andsome, debonair. I cannot speak the English very well--not so well as I now speak 'im--but I manage. I get along. I am intelligent, amiable. Everyone loves me.*

No, not everyone. Captain Bassett, he does not love me. And why? Because he loves the charming Miss Marion, and observes that already I am succeeding with her like a 'ouse on fire. He is ami de famille. *He is captain in your Garde Ecossais, and my 'ost told me 'e has distinguished himself as soldier pretty much. It may be so. As soldier, per'aps. But at conversation he is not so good. He is quite nice fellow, you understand--'andsome, yes; distinguished, yes. But he does not sparkle. He has not my* verve, *my* elan. *I--how do you say?--I make the rings round him.*

But, Chut*! At that moment I would have made the rings round the 'ole British Army. Yes, and also the Corps Diplomatique. For I am inspired. Love 'as inspired me. I am conqueror.*

But I will not weary you, monsieur, with the details of my wooing. You are sympathetic, but I must not weary you. Let us say that I 'ave in four days or five made progress the most remarkable, and proceed to the tragic end.

Almost could I tell it in four words. In them one would say that it is set forth. There was in London at that time popular a song, a comic, vulgar song of the 'Alls, 'The Cat Came Back'. You 'ave 'eard it? Yes? I 'eard it myself, and without emotion. It had no sinister warning for me. It did not strike me as omen. Yet, in those four words, monsieur, is my tragedy.

How? I shall tell you. Every word is a sword twisted in my 'eart, but I shall tell you.

One afternoon we are at tea. All is well. I am vivacious, gay; Miss Marion, charming, gracious. There is present also an aunt, Mr 'Enderson's sister; but 'er I do not much notice. It is to Marion I speak--both with my lips and also with my eyes.

As we sit, Captain Bassett is announced.

He has entered. We have greeted each other politely but coldly, for we are rivals. There is in his manner also a something which I do not much like--a species of suppressed triumph, of elation.

I am uneasy--but only yet vaguely, you will understand. I have not the foreboding that he is about to speak my death-sentence.

He addresses Miss Marion. There is joy in his voice. 'Miss 'Enderson,' he has said, 'I have for you the bally good news. You will remember, isn't it, the cat belonging to the American woman in the hotel at Paris, of which you have spoken to me? Last night at dinner I have been seated beside her. At first I am not certain is it she. Then I say that there cannot be two Mrs Balderstone Rockmettlers in Europe, so I mention to her the cat. And, to cut the long story short, I have ventured to purchase for you as a little present the cat Alexander.'

I have uttered a cry of horror, but it is not 'eard because of Miss Marion's cry of joy.

'Oh, Captain Bassett,' she has said, 'how very splendid of you! Ever since I first saw him have I loved Alexander. I cannot tell you how grateful I am. But it amazes me that you should have been able to induce her to part with 'im. In Paris she has refused all my offers.'

He has paused, embarrassed.

'The fact is,' he has said, 'there is between her and Alexander a certain coolness. He 'as deceived 'er, and she loves him no more. Immediately upon arrival in London, he had the misfortune to 'ave six fine kittens. 'Owever, out of evil cometh good, and I have thus been able to secure 'im for you. 'E is downstairs in a basket!'

Miss Marion 'as rung the bell and commanded for him to be brought instantly.

I will not describe the meeting, monsieur. You are sympathetic. You will understand my feelings. Let us 'urry on.

Figure yourself, monsieur, to what extent I was now 'arassed. I am artist. I am a man of nerves. I cannot be gay, brilliant, debonair in the presence of a cat. Yet always the cat is there. It is terrible.

I feel that I am falling behind in the race. 'Er gratitude has made her the more gracious to Captain Bassett. She smiles upon him. And, like Chanticleer at the sight of the sun, he flaps his wings and crows. He is no longer the silent listener. It is I who have become the silent listener.

I have said to myself that something must be done.

Chance has shown me the way. One afternoon I am by fortune alone in the 'all. In his cage the parrot Polly is 'opping. I address him through the bars.

'Move and I shoot I' he has cried.

The tears have filled my eyes. 'Ow it has brought the 'ole scene back to me!

As I weep, I perceive the cat Alexander approaching.

I have formed a plan. I have opened the cage-door and released the parrot. The cat, I think, will attack the parrot of which Miss 'Enderson is so fond. She will love him no more. He will be expelled.

He paused. I suppose my face must have lost some of its alleged sympathy as he set forth this fiendish plot. Even Percy the bluebottle seemed shocked. He had settled on the sugar-bowl, but at these words he rose in a marked manner and left the table.

'You do not approve?' he said.

I shrugged my shoulders.

'It's no business of mine,' I said. 'But don't you think yourself it was playing it a bit low down? Didn't the thought present itself to you in a shadowy way that it was rather rough on the bird?'

'It did, monsieur. But what would you? It is necessary to break eggs in order to make an omelette. All is fair, you say, in love and war, and this was both. Moreover, you must understand, I do not dictate his movements to the parrot. He is free agent. I do but open the cage-door. Should he 'op out and proceed to the floor where is the cat, that is his affair. I shall continue, yes?'

Alors! *I open the cage-door and disappear discreetly. It is not politic that I remain to witness what shall transpire. It is for me to establish an alibi. I go to the drawing-room, where I remain.*

At dinner that night Mr 'Enderson has laughed.

'In the 'all this afternoon,' he has said, 'I have seen by chance the dickens of a funny

occurrence. That parrot of yours, Marion, had escaped once again from its cage and was 'aving an argument with that cat which Captain Bassett has given to you.'

'Oh! I hope that Alexander 'as not hurt poor Polly, of whom I am very fond,' she has said.

'The affair did not come to blows,' has said Mr 'Enderson. 'You may trust that bird to take care of himself, my dear. When I came upon the scene the cat was crouching in a corner, with his fur bristling and his back up, while Polly, standing before 'im, was telling 'im not to move or he would shoot. Nor did he move, till I 'ad seized the parrot and replaced him in the cage, when he shot upstairs like a streak of lightning. By sheer force of character that excellent bird 'ad won the bloodless victory. I drink to 'im!'

You can conceive my emotion as I listen to this tale. I am like the poet's mice and men whose best-kid schemes have gone away. I am baffled. I am discouraged. I do not know what I shall do. I must find another plan, but I do not know what.

How shall I remove the cat? Shall I kill 'im? No, for I might be suspect.

Shall I 'ire someone to steal 'im? No, for my accomplice might betray me.

Shall I myself steal 'im? Ah! that is better. That is a very good plan.

Soon I have it perfected, this plan. Listen, monsieur; it is as follows. It is simple, but it is good. I will await my opportunity. I will remove the cat secretly from the 'ouse. I will take him to an office of the District Messenger Boys. I will order a messenger to carry him at once to the Cats' House, and to request M. le Directeur immediately to destroy him. It is a simple plan, but it is good.

I carry it through without a 'itch. It is not so difficult to secure the cat. 'E is asleep in the drawing-room. There is nobody at hand. I have in my bedroom a 'at-box which I have brought from Paris. I have brought it with me to the drawing-room. I have placed in it the cat. I have escaped from the 'ouse. The cat has uttered a cry, but none has 'eard. I have reached the office of the District Messenger Boys. I have 'anded over the cat in its box. The manager is courteous, sympathetic. A messenger has started in a cab for the Cats' House. I have breathed a sigh of relief. I am saved.

That is what I say to myself as I return. My troubles are over, and once more I can be gay, debonair, vivacious with Miss Marion, for no longer will there be present the cat Alexander to 'arass me.

When I have returned there is commotion in the 'ouse. I pass on the stairs domestics calling 'Puss, puss!' The butler is chirruping loudly and poking beneath the furniture with

a umbrella. All is confusion and agitation.

In the drawing-room is Miss Marion. She is distressed.

'Nowhere,' she has said, 'can there be found the cat Alexander of whom I am so fond. Nowhere in the 'ouse is he, Where can he be? He is lost.'

I am gentle, sympathetic. I endeavour to console her. I 'int to her that am I not sufficient substitute for a beastly cat? She is, however, inconsolable. I must be patient. I must wait my time.

Captain Bassett is announced. He is informed of what has 'appened. He is distressed. He has the air as if he, too, would endeavour to be gentle, sympathetic. But I am Johnny-on-the-spot. I stay till he 'as gone.

Next day again it is 'Puss, puss!' Again the butler has explored under the furniture with the umbrella. Again Miss Marion is distressed. Again 'ave I endeavoured to console.

This time I think I am not so unsuccessful. I am, you understand, young, 'andsome, sympathetic. In another two ticks I am about to seize 'er 'and and declare my passion.

But, before I can do so, Captain Bassett is announced.

I gaze at him as at unsuccessful rival. I am confident. I am conqueror. Ah, I little know! It is in the moments of our highest 'ope, monsieur, that we are destroyed.

Captain Bassett, he, too, 'as the air of the conqueror.

He has begun to speak.

'Miss 'Enderson,' he has said, 'I have once more the bally good news. I rather fancy that I 'ave tracked down the missing Alexander, do you not know?'

Miss Marion 'as cried cut with joy. But I am calm, for is not Alexander already yesterday destroyed?

'It is like this,' he has resumed. 'I have thought to myself where is lost cat most likely to be? And I have answered, "In the Cats' House." I go this morning to the Cats' House, and there I see a cat which is either lost Alexander or his living image. Exactly is he the same to all appearances as the lost Alexander. But there is, when I try to purchase 'im, some curious 'itch which they do not explain. They must 'ave time, they say, to consider. They cannot at once decide.'

'Why, what nonsense!' Miss Marion 'ave cried. 'If the cat is my cat, surely then must they return 'im to me! Come,' she has said, 'let us all three at once in a taxi-cab go to the Cats' House. If the all three of us identify the lost Alexander, then must they return 'im.'

Monsieur, I am uneasy. I have foreboding. But I go. What choice? We go in a taxi-cab to the Cats' House.

The directeur *is courteous and sympathetic. He has introduced us to the cat, and my 'eart 'as turned to water, for it is Alexander. Why has he not been destroyed?*

The directeur *is speaking. I 'ear him in a dream.*

'If you identify 'im as your cat, miss,' he has said, 'the matter is ended. My 'esitation when you, sir, approached me this morning on the matter was due to the fact that a messenger was sent with instructions that he be destroyed at once.'

'Rather rough, wasn't it, that, on the messenger, yes,' Captain Bassett has said. He is facetious, you understand, for he is conqueror.

I am silent. I am not facetious. For already I feel--how do you say?--my fowl is cooked.

'Not the messenger, sir,' the directeur *has said. 'You 'ave misunderstood me. It was the cat which was to be destroyed as per instructions of the anonymous sender.'*

'Who could have played such a wicked trick?' Miss Marion has asked, indignant.

The directeur *has stooped, and from behind a table he has brought a 'at-box.*

'In this,' he has said, 'the above animal was conveyed. But with it was no accompanying letter. The sender was anonymous.'

'Per'aps,' Captain Bassett has said--and still more in a dream I 'ear him--'per'aps on the 'at-box there is some bally name or other, do you not know--what?'

I clutch at the table. The room is spinning round and round. I have no stomach--only emptiness.

'Why, bless me,' the directeur *has said, 'you're quite right, sir. So there is. Funny of me not to have before observed it. There is a name, and also an address. It is the name of Jean Priaulx, and the address is the Hotel Jules Priaulx, Paris.'*

My companion stopped abruptly. He passed a handkerchief over his forehead. With a quick movement he reached for his glass of liqueur brandy and drained it at a gulp.

'Monsieur,' he said, 'you will not wish me to describe the scene? There is no need for me-- hein?*--to be Zolaesque. You can imagine?'*

'She chucked you?' In moments of emotion it is the simplest language that comes to the lips.

He nodded.

'And married Captain Bassett?'

He nodded again.

'And your uncle?' I said. 'How did he take it?'

He sighed.

'There was once more,' he said, 'blooming row, monsieur.'

'He washed his hands of you?'

'Not altogether. He was angry, but he gave me one more chance. I am still 'is dear brother's child, and he cannot forget it. An acquaintance of his, a man of letters, a M. Paul Sartines, was in need of a secretary. The post was not well paid, but it was permanent. My uncle insist that I take it. What choice? I took it. It is the post which I still 'old.'

He ordered another liqueur brandy and gulped it down.

'The name is familiar to you, monsieur? You 'ave 'eard of M. Sartines?'

'I don't think I have. Who is he?'

'He is a man of letters, a savant. *For five years he has been occupied upon a great work. It is with that that I assist him by collecting facts for 'is use. I 'ave spent this afternoon in the British Museum collecting facts. Tomorrow I go again. And the next day. And again after that. The book will occupy yet another ten years before it is completed. It is his great work.'*

'It sounds as if it was,' I said. 'What's it about?'

He signalled to the waiter.

*‘*Garcon*, one other liqueur brandy. The book, monsieur, is a ’*Istory of the Cat in Ancient Egypt.*’*