

The Worldly Affairs of Lord Gosham

by Kurt M. Schiller

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For my wife, Denise.

Foreward

Welcome, friend! No doubt you have many questions about the text before you. Who is Lord Gosham? Where did he live? What, exactly, were his affairs? Well, have no fear, because I, Winslow Thaddings, am all too happy to explain everything! As president and founder of the Pendleton Historical Society, you could hardly find a better source of information and insight into the life of Henrius Gosham, a most singular man who has now sadly been forgotten by modern popular history.

The story of Lord Gosham is really the story of Pendleton County, which was incorporated in 1523 out of the greater Haversham borough, by decree of the Bishop of Densom. It is largely moorland, with the exception of a few intriguing geological features which I hope to address later, time and space permitting. Until 1721 it was overseen by the Sheriff of Pendleton, at which time the shire was abolished and a new council of freeholders was installed, reflecting the trends of the time. The council included representatives of all the major families of Pendleton and was solvent until 1827, when the entirety of the council perished in a mysterious fire that consumed the council hall and much of the town of Dundle. From that point on, Pendleton has had no centralized government, even to the present day.

In Lord Gosham's time, there were just three towns within the borders of the county Pendleton: Coddlesley, along the northern border with Wymlick county; Dundle, located near the middle of the county in the heart of the moors and today largely abandoned and accessible only by a series of rickety bridges; and lastly Grafley-on-Stratton, which lay in the forest that could then be found along the border with Shefton county, although no traces of either Grafley-on-Stratton or the surrounding forest now remain.

Throughout its storied history, Pendleton has been home to people of all walks of life, from criminals to aristocrats. Lord Henrius Gosham was perhaps the most famous member of this latter class, although his esteemed and storied lineage has lived in the county from its founding in the sixteenth century. The House of Gosham received its title in the crusades, in recognition of what was in truth an ill-advised and misguided military excursion into North Africa led by Severin Gosham, the first Lord Gosham.

I am extremely fortunate to have been granted permission to reproduce a collection of journals authored by Lord Henrius Gosham. Under normal circumstances they remain scattered throughout the private collections of a variety of experts on antiquities, and due to their fragile nature have never

before seen the true light of day. It's this collection that forms the backbone of the work you now have before you.

To the best of our knowledge, Henrius Gosham began keeping a daily journal starting in the summer of 1892, shortly after an eventful hunting excursion to South America. Those early journals are sadly lost to the excesses of time and overzealous historians, but a number of the later volumes were preserved thanks to the valiant efforts of Elizabeth Boddinger, the daughter of one of Lord Gosham's housekeepers. Those later journals are largely intact from the summer of 1904 and beyond, with only a few omissions. They give an interesting (although at times perplexing) glimpse into the life and goings-on of the county Pendleton, and a time which modern history has now largely forgotten.

But I think my little introduction has gone on long enough, and it's really better to let these remarkable volumes speak for themselves. So with that, I hope you will join me in exploring the fascinating history of Pendleton County and the life of its most famous resident, Lord Henrius Gosham.

Winslow Thaddings

Chairman and Founder, Pendleton Historical Society

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Concerning Henrius's Return from
Abroad, the Hiring of Manservants,
and the Cemetery Society

We begin our exploration of the Lord Gosham's journals with the first entry in the earliest dated journal in the collection. He appears to have started a new volume upon his return from a trip to Morocco, which can be assumed to have lasted for several months. Perhaps because of his family's history on the African continent, he seems reticent to record any exact details of the trip beyond vague anecdotes.

- Winslow

22 June, 1904

Having recently returned from Morocco and the dark African continent, I have found myself with a considerable amount of time on my hands. I summoned Cheshire first thing this morning and instructed him to begin cleaning up the mighty dust that has accumulated in my absence. As always, dust is an endless nuisance in Mossthorpe, a little interfering powder that settles on me and my possessions with almost biblical determination. Morocco itself was a festival of dust and grime, but I was able in my journeys to find the most intriguing little shop and from it to purchase a small wooden idol. My guide assured me that it was a genuine relic and item of taboo, but I feel my friend Professor Adolphus should be summoned post haste to perform a more suitable analysis. I hope to visit him in Coddlesley on the morrow.

I mention my local guidesman's assaying of the idol only since I have had poor experiences with local guidesmen in the past, particularly in the realm of the bushmen wherein my specially-constructed bicycle was stolen and served as some sort of idol for a fortnight, until at last myself and several shirpas enacted to retrieve it from the tribe. I value my bicycle greatly and I shan't be relieved of it quite so easily, no matter how emphatically I am clicked at.

Later on, I had Cheshire fix me up a bowl of toasted jutty to rouse my spirits, a purpose it served admirably as I retired to the upper deck and observed the surrounding moorland. From my perch atop the northern wing's entertaining balcony, it was clear to me that my less dignified neighbors had been considerably busy in my absence. I espied numerous moldering automobiles and coaches on the neighboring Rookbury property, strewn willy-nilly across the yards and waines. I hope I need not involve the constabulary in this matter. I shall speak with the Heiress Rookbury this afternoon, I feel.

Though I myself have enjoyed a ride in an automobile from time to time,

particularly when Cheshire sets out my leather gloves and scarf and the special goggles made for me by the professor, I tremble at the thought of my beloved moors becoming smattered with their recumbent and rusting forms. In any case it seems now a frivolous pursuit, particularly when one has been to Morocco so recently and gotten a taste of adventure on the continent. This little idol bears further examining and I eagerly look forward to such matters of research.

But on to more pressing concerns. Cheshire has obviously been snooping about in the west wing again in my absence, a revelation I note with great sadness and no small amount of irritation. I had believed the numerous locks would dissuade him, but he is of Moorish ancestry, a people blessed with a natural curiosity and cursed with the nimble fingers to indulge it. I have instructed Cheshire time and again that the west wing is off-limits to all but myself, and that terrible things could befall anyone who attempts to endure the interior without my accompaniment. But perhaps Cheshire is as deaf and churlish in some matters as he is steadfast and reliable in others.

Once again I shall deliver my lecture on the dangers of the west wing, how the corridors are twisty and deceptive, mentioning as I always do that the Windsford Hall has flooring of a most unstable and rotted nature. It's my hope that a few stern words and a night in the truffing shed will suffice to cure Cheshire of his unfortunate inclinations, but you never can tell. In any case, I shall have Mr. Lordsley, the estate's new automobilist, inspect the shed's interior before committing Cheshire therein.

And now I must ready myself for my visit to the Heiress Rookbury'd abode. No doubt she shall attempt to seduce me, standing once again in the doorway of her estate wearing naught but a nightdress and holding a loaded shot pistol, as is her wont. I fear these little exercises of hers are growing ever more persistent. Perhaps Cheshire can have a word with her man Salisbury.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

This entry was written the following day and concerns Lord Gosham's journey to the town of Coddlesley. As has already been mentioned, Coddlesley lies along the northern border of the county. It is a fairly arduous walk across bleak moorland and would take a young man perhaps two hours to walk; Henrius gives little indication of the time it took to make the journey, saying only that he arrived at midday, but given that he was well into middle age by the time this was written it can be assumed that it took at least two or three hours.

- Winslow

23 June, 1904

This morning after enjoying a breakfast of roast mash, I fetched my special collapsible walking hat from the haberdasharium in the west wing and set forth across the moors for Coddlesley. The little wooden idol I tucked safely in my black bag, wrapped in an advertisement for cold and flu liniment. The road to Coddlesley is poorly paved and often runs to mud when the rains set upon the moors and, as it had rained the night before, I was thankful for my special shoes. They were once the property of one of the shirpas I employed in Morocco until he wagered them in a game of Chettersley Sticks, doffs abunting, and unfortunately for him I emerged the victor!

Yet despite my prized footwear, my trek was as long and winding as the road to Coddlesley. Along the way I saw many interesting sights beneath the moldering grey sky, among the briars, mud, and sow-thistle. Two crows fighting over scraps, a black dog lying in a field as still as a stone, and at one point a travelling harpsichord salesman in his posh automobile. Near the Pendleton county line I espied a strange object in the greying watershed that abuts the blasted patch on which the foundation of the old lord's coach house rests. The thing looked all sogged and sodden in the jarm, and all grown over with briars, but I endeavored to retrieve it from the mire with my hickory cane and a rope which I wove from rushes, using a skill I likewise acquired from the shirpas, although Chettersley Sticks was not involved on that occasion.

The object was revealed to be a fine black viol of Italian manufacture, though of course all twisted and sogged-upon thanks to the grotesque marshes and scotes. It had been carved in the manner of a primitive warrior from the island of Zealand, all swirls and gambols with raised notches between them.

I considered leaving the viol along the side of the road, in case someone

should return in search of it, but I realized that it must have been discarded some time previous and was therefore now thoroughly abandoned by whatever bawdy songman it had once assuredly belonged to. I occasioned to bring the viol with me, tucking it under one arm in the manner of a traveling vagabond.

I arrived in Coddlesley at midday and quickly made my way to the Professor's house. He lives in a charming little Victorian affair in Cumberland Shanks, Coddlesley's raucous and trendy bohemian quarter. The area is just ridden with artists and craftsmen, all offering gew-gaws and knick-knacks of meager manufacture and creativity. Red glass keys and locks, wreathes made of tobacco, tiny pewter figurines of the chief minister, and so on. I must admit one or two curiosities caught my eye, but having so recently returned from my trip to Africa with numerous such trifles I had no need of additional ones.

As I passed the door of a shop dealing a brisk trade in books of dentistry, a thin girl dressed in a black lace dress burst forth. I could see by the shape of her nose that she was of high breeding, or at least bearing its countenance. Among my many expertises is the art the French call 'Par le Nez,' a vastly superior offshoot of the charlatan science of phrenology. Professor Adolphus has assured me that the veracity of par le nez has been thoroughly verified by his associates Windlesen and Pinter at Oxford. I have familiarized myself with several books of anthropology and can now distinguish at a glance the nostrils of the noble Saxon, the cunning Jew, the devious Polack, the vicious Italian, and the untrustworthy Spaniard.

But before I could ask the girl whether she was indeed of Saxon breeding, she darted down a narrow stone alley adjacent to the establishment. I considered pursuing her so as to resolve my inquiries, but when I peered into the alley I saw only an unnaturally tall and thin man in a tophat and an accountant's thrupcoat lingering in the alley. When he caught sight of me, he clutched his spiderly fingers at the air and sneered nastily. He seemed a jagged sort and I did not wish to involve myself with any such ruffians, so I abandoned my pursuit and made haste to the professor's house, whereupon his assistant Chip informed me that the professor had been out all day and was expected later in the evening.

“The professor has gone out in search of a pound of saltpeter,” I was told by the lad, whom it should be remarked is unusually robust for a fellow of science. “He believed it to be available from his friend the barber, but returned empty-handed and left again to make further inquiries. Perhaps he is

now at the apothecary, looking there?"

This was a foolhardy suggestion, as anyone with an alchemical bent knows full well that apothecaries carry only inferior saltpeter, a fact conveyed to me by none other than the professor himself. I take it that this is owed to their digressive nature, a facet which serves them well in conducting repartee with customers, no doubt, but which is at the same time a considerable hindrance to the proper manufacture of potassium nitrate.

"Nonsense and balderdash," I replied, bearing these facts firmly in mind. I considered delivering a brief lecture on the importance of quality reagents, but -- as I have previously indicated -- the boy is foolish and I did not think it worth the effort. "It is quite clear that fumes have affected your brain and shrunk it to the size of a walnut. Until such time as your master returns, I shall occupy the little upstairs room which I know the professor keeps free at all times, and therein review my options."

This being said I proceeded upstairs, leaving Chip to whatever ninnyminded flights of fancy he might erroneously consider beneficial and worth his attention. I have now made myself quite at home in the professor's spare room, where I now eagerly await his arrival. The wooden idol becomes ever more intriguing, as when I examined it with one of my host's scientific seeing glasses I was certain I could perceive a crack or small opening in the wood, as in the manner of a hinge. I have quite run off with this entry, and so I shall have to record my conversation with the Heiress Rookbury some other time. I shudder to even think of it and it does me good to be away from that ghastly woman.

Lord Gosham of the County Pendleton

Though the manner in which Lord Gosham speaks of foreigners and minorities may seem unsavory to our modern ear, he was actually quite moderate and even something of a bohemian by the standards of the time. For an aristocrat of good breeding to speak so frankly about the use of opium would have been almost unheard of, though it is reasonable to assume he would have had at least a passing familiarity with the substance as a result of his many travels.

- Winslow

24 June, 1904

I was informed by Chip upon my rising that Professor Adolphus had not returned from his business the previous evening. I am a man accustomed to late evenings and so had intended to wait for the professor, but I must confess that I was so tempted by my host's cabinet of liqueurs that I had quite drifted off to sleep by the time the great somber bell of St. Cuthbert's had tolled the nine o'clock hour. I am a devil with the drink in me, and so it is perhaps just as well that I was not roused in the course of the night. I have in the past made something of a fool of myself through my liquor-sodden antics and although a romp through the town sounds an intriguing diversion, I would not wish to cause any trouble for my friend the professor, particularly as I have need of his skills in the matter of this totem.

My time being short, what with Cheshire almost certainly now liberated from the shed and the manor's staff still uninstructed in the particulars of my new interests, it fell upon me to discover the professor's whereabouts myself. The professor's boy assistant was of no use in this respect, assuring me that he was far too engaged in his own scientific pursuits to offer any sort of assistance or aid. That boy had ought to feel the back of a firm leather, and soon, lest the humours and vitreums of his own studies completely eradicate any traces of decent upbringing he might still harbor in that coconut he sees fit to call his head.

"Perhaps he is asleep in the library again," Chip ventured. "Sometimes he becomes so engrossed in his readings that he forgets to come home. You might check there, Lord Gosham."

I was taken aback. "The public library?" I asked. "A man of learning such as the professor would have volumes far in excess of those meager tracts of falderol and fancy offered to the teeming masses. What use has he for pedestrian volumes of Dickens and Ludloy when his own library contains

within it no less than a complete set of Lupidius the Bereft's twelfth-century writings on the preparation of unguents, including one for the elimination of Shephard's fever that I myself have made considerable and frequent use of? You are a ridiculous boy, Chip, and make no mistake about it.”

Having thus made no progress within the professor's own holdings, I set forth into the streets and gainsways of Coddlesley in search of his person.

I spent much of the morning visiting various well-handles, bobtail haunts and public houses before getting even a whiff of the old fellow, finally discovering in the Coddlesley market a man selling surgical apparatuses who claimed to have seen the good professor entering a hop house the previous evening. Being a learned man of good breeding, the professor has no taste for opium or its fool's alchemy and would not normally consort with chinamen in any case, so I was at first somewhat skeptical of the turn-screw's claim. But he offered to show me the house in question and within minutes my search had come to fruition.

In surveying the den from without I was struck by its queer manner; it had the appearance of a common tenement, bricks and mortar and broken windows, yet was surrounded by a mass of unsavory commoners far worse than the usual rabble of the street corner. As I watched them move about, into and out of the house, the moldering grey sky opened and it began to rain, falteringly at first and then eventually turning to a great downpour that quickly soaked through my best leather shoshers. I was fortunate enough to have brought one of the professor's stern black umbrellas with me on my travels that morning and hurried under it to the nearest public house to consider what could be done. I am not familiar with the customs of the chinamen or their houses and knew the matter could require delicacy.

I sit now in the Quay Street public house, considering my tactics and choices of maneuvers. There is a bearded jew here, clothed in black and playing a sad tune on a fiddle in hope of charity. I earlier paid him one farthing to restring the ruined viol; I am sure he considered me a strange old bodger for spending money on such an instrument, but I have a

weakness for music and I've never known a fiddler to pass up an easily-made farthing, be they Hebrew or otherwise.

Lord Gosham of the County Pendleton

25 June, 1904

Professor Adolphus is home at last and thankfully unharmed. I myself have emerged largely unscathed from the affairs of yester-eve, though I have suffered some slight wounding in matters of property and holdings, a topic I shall elaborate upon shortly. I have dispatched a young urchin back to my estate, bearing with him a sealed letter for Cheshire with instructions to ready the manor for my return and to furnish the young lad with a cot for the evening in the south wing and to provide him with as much of Mrs. Boddinger's broth as he is able to sup. I came upon the urchin lingering on the street before the professor's apartments, wearing a battered top hat and carrying a cheap pocket watch. He seemed a sprightly lad and I believe he shall cross the moors with considerable speed.

Last night I sought to gain entry to the den of iniquity wherein I believed I might find Professor Adolphus. After much consideration, I decided upon the mode of subterfuge as being the most sound tactic. I entrusted my fine umbrella to the publican at the Quay Street inn and bartered with the jew fiddler for his shawl and little hat. Donning both and concealing my special collapsible hat about my person in the manner of one on a caper, I proceeded through the rain to the run-down building I had earlier been led to.

I approached the building's stoop clutching the ruined viol to my chest in the manner of an indigent fiddler. I was scrutinized by a pair of ponytailed chinamen before my moans and wheedling convinced them to admit me to the innerdom of the building. Once within, I was ushered by a young boy through dusty stairwells lit by wickless lamps to a beaded doorway where I was again examined, this time by a crooked old man in an automobilist's hat whose pockets bristled with cheap cigarillos. He must have been thoroughly taken in by my disguise, as I was soon allowed into a pillow-strewn parlor wherein the patrons of the hoppermen could lounge about and indulge in the chemistry of idiotics. The air was thick with the sickly smell of opium and everywhere there was the indication of tawdry excess and vice.

As I made haste to search the chambers and side-rooms for the professor, I became aware that my actions were being observed. It was with great shock that I recognised my shadow as the same thin man in the thrupcoat whom I had seen lingering in the alley the previous day! I attempted to lose him in the corridors of the opium parlor, but he soon had me cornered and began demanding to know if I was on an assignment from the constabulary.

“You there!” the thin man said, inching closer and closer until my back was

nearly pressed to the wall. "You're a copper's lad, aren't you? Oh, yes, I can always tell a copper's hire, because the smell of treachery and cowardice precedes them."

"No callerwodgings, good guv," I replied, attempting to play up my indigent appearance with the aid of my vast repertoire of the common man's vocabulary. "I am just a poor fiddler, here to turn a good string and make me a bloon!"

"You think you're clever, oh?" he bellowed. "Do you think I can't spot a fob when one's brought before me?"

Tho I continued to assure him that I was only a fiddler, I eventually conceded that I was attempting to locate a friend, at which point he insisted that I go with him and even made such moves as to threaten my person with harm if I did not acquiesce. I saw I had little choice in the matter and so agreed.

I was brought to a room in the rear of the building where a trio of well-dressed men were seated around a barrel that served them as a table. The chamber was lit by a single guttering candle and I was unable to clearly see their countenances. The thin man spoke to them in a language that sounded Germanic to my trained ear, gesturing at me nastily with his spiderly fingers.

At last the thin man turned back to me and demanded that I prove I had no association with the constabulary, and so I offered to play for them a bawdy song upon my viol. My captor scoffed but allowed me to enact my suggestion, and so summoning what meager talent I might still possess from my lessons as a child I endeavored to play for them 'The Banker and The Lady's Legs,' a song I derived much amusement from as a youth. Though I was hampered by the poor condition of the viol and my own poor abilities, the men were apparently deceived by my performance and after a great deal of further discussion amongst themselves I was invited to join them in a game of dobbins.

Sadly, I am not a man for the cards and so quickly amassed a considerable debt. I was ultimately forced to settle up with the fellows by vouchsafing the deed to a small tract of property along my estate's southern edge, which I had been carrying with me in the hopes that I might deposit it at the bank before returning to Mossthorpe. It is hardly a great loss, as it contains little beyond a dilapidated guesthouse and in truth I was relieved to part with it. The tract in question floods often and the road to Dundle passes near enough to it that it has in the past proved bothersome, attracting gypsies and other unsavory

sorts.

As I made to depart the opium den, I espied the woman in the black gown I had seen previously in the company of the thin man, seated in a well-upholstered chair in an adjoining room. My host, who had by now introduced himself to me as one Mr. Speck, informed me that her name was Abscissa and that she was his companion and business partner. He also confirmed my suspicion that she was of Saxon breeding; supposedly she is heir to a considerable fortune and some degree of titleage, though I could not pry from Speck the exact nature of either.

Though I was initially dejected that I had failed to locate the professor, imagine my delight to discover him residing at his home upon my return! He informed me that he had been in Wymlick, visiting his brother the organist. This morning over a breakfast of godgers and eggs we discussed plans to return to my estate, where we shall begin formal inquiries into the nature of the little wooden idol. We shall depart this afternoon after the professor has made preparations. He wishes us to travel by way of his new automobile; I am buoyed by his enthusiasm, though I myself prefer to walk.

It has done me good to see Coddlesley again, but in truth I shall be glad to return to my estate.

Lord Gosham of the County Pendleton

Despite the best efforts of the Pendleton Historical Society, no pictures of the Lady Rookbury have been discovered, likely due in large part to the destruction of her manor in 1917 by an errant shot from the artillery range operating in the county during the Great War. It is known that she lived for a time in London, but no records of her exist after 1926. It has been speculated that she began living under a false name around that time to escape the indiscretions of her youth.

- Winslow

26 June, 1904

Imagine my surprise upon returning to my estate to discover that the manor was in complete disarray! It seems that Cheshire was possessed of a decidedly ill humor following his night in the shed and made to enact his anger upon the house's staff, driving his underlings into a frenzy over the course of several hours and then absconding in the middle of the night without so much as a word. According to the highly reliable account of Mrs. Boddinger, the poor fellow simply walked off across the moorland bearing his meager belongings in a sack. This catastrophe has placed me at a considerable disadvantage, as I have had to personally oversee the activities of the manor's staff in order to ensure that the professor is received in a manner befitting a man of his stature.

Already I have encountered considerable difficulty managing the affairs of the estate, which seem to have grown into a thoroughly Byzantine enterprise since I last dealt with them myself and what must surely be the simplest tasks of the estate are now utterly beyond me. The northern pond must be cleared of addison lilies so that I might walk there on the morrow without being accosted by their foul odor, yet when I asked one of the stableboys to get about doing so he seemed bewildered and nearly refused.

And as if that were not itself enough, the professor's new automobile struck an infant's perambulator half sunken into the mire near the fork to Dundle and he has spent all day fretting over the contraption in the manner of a stablemaster tending to a stricken colt. I attempted to summon Mr. Lordsley the automobilist so that the damage to the automobile might be mended, but quickly discovered that nobody besides Cheshire had known precisely where he lives. I have consulted with Mrs. Boddinger on these matters, but I fear I shall spend the coming days and weeks uncovering countless little tasks which formerly were within the bailiwick of my erstwhile manservant.

This morning after breakfasting with Professor Adolphus, I stumbled upon a most unusual item in the study. Sealed within an otherwise unadorned black envelope that had been slipped under the corner of my blotter some time in the night, I discovered a finely printed and filigreed invitation to join the ranks of something called the Cemetery Society. The invitation stated that a party shall be held somewhere very near my estate in the next week and that I am to ascertain the time and place if I am to become a member, though it bore no other information, disclosing neither the reason for the invitation nor who exactly these mysterious socialites might be.

I myself have never heard of any such association and would not normally deign to take membership of any club or society not dedicated to *ars scientia*, as it were, but I must admit that I am intrigued. When I asked Mrs. Boddinger about the letter, she indicated that the manor received only one visitor during the night: a travelling chemist who came to the door in the early hours of the morn and was turned away, it being an unacceptable hour for a business call. My initial suspicion was that these two incidents were connected, and I resolved to go for a walk upon the lower moors to allow my mind the freedom to properly engage this bewildering fardsarm.

Scarcely had I reached the cumbermoss tree known as the Old Man of the Moor than I was alerted to the sound of hoofbeats. I surveyed my surroundings in search of their origin and was dismayed to find that the Heiress Rookbury had apparently been pursuing me across the moors for some time, riding a fine white stallion and clothed in what I can only describe as inappropriate attire. I made to act as if I had not seen her and began to descend a grassy hill that had formed between a pair of boulders, but the Lady pursued me and attempted repeatedly to engage me in conversation, while I myself tried to do the decent thing and avert my eyes. My walk having been thoroughly ruined, I began making my way back to the edge of my property, my unwanted companion pestering me every step of the way and demanding in a most unladylike fashion that I comment upon the matter of her clothyery.

When at last I reached the iron gates that bar the end of my drive, the Lady attempted to invite herself in despite my cunning and subtle discouragements. I found it necessary to refuse her and her mount entry in as polite a voice as I could muster, claiming that the lawns had recently been reseeded and that the gardner would fly into a rage if a horse were to trample them so soon after he had completed his work. She seemed to accept this reasoning and departed, but not before begging me to come see her again soon. I shall never understand the whims of the weaker sex, though the

professor has instructed me that certain chemicals present in the anatomy of a lady might account for their frequent strange behavior. It is my firm hope that someday a cure for their conditions may be found, and gentlemen such as myself might not be accosted by them at the most inconvenient times.

Now I must meet with Professor Adolphus to discuss the matter of the little wooden idol. He has ensconced himself within the temporary laboratory assembled in my librarium and has spent the entirety of the day examining the idol and comparing it to items in my collection of books on primitive societies. Doubtless we shall have much to discuss and I look forward to it greatly.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

A Brief Interlude

I would like to take this opportunity to pause and give you a bit of background on the life of Lord Henrius Gosham, so that you may better grasp the process leading up to the span of time recounted in these journals. Henrius Gosham was born in 1857 to Lord Blexley and Lady Penumbra Gosham, called Penny by her contemporaries. The Lord and Lady Gosham were well-known socialites within the county Pendleton, the master of the manor engaging in frequent toad hunts across the moors with important social and political figures while the Lady Gosham remained at Mossthorpe Hall and entertained the wives and mistresses of her husband's guests.

When not entertaining, Blexley Gosham was deeply involved in the treacle trade and owned several refineries in neighboring counties, though none in Pendleton itself. He crossed the moors often on the way to inspect his various businesses and his black carriage became a common sight in the streets of Coddlesley. The frequency of his journeys earned him the somewhat sarcastic nickname 'Lord Treacle of Whereabouts,' it being considered unusual and perhaps unsightly for a member of the gentry to so deeply involve himself in the day-to-day operations of a common enterprise. Some of Henrius's early fragmentary writings suggest that his father did not take kindly to this nickname and purchased a newspaper in Coddlesley in order to stop the steady stream of anonymous editorials making light of his reputation.

As toad hunts fell out of popularity in the county in the 1860's and the treacle trade began to falter, Lord Blexley Gosham shifted his attentions to the natural sciences, a passion that his son Henrius would eventually inherit in his adulthood. Blexley spent several years of his life in search of a cure for gout, gradually driving him towards increasingly dangerous chemical experimentation as his obsession with the ailment and its treatment grew. These inadvisable experiments were almost certainly the cause of the great fire that consumed the west wing of Mossthorpe Hall in 1872, leading to the deaths of the Lord and Lady Gosham and orphaning young Henrius, who was wintering in the Ardennes at the time of the tragic fire. The young and impetuous Henrius resisted all efforts to have the damage to the west wing repaired, with the exception of the master bedroom, which he himself continued to use.

The new Lord Gosham showed little interest in the day-to-day management of Mossthorpe Hall and spent much of his time travelling, selling off his father's holdings in the treacle industry and allowing the estate to fall into

some disrepute and decay. He undertook a stint in India with the foreign service, during which time he gained some degree of notoriety as a firebrand and troublemaker. Some uncouth parties have made the absurd suggestion that Lord Gosham was removed from the foreign service for the murder of a local over a game of chance, a charge which has absolutely no substantiation and is at best highly unreliable.

Whatever the reason, Lord Gosham left the foreign service in 1880 and returned to the county Pendleton for a brief time before enrolling in the University of Wymlick and earning his Firsts in classics and natural history. After his graduation, Lord Gosham undertook a series of excursions to various parts of the world. These excursions occupied the vast majority of Henrius's time from 1885 to 1892, when at the age of thirty-five Lord Henrius Gosham at last returned to the county Pendleton and began attempting to restore the now badly decayed estate to some degree of respectability.

Contemporary documents indicate that Mossthorpe Hall had stood empty for many years and was in a shambles by the time of Lord Gosham's return. In addition to more mundane problems such as a damaged roof and broken windows, portions of the ruined west wing had begun to sink into the moors, while the manor's basements had become filled with mud and storm refuse. Lord Gosham personally oversaw the reconstruction efforts, once again residing in the west wing despite badly tilting floors and unstable footing on the rotted boards in many rooms. Henrius again insisted upon leaving the west wing largely untouched, and so in spite of the other repairs to Mossthorpe Hall many of the rooms of the west wing remained gutted and unlivable.

Repairs to Mossthorpe Hall were not completed until the summer of 1894, at which time Lord Gosham threw a party of spectacular magnitude to celebrate his restored heritage and estate, inviting members of every important local family and society and stepping boldly back into the social circles of the county Pendleton.

From 1894 to 1904, Lord Henrius Gosham travelled periodically while remaining very active in the high society of Pendleton county, and it was in the summer of 1904 that he began keeping the journals which are documented herein.

- Winslow

The lithic structure Henrius refers to in this entry is unfortunately no longer in existence, though a great many other fascinating archaeological features do remain within the borders of the county Pendleton. Not least of these is Jennings's Holl, a system of chalk caves whose tunnels and catacombs have at one time or another contained all manner of things, from distilleries to a debtor's prison. In Lord Gosham's day, spending a night in Jennings's Holl was a common way for well-to-do youths of the moor to prove their mettle.

- Winslow

27 June, 1904

The moors were doused with a steady rain today that turned the ground to thick squelching mud, this having greatly complicated the plans devised by the Professor and myself in our excitement to further investigate the little wooden idol. Yet having now the luxury of hindsight, I am forced to categorize our actions today as a catastrophe and to dismiss the entire affair as a sham and escapade of fools, and so perhaps it would have been best had the trut and mire completely impeded all progress and activity.

Yesterday evening my colleague and I convened to compare our findings on the matter of the totem. A considerable portion of our discourse was of no consequence and shall not be recorded here, but singularly and most importantly it was determined that the professor concurred with my own observation that the idol was possessed of some manner of hinge or fissure. Based upon careful observations in strict accordance with scientific principles, it was our conclusion that some unknown object was contained within the idol.

The professor and I spent many hours devising stratagems for extracting from the interior of the idol whatever treasures it might hold, our perambles and cogitations spanning the length and breadth of civilized man's cunning. My own spirits were buoyed considerably by the fact that Lord Bleeth of Dunnymoor, a great man and voyager whom I am privileged to have briefly known in my youth, once discovered a fine ivory comb within a votive statue of the Mohametan god. Our conversation stretched long into the night and by the time my late father's great black hickory clock tolled the eleventh hour, I dare say we had exhausted nearly every cigar and carafe of bourbon in Mossthorpe.

Before retiring for the evening, we attempted unsuccessfully to open the wooden totem by means of the truffing shed's steam-operated drill press and

also with what Mrs. Boddinger later informed me was a device for the braiding of the hair, though at the time I had believed it to be a reticular theriopter of the sort used by haverners. Neither attempt yielded any satisfactory consequences, and it was decided that we should set out upon the morn to enlist additional members of Pendleton's scientific community in our attempts to deduce the supposed contents of the idol.

We rose early this morning and enjoyed a sparse breakfast prepared for us by Mrs. Boddinger, not wanting to tire ourselves with the efforts of digestion that would accompany a more sumptuous repast. While standing on the garden balcony enjoying an after-breakfast shandy and surveying the sodden moorland, I observed Mr. Lordsley the automobilist dozing in a hedge on the north edge of the gardens. When my calls to him went unheeded, I dispatched a porter to rouse him and set him to the task of repairing Professor Adolphus's automobile so that we might use it in the day's excursion. Mr. Lordsley is a skilled man of his craft and within a half an hour had restored the professor's automobile to fine working order, though he cautioned the professor against utilizing its patented hand-crank incline ascender for reasons which remain obscure to me.

I succeeded in withholding many an ungentlemanly comment as the professor rejoiced in his repaired contraption, and before long we had boarded the newly repaired automobile and made haste to the manor of my good friend Sir Thadric Coombs, a noted ornithologist who has authored many books, yet who is descended from a family of Lapplanders; I find myself continually impressed at his ability to overcome such a dire handicap. Sir Coombs directed us to the Waddings estate, where we retrieved Mr. Horace Potts, who joined us in his own automobile and who additionally referred us to the previously-unknown Professor Blackwendle in Coddlesley, and so on and so forth across the moorland in every which way. Before long our two automobiles were quite thoroughly laden with learned men of various fields and backgrounds, numbering seven in all, between whom was passed the little wooden idol for opinions and analyses.

I am somewhat ashamed to disclose that by this time we had begun passing about a flask of aqua vitae which had accompanied the esteemed Mr. Potts, and so it is possible that our considerable intellects had become somewhat muddled by the heady fumes and vitreum of the mixture. After much shouting and disagreement it was decided that the most advantageous way to approach the matter of the idol was with a great show of force and ingenuity, in quite the same spirit as when Alexander split the coil of the peasant king Gordias to expose the jewel of Anatolia. I vaguely recollect some discussion

of placing the idol in the path of a steam locomotive. When no railroad grading could be located on Professor Blackwendle's map of Hodgson's moor our party settled upon the notion that we might wedge the idol between several of the balancing stones within the henge that abuts the road to Dundle, thereby placing it under considerable stresses and perhaps fracturing its outer covering.

I must regretfully report that having attempted this very thing, we have found ourselves no closer to unravelling the mystery of the little wooden idol. In fact, our attempt and our subsequent efforts to remove the idol from where it was wedged succeeded only in destroying utterly the most prized souvenir of my trip to Morocco, as well as quite thoroughly ruining a portion of the county's archaeological heritage with our blunderings.

Professor Adolphus has chosen to remain at Mossthorpe for the time being in order to assist me in the hiring of a new head porter, this having been deemed necessary upon witnessing the decay and collapse of my previously well-ordered estate. On a related note, I fear that the master stairwell leading to my quarters in the upper west wing has finally become dangerously unstable and is perilously close to collapse. I shall henceforth resort to the servant's stairs, though it pains and embarasses me to do so.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

In this entry Lord Gosham speaks briefly of "the underdocking," a mooring position for small watercraft built into the foundations of the manor. Though such features were most often found in estates overlooking small streams or rivers, Mossthorpe was constructed above a subterranean waterway of middling size that connected to a larger river by means of a brick tunnel hundreds of feet in length. The tunnel was forgotten for many years until construction of a larger road across the moors began in 1964 and a bulldozer was swallowed up by the tunnel's collapse.

- Winslow

28 June, 1904

Imagine my surprise upon rising this morning to discover that the long abandoned guesthouse on my estate's southern edge has become a hive of business and activity! I was taking a brisk walk along the iron balcony which circles the topmost floor of the western wing, as I do most mornings, when I observed that a large canvas tent had been erected to the south of the frogging pond adjacent to the old guesthouse. Fearing that gypsies had again returned to the property, I made haste to remove my black velvet robe and don the clothes I had selected the previous evening. And so attired in a long black chesscoat with the flared bottoms that are fashionable at the moment, looking very much the part of a country lord coming to chase ne'er do wells from his property, I stormed down the great spiral stairway and burst forth into the great hall of Mossthorpe.

Yet I quickly discovered that my anger had been needless and misguided, for there awaiting me in the great hall was none other than Mr. Speck, late of Coddlesley! He wore much finer fare than when I had previously been in his company and greeted me with great deference and respect, apologizing profusely for imposing upon me so early in the day and for not alerting me beforehand as to the arrival of himself and his troupe of roustabouts. It was only then that I recalled the earlier forfeiture of the guesthouse and its parcel of land in a game of dobbins several days previous, an action which had been quite flippant and uncharacteristic on my part. Normally I would not deign to even consider parting with a portion of my estate, however miniscule it may be, but I had become caught up in the spirit of the game and acted brashly as a result.

Dwelling on my previous actions, I attempted to purchase the property back from Mr. Speck on the spot, offering him a handsome sum. He politely refused, explaining that he had become quite charmed with the property and

intended to remodel the dilapidated guesthouse into an inn for travelers and wayfarers.

Mr. Speck has assured me that I shall have unfettered access to the property, attempting no doubt to soothe my badly jinted nerves; nevertheless, I fear this is a development which shall take some adjustment on my part, being quite used to my solitude and privacy out upon the moors. I do not fancy sharing any portion of this tract with common journeymen, yet it would appear that the matter is beyond my control and so I shall accept it, however grudgingly.

My discussion with Mr. Speck was not entirely fruitless, as upon hearing of my misfortunes with Cheshire and the oversight of my estate he graciously offered to fill the position of head porter himself! Though I at first objected, Mr. Speck was extremely persuasive and has assured me that he has considerable experience in the field of portership, having previously acted as manservant to a great many important individuals from various lineages across Europe. He has provided me with several references and I have taken great relish in drafting and dispatching letters of inquiry to these patrons. It is my habit to refer to head porters by their given names and so I pressed Mr. Speck to disclose his, yet once again he politely declined and insisted that I refer to him merely as "Mr. Speck." It is an unusual request, but so grateful am I for his services that it does not bother me in the slightest.

It shall do me well to have the manor overseen by an experienced hand once again; I fear that my own efforts were somewhat unsatisfactory, tho surely not for lack of trying. Already Mr. Speck has whipped the slovenly staff back into shape; by midday I had already witnessed him setting the porters to work clearing soot and refuse from the lower crofts and instructing the maids in the proper ways to shank a fresh lampwick. Mrs. Boddinger has vouchsafed to me that she feels uncomfortable in the presence of my new manservant, describing him as "a great spider at rest within its coddlin' web," but I suspect that this is merely one more weakness of the fairer sex; I must however admit that Mr. Speck may have seemed an odd sight in his tophat and fur coat, shaking his cane to dispatch underlings for this task or that. His voice has a cackling quality to it, as of a man lost in a haze of laudanum, yet likewise carries such weight and force that the porters leap to attention when he yells for them.

Newly liberated from the duties of managing the estate, Professor Adolphus and I have begun investigating the matter of the mysterious black letter which I received two days previous. Taking to heart the missive's instruction

that I am to locate the site of this supposed meeting, we have begun combing every inch of Mossthorpe and its surrounding properties, starting with the outlying moors. The professor spent the afternoon driving across the moors in his motorcar while I stood atop the western ramparts with a spyglass, searching for any sign of activity or preparation within the purview of my lands. After three hours of fruitless activity, we abandoned that particular line of inquiry and turned our eyes inwards, to the interior of Mossthorpe. It would perturb me greatly were I to be taken unawares by preparations for such a meeting within my own household, yet I could not rule out the possibility. I had Mr. Speck order all the household staff to the main hall so that the professor might question them as to any unusual activity, while I myself descended by means of the dumb waiter into the sublevels of the house to conduct inquiries of my own.

Mossthorpe Hall is a sizable estate and I employ a great many people both above and below the grounds, many of whom have their own queer manners of entry or egress and whom I do not frequently converse with, their countenances being in some cases less than charming. If some activity were to escape my notice, it would likely have to be carried out within the crofts of the manor. And though the lardermaster said he had seen nothing out of the ordinary, and the same may be said of Miss Wentletrap the washerwoman, I was unable to locate Mr. O'Leary the boatswain, a jovial Hibernian whom my family has employed for many years to oversee the underdocking.

The chamber serves little purpose now, but I recall that as a child a barge would arrive every Thursday to deliver goods and important documents for my father, though I myself was never allowed near the dock for fear that I would drown in the frigid waters. As lord of the manor I have had little cause to venture therein, but I was nevertheless surprised to find the dock entirely vacant, with O'Leary nowhere to be found. I have spoken with Mr. Speck about the matter and he has assured me that he will look into it, and if necessary hire a new boatswain.

I must confess to a growing fascination with this Cemetery Society and their strange invitation; if it is a true thing and a real thing, then it must surely also be a strange thing to conduct its business in such a manner. And Professor Adolphus has just now instructed me that his inquiries yielded no new information, so it seems as if our search shall continue on the morrow.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

*Auguste Presier (1822-1883) was a popular playwright during Lord Gosham's youth in Pendleton, author of over a dozen plays including *Le loup de l'os* and *La dame dans les saumons*, the latter of which is mentioned briefly in this entry. The role of Monsieur Petit, the poetic ruler of Marseille's beggar population, is considered one of the most difficult roles in Victorian theater and it is therefore surprising that it would have been adequately portrayed by a mere amateur.*

- Winslow

June 29, 1904

The entirety of today has been fraught with bewildering events and hijinks, enough to rankle the mind of any half-sane individual. I have now lost all confidence that this mystery shall be resolved in any acceptable or beneficial way, yet at this moment I would accept even the most dire and morbidious explanation if only to bring an end to this madness.

Last night I found myself unable to sleep, so wracked was I with puzzlement and curiosity. As a course of relaxation I chose to wile away the small hours in restless sojourn through the damaged corridors of my estate's western wing, as I sometimes make it my habit to do. Accompanied by a reliable hand-lantern, the cindered oaken panels and great misshapen wooden beams of the Windsford Hall left me in flightful reverie as I recalled dawdling among them as a foolish and carefree youth, whilst my family's ancient and now sadly ruined librarium filled me with melancholia, as it always does.

In the midst of my walk I was forced to consider that the mysterious activities of this alleged Cemetery Society might be ongoing in the abandoned and silent western wing, though I would be greatly upset by such a development, as it is a cherished family sanctuary. With this sobering thought in mind I found myself taken by the urge to search the entirety of the wing, despite the late hour and the peril of conducting such a search alone. Yet there are few enough places within the old chambers that may safely be occupied for any length of time, and after passing through all of my familiar haunts and former quarters I was able to declare the majority of ancient and ruined Windsford free from intrusion.

As I made my way back to my chambers to retire for the evening, however, I came upon a heavy black oak portchapeau door, its havernot adorned with twin swans rampant, the bygone heraldry of my family. The walls near the door looked recently scoured and scraped, and even more strangely this

portal did not figure in any of my otherwise comprehensive recollections of the western wing. Summoning up the strength of a much younger man, I called upon my uncle Willinus's badly tarnished candelabra to serve one final purpose, that of dislodging several timbers that were still blocking the transom of the curious door.

Upon entering the newly accessible room, I found myself in a portion of the manor with which I was shockingly unfamiliar. The room was very small yet richly paneled and decorated with carvings and a fine rug, all of which were sadly quite ruined. Such were the dimensions of the chamber that at first I believed I'd discovered some long-forgotten toilet or bathery. Yet these notions were banished as I took stock of the room's full purview, noting with incredulity that the chamber's walls stretched upwards through at least two levels of the manor, as if the chamber were a sort of shaft or dumb waitery. With the exception of the doorway and what appeared to have once been a ladder of sorts, every inch of every wall was completely covered in narrow shelves that stretched from the height of my waist up to the apex of the chamber some thirty shanks above my head!

Each shelf was densely packed with small black leather-bound volumes, but upon retrieving one such volume I was saddened to note that its contents were all but illegible. The book and all its kin were badly damaged by both conflagration and the accursed paperworms that seem to thrive in these damp territories, tho I was able to make out what appeared to be logs or accountings in some cyphered hand. The writing took the form of letters and figures of a foreign nature, which were unidentifiable even to a man of my considerable education. These same markings seemed somehow sinister to me and I was at once struck with a pressing need to leave the room and retire to the comparative safety of my quarters. Taking the volume with me, I sealed the heavy door of the chamber once more and made my way back through Mossthorpe to my chambers atop the western pinnacle. My wanderlust sated and with a new item for enlightened scrutiny, I was at last able to fall fast asleep, all the while pondering this new significance.

In spite of this deep and restful slumber, this morning proved to be quite a trying and bothersome one. Upon waking, I was extremely unnerved to discover Mr. Speck already within my personal chambers, apparently having lost all sense of manners or good grace. I began lecturing him at length about the need for propriety and formality, but shockingly my new manservant again breached several degrees of etiquette by interrupting me to state in a dark tone that he had valuable information which he felt would forgive his extraordinary intrusion into my own personal lodgings. I demanded an

explanation of what he meant, and in reply Mr. Speck embarked upon a bewildering diatribe on the philosophical notions of both aristocracy and ownership, storming madly up and down my bedchamber waving his stick in the air to highlight specific points of his argument.

“Surely you can see that it is the basic role of the Government to defraud the common man,” my manservant raved as he marched back and forth upon my carpet. “Cloaked in shallow and toneless cries of liberty and the ridiculous claims of fairlaw and common good, is it not the role of the rulers of men to live as little more than common thieves, yet on a much larger scale! And you would interfere in this, the common good of noble acumen at its clearest?”

“Mr. Speck, it is the height of impropriety that you have entered my bedchambers unannounced,” I noted, when my manservant paused in his lecturing. However, no sooner had I uttered this than he embarked once more with renewed spirit and fervor.

“And you and your kind have run rampant upon the common man, a far greater and more shocking impropriety!” Speck retorted, though I could think of no cause for him to speak of me thus. It has been some months since my mishap with the automobile and the surveyor’s wife, and it is still my opinion that she should have found a more appropriate place to picnic than the midst of a country lane.

In any case, the whole thing seemed very tawdry and rhetorical and I must confess that I quickly lost interest. After some short while Mr. Speck concluded rather bluntly by stating that I was meddling in affairs which were of no concern to me, and that the only reason he had chosen to bring these matters to my attention was that he felt honor bound to interfere in these same affairs at all costs.

My manservant refused to elaborate further upon the subject despite my insistent haranguing and quickly departed my quarters, yet not without one final admonishment that we would speak again of this topic at some later time. I felt shaken by the whole affair and so soothed my nerves for a time with Chaucer and a smidge of fine tobacco, until I felt minimally able to formally rise for the day.

The past few days have been surprisingly brisk for midsummer and so I fetched a light riding cloak and trusmarnier from my wardrobe, both items having been received as a birthday gift from my sometimes friend Lady Pandermass of Whelkshire. It was not until I was preparing to exit my

chambers that I realized that the little black volume which I had retrieved from the strange archive was nowhere to be seen. I searched my quarters for the book, yet concluded that it was no longer present anywhere in the rooms.

Mr. Speck's outlandish behavior, coupled with the fact that he had been the only person other than myself to have entered my chambers that morning, led me to blame him for the theft. When I set forth to locate him, none of the household staff seemed to know precisely where he had gone. A scullery maid insisted that she had witnessed Mr. Speck climbing a trellis on the outside of the northern vestibules, while Mrs. Boddinger recounted having seen him running madly through the gardens near the time of daybreak, in the company of a short dark man with a hand lantern. As I questioned further, I found that the estate was once more in a state of upset, with each and every member of my staff having a different outlandish tale of Mr. Speck's activities and whereabouts throughout the morning.

It was ultimately determined that Mr. Speck was entirely absent and had perhaps retired to the guesthouse. Resolving to speak with him at the earliest opportunity, and yet determined not to interrupt his privacy as he had done mine, I retired with the Professor to the western gardens to view an abbreviated performance of *La dame dans les saumons* by Presier, compliments of my artiste de dramatis, Mr. Lefebvre. (The part of Monsieur Petit was played more than adequately by Mr. Lordsley the automobilist, to the surprise of all in attendance.)

After the performance, Mr. Lordsley -- still in his costume of rags and tophat -- disclosed privately to me that the professor's prized automobile had gone missing from the shed that morning. I have chosen to keep this matter private, knowing full well the uproarious response the professor would have to the loss of his contraption. Adolphus is a man of weak disposition and not well suited to great shocks and startles, and I would not wish to rankle him so early in his stay.

The professor and I spent the remainder of the afternoon idly searching for the errant Mr. Speck, all the while discussing the significance of the little black volume and the vaulted archives concealed within Windsford. Adolphus has asked repeatedly to be allowed entry to the west wing in order to examine the volumes, but although I consider him my closest friend and confidant I am unwilling to tolerate another living soul entering my most private and secluded sanctum. It is bad enough that Mr. Speck has apparently seen fit to violate my privacy, without additional interlopers traipsing about inspecting this and that.

This affair has taken on a semblance most sinister to me; I feel unsafe and shackled with paranoia even within my own manor, and indeed even within the seclusion of the old hall of Windsford. The only individual who seems to have any notion of what is going on is Mr. Speck, and having expressed what can only be described as anarchical sentiment I do not know that he can be trusted. It is my solemn hope that an explanation shall be forthcoming and that normalcy can be restored in the hall of Mossthorpe.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

The brief cycling fad had sadly fallen out of favor in the county Pendleton by the time of this entry, the Pedaler's Society having been replaced by a number of upstart clubs for automobile enthusiasts by the early 1900's. But although Lord Gosham employed a mechanic on the estate and appears to have owned at least one automobile of his own, he considered automobiles "foolish at best and thoroughly deadly at worst," preferring to travel by bicycle whenever possible.

- Winslow

June 30, 1904

This morning I rose long before the sun had chased the fog from the moors and made my way through the manor in utter silence, luxuriating in the darkness and calm of the gentle morning. The events of yesterday had left my mind in such a state that I knew I desired naught but solitude for the first several hours of the new day, and so to this end I had decided to embark upon a cycling tour of my family's lands and the surrounding principalities. As the road to Dundle can attract all varieties of miscreants and hopjacks, I brought with me a small shot pistol and several handfuls of the professor's specially formulated bituminous powder, which I judged to be more than sufficient to deter any footpads I might encounter in the course of my journeys.

Having retrieved my bicycle from the truffing shed by lanternlight, I set out upon the ill-kept road which abuts the estate's eastern border, taking care not to pass too near the newly occupied guesthouse for fear of arousing the interest of either the maniacal Mr. Speck or his troupe of itinerant roustabouts. On the topic of Mr. Speck's associates, I fear that they have brought fear and not a little bit of disorder to the staff of my estate, Mrs. Boddinger and the scullery maids having complained to me at great length about their uncouth behavior. I have been informed that Mrs. Boddinger's young ladies took particular offense to their leers and cath-colls, though it is of little surprise to me that persons of low birth should behave in such a way.

I pedaled in silence across the moors for some time without incident, enjoying the unusually brisk breeze and the great greenish-grey expanse of the land. As I passed near the abandoned Throppington hatpin factory, however, I suddenly became aware of a curious dark shape in the sky above the horizon. As I rode closer, I realized that it was a black gas balloon, just visible high above the ground in the distance. It was drifting in an easterly direction as it was conveyed across the heavens by the rousing wind I had enjoyed all morning. I was just barely able to perceive a metallical

undercarriage dangling from beneath the narrow gas bag and the presence of a small propeller at the rear of the craft before it swung lazily about and began to head in my direction.

Considerably disheartened at the prospect of talking to some errant and altitude-sickened balloonist so early in my solitudinous journey, I redoubled my pedaling and turned down a narrow side-road that I had espied for some time in the distance. It took me on a winding path through the grey and sodden swamps that are all about the outlay of Dundle, while in the distance I could perceive the ruined bridges and cast-off roads beckoning entrance to that city of charlatans and mountebanks. Regardless of my considerable speed and the skill with which I navigated between the loose stones and gravel of the little road, each and every time I turned about to gaze back the way I had come, I was dismayed to witness the little black ballooncraft still toddling along in my wake.

I continued riding for perhaps ten minutes, periodically checking the position and bearing of the balloon until it became clear to me that the flying contraption was seemingly in pursuit. I was greatly perturbed at the prospect of interruption, but as retreat from the unwelcome visitor seemed an impossibility I resolved to await the arrival of the balloonist so as to pass through the inevitably ensuing conversation as quickly as possible. When the balloon finally drew within a stonethrow of where I stood, it swung low over the road as if to alight upon it, but overshot considerably and settled clumsily in the nearby swamp. I observed that it was piloted not by a raucous Scotsman of some sort as I had anticipated, but rather by an elderly man dressed in the fashion of an undertaker or vivisectionist who struggled to disengage his feet from the treadle and chain mechanism that seemed to drive the thing's propeller. As he freed himself from the rigging he introduced himself to me as one Mr. Drindle, explaining in a droning and tedious voice that he was a balloon fancier from London.

“And may I ask what brings you so far afield? Catch a bit of an ill-wind, did we?” I inquired, in a humorous tone of voice.

“No, sir, the winds were just fine,” replied Mr. Drindle, without even a hint that he had picked up on my quite obvious jest. “But I lost my way, you see, having gotten turned about and lost sight of the coast. I thought to land and ask you for directions, in fact, but now I fear my grand adventures will be interrupted by the sad condition of my balloon. Mud has gotten into the treadles, and it will take some time to rebrace the bag.”

“Ah, yes, adventures, of course. And what sort of adventures might these be, that bring you to Pendleton?” I asked, for something odd had struck me about the whole situation.

“Very grand ones, your grace,” the man droned. “I possess a charter from the Royal Society to explore along the coast, looking for interesting formations of rocks and waves and such.”

I suspected at once that this was an outright fabrication. Not only was Pendleton’s coast of scant interest to something as lofty as the Royal Society, but Drindle was considerably ill-attired for adventuring, dressed as he was in the dour clothes of a banker, with a ruffled lace collar that was badly out of date and with his thin grey hair tied back in the manner of a school teacher. The obvious deception left me ill at ease, and so I very politely explained that he had no reason to hide his true nature from me, whatever it might be, as I was a reasonable gentleman and a man of discretion and seriousness.

The alleged Mr. Drindle did not seem particularly comforted by my statements, insisting again that he was indeed from the Royal Society, then commenced to pace back and forth in the grass and would answer no further questions. I felt quite bad about leaving the man to his own devices on the moors, despite his obvious fabrications, and so I took a seat nearby to rest and observe him.

After a short while, Drindle came over and asked whether I believed I could hear a carriage approaching, noting that he was hard of hearing. This seemed to me a very odd statement, yet after a minute of listening I did indeed hear the wheels of a carriage approaching from beyond the next hill. No sooner had I informed Mr. Drindle of this fact than a narrow black Gosford carriage drawn by two mottled Clydesdales came into view. It drew up some hundred feet down the road, and stopped.

Seeing this, Mr. Drindle thanked me for my assistance -- though in truth I had given none -- pressed a paper calling card into my hand, and hurried down the path towards the carriage. The carriage leapt into motion the moment the elderly man stepped aboard, sweeping past me in a blur and abandoning the wreckage of the balloon with less fuss than I have seen others discard a worn top-hat or a virginal inherited from a doting aunt.

It was only when I inspected the calling card he had left me that I began to suspect the true nature of Mr. Drindle. Taking note of the card's sable color and its familiar yet unusual typography, I realized suddenly that I held in my

hand a message from none other than the Cemetery Society! The message scrawled upon the card instructed me to wait at midnight tonight in the great ruined librarium of Windsford hall, and so with terrifying speed I rode the entire way back to Mossthorpe in scarcely a third of the time my journey took on the outgoing!

Thoroughly exhausted, I rest now in the comfort of my bedchamber, mentally preparing myself for whatever oddities and confabulation tonight may hold. I struggle with a grim paranoia that these events may somehow all relate to one another, from Mr. Speck's strange behavior to the disappearance of the professor's automobile and even the activities ongoing at the guest house. I feel confident that the fullness of all things shall soon become apparent, and await eagerly my rendezvous with this mysterious association.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

1 July, 1904

Last night after I had finished cataloging the day's events within the pages of my ledger, I shut myself within my chambers to await the eve's gypsum hour, when I might descend to the Gosham family librarium and at last learn the secrets of the Cemetery Society, that mysterious association which has consumed my interest for the past several days. My nerves were by then badly fatigued, and so I sought to calm my mind with a bottle of finest Scotch from my own personal stockroom. As chaser to this delightful beverage, I engaged in a bit of scholarly investigation of the works of Shelley and Byron, particularly as pertains their use of certain grammatical formations and its reflection on the character of the upper-class -- a subject with which any learned or even literate person should be familiar, I'd warrant.

My study was soon interrupted by the ringing of the professor's ingenious mechanical summoner, a device by which the motion of a bell-pull in the servant's quarters may be conveyed to a bell and clapper arrangement within my chambers by means of a series of ropes and pulleys. It has been an invaluable tool to me, given my frequent seclusions and my deep loathing of visitors within the old chambers of the western wing. Leaving the words of Shelley and Byron behind and donning my evening hat, a fine black affair that has reportedly become an item of folk popularity since my recent trip to Coddlesley, I made haste to the main hall of the eastern wing to discover what circumstances required my presence.

Upon arriving in the main hall, the reason for the device's activation was woefully clear: for there in my favorite tall-backed Wickham chair sat the Heiress Rookbury. Mr. Speck was still nowhere to be seen, to my great consternation, but Mrs. Boddinger was on hand to inform me that the lady had arrived by carriage some short time previous and had positively insisted upon seeing me.

"Oh, Lord Gosham, my lovely Henrius," the lady gushed upon seeing me, in a tone of voice that informed me she was quite drunk. "It is simply wonderful to see you! I've missed you so, and you never will come and see me! Oh, what wonderful fun we could have together, though, yes? Sit, sit, your wonderful people have been filling me in on your adventures! And what adventures they are! I simply must hear more!"

It was well past an acceptable hour for a lady to visit a gentleman unchaperoned, the iniquities of our younger generation notwithstanding, and

so I very politely attempted to persuade the heiress to call on me again the following day, when under the rules of propriety it would be much more acceptable. She seemed shockingly impervious to this logic and insisted upon remaining until I regaled her with tales of my many adventures, and preferably in private. This latter suggestion fell on me like an early frost and nearly set my teeth a-chattering, for I know well what that termagant likes to get up to.

Seeing no other way around the situation, I grudgingly dismissed Mrs. Boddinger and led the Heiress Rookbury to the sitting room that faces the western gardens. Though she had seemed anxious to speak with me just minutes before, once we were alone she suddenly lost all interest in conversation and refused to explain her presence further, other than drunkenly demanding that I come sit by her. I attempted to distract her with a tale of my recent trip to Morocco, yet she seemed disinterested and made only fleeting comments, largely devoting herself to fawning prettily in her chair and making deep sighs and over-wrought expressions at me. When I ceased to speak, she draped a handkerchief across her face and refused to look at me further. This act left me somewhat cross and flabbergasted.

It was only then that I realized the late hour, for it was five minutes past Midnight and I was late for my appointed meeting with the mysterious Cemetery Society! Bolting from the sitting room with nary a care for the heiress or her startled cries, I rushed frantically through the western wing, scaling the teetering and rarely dependable spiral stairs with abandon and racing through corridor after corridor to arrive in my family's ruined librarium. I flung wide the oaken doors of the chamber and burst through, scarcely remembering to snatch my hat from my head so as not to offend whatever strange cast might occupy my family's archives.

You cannot then imagine my shock to witness a lone pair of figures standing amidst the piles of ruined books and scattered tables, one a tall and gangly shape, the other much shorter and holding aloft a shuttered lantern which cast a faint and scattered yellow light upon the surfaces of the librarium. I realized with a start that it was none other than the maniacal Mr. Speck and the man who had previously introduced himself to me as Mr. Drindle the balloon enthusiast! I was so taken aback by this development that I bit my thumb in shock.

“Lord Gosham!” oozed Mr. Drindle, that supposed balloonist suddenly taking on a tone as insipid and ingratiating as any solicitor I have ever seen. “What a fortuitous meeting, and may I say it is a great pleasure to see you

again, and thank you such a great deal for helping me the other day. We have much to discuss, it seems.”

“Further Royal Society business, is it?” I said, with great sarcasm. “And you, Mr. Speck! I am surprised to see you here, and not off throwing bombs at some anarchist rally, after your outburst the other morning! And stealing my book!”

Mr. Speck seemed quite angry at my words, yet before he could respond Mr. Drindle cleared his throat and interjected, “Oh, please don’t be upset with Mr. Speck. I’m afraid this was all quite out of his control, at least once he informed me of the ledger you found. It was I who asked him to procure it, so that I could authenticate it.”

“Authenticate it?”

“Why, yes! We needed to know if it was truly the business ledger of your father. You see, Sir Gosham, Speck and I are both part of the same, ah... ‘business interest’ is perhaps the most precise term, although I am sad to say it does not truly convey the scope of the matter. Suffice to say, we are representatives of a going concern that has great interest in the former business doings of your illustrious forebear and predecessor.”

“The Cemetery Society!” I exclaimed.

“A fabrication!” Speck interjected, nastily. “Or are you so blind as to miss that obvious fact? I concocted the whole thing on a whim; an intriguing sounding name and diversion to keep you occupied while I carried out the necessary legwork and this regrettable fellow arrived from foreign parts.”

“Legwork?” I demanded. “Legwork for what? To gobshaw and filly-dally me and make me seem an utter goob?”

“Perish the thought!” cried Mr. Drindle, cutting Speck off. “No, as I said, it is all to do with your father’s business interests. Your father was a much more diversified businessman than even you may realize. Perhaps as a boy you saw strange men coming and going, in meetings with your father? Dark sorts, neither tallywed nor bureaucrat?”

“Certainly, but I had assumed that was all to do with treacle!”

A dark look came across Speck’s face. “Even one such as you should realize

your father's interests extended quite a bit beyond the treacle trade," he said. "Like all moneyed individuals, he sought to grasp at more than what society owed him!"

I was quite taken aback, for my father was a good and just man, with few vices beyond the occasional drink and some wandering hands now and then. "Surely you can't mean illegal matters?"

Mr. Drindle suddenly became very agitated. "Ah, no, no, of course not," he insisted, waving his hands around. "Nothing illegal in the slightest. Merely, let us say, the exchange of foreign commodities, and unsigned bankhand notes, and other very dull and boring particulars of which neither I nor especially not my associate Mr. Speck should bore you with, isn't that right, Mr. Speck?"

Mr. Speck scowled, and Drindle continued. "No doubt you're curious about the contents of the cyphered book you found. Well, permit me to illuminate you: it is a ledger, and contains business contacts and what may broadly be called your father's economical doings. The unusual business deals that I just mentioned are detailed therein. Now, Lord Gosham... what if I were to tell you that I could help restore both your family's honor and its material fortunes?"

I could only laugh, and tell Mr. Drindle that I would think him a very silly man indeed. Much as I hate to admit it, my family's collapse is quite common knowledge in these parts. The man, however, had more to say.

"Before you dismiss me outright, let me make you my proposal," Mr. Drindle said smoothly. "We... by which I mean those who have retained Speck and I, of course... would like to resume the business your father once dabbled in. You need not know the particulars, only that it is perfectly legal, yes, most assuredly. With your father's ledger, we know more than enough to pick up where it left off. There is money to be made, and what's more, we need from you only your assent, and the use of your underdocking."

"Does this have anything to do with those terrible roustabouts in the guesthouse?" I demanded, becoming increasingly bewildered. "And the disappearance of the professor's automobile? And... surely not Cheshire's departure, as well!"

Mr. Drindle looked momentarily uncomfortable, and wrung his hands. "We've dispensed with some members of your staff, it is true, and I do

apologize for the imposition there. Rest assured, Cheshire was compensated very well and provided good references, and all on the very simple condition that he take quite a long trip and abdicate his position. I'm sure you'll find Mr. Speck a more than adequate replacement."

"And the boatswain, Mr. O'Leary?" I pressed.

"Ah, yes, well," Drindle replied, growing increasingly evasive. "He was offered the same terms as Cheshire, but I am afraid a sad and regrettable accident occurred, yes, and quite unforeseen, for while he was considering our proposal, he fell into the treacherous waters of your underdocking and was somewhat... drowned."

"If I'm any judge, he came down with the Grapnel sickness," Speck mused, with what I felt was rather misplaced whimsy.

"Preposterous!" I declared, quite thoroughly taken aback. "O'Leary has worked for my family for what I imagine to be generations! He was a very strong swimmer, I know this for a fact, for my father once told me."

Speck smiled darkly. "Well, the Grapnel sickness strikes us all differently."

I was very taken aback by all this, but Drindle assured me that it was all on the up-and-up, and while I am extremely bothered by the man and find him a very disagreeable and sad person, in the end I decided to give my assent. And so I accepted the offer of the lugubrious Mr. Drindle, and will permit these mysterious benefactors to pursue their business interests. If my father was involved, I am sure it was a fine and upstanding business, for he was not the sort of man to consort with commoners or vile philanderers and certainly not with anyone of questionable ethics.

I was presented with a complicated document drawn up by Mr. Drindle on the spot, and the dour little man explained in the mealy-mouthed words of lawyers that it stipulates a full and equal stake in the board which will oversee these selfsame transactions. I conveyed my approval for the terms of the agreement, the document was signed by all present, and we at last retired to the sitting room of the eastern wing -- where we discovered the recumbent and senseless form of the Heiress Rookbury splayed out upon a lounge, still clutching a snifter of brandy.

Today I rose with a great sense of purpose and tranquility, for I know now that the Gosham name shall be resigned to wallowing in disrepute and

obscurity no longer. Yet despite my desire to think long on these developments, I have a great many things to attend to over the course of today, beginning with readying a carriage to bring the Heiress Rookbury back to her own estate. She weathered the drink rather poorly and has been very cross this morning, but I suppose that is the nature of her kind.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

A short gap exists in the record following this entry, which is uncharacteristic for the normally reliable Lord Gosham.

- Winslow

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The Feline Affair and the Arrival of
Ictor Pembroke, Nemesis

Pets were common in the high society of the county Pendleton, with many aristocratic households treating their animal companions as full-fledged members of their lineages. One man in particular, Lord Harsley of Wicket, even went so far as to use his considerable influence over the House of Lords to have his bull terrier Mutters declared a sovereign individual, full citizen, and the sole beneficiary of his estate.

- Winslow

8 July, 1904

This morning the estate was visited by two persons in the employ of Mr. Speck, their arrival interrupting my breakfast with Professor Adolphus and putting me in a decidedly ill mood. They were the both of them dark characters, possessed of a sulking demeanor and secretive eyes that peered this way and that as if loose in their skulls and desperate to find a means of escape.

The more garrulous of the two was a foul-mannered American colonial who introduced himself to me as Poss Greesley, all the while picking rudely at his thumbnails with a little blade. He had the gnarled ears of a pugilist and seemed a rough sort, and I did not relish his presence in Mossthorpe in the slightest. He was accompanied by a squat bearded man who spoke little, save to give his name in a sour German accent as Doppel Hans. This pair of ruffians informed me that Mr. Speck wished to confer with me at some point on the subject of certain restorations to the old guesthouse, which he has so recently occupied. Their message duly delivered, the two men continued on their way, leaving behind a stench of soiled clothing and throat medicine that lingered in the great hall for several hours.

After concluding breakfast I bid farewell to my friend Adolphus, who has chosen to return to Coddlesley so that he might resume his studies on the interaction of bismolic acetate and the bodily humours. He is certain of a breakthrough in the very near future, and so I wished him a fair journey and speedy progress upon his return. This sad task complete, I made my way back up the drive. As I neared the front door, however, I suddenly noticed some manner of package at rest on the stoop of the manor's grand entrance.

As I drew nearer, it became clear to me that the object was some manner of bassinet. I felt a sense of dread descend upon me, having had previous ill experiences with such things. Some few years ago, while preparing to embark on a journey to Oxford in the midst of a downpour, I came across a

wicker basket abandoned on my step. Investigating further, I discovered that it contained a small olive-skinned infant swaddled in blankets and sucking intently on its thumbs. I canceled my trip so that I might see the matter to its conclusion and ensure that the infant was properly cared-for, only to have the horrid thing devour nearly every item of food in the pantry and ultimately abscond with a sizable quantity of negotiable bonds. To make matters all the worse, I was visited the very next week by a wretched crone demanding several handfuls of drachmas for the loss of her child. Given this lamentable experience, I feel my reticence and suspicion were warranted.

And so for this reason I approached this new bassinet with great care, ready to depart with haste should it appear to be an implement in some further gypsy deceit. But hearing no sounds other than a quiet thrum, I summoned up the resolve to lift aside the blankets within the small bed. To my great surprise the bassinet contained not some vile Sicilian babe but rather a small black cat, which peered curiously up at me with dazzling green eyes and meoled pitifully.

I felt deep regret for my initial suspicion and made to bring the creature inside, instructing Mrs. Boddinger to fetch a saucer of milk and my black leather medicine bag. After giving the feline a cursory examination and finding it undiseased and in good health, I have decided to allow it to remain within Mossthorpe as a mascot or familiar of sorts. In my youth I was forbidden to keep pets, my dear mother having suffered from all manner of allergies and afflictions related to the presence of the feline species, and I find now that some long-forgotten part of my soul longs for the company of a pet. I have named the creature Du Lac after my associate Winston du Lac, who owns a very profitable symphony house in Shefton.

Leaving Du Lac in the care of one of Mrs. Boddinger's scullery maids, I donned my hat and set forth to visit Mr. Speck at the guest house. To my considerable delight I was greeted at the cottage's front door by the charming Miss Abscissa, whose acquaintance I had very nearly made in Coddlesley. She informed me that she arrived by motorcar this morning and shall hereafter remain at the guest house to assist Mr. Speck in his restorations and, ultimately, in the operation and management of his planned wayfarer's inn.

“Ah,” I said. “I expect you help with the tidying up and such? A woman’s touch can be most invaluable, at the correct time.”

The lady smiled wanly at me. “Begging your pardon, sir, but I am a calculist, not a housekeeper,” she replied. “I do up the numbers and make sure

everything is in order. I'm most skilled. In fact, I possess a certification from University College London."

I allowed that this was very impressive, then attempted to question the lady about her heritage and the aristocratic roots previously hinted at by Mr. Speck, but she became evasive and excused herself shortly thereafter, citing a pressing need for refreshment and a lie-down. I was saddened by the brevity of our discourse, but I am confident that we shall have much to discuss in the future.

My meeting with Mr. Speck was of little interest; he wished only to inform me of several architectural modifications to the structure, none of which bear repeating. Afterwards he accompanied me back to Mossthorpe and undertook to organize arrangements for supper, demonstrating once again his capability as factotum and chief porter. The man may be odd and even mischievous at times, but he is nothing if not competent.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

Lord Gosham's family tree was quite large and extremely complicated, even by aristocratic standards. His father was one of at least four brothers (some confusion remains), while the Lady Gosham (née Wadd) came from an extremely robust family, numbering some six brothers and eight sisters, as well as innumerable cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews, and nieces. The Wadd family estate was based in neighboring Shefton county, although an ongoing feud between the two families over an inheritance kept contact at a minimum.

- Winslow

9 July, 1904

I have had a terrible day from the very start, and all because of that bothersome animal! When I returned from my morning walk through the gardens, my bedchamber was in an absolute shambles, with curiosities, heirlooms, and artifacts strewn across the floor in various states of ruination. I discovered Du Lac resting upon the porcelain in my private bath, grooming himself and apparently unperturbed by the great mess he had caused. I vowed to be patient with my new tenant and so tidied up to the best of my ability, returning my bourbons to their proper order and restoring organization to my collection of smoking pipes. I have found that nearly any collection is greatly improved by the addition of proper organization, whether that collection be sartorial or literary in nature.

Having finished with my pipes, I retired to the reading room hoping to ease my nerves. But this was not to be, for therein I discovered that my wooden bust of Kepler had been knocked to the floor and clawed, the head of the great astronomer looking as if it had been attacked by a furious badger. I returned Kepler to his shelf and spent some time engrossed in the works of Byron, then rose and went downstairs for my afternoon tea and whisky and biscuits. Some may think this an odd combination, but it is my experience that the scorch of a fine whisky significantly improves the otherwise dull affair of teatime. Today I supped upon a Caol Glenliddie 1822. It was most delightful, which is more than can be said for Mrs. Boddinger's ghastly chamomile tea.

Whilst enjoying the Glenliddie, I struck upon to the notion of spending the remainder of the afternoon observing the activities of Mr. Speck and his roustabouts through the telescopic seeing glass that I keep in the observatory. I dispatched a porter to call on Miss Abscissa and inquire as to her availability for dinner, then returned to the secluded western hall to begin my

reconnaissance.

As I ascended the set of spiral stairs that leads to the observatory, I heard a clatter of metal and a shattering of glass. I climbed the remainder of the stairs with great haste and arrived scarcely in time to witness Du Lac bolting from the room, apparently fleeing his guilt in the destruction of an antique sextant that I received from my Uncle Vemus. I returned to my chambers and found within my dressing room a set of drapes that had been pulled from their rod and shredded with wild abandon, leaving a mess of black threads cast across the floor like a spider's web. The leather ottoman in the sitting room had also been thoroughly gnawed upon. I attended to these inconveniences as best I could, but I am not a carpenter by trade and I fear I shall have to request that Mr. Speck summon a craftsman to restore my footstool.

I searched my chambers and then greater Mossthorpe for Du Lac, hoping to chaperone the cat so as to prevent further damages to my belongings, but I could find him nowhere in the household. Not willing to give up quite so soon, I enlisted the aid of several porters to help me search for the creature, but in the end all of us met with equal failure in the matter. It is now late evening and I have seen neither hide nor hair of Du Lac for hours, and I dare not allow myself to think too long of the mischief the creature may be up to, lest I spoil my appetite for supper. I have heard no response from Miss Abscissa, but I shall inquire after her whereabouts with Mr. Speck this eve.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

10 July, 1904

This morning Mrs. Boddinger prepared for me a special breakfast of moist scrumpin, a favorite delicacy of mine from my time in the academy. It is quite difficult to find proper oats for the scrumpins on this portion of the moor, and so meals of this sort are quite rare indeed. There is nothing like the warm splash of the gravy to rouse oneself from the last shreds of midnight slumber. Whilst enjoying my breakfast I spoke with Mrs. Boddinger on the matter of Du Lac's behavior, thinking that perhaps her feminine expertise might lend itself to quandaries of the animal sort. I have always believed that the fairer sex has a special affinity for animals, perhaps relating to the more bestial and base manners of womanfolk.

Whatever the reason, my belief was in this instance borne out; Mrs. Boddinger revealed to me that she has made the acquaintance of a most singular individual, a renowned "animal perceptionist" by the name of Dierdre Evansglast. Madam Evansglast's skill with common household pets is extraordinary, and it is said that she can accurately assay -- from a mere glance! -- the precise weight in bushel-pounds of all varieties of canine or feline regularis. She has also been known to discern the ailments -- both of the body physical and of the inner soul -- of dogs, cats, horses, and on one occasion a badger and dormouse. At the time, I noted this as a mere amusing fact -- Du Lac had been difficult, yet not wholly beyond my capacities as a trainer.

I had not seen Du Lac since the previous evening and had become filled with dread at the thought of the mischief he might be doing while not under my watchful gaze; yet as time passed and breakfast wound on into a timely brunch, I found myself increasingly at ease. Surely, I imagined, Du Lac had found some quiet place to bed down and would arise, as before, in late afternoon to pester me with meowling and cait-walling. With my fears quelled, I thanked Mrs. Boddinger for an excellent breakfasting and returned to my chambers -- and it was there that I was met with a terrible shock!

In my restoration of the Gosham family quarters, I arranged for an abundance of cabinets and closetry, for I have long found that proper attitude and manners demand a space that is conducive to gentlemanly behavior and customs. For the same reasons, I also commissioned the subsequent addition of many smaller rooms with purposes both diverse and specific; among these chambers are my observatory, the gazing room, the tiny triangular room which I am in the habit of calling the littlest room (though in truth there is a bread store in the basement which is somewhat smaller), and lastly my

remembrance room, where I store keepsakes from relatives and friends long since departed.

It was to this latter room that I made my way after brunch, seeking to retrieve a small volume on the care and training of the common squirrel given to me by my fourth cousin on my mother's side, Sir Lucius Shropp. Though the squirrel and feline are scarcely alike, I thought I might perhaps find some hint or clue to my current situation. But upon entering the remembrance room I found not the volume in question, but rather an affront nearly beyond description!

For there in the middle of the floor lay the shattered remains of the urn that once contained the ashes of my dear Auntie Fibula. The sight near brought me to my knees, and I let out a furious and anguished yell at the sheer gall of it all. I searched furiously through the rooms of my personal quarters, and at last found the fiendish creature Du Lac sulking beneath a duvet in the miniature library. I felt a terrible and inexplicable vengeance enter into me at the sight of the cat and I attempted to scoop him up into my hands so as to demonstrate the errors of his behavior, yet always I found the creature just quick enough to speed from my clutching hands. I was thereafter led on a merry chase through my quarters in mad pursuit of the beast.

When finally I laid hands upon him, Du Lac was in such a state that he strove to bite and claw me and I was ultimately forced to put him within the sturdy hemp sack I use to transport my builder's theodolite and other surveying apparatuses. I sought out Mrs. Boddinger immediately and inquired as to the whereabouts of Madam Evansglast, for I feel now that expert assistance is required if I am ever to tame Du Lac's feral nature and put an end to his troublemaking. I should feel absolutely awful at being forced to cast Du Lac out on his ear once again, for tho the animal has been with me for scarcely a day I suspect he has already grown accustomed to the finer things and could not now fend for himself. And so when my housekeeper replied that this astounding woman lives within a half hour's carriage ride, I summoned Mr. Speck and had him dispatch a runner at once. He returned some time later with the information that Madam Evansglast shall call upon us tomorrow at one o' clock precisely.

I spent the remainder of today in seclusion, smoking my pipes and sampling a variety of bourbons to calm my tattered nerves. I have entrusted Du Lac to the inimitable Mr. Speck, who has promised to watch over him within the reconstructed guesthouse and ensure that no further damage is done to the estate. I fear that the carpet in the remembrance room shall be a total loss, for

I do not think I could bear to ask the maids to sweep up my dear relative like so much troublesome dust. I shall perhaps have Mr. Speck's laborers dig a pit, in order that Auntie Fibula and the rug might be properly interred.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

11 July, 1904

This morning a letter arrived from Professor Adolphus informing me that Ictor Pembroke has returned to the county. This comes at a decidedly poor time for me, with my own attention presently focused upon the ongoing irregularities at Mossthorpe and my new and burgeoning business venture with Mistrs Drindle and Speck. If ever there has been such a thing in this world, Mr. Pembroke is surely my nemesis. The man is a canker, an utter bore, and a pox on my very life, and I would not wish to afflict him on even the surliest of badgers.

We were the both of us educated at the University of Wymlick, though I in classics and Ictor in philosophy. He is some years my junior, yet was able to attend at a very young age on the strength of his allegedly prodigious intellect -- though I myself have never seen any sign of it. While I occupied myself with scholarly studies and gentlemanly pastimes like fencing, Ictor wasted whatever gifts he might have possessed drinking and cavorting and engaging in schoolboy pugilism. The both of us earned our firsts, yet while I put my education to use voyaging all about the world and engaging in enlightened pursuits, Ictor spent several years mooning about London, flagrantly spending his father's money and falling in with a crowd of alleged artistes. He even took to wearing his hair long like some absurd Byronic hero.

When last I spoke with him, he was in a tizzy over having failed to inherit the lordly title of his father, the Earl of Hutchinson. Ictor refused to elaborate on the circumstances, saying only that it had been thieved from him by unjust forces. Perhaps his late father ultimately perceived his son's uncouth manners and general uselessness and made the wise choice of casting him off from the family name.

Despite his horribleness, there is something about Ictor that the fairer sex finds appealing. I shudder at the thought of him traipsing about the county, inveigling honest ladies in his sinister intrigues. He shall most assuredly call upon me at some point, if only to boast of his most recent expedition or accomplishment, and though I detest the man the rules of common decency and our mutual bond of education will oblige me to treat Ictor with at least some courtesy.

When last he visited the county, I had Cheshire travel to Coddlesley and spread a rumor that I had been stricken with some ghastly contagion and could not under any circumstances receive guests -- yet in spite this, Ictor

insisted upon visiting me and gloating for hours at my bedside of his grand and sordid adventures in Prague with the dowager princess Christina. For some inexplicable reason, he seems to consider me a friend and remains oblivious to the fact that I loathe him in every respect.

Aside from my anxieties over the arrival of Pembroke, today proved itself quite satisfactory. Madam Evansglast the animal perceptionist arrived, as promised, on the stroke of one. She rode up in a fine grey carriage and was accompanied by her assistant, a young girl by the name of Constance. Dierdre Evansglast is a fine and robust woman of a certain age; her manners are extremely refined and her diction is without blemish or slur. However, it is possible that the same might not be said of her eyesight, as she initially mistook me for the head porter and asked to see the man of the house. In her defense, she missed scarcely a beat in introducing herself to me formally after her mistake had been brought to her attention.

After polite introductions and some idle conversation, Constance asked that Madam Evansglast be shown the animal for whose sake she had been summoned. I led the pair to the great hall, where Mr. Speck made a great show of releasing Du Lac from his sack and introducing the creature to the ladies. Though it was an amusing flair and well-received by all, I feel confident that my manservant does not take this matter as seriously as I myself do. It is unfortunate that he is now showing a penchant for sarcasm, as Mr. Speck's services have otherwise been exemplary.

Having been released from his sack, Du Lac made to careen wildly about the room but was quickly apprehended by the young miss Constance and brought to her Madam for examination. After spending some few minutes poking and prodding the animal, Madam Evansglast declared that Du Lac merely suffered from an ague of the lung and could be cured through the judicious application of a special peppermint liniment, which she herself would prepare.

Madam Evansglast has now departed, taking with her a small but handsome sum in bank bills for her troubles. I am deeply grateful for her intervention, though the odor of the liniment is without equal and I fear it may interfere with my dinner until such a time as I have grown used to its troubling miasma. I shall have Mrs. Boddinger prepare a thank-you letter for the good Madam and make note to invite her to my yearly Findlermas festivities.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

12 July, 1904

This morning I summoned Mr. Speck, intending to question him at length on the subject of our nascent business venture, feeling as I do that I am at a disadvantage in my understanding of the doings and workings of the thing. It makes me nervous to be so deeply invested in a business enterprise without having the slightest idea what its actual purpose is. In addition, it has precluded any real involvement on my part in matters of administration and accounting. Mr. Drindle has on several occasions sought my approval regarding vast trivialities related in some vague way to our enterprise, such as whether I felt it more agreeable to refer to ourselves as a concern, a trust, or simply as an interest, and if any of my existing economical holdings might perhaps be of use to our enterprise; yet each time I have been unable to provide a proper response, owing to my poor grasp of the business which operates under my own endowment and upon my very estate.

I fear that even were I to gain a firm understanding of our venture, I would be of little use in matters of such fine detail. I have explained time and again to Mr. Drindle that although the late Lord Gosham was quite adept at economical oversight, I myself am but a mere novice in the sport and am much more acquainted with matters of science and history. I fear that my lordly title and vast estate have quite confounded the insipid Mr. Drindle, given his inability to distinguish my proper areas of expertise. And true to my initial impression, the accountant has proved to be a very pedestrian and tiresome little man, always frowning and capering about on some task.

Mr. Speck was some time in arriving, and so in his absence I began work on a series of enlightening tales for little folk -- a project I have been thinking over for some time now. When I was a youth my governess would, on occasion, concoct stories to occupy my mind and provide relief from the rigors of daily schooling. They were filled with adventure and intrigue and provided useful tidbits of information on the world around me, such as the fact that a thrupenny piece may be used to clean a lampwick if one also possesses a measure of spirits. I feel quite firmly that I am a better man for having been told stories of Admiral Buckweather and his spanish manservant Fenton, yet I must nevertheless acknowledge that they were but the whimsies of a rather senile old woman who sadly did not possess the luxury of modern scientific thought and insight. It is fortunate for me, then, that Professor Adolphus has authored several texts on child rearing. It is from these documents that I have derived my inspiration.

The professor has, through various rigorous tests, demonstrated that children

have an unusual affinity for animals, and so my protagonist will take the form of a feline whom I have named Lord Sir Buttons of Meow. Tho I derived great interest from Mrs. Varberger's tales of high-seas adventure and piratical escapades as a youth, I fear that those particular stories left much to be desired. The stories of Sir Buttons shall be more than mere entertainment, and will in fact double as a guide to ethical and productive living. Rather than galavanting about the world fruitlessly, Sir Buttons shall spend much of his time in a laboratory conducting experiments for the betterment of cat-kind, or perhaps petitioning Parliament to relax restrictions on the purchasing of large quantities of cat-chemicals.

But so as not to lose the interest of my theoretical audience amidst tiresome tales of endless experimenting, the hypothetical Sir Buttons will also possess a wondrous umbrella with which he can travel to any place in the world by simply closing it around himself and saying aloud the name of the town or place he wishes to visit. I realize this to be a very fanciful notion, but Professor Adolphus has assured me that it would not seem the least bit incongruous to the mind of a child. This is fortunate, since I feel it is an excellent start and it would be a shame to abandon my labors.

I must take pause to remark that I find the act of writerly creation to be one that provides particular bromide to the weary and dullor of life's cares. This quality is most enhanced by the use of a fine wooden desk, varnished with a preparation of chalm and coal powder that has been boiled for some hours to remove impurities, along with a dip pen of the finest manufacture. I acquired my own pen on one of my infrequent sojourns to London, purchasing it from a very knowledgeable merchant doing business under the name of Salisbury & Stopp. I am told that it is of the latest design, and engineered so as not to sully the trousers should the working artist become overly excited and drop his writing implement.

I was just beginning to immerse myself in writing when Mr. Speck arrived. I quickly set about the task of questioning him about our business concerns, but I am sad to report that my investigations revealed very little new information. My manservant has a curious knack for evading even the most direct inquiries, no matter how cunning they are phrased. I asked in several different ways what the exact nature of our business was, and from where exactly our money would come, but with each answer Mr. Speck endeavored to divulge no new information, while at the same time sufficiently bamboozling me with cunning words and turns of phrase that I was initially left thinking he had been very forthcoming. It was only when I reviewed my notes following his departure that I discovered that the "information" he

provided me was nothing but worthless trivia.

Even more vexing to me is the fact that when I at last confronted Speck with the shortcomings of his explanations, he took upon himself a very dark tone, and remarked to me that I was “meddling in affairs I know not wot.”

“Surely I may know what goes on in my own manor?” I pressed, as Speck turned to leave.

He whirled about and stormed up to me, then, yelling, “Know this, Lord Gosham! You are beginning to meddle, and to dip your toes into a deep and terrifying pool that contains men who are as sharks. And they shall devour you!”

I was taken aback by this outburst, and quickly changed the subject, inquiring about what dinner might be -- to which he replied “Beans, and portents!” and left without elaborating. (I later checked with the cooks and found that he was mistaken, and tonight’s dinner is glazed ham and turnip.)

Several hours of daylight remain, but I believe I shall retire to my study to resume work on the manuscript. If all goes well, I may complete it as early as tomorrow. But then again, perhaps not; I am nothing if not fickle.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

13 July, 1904

I have received a short missive from my nemesis, Ictor Pembroke. It would appear that he is currently residing in a townhouse in Coddlesley, not far from that owned by Professor Adolphus. In what is surely a cunning bid to overcome my aversion to his person, Ictor has requested my presence at a performance of Mendelhov's *Le Cartesian*, and though I wish dearly to decline spending even one fraction of one moment in his presence, the rules of grace and courtesy offer me no alternative but to accept. Yet even setting aside the argent bonds of cruel and indifferent Lady Etiquette, *Le Cartesian* ranks among my most favorite works of later insouçiarique theater and I would feel myself a great daft bird for failing to attend a performance of such prestige.

Ah, to hear the great and glorious crescendo as Peppirco discovers the presence of an entirely new continent! Or the triumphant tuba, most famously played by Rudolpho Paglia, that rises and falls as Captain Mandoloso seeks to educate the savages of the cartographer's new land in such diverse subjects as knitting and the proper placement of prepositions, trying in vain to teach them the hallmarks of society. *Le Cartesian* is truly a testament to gentle Baroque's triumph over the heresies of the charlatan impressionists and their shoddy exhibitionism. If I wished to see a badly painted man in a boat, I would visit a gaggle of student artists at the beach. But I have digressed considerably, I am afraid.

To return to my subject proper -- in order that I might counter the foul presence of my antithetical host, that evil effluence of detestability that pervades all rooms and spaces he inhabits for even the briefest length of time, I have made to invite the Lady Abscissa to be my guest at the performance. I have been thoroughly enamored of the lady since first I laid eyes on her in that alley in Coddlesley, and her presence should be just the balm to soothe my nerves, which are likely to be badly riled by the presence of Ictor.

I have attempted to familiarize myself with the lady at every opportunity, learning her likes and dislikes and seeking to earn her good graces. I know, for instance, that she does not drink tea, but prefers instead the brewed bean drink of the Americans and French, despite its foul and earthen taste. I myself have no patience for the slop, yet I understand that it is favored by the poor, the destitute, and the intensely coarse as a laxative and attention aid. I know also that she keeps quarters in the residence of Mr. Speck, yet as a gentleman I have of course never entered into them. From conversations with my staff I

have learnt that she does not dine at the hours one traditionally does such things, but prefers instead to take her meals early in the morning, long before any normal soul has woken, and late in the night, when all good men have dwindled from their daylight stature and retired for the evening. All these things strike me as quite queer and under other circumstances I would find myself considerably perturbed by them, yet in the case of the lady Abscissa they have accomplished naught but to further intrigue me.

All this being as it is, I was delighted to receive word from the lady -- by way of a tall and surly fellow, who gave his name as Bombadour -- that she is a fellow appreciator of the works of Mendelhov and would take considerable delight in accompanying me to the Coddlesley Round tomorrow's eve. I had thought of asking Mr. Speck for advice on the proper gift one might give to a lady on a strictly platonic and innocent evening out upon the town, but it struck me quite suddenly that I could not be certain that Mr. Speck did not himself desire the favor of gentle Abscissa. As he might give me misleading or destructive advice should he feel that I am intruding upon the attentions of his lady companion, I decided that I would instead turn to Mrs. Boddinger for advice on this most delicate of matters.

I discovered Mrs. Boddinger in the washery, attending to her matronly duties, whereupon she gave me diverse suggestions in the way of appropriate gifts for lady Abscissa. Chief among these suggestions were a bouquet of flowers or, alternately, a decorative tea cozy. I was greatly concerned by the suggestion of flowers, thinking this a rather provocative gift for one platonically seeking the attentions of a lady. I did not wish to seem to her as a card or rapsallion, interested only in her as an objet d'affection, and so I shied away from this initial suggestion and made known to Mrs. Boddinger that I sought above all else to be discreet.

My initial inclination had been to give to her some musical instrument appropriate for a lady, such as a virginal or celletta, as this has long been the custom within my family. However, my housekeeper felt this would be presumptuous and far too cumbersome a gift to bring to the theater -- a fact which, I must admit, I had not considered, owing chiefly to the fact that it is customary for members of the aristocracy to host performances within their own abodes, rather than in some tawdry theater or den of drink. I suppose that this is not an option for poor Ictor, cast off as he was from his heritage. (Although he is still quite wealthy, as I understand it -- not that I would ever concern myself with such a thing, as I am above such trite material concerns.)

My discussion with Mrs. Boddinger has given me a great deal to think about, and I feel it shall profit me to sleep upon the matter and allow it to percolate within my prodigious brain. In any case, I feel certain that I shall have quite fully made up my mind by noontime tomorrow, this being the time our carriage is to depart for Coddlesley. I dearly look forward to the occasion!

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

Here Henrius chose to personify his journal and address a theoretical reader, a practice that was very much in vogue at the time. Although there is no evidence that Lord Gosham expected his journals to attract any interest after his death, many public figures from the period recorded their lives with the specific intent of later publication and would, in writing, frequently address their "readers" as if they were close friends or confidants.

Mr. Farthing Islip, a banker from Chapwick with whom Lord Gosham had some passing familiarity, even went so far as to invite any future readers of his diary over for tea and biscuits whenever they should find it convenient -- much to the dismay of his many descendants, who were quite unaware of this fact when they sold the diaries to a publishing house in 1922.

- Winslow

14 July, 1904

I feel confident in saying that today ranks among the most terrible days I have ever experienced in the two-and-so score years I have lived upon this earth. I have, in the course of the day's events, suffered such embarrassment, such horreur enorme, such impressive malfesance upon my person that I do not know if I shall be able to maintain composure enough to complete my daily entry. If ever these journals should be read by future generations, please do not be concerned if this entry ends abruptly and without explanation; the cause is surely that I decided to go and have a lie-down so that I might get through the rest of this cursed day!

Troubles befell me almost immediately upon my rising, as I was met in my antechamber by an enraged Mr. Speck, who accused me of attempting to ensorcel his business partner and companion so as to seize his business interests and newly acquired property! When I protested that I, as a proper gentleman, would do nothing of the sort and could do naught but treat his lady friend with the utmost respect and courtesy, he called me a very foul term which I shan't record herein and insulted my lineage and all who bore my name. Having done so he flew from the room; he must surely have angered my animal companion Du Lac in some way, for I began hearing a terrible caterwaul within moments, followed by a clattering of things and then silence. I found the beast cowering beneath an armoire, tho he was otherwise unharmed.

Once I had gathered my wits about me, I went to dress myself for the day, only to discover that several of the buttons on my prized specialty coat had

come off their threads and were nowhere to be found. Deprived of such an ideal garment, I made due to the best of my ability, donning my Rudyard hat and greatcoat with great haste even as I began to fear the very real possibility of arriving late for the show. Tho the cornered hat and billowsome coat were not my foremost choices for showgoing attire, I must admit that these items are of a fine make and would surely suffice for any person other than myself. Yet I am of noble birth and must uphold the good traditions of my heritage, and as such it bothered me greatly to be deprived of my favored garments.

It is my firm belief that the aristocracy holds as one of its foremost duties the requirement that it should keep to the highest standards of culture and aesthetic, always donning the finest of regalia when out galloping, and taking great care to adhere to the most strict and stringent rules of etiquette. We might thereby permit the little people of the cities and towns to look up in wonder and witness the lofty heights to which they might someday aspire -- or at least the lofty heights to which their descendants might someday aspire, should they save their money very well or perhaps lead troops to a noble death in some way. Perhaps in the land of the Slavs, which now seems to be the fashionable place to get up to things of that sort.

Now quite prepared for the show, which would commence some three hours prior to teatime, I made haste to meet the Lady Abscissa outside Mr. Speck's cottage so as to accompany her to my chartered coach. Though Mossthorpe has within its stables many fine steeds and a number of oak and mahogany carriages, any of which would surely do well to carry my guest and I to Coddlesley, I must confess that the livery of my drivers is somewhat old fashioned and I did not wish the lady Abscissa to be transported by any but the most fashionable coachmen. Last night I dispatched a runner to the Heiress Rookbury's estate and requested the use of one of her coachmen and carriages, she being one to possess naught but the latest style of things. The Heiress agreed and the coach was to arrive sharply at the stroke of Tenses, but in exchange for this favor I am now expected to have dinner with that loathsome woman on an evening as yet determined. I dread to even think of what might transpire, yet the short notice had left me with little recourse.

I met the Lady at Mr. Speck's cottage and walked with her to the coach, which had arrived and awaited us before Mossthorpe's main gate. She complimented me on my hat, and I on her handkerchief. All seemed to be well, and indeed the first leg of our journey was satisfactory, if tiresome. My one concern was that I found myself stricken with an inability to make conversation with the young lady, leading us to sit in silence as our carriage followed the Coddlesley road through murky swamps and grey fields, past

derelict farmhouses shrouded by mist that the sun had not yet banished and which, judging by experience, it never would.

This went on for some time before I began to fear that my silence might be taken as rudeness or curtly behavior, prompting me to attempt some light discussion. I asked her opinion on the Wickle-Durshore property dispute, which has raised many ires in the county in the past decade, and which I felt was a topic on which any educated soul would hold an informed opinion, it being of chief importance, what with Lord Durshore's family having held the Wickle stead for countless generations, decision of 1372 by the High Court notwithstanding. I was somewhat taken aback when the Lady replied that she had no opinion and in fact had not even heard of the dispute. I sought to explain it to her, but saw that her interest waned rapidly. It is a very complicated matter, and so perhaps exceeded the bounds of her feminine intellect.

Some time later the Lady asked my opinion on various flowers -- roses, black cordelias, and bonnie-may-whats. I was stricken with unnamed terror, flowers not being something which is often studied by students of the histories in proper school. Perhaps things are different at whatever school for ladies is maintained by the University College London, but at a proper school such as I myself attended there is far too much Pliny to discuss to also spend time discussing trite little blossoms. Yet so as not to seem a cad, I informed her that the stem of the rose may be used to brew a quite potent liqueur which my family was once renowned for, and that the black cordelia is extremely poisonous and consumption leads inevitably to death from vomitus, which I then went on to describe in detail by relating an account I had read in one of Adolphus's books of medicine.

I had hoped her to be impressed by the depth of my knowledge, yet realized at once that the subject of vomitus, tho dignified and informative in the proper company, might not be appropriate conversation for a lady, especially one so well-bred. And indeed she had no response to my insights, and spent the remainder of the journey looking out the window and sighing dramatically. I asked her several times if she would care for refreshment, Mrs. Boddinger having packed liverwurst and several varieties of aperitif, but received no further reply. I fear that my discussion of the toxicity of the black cordelia quite ruined her appetite, both for food and conversation.

It took us some time further to reach Coddlesley, and an additional several minutes to reach the steps of the theater, all of which was spent in agonizing silence. Upon arriving it was clear by the abundance of coaches that many of

the guests had already arrived, a fact which I am sure Lady Abscissa noted, for we were late -- embarrassingly, if not scandalously so. I espied the carriages of Lords Dunder and Bentley, as well as a number of automobiles which I assumed were the possessions of wealthy businessmen and fops about town. Their ghastly fumes upset our horses considerably, and we scarcely succeeded in lurching to a stop before the great Coddlesley Round. I helped the lady from the carriage and we made our way into the theater, where we were announced formally and led to our seats.

...

I should like to commit the remainder of my experiences to paper while they are still fresh upon the mind, but I have now begun to feel quite faint and believe I must retire for a time. I shall continue recording this tale of woe and misfortune later in the evening, when one hopes my spirits and health will have improved considerably. I feel it is the very least I am entitled to ask of the world, it having treated me so harshly!

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

The "Mr. C" to whom Henrius alludes in this entry is none other than Sylvester Cotts, an aestheticist, inventor, and personal librarian to the Vicarage of Dundle who would rise to prominence in the following months. He would eventually become a successful businessman and writer, always publishing under the somewhat psuedonymous "Mr. C" and would ultimately emerge as a close friend and associate of the House Gosham.

- Winslow

14 July, 1904, ii.

I must report that my recently-concluded and perhaps sorely misguided attempt at relaxation did little to calm my nerves, leaving me just as flustered as I had previously been. In the process of writing my prior entry, I had worked up a perilous thirst and so decanted a spot of fine whisky, yet found that this normally delightful libation turned to bitter twist across my tongue. Denied the comfort of the drink, I attempted to read a column from the Pendleton Observationist submitted by one "Mr. C" concerning the subject of religion and philosophy and their application upon proper bookbinding, yet despite my natural inclinations towards these realms I found that it served only to depress me further.

My choice, then, was one between wandering the halls of Mossthorpe in my argyle dressing gown and velvet slippers or continuing my writings. I have always derived great comfort in times of stress by wiling away evenings in frivolous meandering, and doubtless it was a remedy which I should have thought to try sooner. And so as these two disparate notions appealed to my sensibilities in equal degrees, I endeavored to locate a happy medium betwixt the two and, having done so, sit now atop the ramparts of the western hall, the tallest point in all the manor, clad in my bedclothes and brandishing only my fine pen, inkpot, and this journal as bulwark against the moldering grey sky. Under inauspicious yet somehow satisfying circumstances such as these, I shall continue my tale.

When last I ceased my writing I had related the arrival of the Lady Abscissa and myself at the theater, our ride having been largely pleasant and yet tainted by social awkwardness. I was greatly relieved to be at last within the Coddlesley Round, though I am ashamed to note that as we entered the theater proper I harbored a quantity of dread for my first encounter with the Pan-like figure of Ictor Pembroke, my nemesis and constant provocateur. For the final leg of the journey, my mind had dwelt long upon the tribulations that Ictor might wreak upon me, my torment being the foremost concern of

his mind by all appearances.

Striking Ictor's terrible mocking visage from my thoughts, I helped the lady into her seat and then brought her coat to an usher, leaving him with my hat and walking stick also. Upon my return to our seats, the lady and I discussed our great anticipation for the show and also for the unique cast which should be performing it -- for the role of Horatius Billoughsby was to be sung by the great Venetian singer Bennisì D'Oraculio who, while somewhat larger in girth than those who would normally fill the role, is greatly renowned amongst all circles of the arts.

Yet ultimately that moment proved the high point of the evening, for from thence onwards it was fraught with disappointment and dismay. A large and enraged grackle was somehow loosed in the theater moments after the curtain rose, its frantic cackling and screeches quite drowning out the overture and upsetting many of the guests, including an heiress from Dickery whose wimple was stolen by the foul avian. D'Oraculio, billed as the highlight of the show, proved merely adequate in spite of his artistic pedigree, his deep and lisping voice entirely unsuited for a role quite clearly meant for a tenor.

The reception at Pembroke's residence was a great bore and excessively trying, for the manners of those in attendance were already strained by Ictor's utter failure to appear at a performance he himself had arranged. Ictor's manservant, a great brute of a man with a single cyclopean eyebrow and a face suited more for the unloading of oceangoing vessels than the opening of doors, informed us in a low and laborious voice that Pembroke had been gone the entire evening. Rumors abounded that he had spent the evening consorting backstage with the theater troupe, though the good lord could scarcely know what sort of chagranderie those sordid folk could have gotten up to. One feels that the theater should be considerably improved were the presence of the theaterfolk themselves not required; they are a vicious and vile lot, and it is a wonder they are able to rouse themselves from their stew of fluids and regrets each morning to create great art only a short while later.

Tho the lady and I mingled as a pair for a time with the other guests, prestigious and of high pedigree all, we were ultimately separated when I found myself cornered by a tiresome master of accounts who had in his youth spent several seasons in the employ of my father. Through cunning and diverse hand gestures I was able to indicate that the lady could continue mingling whilst I completed my discussion (if it could truly be called such) with the old man and escaped his vernacular clutches, ultimately losing sight of her around a corner.

When I at last evaded the bothersome old accountant, Abscissa was nowhere to be found. I wandered Ictor's apartments for some time, searching every accessible vestibule and corridor until at last I overheard the lady's familiar laugh emerging from a small and previously overlooked side-corridor which lay adjacent to the kitchens. Through a set of glass doors that led to a small and quaintly decorated potting shed I discovered, to my shock and horror, the lady Abscissa engaging in friendly discussion with none other than my nemesis, Ictor Pembroke. But my shock would be nothing compared to the absolute confabulation I experienced upon witnessing the lady laugh happily and place a dainty kiss upon Ictor's cheek!

I burst into the glass potting shed, seeking to enact my vengeance upon Ictor and to denounce as bobtail and bawd the lady who had so recently been the object of my platonic fascination, only to be greeted warmly by Ictor.

“Oh, Henrius!” he bleated, in an entirely innocent and sly voice. “I have just been entertaining your lady friend here, who may I say is quite thoroughly delightful!”

“I know of your tricks, Ictor!” I shouted, waving my stick at him menacingly. “You are up to no good, and I simply won’t have it!”

“Why, whatever do you mean? I found the lady meandering about my chambers, obviously lost, and sought only to keep her company until you returned. We were just discussing the performance. Tell me, Henrius, how did you find it?”

“Adequate,” I said, and prepared to embark on a nuanced critique, but was cut off most rudely by the lady!

“Lord Gosham, thank you so much for your kindness,” she said, not even blushing at the fact that I had very nearly caught them being indecent! “I have had a wonderful evening, but I fear it is at a close.”

“You are ready to return, Lady?”

Ictor cleared his throat. “Ah, no, Henrius,” he said, with a sly grin. “I have invited the lady to remain here with me to enjoy the town for a day or two, and she has graciously accepted. Do not worry -- I shall see that no harm comes to her, ha ha!”

And so it was that that toff and useless vagrant stole out from under me perhaps the most interesting woman to have entered my life in recent memory! Enraged and humiliated, I stormed from the room without a word and burst forth into the streets of Coddlesley, wandering aimlessly for a time before finding myself at last before the great iron clock that abuts the steps of Coddlesley Round. Nearby I located the Heiress Rookbury's coachman, still awaiting my return so as to bring us back to Mossthorpe. I informed him that our plans had been irrevocably altered and that we would return at once to my manor.

I scarcely remember the return journey, so furious was I. I recall only the clouds encroaching from all sides, spreading their encircling grip about the sky like the skeletal clutching hands of an old and terrible man. Our coach was followed by the flash of lightning and the roar of thunder as it neared Mossthorpe and it was by this that I was awoken from what could only have been described as a waking stupor.

And so ends my sad and sordid tale! I consider myself a great fool to have placed so much of my hopes in the pursuit of a woman that I now realize I scarcely knew and had said not half a dozen words to in the weeks prior. I fear I shall require some time before I am again able to venture forth into polite society, and owing to this I have as of yet spoken to no one of the preceding events -- not even Mr. Speck, who should I think be quite interested in the activities of his companion and business partner of late.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

15 July, 1904

I received word this morning via bicycle messenger that Ictor Pembroke shall be departing Pendleton County -- and not only that, but departing the country itself, bound for the Continent and parts beyond! I was at first suspicious of the messenger, a lanky and rather scruffy fellow clad in denim workman's clothes that smelt of oil and bitumen. However, he explained that he had been dispatched by my friend Professor Adolphus, and in fact had ridden all morning on one of the professor's specialty patent bicycles. I was most impressed with his cyclemanship and told him so. I attempted to engage the fellow in a conversation on cycling, it being a subject I am rarely if ever able to discuss to my satisfaction, but he did not seem particularly interested, even when offered the opportunity to see my collection of bicycle gloves and replacement mechanisms.

Dispatching the courier, I returned to my morning repast. I had decided to skip breakfast in the main hall and eat upon the quarter terrace, affording myself a view of the gardens so as to aid in my digestion. Yet paranoia conspired to ruin my meal of budgin and cake, which was otherwise delightful despite Mrs. Boddinger having added rather too much thyme. I was greatly unsettled by the courier's news, as it has previously been Ictor's habit to linger like some manner of typhoid or lymphatic fever, plaguing me for months at a time until at last he can derive no further amusement from tormenting me and departs. His sudden departure implied to me some deeper and more sinister motivation on his part; perhaps even an elaborate plan to embarrass me further. Clearing the last of the budgin from the china, I resolved to seek out Mr. Speck in order that I might discuss the matter with him, my head porter having proven himself something of an expert on rash behavior and ridiculous people.

After a thorough search, I failed to locate Mr. Speck in the manor proper or elsewhere about the grounds. And so, donning my mucking boots and a sturdy hickory walking stick as a contingency against any bandits or drunken hooligans I might meet, I ventured into the marshy field where his coterie of foul-smelling and scheming roustabouts makes its camp each evening. I have avoided acquainting myself with any member of that surly cast, as they are greatly below my station and largely comprised of foreigners and other undesirables, but it seemed I could put it off no longer.

As an outsider to their peculiar arrangement of tents and makeshifts, I knew not precisely where to begin my search for their employer. I wandered for a time through their camp, witnessing such unusual sights as three bare-chested

men fighting with large cords of wood while others looked on and cheered, and an old man carving bawdy sculptures from rosewood in the fashion of Greek sculpture. I also espied several gypsies, all of whom endeavored to relieve me of my purse, much to my displeasure. I did not feel that these characters are a proper addition to a delightful country estate such as mine and resolved to raise the matter with Mr. Speck at the earliest convenience.

After some considerable time spent wandering the encampment, I discovered Mr. Drindle seated upon a blackened stump of a Heldewas tree alongside the camp. He appeared to me very out of place amidst the charcoal fires and the hoary smell of rendered sow fat, which I fear I shall henceforth associate indelibly with a general notion of shoddiness and ill manners. Speaking as always in a loathsome and wheedling fashion, Mr. Drindle informed me that Mr. Speck had not emerged from his cottage all morning and was likely in his study or elsewhere about the premises. I thanked Mr. Drindle for this information and returned at once to the cottage.

After a fruitless search of the lower floor, wherein I saw many partly furnished rooms and apartments, each decorated in the latest fashion, I at last found my head porter in a small and darkened room upon the second. He was crouched over a desk with diverse papers scattered about tarry-darry, clutching a quill pen and writing across many long sheets of yellowed parchment with great fervor and concentration. I surveyed the room, noting that it contained many small volumes of the sort I located in the mysterious archive within the western wing of Mossthorpe, as well as a grandfather clock of excellent construction.

Mr. Speck was not greatly pleased to see me, yet neither did he go quite so far as to object to the intrusion, an action for which I would most surely have confined him to the truffling shed for at least a fortnight, given my decidedly ill humor. I had scarcely begun to chastise him for the shoddy inhabitants of his work camp when he interrupted me quite rudely, stating with some satisfaction that he knew the true reason for my presence and that these selfsame events were already within his knowledge and that furthermore he was not over much surprised by their details. I inquired as to his meaning, which prompted him to become quite irate and to gabble in the manner of a bothersome schoolmarm at great length about the cunning artifices of women -- a subject which I need not be enlightened upon further, it being a matter of considerable familiarity to me.

“They are fiends!” he declared, waving his spindly fingers about. “Always conspiring, always out to interfere. Do I trust them? Hah! Sometimes I do,

sometimes... but then, always, I am shown to be a fool! Do you get my meaning, Lord Gosham? There is little in the powers of women that they would not turn against us at the drop of a hat, and we would do well to watch out for them, for they are... they are always scheming, scheming!"

I was quite bored by the time Mr. Speck had concluded this little lecture and so, feeling rather saucy from my wanderings in the encampment, asked him in curt fashion if he had any point to speak of, or if he had perhaps simply required exercise, this being a humorous quip which I recalled from my boyhood. I was surprised when Mr. Speck did not respond in kind, instead stating in a somber tone that he was aware his companion had run off with my nemesis. He further explained to me that this was not the first time the lady in question had taken sudden fancy to a rich fellow of below average intellect and cunning -- for it had, in the past, been her habit to befriend men of great wealth and then, their faculties being blinded by her grace and fair appearance, to use their great resources for her own amusement before ultimately tiring of them and abandoning them for some new beau!

I was greatly astounded by this information, for it represented feminine cunning beyond my most terrified imaginings, and inquired immediately as to what Mr. Speck foresaw as Ictor's ultimate fate, a question which elicited from him a cold laugh and the flexing of the fingers and knuckles. He informed me that it would surprise him little if they were in Paris within a fortnight, and from there, onwards across the Continent until Pembroke could no longer afford the travels and trifles which fascinated the lady, and to which she had doubtless convinced him of committing. This having been said, Mr. Speck inquired whether I had further need of him, and, saying that I did not, I returned to the manor to consider these new facts.

I thought long and in great detail upon these developments whilst suppering in my chambers, and I now believe the proper course of action is clear to me: I must rescue Ictor Pembroke from his own foolishness! I see it as my duty to protect him from this ignominious fate, not only as a fellow aristocrat, albeit one of much greater renown and repute, but also as one who, I now see, very nearly fell victim to the same cunning ploy. And although I have little respect for him and indeed would take some measure of delight in seeing his name become synonymous with great foolishness and chuff, I take even greater solace in the possibility of teaching him a lesson in humility. Such a thing might even improve his character and terrible demeanor, although that may be too much to hope.

While a less prudent man might alert the constabulary, I am all too aware that

commoners are ill-equipped to comprehend the tribulations of the gentry, and so I have decided to personally and with great haste follow in the footsteps of my nemesis and, in doing so, warn him of the dire outcome which awaits him. Preparations for my departure have already begun, and a great number of porters are even now engaged in the business of gathering and securing my personal belongings for travel so that I might depart to-morrow before dawn.

A sampling of my finest brandies and whiskies has been sealed properly within a crate for transport, along with sufficient tableware that I might enjoy them *sur l'aller*. I also spent the better portion of an hour selecting which items of headwear might best suit an outing such as this, deciding at last upon my pith helm and a variety of formal chapeaus. I was for a time torn between my any-weather driving goggles and the professor's patented collision protector, though as I look something of a fool in the protector, functional though it may be for journeys by automobile, I have elected to bring the goggles.

I do not know precisely how long I shall require to overtake Ictor and his sinister companion, and as such I have left extensive and detailed instructions for the manor staff in my absence, dictating to them the proper mechanisms for the cleaning of the fireplaces, the times of day at which it is safe to enter the underdocking, and the order in which the various rooms of the household should be dusted and to what extent -- this final matter being of chief concern, given the disturbing state of Mossthorpe upon my return from Morocco. Additionally, Mrs. Boddinger has promised me that she shall take very good care of Du Lac in my absence.

Though I briefly considered leaving Mr. Speck behind to oversee matters, I ultimately chose to request that he accompany me on my hasty pursuit, to which he quite grudgingly agreed. Lastly, I have chosen not to inquire of my manservant why he would consort with such a character as the lady Abscissa has proven to be, for it has become quite clear to me that there may be somewhat more to Mr. Speck than at first meets the eye. It is my suspicion that he is cut from a far more sordid cloth than I had ever before realized. Harboring anarchist sentiments is one thing, but having business dealings with a cunning jezebel out to defraud honest aristocrats is quite another.

I have sent word to the Heiress Rookbury that our dinner engagement must be postponed indefinitely. I suppose it is too much to hope for that it be postponed ad infinitum.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

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Foreign Travels and Unusual Japes

The road to Dundle had a rather poor reputation during Lord Gosham's time and was believed to be home to any number of brigands and thieves. But even without such extraordinary perils, it was still an isolated and notoriously poorly-repaired thoroughfare. For this reason most traffic avoided it entirely, passing to the west of the marshes. This lack of commercial traffic undoubtedly contributed greatly to the economic and social collapse of Dundle, culminating in 1917 when a second great fire consumed the remainder of the town.

- Winslow

21 July, 1904

It has been nearly a full week since our small party departed from Mossthorpe in pursuit of Ictor Pembroke and the temptress Abscissa, our travel thus far having been conducted entirely by carriage. We embarked early in the morn upon the 16th, my effects and supplies having been loaded in two carriages, along with a third coach for which to carry myself and Mr. Speck. I have brought with me only the most basic essentials of survival, comprising some seventeen trunks and numerous smaller bags within which have been packed my books, libations, items of haberdashery, and a brief selection of phonograph records for the purposes of music to distract my mind whilst in transit. We made excellent time to Coddlesley that first morning, tho our progress slowed considerably upon arrival, as we initially found no indication of our mark's precise manner or direction of departure, other than learning from Professor Adolphus that his apartments had been hastily vacated.

I was able to convince the steward of Ictor's townhouse -- a shoddy man who chose against all reasonable judgment to attire himself in a suit of drab green and paisley -- to allow us access to his property, pointing out that Ictor was one of his very few tenants and and that his safe return was absolutely essential to the health of his ledgerbooks. The following day my manservant and I spent some few hours inspecting the now-unoccupied home, discovering therein many priceless works of art which had seemingly been ruined in acts of debauchery or carelessness, as well as much overturned furniture.

His bedchambers in particular were a tantalizing enigma, being host to such peculiarities as a closet which contained no fewer than six bicycles and a small budgerigar within a brass cage, now left in the care of Adolphus and his assistant. Though intriguing, Ictor's apartments yielded no new clues; it

was not until the next morning that we discovered a man in a public house who recalled a finely dressed man and woman inquiring within about transport to Densom.

It was thus decided that we would travel to Densom, which unfortunately is most easily reached by way of the road to Dundle. Later that same day we departed, returning to the vicinity of Mossthorpe before striking south through the heart of the moors, towards Dundle and the sodden waterways of the lower county. It was by then some few hours later and the sun had dipped low in the sky, bathing the land in shabby brown and interfering greatly with a game I had devised wherein I would state that I had perceived some object upon the countryside and my manservant would attempt to guess the precise nature of it. I fear he was not as taken with this pastime as I, as he seemed relieved when I suspended my play as night fell.

A cold and clinging rain began to fall as we left the up-county behind and passed along the Dundle fork. It became increasingly difficult to see, despite the paraffin oil lamps mounted upon the front of the coach, and there was some talk of stopping for the night -- though this notion was quickly dismissed by Mr. Speck. Some ten miles further along, we were hailed by a solitary figure clad in slick red oilskin and a hat of rain-damp wool. He bore before him a lantern hung in the manner of a standard from a long and gnarled pole, although the lantern accomplished little but to make itself visible against the gloom, and his face remained masked by darkness. Mr. Speck, perhaps detecting in me a hint of curiosity, urged the coachman to continue and not to dally upon the road; yet as there were no dwellings within sight and we were yet several miles from the cantilevered truss granting access to the outlay of the town of Dundle, I felt the man must surely be in need of assistance and so ordered our coachman to halt the carriage.

I threw wide the curtains and leaned out to regard the fellow. "I say, good man!" I shouted from the window. "What brings you out here in the dead of night? Do you require assistance?"

"Ah, right enough, lord guv," the man replied, using a strange patois. "If it please ye, sir, I'm a humble traveling undertaker, and I've lost me way. A band of gypsies done me low, trickerin' me and making off with me wagon wheels. I'd be ever so chuffed, good sir, if you'd give me a lift."

Mr. Speck inquired where we might find the man's wagon, in order to verify his story, to which the fellow replied he had lost it and did not now know its

location, having become distracted. I always find it a bother when carriages are misplaced in this fashion, and I sympathized greatly with the fellow.

Through further discussion I learned that the man, whose name was Llewelis Barnaby, sought transport to Tjaskerhob so that he might call upon a trouser-mender he had once made the acquaintance of and from him request assistance in returning to London, that being his home. I offered the services of our carriage to carry him the remainder of the way, Tjaskerhob being a small camp of tinkers upon the outlay of Dundle and already lying on our chosen path through the riverhead. Mr. Speck made known his disapproval, speculating that this man was himself a gypsy and intended to defraud us through our good-natured innocence; seeking to allay my manservant's fears, I explained to him that I had as a youth known a cook by the family name of Barnaby and that he had been of a fine character and honest countenance, and that for this reason I felt that Llewelis Barnaby must himself be an honest gentleman. I invited the man within our vehicle despite the protestations of the ever-suspicious Mr. Speck and we went about our way.

Mr. Llewelis Barnaby quickly proved himself a pleasant sort and we had many discussions on the subject of undertaking; I shared with him my knowledge of physiology and chemistry, recommending to him that salts of mitre might be used for the whitening of the skin so as to make the departed more appealing to the eye, which Mr. Barnaby thought an excellent idea, despite the unstable nature of the salts, which I have always felt is vastly overstated, having experienced only some few minor mishaps with them in all my years of usage.

I daresay he was quite impressed with the breadth of my understanding, as he offered several times to sell me solutions of his own derivation which were guaranteed to preserve the body whilst it still lives, bringing with them no significant ill effect upon the person. I purchased a large quantity of one such solution, and when later I examined it found its consistency and taste quite pleasant, reminding me of nothing so much as camphored water. I greatly value my youthful appearance and as such have made certain to take the prescribed dose each morning since.

It was some while before the black moors gave way to the twisty and oblique riverways of the Dundle plain, and the spires and fireglow of that like-named town came within view through the small gilded window of the coach. Not long after, we left Mr. Barnaby within sight of the metal shacks and tents of Tjaskerhob -- so named for the wind-driven Archimedes screws that have been constructed upon the marsh in that locale, in order that Dundle might

not be overtaken and swallowed up by the encroaching wash of foul blackened water. Mr. Barnaby bid us adieu and thanked us greatly for our assistance.

An oppressive silence fell across us as our carriage made its way over the bridges and wharfs within which skulked the half-ruined city of Dundle, once the untarnished jewel of Pendleton County. On reflection, it is an awful place and I do not soon wish to return therein. The buildings, which upon their construction rivaled those of the finest blocks of London-town, are now all overcome by decay and decrepitude. Their walls are covered with a sooty grime which not even the thickest rain could wash away, each gangly abode having the appearance of an arson, looking as if burnt and consumed utterly from within. Not in one's wildest imaginations could they be home to anyone, and we saw never a soul before the carriage, yet with each glance to our wake we would catch sight of faces watching from barred windows or some ragged figure vanishing from sight by means of a cross street or alley.

In Dundle's main square we were met with great suspicion and dislike, for it is a town of criminals and foreigners and they could surely see in me one who would not tolerate their flim-flammery, and for this reason I was greatly unpopular and some few stones were cast in the direction of our carriage. Mr. Speck bid me wait in the coach whilst he spoke with some various acquaintances of his, during which time I played a game of reds-and-blacks with a handsome young fellow who lingered for a time beside the coach and had, he said, come to inspect the wheels of the carriage. I was greatly impressed by this service and the fact that it should be offered without fee to a humble traveler such as myself.

That said, the state of Dundle's main square was quite appalling, its cobbles all cracked and stained by mildew, and indeed nearly every window in sight had been shattered through some unknown artifice. It came also to my attention that many of the blackstone buildings were a-cant, as if sliding at an angle into the very earth. It seemed to me that it might be a perfectly charming town with some minor efforts to repair it, tho I am loath to believe the skulking and penumbral inhabitants of that borough would be up to the task.

Mr. Speck was gone some half of an hour, and upon returning became very irate and chased away the fellow who had been inspecting the wheels and conversing with me, which greatly perturbed me as we had not yet concluded our game. My head porter spoke briefly with the coachman of each carriage, delivering unto them some special instruction which he later refused to

disclose to me, after which we left that ramshackle den of thieves behind and continued south on our way to the border of Shefton county, and from there onward to the port town of Densom, where we have remained for two days and nights whilst attempting to book passage across the channel.

Densom is a handsome town inhabited by colorful sailor-types, whose only fault is perhaps too great a love for drink and song. I have become quite popular in the watering holes of the port in the short time since our arrival, for I have spent my days in various pubs about town, observing the goings-on of the patrons and becoming charmed by their simple sailors' tales and humble wisdom. Our conversations have revealed a wealth of knowledge on the subject of concoctions which might be used to dispel the lingering effects of alcohol, as well as sundry other folk remedies, all of which I have taken great care in recording.

But medicine is not the only area in which we have aspired to greater knowledge whilst in Densom, a short visit to the office of the harbormaster having confirmed our earlier suspicion: Ictor Pembroke and his lady companion passed through the town two days before our arrival, having retained the fastest available schooner to convey them across the channel, where they might proceed by rail to Paris.

Mr. Speck notified me of his success in securing transport only this morning, and the revelation has greatly saddened me, as I must leave my newfound friends and drinking companions behind. The coachmen shall be instructed to return home to Mossthorpe, whilst my belongings are even now being loaded upon the ship for passage. I fully expect our voyage to the shores of France to be quite dull and tedious, as I have always found travel via boat to be, though the captain seems at least a good natured sort. We intend to hire transport to Paris upon arriving in Cherbourg; if we are able to proceed with great haste, we may even catch Ictor while they remain still within that city.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

Another Brief Interlude

It might benefit readers to provide a concise history of the fallen city of Dundle. I must thank Dr. Pitton, a close friend and fellow society member, who graciously interrupted his ongoing studies into the dialects of eleventh century Wales to assist me in composing this greatly abbreviated historical outline in time for the publication of this journal.

Dundle has existed in some form since 1380, when it was incorporated as “Dyndle-upon-Wicton” along the bank of the Wicton creek, a small waterway which ran through the south and central portions of the county in that time. It existed as a hub for travel across the moors, particularly by peat traders, and was elected the seat of Pendleton county upon its creation in 1523.

Dundle was not always situated within an immense marsh as it is today, and as it was in Lord Gosham's time. This was the result of a plan championed by Lord Brixton Hobb in 1549, whereby the Pendleton council of freeholders attempted to create a larger waterway through the construction of a dam along Wicton creek. Plans drawn up by Lord Hobb, now within the possession of the Pendleton Historical Society, show Dundle with a sizable harbor and a water passage deep enough to allow oceangoing vessels to travel inland from the coast -- despite the fact that the creek at no point connected to the sea.

However noble Lord Hobb's intentions, the dam succeeded only in causing the creek to overflow its banks and swamp the surrounding countryside in several feet of water for months during the rainy season, causing considerable damage to the various smaller settlements throughout the region. In retribution, Lord Hobb was reportedly chased out of the city by an angry mob of people, who beat Hobb with small sticks until he was ultimately forced to jump into the marsh of his own creation in order to escape.

The black death arrived in Dundle in 1656 during the Great Plague of London, ultimately wiping out nearly a quarter of the town's population. The superstitious inhabitants of the town blamed a recently arrived troupe of minstrels and actors, which was thrown in prison and then hanged during the height of the plague as an attempt to put an end to the pestilence. Medical cauterization, called bornening, was popular in the region during this time, a fact which likely increased the death toll significantly as the ill-advised procedure had a fairly high mortality rate.

The town's economy was devastated by the plague, giving rise to large numbers of robbers and mountebanks in the region by the early eighteenth century. These gangs of robbers were led by colorful characters such as Prindle Redd, a traveling surgeon who turned to brigandry after being unable to make sufficient money in his trade, and Big Stetley Mott, known as Ludd Mott by his contemporaries for his large estate that he constructed on the moorland with his ill-gotten gains, and which was reportedly host to wild debaucherous parties which could last for days and were attended by the upper crust of Dundle society.

The disastrous fire of 1827 plunged the town into anarchy. It began mysteriously in the basement of the city hall and claimed the lives of all seven members of the council of freeholders, including Henrius Gosham's grandfather Lorchrissus Gosham. From there it spread through downtown Dundle before consuming the rest of the city, leaving nearly three-quarters of the buildings in ruins and almost the entire population homeless. Riots spread through the remainder of the city when the small private fire departments refused to assist the less affluent portions of the towns, choosing instead to allow the majority of the city to burn to the ground. Dundle would never recover from this catastrophe and became little more than an inhabited ruin, its occupants mainly the poor and the infirm who could not afford to live elsewhere or were otherwise unwilling to abandon their homes. The town descended into lawlessness, though justice of a sort was at times enforced by one of the many gangs that vied constantly for control of what remained of the town.

By Lord Gosham's time, Dundle was viewed with immense suspicion and fear by the rest of the county Pendleton. Trade through the area was rare and robbery extremely common, making it quite remarkable that Henrius's carriages were able to pass through the area largely unaccosted. The population declined steadily as a result of a series of crackdowns by the constabulary of Coddlesley beginning in 1908, until only a few holdouts remained to inhabit the wreckage of the town. A second suspicious fire engulfed the ruins in 1916 and consumed a nearby munitions factory, resulting in a series of explosions that leveled the few remaining buildings. Today only a few scattered foundations and collapsed bridges mark the site of what was once the greatest town of Pendleton County.

- Winslow

As indicated very briefly in this entry, the Comte de Valerou was an avid balloonist and in 1914 attempted a solo crossing of the English Channel in a lighter-than-air craft. He sadly never learned of his own success, as upon landing near Dover he came to believe he had been blown far off course and had drifted into hostile German lands. He spent three weeks hiding from all attempts to locate him, before finally dying of starvation and exposure.

- Winslow

27 July, 1904

It has been a week of tremendous activity for Mr. Speck and I, yet being now at its conclusion we find ourselves no closer to overtaking Ictor Pembroke and the temptress Abscissa. In spite of our best efforts, we have found ourselves always at the mercy of misfortune and circumstance, the itinerant couple having, through no apparent planning, eluded our pursuit again and again.

Our voyage across the channel on the good ship Ubwich was very boring, and I shall not waste my time recording that pitiful stretch of drudgery here. It will suffice to remark upon the poor manners, ill-informed etiquette, and general surliness of the nautical man, a species which I should very much like to see become extinct in the fullness of time. Perhaps there shall one day be automobiles which are, through ingenious device and mechanism, able to cross large bodies of water, and through this invention sailors might once and for all be done away with. I hope dearly that it may be so.

I was delighted to disembark in the town of Cherbourg, the perfumed streets of which were a welcome reprieve after the foul-smelling and filthy voyage and the unpleasant business of navigating the town's harbors and anchorage. Mr. Speck wasted no time in retaining two coaches in which we might travel, and urged me to go forth and explore the town for a time while he oversaw the loading of my belongings into our new means of transport. I dallied for some time in the markets and alleyways of Cherbourg, amidst pale stone doorways and charming little buildings, wherein I encountered a vendor of cheeses who informed me that he had for a time resided in Coddlesley as a shoe-mender. The poor fellow explained that his wife had run off with a cartographer and so he had returned to Cherbourg to start his life anew, seeking in fromagerie a more simple trade -- though I told him I felt cobbling was rather simple already, a sentiment he did not share. I lamented his sorrows for a time, discussed the various ways in which cheeses may be combined with spirits in order that their pungent unguence might enhance

the bitterness of the liquor, then bid him adieu and returned to the docks to inquire after Mr. Speck's progress, it having been some time since my departure.

Upon locating the carriages I was informed by Mr. Speck that we had been swindled by the crew and captain of the *Ubwich*, for they had cast off and departed with my belongings still aboard! I was assured by Mr. Speck that the local constabulary had already been notified, and so certain were they that my items would be quickly returned that we could depart at once for parts inland. I asked my man why the crew should do such a thing, they having evinced neither the inclination nor intelligence to commit such a foul and cunning deed, but he could provide no satisfactory explanation and further insisted that we should leave that same eve. I would have none of this and declared that we would spend the night in a nearby inn, so as to be present should any new information on the loss of my property come to light.

I found the inn charming, if poorly furnished and rather cramped. To my immense horror there was not even a rack on which to hang my hat and pillory coat, a fact I attempted to address in my brief conversation with the innkeeper the following morn. My grasp of French is passable, yet perhaps not so adequate as once it was, and I experienced considerable difficulty explaining to the man the particulars of my criticisms. The innkeeper, a short man with the great red nose I have found to be characteristic of the French, did little to remedy my concerns, choosing instead to stare at me with eyes asplary whilst packing one of the foul little cigarillos which remain popular in those parts. For my troubles he gave to me a bottle of potent wine and a small wedge of foul cheese from the stores, yet these trifles did little for the issue of an unhung pillory coat, which is known to lose its essential ruffle should it be cast carelessly upon the floor as I had been forced to do.

Here I must remark that I remain deeply suspicious of the theft of my things, as the very next day our carriages came upon two of my trunks some few miles outside Cherbourg, where by all appearances they had been carelessly abandoned in a ditch. It was discovered upon opening them that they contained only my most rudimentary implements of clothing, a small tin musical box which was certainly not mine, and a handwritten note warning us from investigating further. I have come to suspect that this was the work of some subtle conspiracy enacted by parties unknown so as to throw us from his trail, there being no other suitable explanation.

We arrived some time later at the chateau of the Comte de Valerou, an old friend of mine whose hereditary holdings are within a day's journey of

Cherbourg. Arriving at this destination had been a battle hard fought yet won, Mr. Speck having become extremely irate when I informed him that we would not be heading directly to Paris, even when I explained that I had not seen de Valerou for many years. It sometimes seems to me as if Speck may be somewhat simple-minded, particularly his failure to comprehend even the most basic etiquette of proper society. To pass up the visiting of a dear old friend would be a great insult, circumstances notwithstanding. I shall perhaps have Mrs. Boddinger lecture him on the specifics of these matters upon our return, for I consider it of paramount importance that any servant of mine should have a full and complete grasp of gentlemanly *de rigeur*.

The Comte met us at the door to his residence, which I found quite impressive and stately, perched as it is with its many battlements and wings upon a hill that overlooks the valley below. Yet as stately as the outside might appear, the inside was a great carnival of pomposity and gaudy Continental luxury. The whole of the chateau was decorated in the most dandy and ladylike fashion, with nary a wall free of the diaphanous grasp of tabards and tapestries. One felt at times as if they would be suffocated under billowing cloth and gilded mahogany. I must remark again, as I have elsewhere, that the stern regality of the modern Breton far surpasses the effete pomposity of our French counterparts. I consider the Comte a dear friend, but this is not for reason of his sense of the aesthetic, which I have always found entirely appalling.

The Comte invited us to stay for the evening, which I elected to do. I was put up in quite nice chambers, with a full compliment of staff and all the courtesy of the house de Valerou -- a welcome thing, given that it had been over a week since I left the comforts of Mossthorpe behind. The Comte staged for me a lush banquet, inviting from the area some persons of import, including a Chatelaine de Vau-le-Chatel whose beauty and charm I found quite delightful. Yet during the course of the evening I was pulled aside by Mr. Speck who, reminding me of the folly of my nemesis Pembroke, counseled that I keep from any deep association with ladies for the immediate moment. I was disheartened, yet saw no valid reason to discount his advice.

Later in the evening the Comte performed for us upon his harpsichord, to the delight of all, save Mr. Speck, who finds the sound of harpsichord music very disagreeable. The Comte expressed a desire that we stay longer, yet I explained the urgency of our errand and made clear that we positively had to depart first thing upon the morrow. A light dessert, with quite interesting beverages that tasted of blackcurrant, was later served.

The next morning while we prepared to depart, the Comte's man Michel came to us with news that the road to Paris had become blocked in the night by a mudslide, which came as a surprise to all present, as it had not rained. The Comte offered us the use of his hot air balloon, indicating that this should carry us to Paris in nearly the same time as a carriage, provided the wind did not change. Mr. Speck was quite skeptical of this scheme and suggested that we depart by carriage as planned and hope that the road had cleared; which it had, for there was no sign of mud anywhere, and I think this a highly unusual fact.

We reached the great city of Paris after three days spent traveling the charming French countryside, during which time I viewed many farms and further chateaus dotting the verdant countryside. At times we would linger at one of the quaint little inns we passed in order that I might sample the food and drink, but as I saw this agitated Mr. Speck each time it occurred it came to pass that I ceased requesting we stop.

Paris has been very good to us these past few days, but I am sad to say that once again Ictor and Abscissa have eluded us and we shall have little time to linger in this city of lights and culture, for our quarry evidently departed mere hours before our arrival, which was quite late upon the eve of the twenty-fifth. We spent the whole of Tuesday and today scouring the city for evidence of Pembroke, Mr. Speck focusing largely on the banks and moneylenders, as Ictor is known to withdraw large sums of money when on a jaunt, while I myself spent much of the time investigating various gentleman's clubs and theaters. It was I who ultimately found success, as the doorman of a club called La Porte Rouge indicated a man bearing a remarkable likeness to my description of Ictor had attempted to gain entrance in the company of a lady while staying at an adjacent inn; the owner of the inn explained that Pembroke had stayed for two days before departing eastwards, heading perhaps towards Switzerland or Germany.

One hopes that it is Switzerland, for I haven't the stomach to deal with the Huns or their ridiculous sausages at this age. Wherever our destination, we shall depart tomorrow.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

Lord Gosham did ultimately return to Mossthorpe with several piscine specimens, although it's not known whether they were the same ones he obtained accidentally while in Paris. From this small beginning he would eventually cultivate the most extensive collection of marine wildlife in Pendleton, including a number of fantastical creatures which have since been identified as expertly made fakes. Among these fakes are several matching the description of the dalfish Lord Gosham provides in this entry. The collection is now in the possession of the University of Wymlick.

- Winslow

29 July, 1904

It has come to my attention that my manservant Mr. Speck may be attempting to sabotage my pursuit of Ictor Pembroke and his consort. Our attempts to depart Paris have been met with a deluge of curious mishaps, which have robbed us of the ability to proceed and imperiled our chances of apprehending Pembroke. After giving the matter due consideration and pondering long over the possible causes of these events, I find myself left with little recourse but to place suspicion upon Mr. Speck -- he being the sole man for whom the means to execute such deception and malfeasance would be readily at hand. I do not know who to trust or upon whom I can depend, being in foreign parts so far from my home in Pendleton. Though the options presented to me are limited at best, and my patience and wits are now nearly at their ends, I will attempt to record the process by which I have become aware of the dark hand of the manipulator in these events.

The unfortunate mishaps began yesterday, while we prepared to depart Paris. It had been our intent to pursue Ictor to the eastern borders and into the domain of the Huns and the Slavs, if necessary. I had hoped to find further clues to his whereabouts as we neared the Rhein, and spent the previous evening preparing a list of small towns and hamlets along the way in which to inquire, as well as a list of likely persons in each town who may have been visited by Ictor or Abscissa -- haberdashers, purveyors of fine goods and furniture, vintners, and so forth.

All seemed set for departure, and yet after finishing off a light breakfast it was discovered that our coachmen had vanished with the morning mist! By way of explanation they had left only a scrawled note en francais alluding to a great and unfortunate familial occurrence -- a cause I am not unsympathetic to, my own graduation from university having been delayed by the death of a

distant cousin.

And if the loss of our coachmen were itself not a sufficient bother, our horses had at some point been loosed from the stable of our inn, allowing them to escape and run wild through the streets, where they badly upset a number of elegant Parisian cafes and overturned a fishcart. We found the streets in a turmoil, filled with gaudy Parisian folk storming up and down gabbling to one another in their misbegotten tongue.

I quickly located the proprietor of the overturned fishcart, hoping to make amends, yet found him quite furious and entirely unreasonable. He demanded that I compensate him for his lost wares, despite my assurances that this was the work of some mysterious and unknown party and that I had played no part whatsoever. But bound by my innate sense of honor and propriety, and finding it impossible to arrive at any suitable alternative, I was forced to purchase his entire stock of mackerel, cod, and dalfishes, spending the entire day's traveling allowance in doing so and causing considerable upset to my carefully laid plans.

I must pause here to remark upon the curiosity of one variety of the fish which I suddenly possessed in abundance -- the *Lophiodes ocellaris*, or dalfish as it is commonly known. The dalfish is an odd little fellow, and I have often wondered what natural progression might have given rise to its bulbous eyes, toothed maw, and curious hat-like protuberance. It seems designed neither for swimming nor for eating, characteristics one would expect all fish to possess. Though it is an ugly fish by all accounts, I have found some degree of nobility in its spoiled countenance, so much so that I had resolved to take some few specimens home for the purposes of mounting and display within the great hall -- as a sort of tableau or curiosity. Two or three would have suited my purposes, and yet the seven score of dalfish I came to possess was vastly more than would be required for even the most robust experimentation!

Abundance was not the only fault of my new stock, for the fish of which I now found myself the woeful owner were at once stewing and turning to muck in the hot Parisian sun. The fact they had been lately laid upon ice was little consolation and did nothing to delay their decrepitude. Their presence gave short rise to an evil effluence that besieged the senses of every Parisian passing near the Rue L'Elraux, causing some few ladies to faint upon the sidewalk. That the Parisians would take notice of the odor should speak to its tenacity, for they live in a city whose odorous ambiance is an offense to all people of good breeding and culture; to offend the nose of a Frenchman,

accustomed to the worst sorts of cheeses as well as to a city that is itself practically an open sewer, is a great accomplishment.

Some short while later a ridiculously attired policeman appeared and informed me that I would be given a substantial fine unless I tidied the street and restored it to its former odor, which I did not think a great improvement, in truth. Owing to his outlandish garb, which in no way resembles the noble uniform of the British constabulary, I initially did not realize that he was truly a lawman and took him for a street performer or simple miscreant. Once his authenticity was confirmed by Mr. Speck, however, I was forced to exhaust the following day's travel money on the hiring of several urchins to gather up the mess so that we could avoid the threatened fines.

I include these events in this record merely to illustrate our sad situation -- they did not at the time seem deserving of suspicion. The possible complicity of my companion only came to my attention upon the unlikely arrival of a strange and dirty fellow who claimed to be our new coachman. He wore the livery of the company Mr. Speck had selected to convey us and seemed quite skilled with horses and carriagery; yet the man seemed strangely familiar to me, and indeed upon further reflection I am certain that he is none other than one of Mr. Speck's coterie of roustabouts, lately seen occupying the field adjacent to my manor!

I see no reasonable explanation for how this man should have come to be in Paris, nor how he could have become aware of our misfortune except through the providence and machinations of Mr. Speck. He is certainly not from the coach company, which did not seem the sort of operation that would hire a man of such ungentlemanly demeanor. From the start I was hesitant to travel with such a dire fellow, as even following the mishap with the fish I found his odor objectionable, and his voice had the characteristic tremble of Dundle folk, which has always been indicative of poor breeding and a trepensary nature.

While dwelling on the stoop of our inn and attempting to think upon my next move, I was approached by a great and rotund man who made known in no uncertain terms that he wished to do me harm for the lingering stench of fish, it having upset the customers at his cafe and quite ruined his day's take. I am not ordinarily a fighting man and so was left with no other choice but to make good my departure immediately, whatever reservations I may have had about the identity of the supposed coachman.

Unlike Ictor, who is famed at university for his love of fisticuffs and

willingness to resort to its practice at the drop of a hat or any other item of clothing, I myself avoid pugilism at all costs, and furthermore feel there is no dishonor in escaping from a violent situation. Thus, I was able to mislead the man into thinking that I would meet him the following evening in a certain nearby market to settle our differences, allowing our party time to finish packing and depart Paris with haste.

The remainder of the day's journey was quite tiresome and uninteresting. Mr. Speck seemed unusually tense as we crossed the Lendeaux plain and all attempts to speak with him failed. He seemingly had scant time for anything but the lengthening of his diary, which he is forever reading and making little notes within as we travel. He showed little interest even in the bottle of wine I had acquired the night before from a young street woman for quite a tidy sum, despite my assurances that it was of a fine vintage and would rouse his spirits. For my troubles I was repaid with a lecture on the incorrigible nature of the indigent and the uselessness of female beggars, which I must say I was already quite aware of.

We retired in a small town some dozen miles beyond Paris, rising again today to continue our voyage to the east. Evening is now quickly approaching and I am faced with the sobering fact that we have frittered away yet another turn of the earth with no great headway in deducing the route of Ictor Pembroke and the lady Abcissa. We have dallied in each and every town on my prepared list and spoke with more French folk than I thought myself able to endure, yet there was not a man among them that had seen Ictor or his consort.

Tomorrow we shall continue our pursuit, yet as the Rheinland looms large in our future I must consider the very real possibility that we have lost the trail and Ictor is even now being victimized by that shameless woman. Tomorrow we shall arrive in Mondeaux, near the German border -- I can only hope we meet with more success than we have today.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

Lord Gosham's inability to recognize simple charlatans speaks to the fact that as an educated nobleman he would have had very few opportunities to mingle with common people, even given his comparative worldliness. This sort of naivete was a common problem for young aristocrats -- one of Henrius's acquaintances, Lord Chiswell of Lurchpond, was once tricked into marrying no fewer than seven women in a three week period as part of an extremely well-orchestrated confidence scam.

- Winslow

31 July, 1904

It seems as if triumph may be close at hand, for recent events in the town of Mondeaux have brought our party closer than ever before to our quarry. I wish to preserve my thoughts on this matter for posterity, necessitating the existence of this entry, yet I must be brief so as not to miss what is perhaps the only opportunity to achieve our long sought-after goal!

Our party set out with the sun's rise on the day following my previous entry. The carriage passed by many of the curious little vineyards and groves which characterize the French countryside, though I found the quality of the roads sadly lacking and unsuited for enlightened pursuits. My drawings of the countryside have been ruined on many occasions by a bump or notch which surely could have been removed with very little work, if only someone had only had the foresight to do so.

Yet aside from the roads it was an otherwise delightful journey, and some few hours later our carriage arrived in Mondeaux just as the cathedral rang noonses on its great and joyful bells, which are so unlike the somber iron titans of St. Cuthbert's. The sound filled me with a sorrow and renewed my drive to conclude matters so that I could again walk the grey and sodden pastures of my youth, leaving the tiresome French and their songs and laughter far behind. Excursions, I have decided, are all very well and good, yet they are no substitute for the steadfast reliability of simple country life.

I must also confess that I have become increasingly bothered with thoughts of the quarrels and quandaries which might have befallen my stately abode since my departure. Over the past few days, my mind has gone positively a-twitter with worries, sometimes concerning Du Lac and the proper application of his liniment -- which is a matter of great importance and must be undertaken, lest we are to witness a resumption of his destructive behaviors and the loss of further heirlooms -- and at other times entertaining

the possibility that vagrants might have taken up residence in the east halls, this latter thing having been the case once before when I was visiting relatives in Amsterdam and forgot to seal one of the hobble gates behind me. I returned to find no fewer than a dozen gypsies residing in the forlorn corners of various disused kitchens and store rooms. It was a great bother to remove them, costing my estate no small amount of coin and several bottles of finest liqueur from my cherished stocks in the underdocking.

No sooner had our decrepit and ill-mannered coachman reined the horses to a standstill than Mr. Speck insisted upon beginning our reconnaissance. Yet here I was to put my foot down, for I had decided that we should take the liberty of sampling the local fare before embarking upon our investigation of Mondeaux. Owing to my time in the foreign service, I have come to believe that it is only through perceiving and fully taking on the culture of a place that one may move naturally among them, seeing the world as they do and in every way behaving in the manner of a local. I had begun to feel that a lack of proper acclimation was partly to blame for our great difficulty in Paris, where time had been short and I had scarcely been able to enjoy the many cafes and restaurants I had included in our itinerary before being whisked off to another portion of the city.

I was determined not to make this same mistake a second time and had prepared a detailed list of local fromageries and vineyards so that we might experience our first day in the manner of frenchmen, though of course in a far more gentlemanly manner than has ever been attempted by any member of the so-called french nobility. And so the remainder of that first day was spent visiting each of my prescribed destinations in kind, with Mr. Speck grudgingly accompanying me at my behest.

Speck all but snarled at me at one juncture, when his protestation had risen to what I can only describe as a fever pitch. "Sir, your pursuits are misguided, foolish, and without merit," he raved, while I sampled an incredibly decent chablis. "At this rate we shall never catch up with Pembroke, and this excursion will have been nothing but a waste of time -- mine and yours both. We scarcely have time to reach our actual destination, to say nothing of these pointless dalliances with cheesemongers and drunks."

I saw fit to use this diatribe as an opportunity to comment upon some basic imperfections of my manservant's constitution.

"Ah, Speck, your objections reveal your ultimately suspicious and violent nature, while also speaking volumes about the perils of low breeding," I

replied, with what I took to be an exceedingly reasonable tone, considering my fellow's lack of propriety. "Do take care to live a little. We are in France, are we not? A most bothersome and uncouth land in many respects, yet in others -- such as the manufacture of perfume, clarinets, and other such ladies' fancies -- above all reproach and without equal!"

Having said my part, I allowed the matter to rest, leaving Speck to stew in his foul humours while I contemplated our hasty departure from Paris. I had feared that my brief acquaintance, the belligerent Parisian chef, might have dispatched underlings -- perhaps sommeliers or makers of sauce -- to find me and compel me to complete our engagement to do battle. I have found the culinarian to be a crafty breed and I should put nothing past them, not since I observed an otherwise exemplary server at a society function expectorate into the very morsels he was preparing to serve. Yet in spite of my querulous mind I saw no indication of pursuers, and by the time evening had fallen upon the countryside the several bottles of wine I had imbibed quite alleviated any fears I might otherwise have been victim to.

Mondeaux is renowned both for its theatre and its cheeses, the latter being of such great quality that it is said even the eminently discerning palate of the Englishman might tolerate them. I must however confess that the quality of their stock shall remain a mystery to me, as cheeses and indeed all dairy products have always caused me some degree of concern, having witnessed the manner in which milk is gathered and found it quite crass and ungentlemanly. Were it not for the presence of such folk as operate the dairies of the world, I do not believe milk should have nearly the popularity that it does, which is to say nothing of the making of cheese, an activity so squalid that I would not deign to recount the process herein. The very notion fills me with trembles and gastric ague. Mr. Speck does not suffer from these same reservations and informed me that the proffered cheeses were adequate, though lacking in the firm character and nobility of a stilton -- which is, of course, to be expected.

We spent the night in the town's only inn, aptly named La Auberge Seule, and rose early today so as to thoroughly inspect the town centre before afternoon. Mondeaux is built around a central square that contains its theater, shops, and the grand cathedral, a remarkable piece of architecture the name of which has sadly been lost to the ardeurs of time and this country's sordid revolutionary history.

I observed in the square a great number of French curiositiars earning their keep, among them a man who offered to demonstrate the eating of a mouse

for some several francs and another who claimed that if I would only provide him with a ten pound note he would demonstrate a most incredible act of vanishing and subsequent invisibility, after which he would return miraculously and the note would, as if by magic, reappear in my change purse. Mr. Speck advised me not to accept this offer, it being, according to him, a trick. I feel foolish now for having neglected this opportunity, as ever since I have been plagued by thoughts of what exactly his vanishing act might have entailed and how it would have been accomplished.

As amusing as the denizens of the square were, they knew nothing of high society and were of little use to our quest. It was not until I happened upon a curious old man dozing within one of the shallow troughs of the square's fountain that I was enlightened as to our quarry's whereabouts for the first time in many days. Mr. Speck had excused himself, leaving me alone to wander and observe the festivities of the market, when I perceived the aforementioned elder fellow asleep in his peculiar resting spot and felt driven by some strange compulsion to speak with him. Upon being roused by my shouting and the handful of change I threw at him to engender a spirit of cooperation, the man espoused a most amazing tale, which I have now come to believe: he claims to have been a general in the French forces, though at this time he is retired and lives off nothing more than the respect and charity possessed by the average Frenchman for a man of uniform.

The man is filthy and host to many flies, and his grasp of English is all but nonexistent, yet he has explained that beneath his rags he is clad in the uniform of the French Foreign Legion and that despite his appearance is a master of tactics both overt and clandestine. I am now accompanied by this strange fellow, who has resisted all attempts to ascertain his name and insists instead on being addressed as *Le Conquerant*.

Le Conquerant possesses a great knowledge of town society, and when I inquired after any gossip he might have overheard concerning be-wandering British aristocracy he vouchsafed to me that a pair of Britons had appeared just some few days previous, arriving in the dead of night in a fanciful carriage all draped in sable and silver. He described also a great and elaborate ball to be held this very evening at the manor house of *Msr. Bernarde Fournier, seigneur de Mondeaux, Maitre des requetes*. My informant has not himself seen the guests of honor, but has it on very good authority that they bear a striking similarity to my descriptions of *Pembrooke* and the *Lady Abscissa*.

Time is of the essence, as there remain only some few short hours before the

ball is to begin. I have sought out Mr. Speck in vain, for he is nowhere to be found, doubtless occupying himself with the search elsewhere in town. My only hope is that Le Conquerant and I might somehow infiltrate this gathering of peers and use it as an opportunity to warn Ictor of the peril he faces, and in doing so put an end to this chase once and for all!

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

31 July, 1904, ii.

It seems at long last as if I shall be able to return to Pendleton and the hoary comforts of Mosssthorpe Hall, if not necessarily triumphant then at least without the heavy heart of failure. I must say that I have tired greatly of this excursion in the past few weeks, which for sundry reasons I now view as ill-advised, if also a needed diversion and one wholly demanded by manners. Yet having snatched my nemesis from out the clutches of vile femininity, thus ensuring that the modicum of honor and dignity he possesses are not viciously dashed upon the stones of folliful dalliance, I am anxious to return home -- and indeed plan to do so with all requisite haste.

I must take pleasure in our task's completion, for it came about as something of a stroke of genius, which I might even go so far as to call Homeric in stature. To think I should have engaged in such extraordinary adventures to defend the honor of a fellow, at my age and with my misextended knee! In the end it was only through firm resolve and cunning intellect that we were able to avert catastrophe, as I shall shortly elaborate, for I fear my mind is running free and I am failing to make any point whatsoever.

Yet I must pause for a moment to consider how my own achievements bring to mind the legendary exploits of my great uncle, Lord Vitorius Trivett of Tremblebrook Manor, the fourth Earl of Hoffthrupp, who in my youth was widely held as Britain's foremost world traveler and adventurer, having forged paths into darkest Africa and the great expanse of Asia Minor, all in the name of Britannia and always while upholding the highest standards of proper behavior. In the eye of my mind he looms large as a great man, huge in stature and with a well-styled moustache, playing for me clever songs of his own composition upon his violin, or reading from some moldered tome in which were recorded the ways of savage men.

Many times as a child I went to visit him at his estate in Tremblebrook, a fabulous place resplendent with tokens and trophies of his journeys, when the attentions of my parents were required elsewhere and the presence of a small and sickly child was not desired -- for I was not always the robust man I am today, and was as a youth stricken by afflictions of the toes and lymph. Upon each occasion I was regaled with stories of his exploits, be they bringing the custom of teatime and an understanding of biscuits to the savage Wxisi of Leopold's desolate Congo, enlisting the help of the Wxisi's women -- of whom he always spoke quite fondly -- in hewing a small boat in the shape of a swan from a felled tree and sailing inland further than any Englishman had hitherto traveled, or beating the dastardly Belgian mountebank Jan Verbeke

in a balloon race around the Cape of Verhoeven to win the hand of the gentle lady that was to become Lady Trivett, tho she died of the yellow ague only a short while later.

Uncle Vitorius himself had gone quite mad with the African fever after besting the legendary white rhinoceros in pugilistic affray and being made shaman by the Wxisi, and could as such not always be relied upon to remain strictly accurate in the telling of his tales, nor to use cutlery at dinner without the risk of misadventure.

Having now seen my own adventure to its stunning conclusion, I can only hope that my exploits would have impressed Uncle Vitorius, had he survived to witness them and not been trampled by an oliphant whilst on a further outing.

It all began some short while after my previous entry. Le Conquerant and I initially attempted to gain access to Msr. Fournier's ball in the traditional manner, announcing our presence to the doorman as is customary. I had furnished the elderly gentleman with one of my spare suits so that he should not be quite so conspicuous, yet my french was not sufficiently glib to convince the doorman that we were proper guests, even when supplemented by a lengthy commentary from my companion on the importance of courtesy to one's countrymen. We were shown back down the lane by the seigneur's porters, quite rudely and in an unnecessarily rough manner I might add. But rising to the occasion, we then devised a plan to create a distraction of suitable magnitude to attract the attentions of those selfsame porters, thereby allowing us to enter the ball undetected.

Proceeding in the manner of thieves and scoundrels around the hedges to the rear of the house, we located a tremendous black iron pot and several buckets of pitch in a shed which also contained several carriages, a number of umbrellas, and quite a few fresh casks, no doubt the intended targets of the pitch. We poured the foul black stickiness into the cauldron, creating something referred to by commoners as a smudgepot, which we proceeded to set ablaze with a filthy rag torn from Le Conquerant's clothes and a packet of matches I happened to be carrying.

The pot had been positioned beneath one of the manor's luxurious eaves, within close proximity of the ball so as to attract the most attention, and the area was quickly consumed with a malodorous and acrid smoke. Yet far in excess of our intended goal, we discovered that the wind and the design of the awning under which the cauldron had been positioned conspired to direct

a vast quantity of the smoke directly into the open windows of the manorhouse, quite in the same manner by which a fire may be lit upon a badgerhole in order that the badger might be extracted.

My associate and I took refuge behind the shed, while from within the manorhouse we could hear the sounds of the ball replaced with coughing and expectoration, followed by a great caterwauling that culminated in much shouting and awful shrieks. I was at first mortified, as ruining a delightful ball is always a tragedy, especially one in such a fine abode as Msr. Fournier's, but quickly discovered that those in attendance were making haste to vacate the manor by means of a back balcony and accompanying promenade. And there, at the edge of the newly arrived and trembling crowd, stood Ictor Pembroke! He was dressed in the latest Parisian fashions, which doubtless had cost Ictor a considerable sum of coin despite his ridiculous appearance. Ruffles should never be considered appropriate for a man, and I did not find that they did any justice to Ictor's already displeasing countenance.

"Pembroke! I say, Pembroke, over here!" I called, dashing out of my hiding place.

Ictor looked utterly taken aback. "Henrius! What are you doing in France? And have you seen the terrible thing that has befallen my party? I'd wager it's quite utterly ruined."

"Ictor, you sop-minded idiot, I am here to save you! The lady is deceiving you utterly, and wishes only to defraud you of money!"

I had expected Ictor to become furious at my accusation, but he instead placed a hand to his forehead and sighed mightily. "I suppose I should be extremely cross at you for saying something like that, but the truth is I simply don't have it in me. If Abscissa has deceived me, though, it is only in stealing my heart, and then running off with it! I fear we're drifting apart... these past few days, she cares so little for what I say or do! It is as if I have become a ghost to her! Henrius, Henrius, this time it was meant to be different! I was prepared to give up my womanizing ways, and told her as such! She is a flower, Henrius, a wonderful, dew-kissed flower!"

I slapped Ictor across the face, hoping to restore some sense to him. "This is no time for poetic musings, Ictor! You must escape at once from the clutches of this woman! I can see she's got her hooks into you, but for all your failings I won't see a fellow man of Pendleton brought low like this."

“I say, Henrius, I’m starting to have just about enough of this! Can’t you see I’m in love? Say what you will of the lady, but we were meant to be together! It’s... it’s so clear! If this party doesn’t save our relationship, I can’t bear to think of what might befall me!”

“I say, did you say this was your party? I had thought it to be Msr. Fournier’s!”

Ictor looked nervous. “No, no, it is mine. I’ve paid quite a large sum to Msr. Fournier for the use of his manor... it was, you see, meant to rekindle our romance! Henrius, I know it must seem like great folly, but the lady is worth it! The lady is most assuredly worth it! I would do anything if she would but look me in the eyes as she did a week ago!”

“And where is the lady just now, Ictor?” I inquired, for I was just noting that she was nowhere to be seen.

Before Ictor could respond, a general susurrantion flowed through the crowd, as of many people gasping at once. We turned about and saw all at once the object of their fascination -- for a great and colorful hot-air balloon had arisen from the far side of the manor, and was now hurtling forth into the sky!

We raced around the house, leaving Le Conquerant and the remainder of Msr. Fournier's guests behind, only to discover that the occupants of the balloon were none other than Lady Abscissa ...and the Comte de Valerou!

So shocked was I that I stumbled and struck my head upon a rock, only to awaken some time later to discover that the balloon and the guests had gone, leaving behind only Ictor and myself. We elected to return to Mondeaux within my carriage -- and though I wished to offer Le Conquerant transportation and perhaps invite him to Mossthorpe for a short spell, the man was nowhere to be found and we were forced to depart without him. I should like to send him some form of compensation as thanks for his assistance, and must inquire as to his proper address should the opportunity arise.

I’ve since discovered that the Comte had been invited as a matter of course after arriving unexpectedly, having been blown off-course in his attempt to reach Paris before Mr. Speck and I. He is ever confident in the superiority of his flying vessels as a means of conveyance, despite their general

impracticality. I suppose it would be the gentlemanly thing to warn him of the predicament he is now in, for Ictor was rendered all but penniless in his pursuit of the Lady's affections, but just at the moment I have neither the wherewithal nor the means to contact him and he shall simply have to discover it for himself. He is a clever fellow despite his eccentricities, and I do not doubt that he shall be none the worse for a small adventure.

Ictor, Mr. Speck, and I shall depart this evening, traveling to Cherbourg by the most direct route and from there back upon the same course to Pendleton. Pembroke is quite badly heartbroken and has sworn revenge upon the Comte, but based upon my past experiences with him I believe that such wishes shall be fleeting at best.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

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Concerning a Deluge of Unusual
Proportions

This entry marks the beginning of Lord Gosham's account of what would come to be called the Great Damp of 1904, a disaster which came about as a result of blockages and damming of the numerous creeks surrounding Dundle and which, coupled with above average amounts of rainfall over a period of several days, resulted in the flooding of much of Pendleton County.

- Winslow

11 August, 1904

No sooner have I returned Ictor to his apartments in Coddlesley and ridden home to Mossthorpe than I am again besieged by troublesome bothers which threaten the comfort and quality of my abode! I have been informed that a series of floods and great storms has swamped the county in my absence, leading to this present situation wherein I am forced to hide, rat-like, from the rising tides that have swept 'cross my lands, badly battering my lovely gardens and quite ruining much of the turfing and hedges.

The lowermost floors of Windsford have flooded with water, filling those disused chambers with a toxic mire of silt, dust, and refuse from the grounds. A smallish shropsford oak was swept into Aunt Henneford's sitting room by a torrent of water, where it shall likely reside until such time as I am able to induce Mr. Speck's roustabouts to dismantle and remove it, likely by plying them with drink and cajoling them once their inherent surliness has been sufficiently diminished. Though it is not my policy to allow common laborers within the sanctum of Windsford Hall, a sitting room is not an appropriate place for a tree and I shall be willing to tolerate such intrusions in the interests of propriety and correct landscaping.

It is fortunate that I have to a considerable degree restored the underdocking to its former working order, as in the event that my grounds are completely overwhelmed by this deluge of floodwaters it, and the small watercraft stored therein, shall likely be the only means of hasty egress, the roads having been drown'd beneath the tides only a short while after my return.

A series of levees and breakwaters has been hastily constructed in the main halls from disused and unimportant furniture, in order that damage to the more valuable heirlooms and tapestries contained within might be prevented. Nevertheless I have had many of my most valuable possessions moved to my private chambers, including Uncle Theodorus's suit of armor and my dear departed mother's collection of wimples and other lady's hairpieces. Sadly this has had the most unfortunate effect of quite cluttering my chambers,

leaving Du Lac in a tizzy and instilling within me a great concern for the well-being of any fragile items I am now storing within his clawed and malevolent reach.

Some hours ago I climbed out upon the northernmost tower with a spyglass, in order that I might peer across my properties and observe the condition of the Heiress Rookbury's manor and estate. It was my hope that she would have been forced from her abode, perhaps delaying our dinner engagement until such a time as my intellect could devise additional excuses to waylay her affections and save myself from my appointed fate at her dinner table. Yet much to my dismay it appears that the Rookbury estate lies upon somewhat higher ground than my own, and is therefore untouched by the flood waters as of yet. Perhaps I shall instead claim that I took ill during my journeying, for the heiress possesses a great fear of foreigners and foreign parts and could be made to believe such a deception.

As I was already upon a high vantage, I took the opportunity to observe the condition of the surrounding lands beyond my own purview. It seems that the moorlands are wholly awash in grey muck and foul black water, seeping ever upwards from the numerous small cricks and estuaries that criss-cross the landscape in the manner of veins and arteries. Waterfowl and other aquatic creatures have taken the opportunity to expand their dominion, and I witnessed numerous flocks of geese adrift upon the whorls and gusseting waves.

In the course of my observations I espied also a number of small watercraft crossing the flooded plains, many of which were doubtless filled with gypsies hoping to steal hatboxes, armoires, and other buoyant objects from the water in the hopes that they might perhaps contain precious items and valuables, and which might later be ransomed back to their rightful owners for a hefty fee. I myself fell victim to such a scheme subsequent to a flood which occurred some years previous, leading to my current great concern for such matters.

I should note that there was one further item of business to which I attended this evening before retiring. During our return voyage, I had resolved to summon the unusual Mr. Drindle to discuss the ongoing business arrangement established between myself, he, and Mr. Speck, on which I have received no significant information since the initial agreement was consummated some time previous. Quite in spite of the deluge now upon us, I have observed a great deal of activity surrounding the entrances to the underdocks, and in fact noted several barges navigating the treacherous flood

currents to dock beneath the manor, accompanied by a collection of Speck's roustabouts clad in stout wicking coats.

Desiring further details about the activities of the barges, I dispatched a runner who induced Mr. Drindle to brave the storm and meet personally with me about the matter. The queer fellow, whose given name I have now learned is Sterwick, arrived quite drenched and muddied, and so I provided him with a place by the fire and a snifter of finest brandy to rouse his spirits. Drindle seemed to relax considerably, yet jumped once more to suspicion when I inquired after the business venture.

At first he allowed only that factors were aligning within our favor in spite of the difficulty posed by the storm, and even delivered to me a bank bond in the amount of quite a tidy sum, which he indicated represented my share of the profits from the venture. I took that this gesture was meant to preclude further inquiry, yet I pressed him for details, and after much hemming and belagging he consented at last to respond in kind.

“It is a somewhat complex arrangement, Lord Gosham,” Mr. Drindle explained in his soft and wheedling voice, which seemed all the softer for the rain beating upon the windows, “making use of mathematics and assays off the highest order. Perhaps an example shall adequately explain it. Consider, if you will, a fellow in France who has in his barn a collection of fine art, let us say some ten thousand francs worth, yet through no fault of his own he does not have appropriate documentation of sale, they having been inherited from a strange and unreliable relative whose habit it was to discard such things. A discerning collector in Midsomer wishes to purchase this lot of art, as the items are of a high quality and quite rare, yet the Frenchman is not able to complete his sale as a result of his poor documentation, this being just the thing to arouse the suspicion of the Exchequer or other overzealous authorities. Consider, then, that the two men instead trade some less noteworthy yet thoroughly taxed commodity -- let us suppose it to be pewter figures or ornamental basalt, plus a measure of bricks weighing two hundred stone. Along with these bricks is delivered our artwork as, not trade, but gift, thereby benefiting all involved. Of course, the payment for these bricks might be adjusted appropriately, then passed through various subsidiaries which I myself oversee, returning at last to the origin of sale, less a small fee for our own services as arbiters and transactors.”

This explanation seemed convoluted, yet plausible. “And the purpose of my underdocks?” I pressed.

“Why, it is through the underdocks that the goods pass, and therein that the art is removed while the bricks and basalt continue on to their final destination. Your manor, you are aware, lies along a most useful route for such transactions and trades.”

I allowed that I was indeed aware of this fact, and thanked Mr. Drindle for taking pains to explain to me the business. I offered him a spare room within the manor so as to preclude his braving the downpour once more, yet he was insistent that he must return at once to the guesthouse and set forth into the storm without another word.

I must say that our mutual venture seems quite innocent now that I have been made witness to the long and the short of it, and I am surprised that Misters Drindle and Speck were previously hesitant to provide thorough details. I admit that it is somewhat below my station to involve myself in base arbitrage, yet I am shamed to note that the Gosham family accounts are not as robust as once they were, and it does me well to think that the coffers are once more being filled.

In any case, it seems now as if the cloudburst shall continue onwards into the night, as the pattering of rain upon my roof has increased to a battering and cavalcadenous sound. I had hoped to host a soiree of sorts to commemorate the occasion of my return to the county, yet it seems that this is not an auspicious time to do so and as such I shall have to delay my intentions. I only hope that conditions do not worsen tomorrow, for I have doubts about the fortitude of the east wing's roofs.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

P.S. Du Lac has been returned to me from the safe-keeping of the roustabouts, who minded the feline for the duration of our pursuit of Ictor Pembroke. I note that he is somewhat more pronouncedly timid and excitable than when last I saw him, a factor I attribute largely to the special liniment with which Du Lac is regularly provided. At my behest, Mr. Lordsley has constructed an enclosure of sorts within which Du Lac might weather the evenings, and which I shall keep within my chambers, the better to keep an eye on the beast.

Henrius's great grandfather was renowned the world over as a collector of shoes and other footwear, and his collection occupied nearly a half-dozen rooms in the lower portions of Mossthorpe Hall. Although a great many of these shoes were no doubt destroyed by the activities alluded to in this entry, some four hundred pairs survive and have been willed to the archives of the Society, where they may be viewed by special request.

- Winslow

12 August, 1904

The flood waters have continued to rise and I fear that I shall be forced to abandon my home if conditions do not improve. Earlier today, I donned a pair of sturdy boots and my father's swintcoat -- which I went to great pains to recover from the mildewed and battered battletrunk beneath the stairs, where it has long awaited just such an occasion -- and ventured down into the annexes and sub-basements of the underdocking. I took care to avoid the small and filthy creatures which have infested my basements with the rising of the waters -- seeking shelter as all living things do, no doubt.

It was to my great dismay that I observed many smallish cracks and apertures in the foundations, which is largely of sandbrick and of no great utility against the damp and drench of such a cloudburst. The grubworms, which have been a quandary for all residents of Mossthorpe almost since ground was first broken by my forebears, have flourished in this damp environ and caused possibly irreparable damage to Cousin Culwitty's collection of undeveloped daguerreotypes. This is most unfortunate.

Due to the severity of the flooding, I have dispatched many of my staff, instructing all but the most essential individuals to return home so as to ensure a greater solitude. Becoming stranded in one's home by inclement weather is all very well and good, and no great disgrace to a man of adventure such as myself, but it would not do to be seen stranded with the common help. That would suggest a basic inability to care for oneself under times of duress, and in these image-conscious times one must take care to keep the stiff upper lip at all costs. This measure has regretfully left me with the rather ignoble task of working to contain, with my own two hands, the numerous small leaks and rivulets that now threaten the sturdiness of my home.

To this end I have positioned beneath these outpours and leaks as many old boots and sealed trunks as can be mustered, and employed the few remaining

porters in carrying these receptacles to the front door and emptying them out upon the lawn just as fast as they are filled. It is regrettable that so much fine old footwear and trunkery should be put to such a lowly task, yet I cannot help but feel that Great Grandfather Mattathias, to whom much of this footwear may be attributed, would understand my actions given the dire conditions I now find myself in.

Having seen to as many of the leaks as I felt able, I again climbed to the apogee of the northern tower and peered over at the Heiress Rookbury's manor with my glass. I observed that the waters have risen somewhat higher than yesterday, reaching now the miniature hedge maze in her eastern corner and plunging a portion of her stables under water. I was puzzled to witness several of her servants beating at the encroaching water with stockwhips, an activity which, while quite literary, is unlikely to lead to any great benefit in the long run, not to mention having the secondary effect of making fishing along those parts quite impossible, I should think.

I dispatched one of the porters to check in on Mr. Speck, whose advice I should very much like to have on several matters pertaining to proper drainage and storm preparation, only to be informed that the way to his cottage had become quite impassable without the assistance of marshwalks or watercraft, neither of which I presently have at my disposal, as I am keeping the small boats in the underdocking for a thing of last resort. I have seen neither hide nor hair of Mr. Speck or his numerous laborers since returning from our excursion, and was unable to glean anything of consequence about his cottage when viewed with my spyglass.

I can only hope that he is coping well and has not been more greatly inconvenienced than I, though I should think that quite impossible.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

P.S. No sooner have I brought Du Lac back into the comfort of my chambers than he has once more set about ravaging my personal effects. I took stock of the haberdasharium this evening before retiring, and noted that some several hats, including a most cherished and valued silk jockey cap bequeathed to me by a distant and little-known cousin, were torn asunder by my feline ward's claws. It is a mystery to me how Du Lac persists in gaining access to these prized corners of my collection, given as they are protected by a steel padlock that Mr. Lordsley assures me is quite sturdy. I am not especially an expert on the habits of the common housecat, and many of their most cunning artifices would be lost upon me. Are they tunnelers? I do not know,

but I most consider the possibility.

A paper recently published by our own Dr. Pitton argues that Sir Bartholomew Gobgrundle may have been none other than Jack Fendle, also known as Tipper Jack, a notorious thief and impersonator that worked the region steadily for the first half of the eighteenth century. Originally employed as a butler by a Scottish lord, Jack was inspired by the death of his employer to take on the identity of his former master's nephew and to abscond with several hundred pounds from the estate before the genuine heir to the fortune arrived from London. If this were true, it would make the House of Gosham one of several prominent families to be victimized by this expert impostor.

- Winslow

13 August, 1904

There is now water absolutely everywhere I turn within my home! It pours from out the plumed helm of Uncle Theodosus's armor, from between the stacked watercolors of Aunt Tepitula in the lattice store, from trunks and book cases and down the main stairs, in a great grey waterfall descending the disused and moldering eastern stairs, and across the ancient laidbrick promenade along the back of my property. There remains no place as yet untouched by this watery intrusion, yet still the heavens pour out their great and bothersome wetness upon my head and across my lawns and greens, which may now only safely be called browns, one supposes. It must be by the grace of God that Mr. J. Pewitt, the master of the lawns, reputedly took ill some weeks ago and has not been to work during this catastrophe, for I fear that kind and studious old soul would drop dead on the spot were he to see the present condition of his beloved landscaping.

A number of rickrack paddleboats have drifted 'cross my lawn in the past few hours, all of which were likely filled with thieving gypsyfolk eager to lay siege to my riches and plentiful antiquities, that they might barter and trade them amongst themselves for whatever gewgaws and knickknacks catch their fancy when next they attend one of their heathen markets, which I am to understand occur only on the blackest nights and in secret locations upon the moors, known only to that disingenuous and scheming lot.

In order that I might defend myself and my estate from prying fingers and the artifices of subtle folk, I have retrieved from storage my father's trusty blunderbuss and filled its breech with ornamental hatpins, smallish brick nails, and interestingly colored pebbles, all of which I possess in abundance owing to my dear departed mother's worrying propensity for collection. Any

interlopers daring to trespass before me should take heed, lest they taste the withering sting of such things across their misbegotten brows!

I have grown increasingly concerned over the matter of drainage, many of the chambers beneath the Windsford Hall being now submerged in water to the height of one's hips and having no apparent means for the egress of water. It was under very similar circumstances that the manor of my cousin Finnius was made to sink beneath the sogging and greyed mires of Wyttnoor, ultimately to be swallowed up to its steeples by the thick black mud and grimgrass of that region. As I have no great desire to see the same fate befall noble Mossthorpe, I have devoted considerable time and effort to researching a solution to this vexing problem.

Rolled up and tucked into the leather handle of an old haverner's twist, which had carelessly been stored at the bottom of a chest of drawers amongst the taxidermy of my father's friend Parnassus McKay, I discovered a series of plans that must date to Mossthorpe's most recent renovation, which I do believe occurred under the tutelage of an ancestor of mine by the name of Sir Bartholomew Gobgrundle, likely a distant septuncle or great grandmother's cousin of some variety. These plans suggest the existence of a number of sluice gates located in labyrinthine channels beneath the underdocking, the opening of which might very well permit some of the flooded chambers to disgorge their watery vitriols into the bowels of the earth, thereby sparing my beloved home from the ignoble fate of Wyttnoor House.

Tomorrow I plan to make an excursion into the underdocking and the byzantine aquatic works that lie beneath it, in order that I might survey the condition of the sluice gates and ascertain whether they might still be made to work, despite their years of disuse and decay. I believe now that my father may even have spoken of them once, mentioning in passing that they are fraught with danger and hazards the likes of which he could not fathom. I have asked one of the porters to prepare some sandwiches and a light aperitif for which to bring with me on my descent.

It is now becoming dark as the sun, ever murky and grey-shrouded in this dire weather, sinks to the horizon and plunges the moors into the thick blackness of what is sure to be a tempestuous evening. I plan soon to fire several flares from the towers of the Windsford hall with the aid of a ship's signal cannon and mortars I found stuffed into a boot whilst foraging

amongst the rubble of my father's apothecarium. It is my hope that Mr. Speck or some other occupant of his cottage might see these and send word to us, having had no luck thus far in reaching them through any more ordinary means.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

14 August, 1904

Though the matter of the drainage seemed at first a simple one, having spent but a day devoted to it I have found it growing into a great and lumbering beast of an issue, and one which threatens to plunge my home once more into the depths of intrigue and curiosity. And being myself a naturally curious individual, I shall no doubt feel compelled to investigate until such time as the matter is exhausted. Given the rather vexing issue of the flooding, I have scant few moments to spend on frivolous investigation -- yet spend I must, for it is in my nature as a Gosham!

My descent into the internecine stone chambers of the sluiceways went well enough at first, for I discovered that against all probability the mechanical incline between the porter's chambers and the underdocking still functions, despite the artifices of woodrot and damp. I quickly learned however that its oil reservoir was depleted and so summoned Mr. Lordsley the automobilist to refill it with a bit of his specialty jelly, useful not only for its viscous slipperiness but as an additive in cooking, I have found, on nights when the chill sets in and a little pick-me-up is required. This having been done and the gear having been made slippery to my satisfaction, I instructed Mr. Lordsley in the operation of the mechanism, though I must say the man smelt as if he had perhaps enjoyed a nip of the creature, and I was at first hesitant to stand upon the thing until I was reassured as to his capacities.

Though the incline proved quite serviceable, its mechanism persisted in emitting a series of worrying trundles and thuds which caused me no end of nervosia as the wooden platform on which I stood was lowered into the sodden gloom. Given its great age, I must confess some surprise that it functioned at all and that it failed to plunge me to a horrifying death, a possibility I had considered, owing to my familiarity with the quality, or rather lack thereof, of such contraptions. While the thing itself did me no harm in the grand tally, I was at one point assailed by a badger which emerged from out of the nowhere as I passed through an abandoned floor -- a floor which must now be home to many of the beastly vermin, judging by the sinister and malingering odor -- yet I succeeded in repelling its attacks with my hickory stick and sent it scurrying back into the darkness.

The base of the descender's track lies within a chamber which I believe was once used for the storage of grain and chilled meats, yet which now holds a considerable amount of water, covering the floor to a depth of some six inches and forcing one to wade about in a horrible mire of stagnant water and debris which quite ruined my muckboots. It was quite apparent to me that the

dreadful wateriness has permeated even the steadfast bedrock of the underdocking, though for reasons I cannot fathom it was less disastrously flooded than many of the larders and stores in the basement proper, some several dozen feet above.

Nevertheless, the underdocking is quite sodden, with many inches of standing water in nearly every room. On top of this, a foul smell as of greygrowth of the foot had permeated the air and conspired to cause the beginnings of a great and terrifying ache of the head. I spent some time in the examining of the various rooms and glens of that subterranean suchwhere, searching all the while for any aperture which might lead lower and deeper into my manor's foundations, until at last I located a sealed iron door which I deduced must lead into the sluiceways, owing to the gasps of chill air surging from around its frame.

I was unable to pass this door for a time, until I came across a small wooden box laying nearby. The box bore the initials of my father, and further inspection revealed that its contents were a scrap of filthy parchment covered with wholly inscrutable writing, and a simple iron key bearing my family's noble seal. I saw that this key was precisely the right size and shape to fit snugly within the door's metal lock, and within no time at all had it unlocked. On the other side of that portico I found a steep set of granite stairs, descending far down at right angles and blasted constantly with the same frigid wind I had detected previously. They seemed quite treacherous, even aside from the energetic if miniscule waterfall that now descended them with wild and mucky abandon.

To my intense surprise and subsequent curiosity, I saw that a series of lit torches adorned the walls of the stairwell. This fact set my mind to racing and made me cautious to proceed, as the common torch burns for a mere four hours unassisted, and to my nearest knowledge no soul has recently traipsed those cold and desolate corridors. Where, then, had the torches originated?

This mystery vexed me to such a great extent that I quickly abandoned my descent into Mossthorpe's underhalls, vowing to return to the surface and suss out the person or parties responsible for the lighting of the torches. I flew with a great quickness back to the mechanical incline and used the bell pull to signal Mr. Lordsley to operate the lift's infernal machinery once more, lifting me from out of the depths and back to Mossthorpe proper. I saw no sign of the badger which had previously molested my person, yet kept my guard up and my stick handy all the same, in case he were to prove a recidivist of sorts.

This evening I shall interview each of my remaining staff in kind, there being a mere dozen or so of them still upon the grounds. Their number includes Mr. Lordsley the automobilist; my chef, Fennelworth; Lubbek the lamplighter; Hubert MacDonnagal, master of tapestries; and a number of porters whose names I cannot at this time recall, it not being essential to their basic functions within the household. It is my belief that one of these men -- miscreants and gentlemen to varying degrees and in differing capacities -- has had some dark business in the underdocking, whereby this personage must have had occasion to ignite the torches I encountered.

As I am not soft-minded, I have considered the possibility that this is the work of Speck and his roustabouts and may in some way be connected to that mysterious enterprise. However, I see no way that they could have gained access to the underdocking with the paths to the guesthouse utterly swamped with stormwater, and have dismissed it outright.

Being a student of science and philosophy, and one familiar with the epistemological arts, I plan to ferret out the culprit with a combination of wit, cunning, and the scientific investigational techniques of the esteemed Dr. Werner von Straker, whose work I am well familiar with. It should prove quite an exciting exercise!

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

P.S. Du Lac remains suspiciously calm in the face of the encroaching waters. I have observed him prowling about the western wing's fourth floor in the vicinity of Uncle Trepasarius's favored reading room, through which considerable water was diverted by a foolhardy kitchen boy. The lad has been condemned to an evening in the truffing shed for this gross violation of my privacy, though I am informed by the stablemaster that he occasioned to escape through means of a rope and pulley mechanism fashioned from Mr. Lordsley's cast-offs, which are often discarded in the shed for lack of a better destination.

P.P.S. Still no word from Speck.

Although suicide was nominally a great taboo amongst the aristocracy of Lord Gosham's day, it also possessed a certain romantic attraction which led many wronged lovers and fallen captains of industry to off themselves in curious fashion. Although drowning oneself from a rowboat, as Mr. Pembroke is indicated to have planned, was chief among methods, other popular means were the consumption of deadly poisons, jumping from the top of tall structures, engaging in ill-advised duels and, in the notable case of Sir Baxter Hoff of Fowlswayn, fooling a hunting party into pursuing and ultimately shooting him in the midst of the yearly St. Ulrich's day hunt (now sadly discontinued).

- Winslow

15 August, 1904

My efforts to pinpoint the identity of the mullsome scoundrel responsible for the strange occurrences within the underdocking were interrupted this afternoon by the arrival of an unwanted visitor. Though I had intended to begin my tribunal the previous evening, I was distracted by a variety of unexpected problems in my manor, foremost among them the discovery of a wild boar which somehow gained entry to the kitchens. When at last the boar was captured and order was restored, it was far too late to begin the serious task of investigating, and so I opted to turn in for the night and revisit the endeavor this afternoon.

Things were going quite well, at least to begin with. I had just established that the newest of the porters, a young red-maned fellow by the name of Collis Killearny, had presented upon his hiring several untruths concerning his favored public house, the given name of his mother, and the usual manner in which he laced his boots -- all matters of great concern to me, as I seek to hire only proper fellows. I felt I was quite close to cracking the lad and extracting a full confession -- hopefully one which explained the scurrilous deeds beneath my household -- when my inquiry was interrupted by an excited tapping on a window at the opposite end of the room.

I leapt to the window, a towering Dutch affair installed by my great aunt. My first thought was that the gypsies had at last arrived to plunder my antiquities, and for this reason I brandished my walking stick with what I hoped was sufficient menace to give pause to any skullduggerous Turks I might encounter. Imagine my great surprise, then, to have thrown wide the window only to be greeted by the sallow, sad, and rather damp countenance of Ictor Pembroke, late of Coddlesley and parts beyond. My mind was

further vexed when I observed that he stood within a small and brightly painted rowboat, of the sort which might be used by two lovers for a tryst upon a lake or pond, and which looked rather oafish floating upon the floodwaters.

I was preparing to remark upon the incongruous appearance of the boat when my nemesis forced his way past me into the main hall -- quite ignoring proper etiquette as pertains to the arrival at homes and dwellings of the gentry, I must say. He proceeded to storm back and forth in a fervor and to drip greatly upon the floor and my rugs, much to my chagrin, and also to the further chagrin of the assembled porters, who, though being of less nimble mind than a man of my lineage, surely foresaw a great deal of mopping and wringing in their future.

I had scarcely sealed the window behind Pembroke when he began lamenting, at length and at considerable volume, the circumstances of his life, particularly as pertains to romantic pursuits and especially the pursuit of the scurrilous Abscissa.

“I am undone, Henrius. Undone!” he wailed, standing in a quickly spreading puddle of rainwater and mud. “That terrible woman... that, that termagant! She’s brought me low, brought me ever so low, and I don’t know how I shall ever recover.”

“Oh, buck up, chap,” I said, with what I must confess was some amount of sarcasm. “I am sure it is not as bad as all that.”

“Not as bad as all that? My late father’s trust has cut me off utterly, Henrius, and I am destitute! A ruined scion, with nary a penny to his name! Oh, woe is me, for ill tidings have befallen the house of Pembroke! Do you know,” he added, his eyes watering, “that I have had to purchase second-hand clothes? Last year’s fashions, Henrius!” And here he paused to clutch at his clothing in a pantomime of agony. “I cannot bear to even touch them!”

“I should remark, Ictor, that none of this explains why you’ve arrived at my window in a small boat!”

Ictor seemed taken aback by the interruption, but soon rallied. “Oh, Henrius, it is the saddest of tales! You know that I am a man of great emotion and feeling, and I believe it all goes back to my dear mother, don’t you know? For she was ever so smothering, and yet she taught me so much. Why, as a young schoolboy...”

And so on and so forth, for quite a while. He was just reaching his stride and beginning to elaborate upon his romantic failures in finishing school when I silenced him with a harsh gesture, motivated by ill temperament and the depths of my perturbation. I instructed him in no uncertain terms that we would be dining shortly and that he could explain his predicament over dinner like a sensible person, instead of like the great ninny he actually is.

Tho Pembroke is a ridiculous sort and a great dimwit, perhaps the greatest I have ever myself encountered, he allowed himself to be ferried off to one of the few guestrooms that remains largely untouched by the encroaching waters. I arranged for a porter to furnish him with suitable attire for dinner and to encourage him to sample some libations that I have found to be a great help in recovering from emotional turbor.

As I was already dressed for the evening meal, I took the opportunity to ascend to the balcony of the north tower in order that I might survey the moors. And indeed I found them largely unchanged, except in the furtherance of that which had already come to pass; Mossthorpe, I observed, stood now in the midst of a great grey mass of water, looking for all the world like a rather unusual galleon rising above the waves. The rain continued to fall in buckets and sheets, as it has done ever since the deluge began.

Dinner consisted of warmed sandwich of fowl and a rich harvest soup with flute mash and a slurry base, over which Pembroke explained his strange predicament, which was as follows: Upon being returned to Coddlesley, Pembroke had lost interest in all of his usual activities and haunts, taking pleasure in neither womanizing nor drink. Being a most ridiculous and dramatic fellow, he ultimately found himself so wracked with despair that death via drowning had seemed preferable to carrying out his lovesick and heartbroken existence, and he resigned himself to this ignoble fate.

To this end, he purchased a small rowboat from a fellow who performed lake tours and rowed out into the midst of a small pond on the outlay of Coddlesley, where he planned to end it all. However, no sooner had Ictor reached the spot he'd selected for his suicide than the ridiculous man lost his footing on the slippery wood and jogged his head quite nastily on an oarlock.

After lying unconscious in the boat for several hours, he awoke with a splitting headache to discover that his small craft had been swept out across the moors by the rising flood waters. Not wishing to drown himself in unfamiliar waters and risk discovering a muddy bottom a mere two feet deep

-- or worse still, he noted, for his remains to never be recovered -- Ictor rowed on, hoping to spot some familiar landmark. However, in the strange and sodden landscape of the deluge he could find nothing to navigate by.

He apparently drifted for some few days and, having brought no food, was forced to eat the lengthy note he'd composed to explain the reasons for his mortal departure. And since a gentleman simply cannot conduct his demise without a proper farewell note, Ictor was forced to row further and further afield, until at last he'd sighted a strange looming shape -- which the clearing mists had revealed to be my manor house. It was then that I discovered him drifting outside my windowbox.

While this tale was ludicrous in every respect, I must take it as true, bearing as it does the hallmark of dullardly foolishness and misadventure which one always finds in any enterprise involving Ictor. I have spent the remainder of the evening consoling him as well as I am able, largely through means of drink, but also keeping a sharp eye upon him so that he does not have the opportunity to off himself nastily within my home. I will be party to no such foolishness, and if he wishes to remain as my guest he would do well to remain amongst the living for the duration. A body is not a thing I desire to contend with on top of the already damnable flood.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

P.S. I am certain that Du Lac has brought some form of carcass within my chambers, as the small triangular room now smells quite strongly of spoiled meat. It is possible that it is a badger, though I have seen no evidence to indicate this, nor clues through which to discern the location where it has been concealed.

Widescale mischief and theft followed the flooding of 1904, bringing about a crime wave that persisted for several weeks as scavenging parties and hopeful treasure-seekers combed the moors for lost items of value. Several priceless works of art were liberated from nearby manors in the ensuing chaos, including a nude from the Rookbury collection, the installation of which had caused some deal of controversy the previous season due to its risqué subject matter.

- Winslow

16 August, 1904

I have been entirely stymied in my investigatory efforts by the need to constantly observe and steward Pembroke's emotional state. He has all but transformed my humble abode into what must surely be called a mausoleum, filled with wailing and moping and the sorrowful cries of his harrowed spirit. The man is like a lesser banshee, a dire harbinger whose cries portend not death, but rather extreme annoyance and misfortune. His pitiful weepings echo about my home without pause, disturbing all and preventing any work from continuing. The only beneficial thing of which I might speak is that the flood waters have at last begun to recede, in concordance with the cessation of the damnable rain which had so recently plagued me and turned my moor to the foulest sort of swamp and mire.

While sampling the morning bourbon I found myself interrupted by a sad and pathetic tapping upon the doors of my private chambers; outside I found Pembroke, clothed in a tattered smoking jacket which had once belonged to my Uncle Theodosus, his eyes sunken deep within his head in the manner of a sick man. I inquired as to his purpose, and was met with trembling lip and an exasperated, breathless babbling that better befits some egg-eyed poet than a member of the gentry, however disgraced he may be.

"Oh, it is a sad and terrible thing," Ictor wailed at me. "For of all the worlds and stories that we might inhabit in our lives, is not tragedy the most pathetic? Scarcely more than two weeks ago, I was filled to bursting with a glorious sunniness as of daffodils on the finest spring day. Yet now I live in eternal winter because of the loss of my dear Abscissa. This sad and diminished jacket is, I dare say, the only thing keeping me from out the gaping maw of despair, yet it is poor solace for my doomed spirit. Even now, I feel a chill upon me, dwelling as I do upon Death's homely door!"

Seeking to soothe his nerves and cease his incessant prattling, I provided him

with a glass of gin from my own stores and sent him about his business. I advised that he should conduct a walking tour of the galleries, which contain many fine works of art and artisanry and would surely have brought light to his troubled mind.

Yet it seems that my advice fell upon deaf ears, for only a short while later I observed him drifting back and forth in my librarium like a ship loosed from its moorings. Over the course of an hour I observed the miserable fellow hungrily perusing the works of Poe, Byron, and numerous other writers of a melancholic fashion, which I am certain did nothing to aid his mental state. Not wishing to dwell on Ictor's problems any longer, I sought to immerse myself in a most informative book on chemistry, yet encountered such significant impediment in the form of the pathetic fellow's sorrowful mumbling and whimpers that I felt obligated to distract the old boy.

Hoping to take Pembroke's mind from off the matter of his miseries, I instructed the porters to retrieve his rowboat from the shed into which it had drifted and reberth it at the water's edge so that we could embark on a short excursion across my sodden property. The waters had by then receded almost beyond the northern terraces, providing a convenient and easy launch from the midst of the bowling green. My unfortunate cohort and I spent the next few hours dallying in the stews and gimbles of the sodden moor, observing the lolling passage of uprooted trees drifting about my property and stumbling upon the watery resting places of several ruined automobiles -- no doubt from the heiress's property, yet now awash upon the swaines.

Growing tired of these familiar scenes, we ventured further and further out upon the waters, making ample use of the boat's oars and sturdy construction to steer twixt the dams and mires. I began to realize that the flood was of far greater proportions than originally thought, for wherever we went we saw floating detritus from every part of the county -- ranging from bricks and barrels to bundles of sodden documents, and in one case a large wooden statue of a pig, which had become all clung upon with mud and thistlereed. Pembroke was of the opinion that we should seize it and make it a trophy of our expedition, but as the boat was quite small I elected to continue on in hopes that we might come across some more convenient object of salvage.

Not long afterward, I espied several gypsy scows making way with pole and paddle towards a waterlogged trunk that had become scuttled up against a felled tree; making to gesture fiercely with my stick and blunderbuss, I persuaded them that they might depart and sought to retrieve the trunk for myself. I could see at once that it was of a fine manufacture and had perhaps

once been upholstered, if one were to judge by the tacks upon its side. We were greatly excited by this find and, securing it to our bow, made haste to return to my properties, only to discover that we had become quite lost in our wanderings and could no longer derive bearings from our strange surroundings, this owing to the meandering and all but featureless landscape in which we floated.

Though our return required somewhat more time than anticipated, through pluck and clever artifice we found ourselves at last upon my lands once more, and from there it was a simple matter to make landing at hoary Mossthorpe. It has become late, and so our investigation of the trunk's contents shall have to be postponed until the morrow, for it has proven itself securely latched and the assistance of Mr. Lordsley might ultimately be required if we are to peer within.

On a final note, my house was this morning graced by the presence of several of Mr. Speck's men, who informed me that their employer is in high spirits and that they had merely come to retrieve some items of interest from his personal stores in my basements. I hope very much that I shall see my manservant in the near future, for I fear Mossthorpe is the worse for his continued absence.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

P.S. Du Lac badly startled a scullery maid who was attempting to clear sodden debris from the servant's entrance. I have sent her home for some several days, for which she will be paid despite her absence. I am to understand that the feline felled a stork or some other variety of waterfowl and ensconced itself in an upturned tin birdbath with its prize, where he was then found by the maid, who took ill at the grisly scene.

The Pendleton Faire was a yearly gathering that celebrated the culture and history of the County Pendleton. Among its regular attractions were fortune tellers, gymnasts, and oddities. Perhaps the most famous of the attractions were the Fantastic Flapp Siblings, a set of quintuplets famed for feats of mentalism and mind reading. They were banned from further performance after it was discovered that there were eight, not five, Flapps, and that the additional three earned their keep as informants in the audience.

- Winslow

17 August, 1904

This morning I sought to consult with Mr. Lordsley the automobilist on the matter of our recovered trunk, hoping that he might lend insight into methods and artifices for the opening of same. To my great dismay, I found that he was nowhere within the manorhouse or the various smallish sheds upon my property, and none of the other staff seemed to know where he might be.

This has become a troubling habit of the fellow's, and one which has persisted in spite of my most stern warnings; he scampers about at all hours of the night, sometimes to be seen drifting 'round corners or lurking in the shadows of his shed, making nary a sound. Always he has about him the odor of peppermint oil, but never have I seen him suck upon a candy of any sort; he alludes to a home in town, yet when pressed refuses to name either the town or the precise whereabouts of this residence. Mr. Lordsley is a most suspicious man, second only to Mr. Speck in this regard, yet like Speck his expertise makes me perhaps overly tolerant of his foibles and eccentricities; a less capable fellow would surely have been dismissed by now for such odd behavior and manners.

Last night was a restive one and no great satisfaction arose from it, and so this morning I was not of a mind to tolerate Mr. Lordley's poor-mannered frivolities. At any other time I might have opted to retire for the remainder of the day to play a bit of wickets upon the moor, or perhaps see if the road to Coddlesley had been yet cleared, but the prospect of the trunk had stirred within my bosom a spirit of grand adventure. It was in this same spirit of adventure that I decided to expand my search for the automobilist, rather than allow him to escape the duties for which he is, I must emphasize, well compensated.

After a brief argument, Pembroke and I agreed that we might conduct a more efficient reconnaissance by scouring the grounds independent of one

other. I opted to search the eastern gardens and the blasted patch by the old lord's coachhouse, while Pembroke was to search the ponded valley, stables, and lower moor. Even in the face of such a rousing task as this, my guest remained wholly committed to his task of moping about and darkening my manorlands.

“How,” he bayed, lifting a hand to his brow with great drama, “can one seek but a simple man when the vile strands of Fate have twisted together so as to form an impenetrable knot about the heart? And what profits man to seek his fellow when ultimately they must remain forever apart, knowing only the barest shreds of each other's souls?”

Sensing then that my nemesis was bracing himself for a great and terrible monologue, I made haste to excuse myself and depart for the eastern gardens. Once arrived it took me but a short while to uncover Mr. Lordsley dozing within the leafy embrace of a topiary elephant, but I decided that Pembroke might do well with a bit of healthy activity and so allowed him to continue searching the moors for the next few hours, ignorant of the fact that the machinist was already found.

This minor deception left me at liberty to pursue other interests for the afternoon, and it took me but a little while to settle on how to occupy myself for the remainder of the day. Ever since the great social catastrophe which occurred at Ictor's coming-again party, my mind has pondered o'er the precise manner in which the musical arts might be improved. That particular affair, it now seems to me, might not have been half as ghastly were it not for the presence of dithering, uncouth musicians, whose characters I have always found greatly lacking and roundly unfit for proper society, of which I am proud to be an esteemed member. At that moment of great humiliation, which even now stings the mind, who was it who surely guffawed the loudest, in horrid bacchanalian voice? I put it to you that it was the very musicians meant to entertain us that eve!

Surely no scofflaw or mountebank ever disgraced chaste Britannia to the extent achieved by even the most mild-mannered trumpeter, and on a regular basis! I will admit that flautists, and indeed many of the woodwinds, with the exception of bassoonists, may on occasion be tolerated -- but show to me a member of the string section and I shall show to you a man who stands a mere ha'step from barbarity and other vagrantly behavior. Even the violin, whose nobility could be doubted by none of sound mind, stands but a hair's breadth from the ignominious fiddle, whose misanthropy has been well documented.

My mind struggled over these notions for many a night, before at last striking upon a solution. If it is musicians themselves that prove most problematic to the acceptability of songs and songsters, might not music sans musician be just the thing to elevate this most uncouth of artforms to the level of its liberal fellows, such as painting and dramatic writing? I pored like a demon over several of the Professor's schematics before coming at last upon a design for rotary hammers of a sort, intended for the flattening of metal, yet sending now my mind to working at a furious pace. This fugue of ingenuity culminated at last in the design for the bell automata -- or rotational bells, as I prefer to call them. A set of treadles shall be connected, by way of woven belt of indian rubber, to a series of spinning flywheels, on which shall be placed numerous small hammers and clappers. These hammers shall be adjusted with relation to each other in the precise manner that, upon the operation of the treadles, charming music might be created from out the device, and without the troublesome involvement of bourgeois musicianry.

After further reflection and additional study, it seemed to me as if this same principle might perhaps be applied to other instruments, with a clever rocker and peg mechanism for the operation of the strings, or some arrangements of bellows and stoppers for the woodwinds. Elements such as the timpani would be most easily intermingled with larger devices, perhaps duplicating tubas or even organs. I see no reason why the full length and breadth of the noblest of orchestras should not be within reach!

Yet the true beauty of this idea is that any fellow of modest intellect might be employed to operate such a device and, having done so, to produce tones as dulcet and pleasing as any produced by a trained and therefore untrustworthy maestro. I fancy that the whole of Christendom would be much keener on music if they might have a lovely symphony played by an efficient machine operated by a courteous tradesman, as opposed to a sordid collection of what-nots who just happen to be capable of producing tones pleasant to the ear.

I shall have to confer with my friend the professor on this matter, as several elements of its execution are beyond my ken as craftsman and shall likely require his expert oversight. Yet I have high hopes for this project, particularly as the Pendleton Faire is to be held next month and, as is traditional, a prize will be awarded for the invention or artistry that might best improve modern living. A bottle of Mr. Bot's finest Frontenac is being offered as boon for this engagement, and I would be a great deceiver indeed if I were to claim I had not my eye on that particular prize.

I first tasted the Frontenac at a little soiree at the house of Mr. Ulysses Bot, convened to celebrate the engagement of his daughter, Diurna, to a most objectionable fellow who made his trade as a buyer of wood stock in London. He allowed us but a brief taste, served up in a vessel scarcely larger than a thimble, but even from that most glancing of encounters I knew at once that I must have access to a ready supply. It is a thick drink, the Frontenac, with a particular stickiness and a hint of rose, but also a formidable kick that brings to mind the stoutest of whiskies.

Though I count Mr. Bot among my friends, he refused outright to allow me a further taste, even when offered a considerable sum of money for the pleasure. Ever since that time I have sought a means to sample this veritable ambrosia again, yet have found myself thwarted at every turn. At last it seems as if the fates will deliver the delectable liquor once more into my grasp, for I am greatly confident in the utility of the machine.

Pembroke has just now arrived in my chambers, and to judge by his countenance I fear he has discovered the depths of my deception and wishes now to proceed with our investigations of the recovered trunk. Should Mr. Lordsley not succeed in this respect, I shall raise the matter with Mr. Speck, who, I suspect, may know some fellows with experience in matters of this sort.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

18 August, 1904

I have ridden myself at last of the presence of Ictor Pembroke, which has so plagued my abode and provided constant interruption to my endeavors these last few days. This morning, well before I had planned to rise, I was awakened by a terrible crash somewhere below my chambers. I dressed quickly and rushed downstairs, only to discover Ictor flat on his back in the middle of the hallway. When I inquired as to his purpose, he indicated that he had fashioned from his 'kerchief a hangman's knot, meaning to loop this upon a gas light fixture, when the chair on which he stood had given way -- this owing to his having sawed through the legs, I later discovered, though he neglected to mention this at the time and subsequently denied it outright.

"'Twas naught but a lark," Ictor insisted as I helped him to his feet. "I sought only to ascertain the strength of the fixture, and certainly meant no ill against my own person. Rather than prying, you should thank me for concerning myself so deeply with your wall-fittings!"

I realized then that my guest intended to follow through with his self-destructive designs, shuffling from off this world with no more fuss than a fellow might make upon retiring for the evening. While to some small extent Ictor's suicide might be seen as a boon to me, his continued absence from my estate being thus guaranteed, I suspect that it would bring all manners of inspectors and constables down on my abode. No doubt they would then clutter my day with untidy questions about who, or why, or what, or where-go-you, which I should find quite intolerable. Furthermore, I am apprehensive about how Mr. Speck might react were he to discover men of the brass buttons variety snooping about.

Hoping then to head off any such confusion, my mind leapt to the task of devising some subtle method for encouraging Ictor's departure, a process which continued on through my dressing and a very early brunch. I had scarcely noticed that it was time for proper breakfasting when I struck upon a suitable mechanism quite by chance. With my new plan in mind, I made the necessary arrangements and then hurried to locate Ictor.

After much searching, I found my dour guest in the southern garden staring dejectedly at a bust of Pan, sighing repeatedly and blowing his nose into a handkerchief. "Oh, Henrius," he sighed, upon seeing me. "I had heard your gentle footsteps, and in my heart of hearts I thought it might be the spectre of death, here to grant me merciful relief from my earthly suffering! Please forgive my dark tone, but I fear I am not long for this world. I have even

heard the grim call of the raven from outside my window. ‘Caw, caw,’ it seems to say, yet I know it portends my doom!”

“Indeed, indeed,” I replied, in a solemn voice like that of a wise uncle, “And that is precisely why I am here to speak with you! I have quite come around on this matter of suicide, and I have decided that rather than impeding you at every step, I shall help see you off. Should you be ready to do the grim deed, you may proceed downstairs to the underdocking, where you shall find a small boat tied up. You need only take your seat in the boat and loose it from its moorings, and it shall sweep you down and through the lower levels of the manor to your inevitable doom.”

“How wonderfully poetic!” cried Ictor, clutching his hands together. “Yes, it is the perfect departure for me! And... might there perhaps be rapids, and sharp rocks, on which my tattered body will be tossed? That would be positively literary. Ah, to exit this life in the manner of Shelley, storm-tossed and luckless!”

I allowed that there might very well be rapids and rocks in store, at which point Ictor ran over and embraced me. “Oh,” he declared, tears in his eyes, “you are a true friend indeed, Henrius! I know not how to thank you for your kindness. You are as the Odysseus to my Achilles, the Iolaus to my Heracles, without whom my earthly pursuits would be for naught.”

I felt only the merest hint of regret as I patted him upon the back, saying, “Think nothing of it, Ictor. Is it not the most basic responsibility of the good host to ensure that the needs and wishings of his guests are well seen to?” I am not a man for sarcasm, it being a base gesture and a recourse of the lowest form of scoundrel and dandy, yet I confess that at that moment I could quite see its appeal. Yet I held my tongue, not wishing to upset my ingenious scheme, and sent Ictor about his way, escorting him down to the promised boat and seeing him off. He waved sadly to me as he floated away down the sluice and around a bend in those subterranean tunnels, and I have not seen him since.

Now, a more attentive man might have realized that my chamberways and underdockings do not drain into the perilous rapids I had promised, and instead lead to a small and gentle crick that ferries its water swiftly along to the old Pendleton canal, and from there on to Coddlesley. But as evidenced by his many academic failures, Pembroke is somewhat loose-minded, and I was not greatly surprised that he overlooked this.

It is my hope that even now that buffoonish man is sitting sadly within his absurd little boat, drifting through the outlay of Coddlesley and towards other poor souls whose doorsteps he might darken, bemoaning, no doubt, the fact that his dear friend has deceived him. Nevertheless, I wish him well in his efforts to execute himself, so long as he conducts it under someone else's roof, and does not mention my name.

Yet even this small triumph has brought other bothers in its wake, for this afternoon I was accosted on the lawn by a chirpish fellow purporting to represent the Heiress Rookbury. He offered me a most cordial invitation to dinner at the Heiress's estate, to occur two nights hence, with formal attire quite expected. I do not relish the thought of attendance, but as I did agree to withstand such things as just compensation for the allowance of her coach and liveried men, it is beyond my power to refuse her. The heiress keeps quite ghastly company, and no doubt many bores and tedious individuals shall be in attendance. Upon one prior occasion a small fellow who smelt of fish insisted upon reciting to me a work of poetry in Italian, and I found it very tiresome, not to mention in rather poor taste, if one were to judge by his accompanying gestures.

I shall consult Mr. Speck on the morrow to ascertain whether he might have some suggestion for escaping from such an engagement, but I do not hold forth much hope for the matter.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

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Dire Portents and Shocking Revelations

It would have been unthinkable for Henrius to turn down such a direct invitation from his neighbor, especially one to whom was owed a debt of gratitude, as was the case with the Lady Rookbury. However onerous he might have felt the task to be, even the gentry were bound by social conventions. One Lord Bentley of Ixley, a man with whom Henrius was loosely acquainted, once attended a poetry recital rather than the funeral of his mother. The recital had been scheduled many months in advance -- while his mother had only very recently taken ill.

- Winslow

19 August, 1904

I have spoken with Mr. Speck and he has informed me, much to my considerable dismay, that he is aware of no suitable and proper way to shirk my gentlemanly responsibilities with regards to the Heiress Rookbury and the awful little affair she seemingly has planned for tomorrow's eve.

This leaves me with no alternative but to actually attend the heiress's to-do, a prospect which becomes more grim by the second, aided by strange portents and troubling visitors within my purview. A number of young fellows, lackeys the lot of them, made their way to my estate throughout the course of the day's events, bearing each of them some new condition to be imposed upon my attendance. They were each attired in ridiculous clothes, yet bore always the mark of the Rookbury estate: a leaf of royal blue, rampant upon sable background.

The first fellow arrived somewhat before brunching. He was tall and rake thin, not unlike Mr. Speck, yet wearing a long red coat that was no doubt all the rage in some foreign locale of questionable taste. After being admitted to my property, this risible individual informed me that a small opera would be taking place at the lady's abode, and that I would do well to conduct myself in a classical manner and suitably attire myself for such an esteemed occasion. Not one hour later, an entirely different man, also clad in the lady's livery, delivered to me a hand-written note from the heiress, this communique daring to instruct me that I should wear nothing but the latest in fashions, and indeed nothing too formal, and that furthermore my host was at my disposal to suggest any number of shops within Coddlesley where said fashionable items might be obtained. The third and, so far, final man I chased from my property with a loaded revolver, finding his countenance entirely too disagreeable after the debacles of the previous two, this allowing me to recuse myself from the burden of having to listen to whatever obsequiousness

he might wish to convey on his employer's behalf.

In light of these events, a suspicion has come over me that the heiress, being herself rather incorrigible, may perhaps be attempting to throw me from off my guard, the better to insinuate herself into whatever good graces she might mistakenly believe me to possess. No reasonable person would wear fashionable garb to an opera, a thing which even the heiress should well know, and her suggestion that I do so must therefore be taken with great skepticism and viewed in a sinister light. I dispatched a porter to inform her that I shall dress in the manner to which I am accustomed, allowing only a rather dashing hat, or perhaps my riding gloves with the silver buttons and filigree, as light acquiescence to the lady's whims and demands.

That I should find myself honorbound to attend such a soiree at all is nigh unto intolerable -- to have that airy jezebel dictate my dressings can only be a final insult. That is not, of course, to say that I have never been fond of a party, as I've found that they can be rather charming affairs when conducted with class and good sense. But I shouldn't expect either of these qualities to be in evidence at tomorrow's fete, experience having shewn me that if the good lady Rookbury can be convinced to purchase a bauble, she can be likewise convinced to procure the entire necklace, and the jeweler's shop on top of that! I have no doubt that we will be entertained by nothing less than a full symphony orchestra and made to watch while some vainglorious acrobat flings himself from off the rafters for our supposed amusement, while exotic "food," if one can call it such, is served to the unwary. If I complete the night with none having felt the swing of my stick, I shall consider it a great victory, and myself a moral hero.

On the matter of the recovered trunk, at least, I can report that some progress has been made. Mr. Speck came around earlier and made short work of the trunk's latches and mechanisms with a prybar that he just so happened to have handy in his rooms. This allowed us to peer within and glimpse its interior, which we found to contain scores of hand-written pages, each covered with unlabeled numbers and strange symbols. I believe the pages represent some lost diary or novel that has been encoded by its cautious author, and so I have sent word to the professor that I might soon have need of his services as cryptographer and graphologist. If some fellow has lost his private writings, I feel it is my duty to return them -- and while I am not normally one to pry into coded texts, I can see no other way of finding the trunk's owner.

Also, I should note that Mr. Speck took a most curious interest in the pages,

becoming very excited and flying into as near to a tizzy as I have ever seen him. I had not taken my manservant for a literary or sentimental type, yet he is a man of endless mysteries and I should not be surprised to uncover yet one more facet of his odd personality. In any case, he rushed off soon afterwards, alluding to pressing business elsewhere on the grounds.

The task of clearing the damage done by the flood waters is coming along nicely, and the porters have assured me that in but a few days there shall be no refuse or detritus left to marr the view from my balcony. I retain some reservations about the condition of the now-rather-damp foundation, but those shall be dealt with in the fullness of time, and there are rather more pressing matters afoot just now.

On the matter of the underdocking, earlier today I had Mr. Lordsley fetch his largest and most robust padlock and instructed him to seal the mysterious iron door that I discovered. I hope to find the time to explore these forgotten chambers of the subcanals once I have dealt with the bother of the heiress's party, but for now I must retire to think over my fate and steel myself against the cunning advances of that harpy and the ridiculous coterie of guests that will surely accompany her.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

19 August, 1904

The heiress's party was precisely as devoid of good humor and charm as I had predicted. I found it to be populated with every variety of ninny and fop known to man, congregating like idiotic fairies in some fantastical garden, all flitting about with great glitter and pomposity, quaffing expensive libations which far exceeded their capacities to appreciate them and consuming whole trays of hors d'oeuvres, Leviathan-like and uncaring, braying to each other all the while of whatever trifle of thought happened, at that instant, to occupy their otherwise barren minds.

I arrived fashionably late, as is my habit, and scarcely had I entered Rookbury manor than I found myself surrounded by a gaggle of wretched bohemians, bobbing to and fro and seeking to regale me with tales of their poetic travels, their unwashed hair all the while causing me no end of discomfort. The leader of the bunch appeared to me to be a young lady dressed as a man, a fact which I commented upon in good spirits, though I later discovered that this was not the case. The fellow was very deeply offended -- for fellow he was, in spite of appearances -- but I don't see how I could've known.

Despite my best attempts to excuse myself, this mob pursued me from the lady's gaudily appointed sitting room, through her trifle of a banquet hall and, at last, out upon a small garden balcony. I heard no fewer than ten of the buffoons comparing themselves favorably to Shelley -- tho which Shelly, precisely, was unclear, and their clothes did nothing to lessen the confusion -- and one young man even went on for some time about how dreadful and boring he finds both jam and the music of the harmonium, two things I myself hold dear.

I did finally escape the clutches of this mass of chattering dandies by bolting suddenly from the balcony and locking the door behind me, leaving my pursuers stranded outside. Yet no sooner had I stepped back within the hall than I found myself grasped about the arm by the heiress and led unwillingly into a smokey antechamber. I thought for sure that I was about to be ravished, as unto the Sabine women of yore, yet instead found myself pushed into a luxurious duchal chair and handed a drink. I took my bearings and found that the room was occupied by various other well-dressed types, and in the center of it all the Heiress Rookbury, holding debaucherous court and quaffing vast amounts of moscato, by the look of her.

“Henrius, Henrius, Henrius!” chirruped the heiress. “Oh, it is simply a

delight to have you here. Did you know, I have been thinking of you? Ever so much, in fact.”

“I shudder to think of the context,” I allowed.

“Oh, Henrius, you are always such a kidder! But don’t be so dour, this is a party!” She leaned forward in her seat. “You know, we really ought to go hunting together some time. It’s a delightful diversion. Do you hunt, dear Henrius?”

I informed the lady that I do not, owing to the foul smell and base nature of the common horses.

“Horses!” she laughed, in response. “Oh, I’ve quite done away with those. No, no, I shan’t be hunting from horseback again. These days the fashion is to hunt from automobiles! It’s ever so much more exciting -- and rather more sporting for the poor creatures, don’t you think?”

“I should think the fox is at a disadvantage in either case.”

“Not the fox, you great silly man, the hounds! I let Bartholomew and Robespierre stand on the runners, you see, and their darling little tails wag ever so much.”

I felt that I was rapidly losing ground, and so attempted to change the subject. “I really must thank you for this party, Madame Rookbury. It’s a fine privilege, although you really didn’t need to go to such trouble just to uphold our dinner engagement.”

The heiress looked puzzled, then suddenly clapped her hands. “Dear me, no! The party isn’t for you, Henrius!” she said, with what can only be called a cackle. “It is for my newest friend, Carlisle Toddings. Have you met Mr. Toddings? He is a writer. He publishes something called *The Sojourner*, which I take to be a magazine by his description. You explain, Mr. Toddings, it’s all quite a bit beyond me!”

Mr. Toddings turned out to be a small bespectacled fellow seated to my right. He is apparently an adventurer and curiosity seeker, but also publishes a small and outlandish tract which goes by the name *The Sojourner*. As Toddings explained it to me, his aim is to chronicle and scientifically investigate all manner of puzzlements and phenomena, his discoveries being subsequently printed in his gentleman’s magazine. Never have I met a more

dour or serious individual, and I found his stern black suit and cane -- embossed with a compass rose on its crown -- perhaps overly restrained, yet his stories were wondrous and varied and in no time at all we'd very much hit it off.

He spoke at first of the events which had brought him to Pendleton, namely the discovery of a body along the southern cliffs some years before, dead from no apparent misdeeds or misadventure and seemingly in the prime of his life. Yet none could identify the man, not even when a strange brown case was found in Coddlesley Station containing a length of rope and a sextant engraved with the letters "R.Q.R.," these initials having also been found in a coat worn by the man.

"It was a most curious occasion of events," explained Toddings. "For the case was of the sort used by merchants and yet the fellow who had been found had no indication of the mercantile lifestyle. Indeed, one would be led to assume from the condition of his palms that he was accustomed to a genteel existence, seeing neither trouble nor hard work in his lifetime."

"Perhaps it was by means of being a deception," I opined. "Some fellows are known to travel incognito so as to avoid suspicion or undue duress. I myself have periodically set forth clad in the raiment of simple country folk, donning an over-large sun hat and workman's coveralls, so as to mislead any and all observers as to my true station and identity. It is most useful in some particular circumstances, e.g. when seeking to escape pursuers or avoid an irate relative."

"You must have very persistent relatives indeed, Lord Gosham," remarked Toddings.

"I should say so! Once, upon failing to return to my Uncle Trebasius a volume of Braunheim which had been personalized not only by the man himself but by his reclusive typesetter, I was set upon by a clan of Scottish ruffians who sought to recover the text at any cost, up to and including great personal inconvenience."

I started to offer further speculation about the story Toddings had related, but he veered suddenly into a discussion of more general curiosities, including most interestingly a nautical event whereby a galleon had been seen to emerge from out a bank of fog, its decks and rigging aflame, accompanied by a great wailing and hooting which suggested to the observers some apeish creature. Yet in spite of this great conflagration, no residue or evidence of

such calamity could be found the following day, and indeed no ships had been reported as lost.

Needless to say I was greatly intrigued by such tales, and asked Mr. Toddings if I might possibly speak with him more at some later date; it is a happy coincidence that he plans to remain in the county for a week or more whilst conducting his investigation, and I have invited him to visit me at Mossthorpe whenever he should find it convenient to do so. I gathered from his lukewarm reception that he will seek to escape this particular engagement, yet I am not to be thwarted so easily and am already concocting various means through which I might ensure his visitation.

Shortly after our discussion, the heiress announced that the party had reached a conclusion, and I said my farewells and returned to my estate as I had come. I should like very much to acquire a copy of this Sojourner of which Toddings spoke, and plan to inquire after it when next we meet.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

20 August, 1904

This morning I received a rather regretful missive from Mr. Toddings explaining that he shall be unable to accept my gracious invitation to visit Mossthorpe. Apparently, the esteemed gentleman must return to London at once in order that he may attend to some pressing matter or another. I find this quite vexing, as I had heretofore thought publishing something of a gentleman's concern, where a man of decorum might satisfy the demands of his industry without being forced to forgo other plans. However, the cancellation of such a formal invitation as I had offered Mr. Toddings begs me reconsider.

Had I known that publishing was so fraught with bother and put-uponness, I would already have dismissed it from my thinking entirely, much as I have the other habits and proclivities of the so-called "professional" writer, a calling that seems to attract the most boorish and unfortunate sort of fellow. And indeed, any man who would adopt a pursuit in which he is forced to shirk societal obligations to quiet some lexicographical hullabaloo is a fool I consider altogether unworthy of my attention.

This entire episode is most unfortunate, as I had hoped to regale Mr. Toddings at length on the matter of my family's history, a topic that in my estimation would make for a ripping good yarn and excellent material for a learned chronicler. I can't say I'm altogether surprised to have been so thwarted, however, as the Lady Rookbury is known to be preternaturally jealous of her guests, and I would scarcely bat an eye were I to discover that she herself sent Toddings back to London simply to avoid his falling into my clutches.

I had scant time to dwell on my regrets, however, as just a short time after breakfast an urgent letter arrived from Coddlesley that demanded my fullest attention. Apparently an infestation of waterbugs has not only caused the town to cancel its annual harvest festival, but also induced them to move forward the date of the Pendleton Faire by several weeks. Thanks to this latest development, I now have mere days to complete the rotational bells, at least if they are to be considered in this year's pantheon of improvements and contraptions. Rumors of rival entries abounded at the Lady's soiree, including any number of automata and cure-alls, as well as an "artistic" entry from the Pendleton Sevenses, a literary "club" of sorts with which I am unfortunately well acquainted.

Some years previous, a rapsallion by the name of Hubertus Fripp saw fit to publish a piece of slander entitled "Lord Gorshem, Or The Follie of The Moors" in the Sevenses' quarterly papers. It was a vile piece that made light of certain of my fashions and habits in the form of lyrical verse -- the lowest and most base form of authorship, to be certain -- and Fripp's scribbings caused me no small amount of upset. Indeed, it was many months before I could show myself in polite society without hearing a snippet from his dire missive whispered at me from across the room.

It should be evident that Fripp is a man of poor morals and ill esteem, and the fact that the Sevenses would permit such a creature to hold membership says all that needs be said about the overall candor of the organisation, to say nothing of their willingness to publish his libelous filth in their official quarterly. In spite of his sordid history, Fripp is also said to be in the running for a seat on the Sevenses' directorate, which leads me to conclude that there is not a single honorable or even sane man within the walls of that misbegotten club. (As if to further make my point, I recently learned that Ictor Pembroke is also a member.)

But enough of old grudges. It is clear that I shall need to bring the full might and heft of my intellect to bear on the task at hand if I am to emerge victorious, and it will do me little good to have ill thoughts clouding my not inconsiderable mental prowess. Securing an accolade of this nature would be a true feather in my cap, and do a great deal to rejuvenate the Gosham family name (to say nothing of the savory unctuousness of the prized Frontenac). It would also thoroughly outstrip the tiresome parties and receptions thrown by Lady Rookbury or the trifling diversions of other inhabitants of these moors, and would no doubt secure me a prominent entry in this year's Pendleton Council newsletter, thereby providing me ample material to lord over my neighbors for at least the next season.

With such heady thoughts in mind, I retired to the library for much of the remainder of the day, emerging only periodically to consult with Mr. Lordsley. I have assigned a keen and quick-minded house boy to assist my machinist for the duration, partly as apprentice and partly as caretaker and steward, lest Lordsley slip once more into the swamp of drunkenness that he seems to forever plod towards. It would not do to have such a momentous and essential pursuit endangered by the profound iniquities of drink or the basic mealy-mindedness of the lesser classes.

While studying diagrams and mechanical theory in the library this afternoon, I came across a number of curious references to past and similar

undertakings by my forebears, figurative and literal alike. The most significant and fully realized of these was a design for a self-playing flute conceived of by my Great and Esteemed Uncle Gravius, from which I borrowed an ingenious bellows and valve arrangement. Uncle Gravius's schematic was already considerably ahead of its time, and with the introduction of an elaborate crank mechanism I believe that I can further improve upon the basic principles of his design. It is a shame my dear uncle is not alive to see his ingenuity borne out, but he perished under suspicious circumstances when I was but a lad, as is so often the case with my relatives.

I have attempted to dissuade Mr. Lordsley from undertaking further investigations of the mysterious trunk, which I now view only as a distraction. Unfortunately, the man's liquor-sodden mind has latched firmly onto that particular endeavor and no amount of cajoling or threatening seems likely to waylay him. According to him, the key to the trunk's owner lies not in the encyphered contents, but rather in the specific make and manufacture of the lock. I have explained that it is a matter for another time, but to no avail. I confess to a certain melancholy over abandoning that particular pursuit, but such is the price of ambition.

Exhausted by my mental endeavors, I have retired now to my private chambers to contemplate less serious concerns. Yet even in the closing of the day, I find my mind dwelling again and again on the task at hand and the illustrious portents it holds for my family's standing. Tomorrow holds great promise, for even now Mr. Lordsley and his new assistant are no doubt hard at work in the machine shop assembling my latest prototypes, and with any luck I shall have a functioning mock up of my design by tomorrow morning.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

21 August, 1904

I awoke this morning in a fine mood, anticipating a hearty breakfast and a quick stroll about the property, then perhaps a stop by Mr. Lordsley's shed to see his progress on the rotational bells. I'd also hoped to find the time to pen a few lines of verse in my ongoing account of the great wreck of the H.M.S. Tantofee off of Madagascar -- a fine and glorious spectacle that I had the considerable good fortune to witness some few years back from the comfort of a sedan chair borne by cheerful local chaps.

And yet this was not to be -- as I've discovered that I have been quite unforgivably burgled! And as if that isn't bad enough, the overwhelming evidence points to the complicity of my own staff! But I am getting ahead of myself, and should return to the beginning.

Shortly after my formal rising -- which I occasioned with a finely fringed red and gold morning robe that's been moldering in my closet for months, having gone temporarily and regrettably out of fashion -- I was informed by a houseboy that the customary thrice-yearly inventory was just completed. That was fine news, as I value a well organized manor and proper recordkeeping is, of course, of paramount importance. But his subsequent pronouncement was a most dire one indeed: for it seems that numerous items, all of them highly valuable, are missing from the stores!

My bust of Hawthorne, gone from its place on the mantle! A mercury glass rendering of a Burmese elephant, purloined from the small triangular room! Why, even my vast father's collections of pinned moths and emperor beetles were not safe from whatever cunning hand picked over my belongings. But the most troubling fact of all was yet to come, for the houseboy concluded by informing me that several dozen of my father's coded journals and logbooks have gone missing from the library!

Now, as these are the very same books that in months past attracted the attention of Speck and his ilk, I attempted to seek out my manservant to get his sounding on the matter. I searched Mossthorpe high and low, visiting many of his favorite haunts in a futile attempt to locate him -- the western gardens, the pinnacle of the unfinished southern stairs, and even Aunt Peredilla's dowarium, where I have previously observed Speck meeting with associates and smoking a curiously large pipe apparatus, which I am led to believe is of a medicinal nature. And yet I could find no sign of the man -- which was, perhaps, the first sign that something jolly rotten was afoot.

I continued my search in the roustabout encampment on the northern lawn, which has now wandered a considerable distance from its initial location. Its boundaries seem to slide surreptitiously across the grounds as tents and lean-tos are constructed and torn down with equal haste, not to mention an almost universal disregard for aesthetics. The cumulative effect is not unlike the spread of a troublesome rash, leaving naught but devastation and ruined flora in its wake, along with a curious brown residue that clings to anything it comes in contact with.

I was shocked to find the camp in a state of disarray. Now, the roustabouts are nothing if not easily riled, but this was something else altogether; it was almost as if the fellows were preparing to break camp and depart! I must admit that I was at first cheered by this thought, as I have received numerous letters of complaint from the heiress and her various solicitors about the behavior of Speck's associates, but it seemed a very dire portent in light of the thefts.

I searched the camp high and low, and not without cost, for I was rudely jostled no fewer than seven times by various individuals of low birth and poor personal grooming. When I came at last upon the always insipid Mr. Drindle sitting on a stool in the midst of the camp, he regarded me with a look of total panic and leapt to his feet.

I caught his attention and marched hurriedly over, surrounded by the din of the roustabouts and their labors. "Drindle!" I yelled, with as much restraint as I could muster under the circumstances. "I must find Mr. Speck at once! A matter of great personal importance has been uncovered! Numerous possessions of mine are missing, and I require Speck's help in sussing the nature of their disappearance."

From Drindle's darting eyes, I inferred two things: firstly that he was hiding something from me, and secondly that he would rather curl into a small ball or perhaps disappear from this earth completely than speak with me. "Lord Gosham," he moaned, in the wheedling voice I am now all too familiar with, "I, uh, Mr. Speck is abroad, I'm afraid! I'll be happy to direct him to you upon his return, however!"

I would have none of this, and told him as such with the full force of my lordly demeanor. "You are a daft blazing totterhead, Mr. Drindle, if you think I shall believe that! Why, I saw the man just the other day, and he said nothing of travel abroad."

“I, ah, yes!” Drindle stuttered, backing away. “What I mean to say is that he has gone to Coddlesley on urgent business, yes, and shan’t be back for some days.” The elderly man seemed at a loss for words, then added, “I believe he said he was going for the faire! Yes, that was most assuredly it! He went to prepare, and everything is going swimmingly!”

“The faire!” I exclaimed, briefly mollified. “Why didn’t you just say so? How very curious. I wonder why he didn’t tell me he was going there to get ready. I should have liked to send him on ahead with some essential supplies.”

Yet just then, we were interrupted by a large and well-muscled man who approached Mr. Drindle and hailed him in a very familiar manner. “Here’s the book ye done wot asked for,” he slurred, in the gutterspeak of the underclass.

I turned to regard the roustabout, and near fell off my own two feet! For there in his hand was not some book of tawdry verse, as I had suspected, but one of my father’s books -- the very same that had just been taken from me!

“My father’s journals!” I exclaimed, throwing my hands in the air. “What deception is this? Am I to tolerate no end of insidious intrigue within my own household? You will tell me the meaning of this right now, Drindle, or face the wrath of my hickory stick!”

Drindle could only babble platitudes and apologies in response, flailing his hands this way and that and saying nothing of sense. And then it hit me, my clever mind seeing suddenly through the haze of balderdash and spotting the true devil behind all this upset. The missing curios, the journals, upset in the staff -- they were the telltale fingerprints of the Cemetery Society, that most illustrious and mysterious of secret cabals!

“Do you think me a fool?” I bellowed, taking a swipe at Drindle with my stick. “You’ll need to try harder than that to fool a Gosham! I can see plain as day that this is all a subtle machination of your secret masters, the Cemetery Society!”

“Lord Gosham,” Drindle stuttered, “The Cemetery Society was merely a ruse! Mr. Speck told you so himself, did he not?”

“Hah! Obviously, that was the real ruse, meant to keep me off the scent! Now, tell me where I may find Speck and his invisible employers, so that I

can give them a piece of my mind!”

Drindle, however, would only insist again and again that this was all a misunderstanding, and that the Cemetery Society was wholly fictional. I grabbed him by the arm and dragged him to a burly gentleman a short distance away, who seemed hard at work attempting to remove a large wooden stake from the ground.

“I say, my good man, I wonder if you might answer a few questions for me!” I remarked. “And might I say that is a ruddy big stake you have there?” This latter portion, you see, was to establish a rapport and shew the man that I, like him, was a salt of the earth sort, although I daresay I am a much finer grade of salt. It was a tactic my dear uncle pioneered while being held captive by a Malay kidnapping ring, and which he took great joy in telling me about when I was but a lad.

“Oi, guv,” the man replied, pausing in his tasks. “as Mr. Drindle done somethin’ to ye? Only ya got him about the arm, so’s I see.”

Mr. Drindle began to speak, but I cuffed him upside the head with the back of my hand, and turned to regard the roustabout once more. “We are having something of a gentleman’s disagreement, you might say! Now, could you tell me if anything odd has happened recently? Anything curious, or out of the ordinary? Perhaps something involving the illustrious Mr. Speck?”

The burly fellow looked between Drindle and myself, then shrugged. “Sure, guv,” the brute replied. “I seen him this morning with a dark fellow who come from Dundle. He set Speck in a bad way, and he run to your manor, and then made off. That’s all I seen.”

“And Mr. Drindle?” I asked, in my most cunning voice.

The man screwed up his face, looking at Drindle with hard eyes for several seconds. If I had not been present I suspect that he would even have expectorated rudely upon the ground, or perhaps on Mr. Drindle. “Sterwick there ain’t got two strings to tie together, and he’s been rippin’ his hairs about all mornings. Oh, something’s got him all riled up, sure enough. Now, can I get back to my digging?”

I allowed that he might, and, having uncovered precisely the information I sought, released my grip on Drindle.

“So!” I said, shaking my finger at him in a most stern fashion. “Coddlesley, is it? Or was that but one more lie?”

“It’s the truth, your grace!”

“Very well then! Then it is to Coddlesley I shall go, to retrieve my property and confront the Cemetery Society! And you... I shall deal with you later, you misbegotten judge-botherer!” This being said, I stormed from out of that camp of hellions with haste, lest my morning robe become any more sullied from misadventure -- for I had not had occasion to remove it since breakfast, and it was by then quite disheveled.

I have since given much thought to the mystery and arrived at what I believe is a reasonable reconstruction of events: Some ill news must have arrived from our mysterious benefactors, and it roused Speck to such an extent that he saw fit to tear off without me, taking my father’s journals for whatever dark purposes he may yet serve. I am very cross that he has sought to exclude me from this matter, and this goes double given that it would seem to pertain to our joint enterprise with the forever-mysterious Cemetery Society -- an enterprise which I still feel I have been ill-informed of! And while my father’s inscrutably cyphered journals are of little interest to me beyond sentimentality, I shan’t stand by while my possessions are taken without so much as a by-your-leave.

And so it seems that I must complete my preparations for departure well ahead of schedule, and that a rapid trip to Coddlesley is in my immediate future. I have already instructed the manor staff to pack the necessary accoutrements in my three swiftest carriages, and I shall depart upon the morn. As the faire looms large on the horizon, I shall be forced to make whatever adjustments I am able to the rotational bells while en route. Hopefully this matter with the Cemetery Society can be resolved in due time for my triumph and utter deliverance at the hands of mother invention!

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

22 August, 1904

This morning I departed fair Mossthorpe, bound for Coddlesley and in hot pursuit of my increasingly erratic manservant, Mr. Speck. I spent the majority of the morning perched atop the lead carriage, quite taken with the dashing nature of my endeavor and finding great pleasure in barking orders at the other carriages, ordering them this way and that and no doubt impressing all with my vast knowledge of equestriana and land-navigation. (For instance, few men of my class would be aware of the strange but true fact that horses refuse to eat in the presence of gypsies.)

My carriages made excellent time and stopped just once, and that for lunch, where I was disheartened to discover that a great many items of my fore-planned meal had been carelessly left behind. The portable brazier? Left sitting in the fore-kitchen! My travel cheeses? Forgotten in the pantry! And who can say what has become of my prized barrel of summer shandy? It was allegedly packed in the servant's carriage, yet no trace of it was to be found. No doubt some roadside indigent is even now quenching his thirst with its precious contents.

I was thoroughly outraged, to say the least, and wasted no time in exacting revenge on my lazy employees. After dressing down the carriage-men and confronting them with their many failings, I ordered them to dump out their own lunchpails on the side of the road. With all the staff watching, I proceeded to gather up whatever meats, cheeses, and breads struck my fancy, threw the rest of the food into a small bog, and settled atop one of the carriages to enjoy my lunch in full view of that now-disheartened mass. It was not the finest meal I have ever laid eyes upon, consisting largely of mismatched meat-ends and dubious peasant cookery, but comeuppance is a fine spice and I must say I felt rather better afterwards.

In any case, we soon resumed our journey. I had planned to tap the barrel of shandy for the second leg of the trip to Coddlesley, but as that was now out of the question I made do with several bitter glasses of subpar sherry -- namely, a rather tawdry Midwicket '89 that I keep hidden in the carriage in case I should need to spite an enemy or entertain one of my dreadful cousins. Midwicket made many a fine vintage in his youth, but once he fell to the drink himself his output turned to utter pot. A less cultured fellow might call that irony -- I myself prefer to think of it as a waste of good sherry.

Unsuitable though the sherry was, I did find that it cleared my mind enough to ponder over the matters at-hand: namely, the rotational bells and the

whereabouts of Mr. Speck. On the former matter, I have decided that I shall leave the bells in the capable hands of Professor Adolphus -- for though my intellect is undoubtedly vast, the great mechanical insights I perceive are not always graspable by the common folk (consider the failure of my reticulated cutlery-gatherer, a rather ingenious device that was nevertheless greeted with mockery). I am confident that Adolphus will be all too happy to assist me and will do a positively bang-up job of completing my design, although as the visionary behind the project I shall of course still be the one to present it to the public.

And on the second matter, that of the ever-elusive Mr. Speck, I have resolved to begin my search at Coddlesley's Whiteglove Market. Whiteglove is a rather queer place and is filled to bursting with hawkers, con-men, and unsavory quacks selling dubious cure-alls, and yet I can think of no better place to begin my hunt. If Speck has taken not just my father's journals but the curios as well, as I greatly suspect, then the Whiteglove Market is one of the very few locations where he might find a buyer for those highly unusual items. Not only that, but it's just the sort of place a man like Speck would feel at-home, what with his avowed fondness for anarchists and seeming affinity for ne'er-do-wells of every stripe.

We are arriving in Coddlesley even now, so I shall conclude for the time being. I shall be personally overseeing the unloading of the carriages to ensure that my faire materiel is not mislaid as carelessly as was my lunch, then must make the short walk to the professor's apartments. I did not have time to send a letter in advance of my departure and so shall be dropping in a tad unannounced, but I don't imagine the professor will be bothered, as he is always such a gracious host and humors my comings and goings with great aplomb.

Also, I note with displeasure that it is becoming quite hot. But in this as in all other matters, I am prepared to keep the stiff upper lip and sally ever onwards with the utmost dignity.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

22 August, 1904

(ii., this being the second entry of the day)

This thrice-damned heat is unrelenting, to the point that I am now prepared to commit any number of vile acts if it would grant me even a momentary reprieve from the sun's odious glare. Even now as evening falls, the city remains wrapped in a bouillabaisse of humidity thanks to the lingering impact of the sun's horrible transit.

Matters are certainly not improved by the fact that I was accosted this afternoon by not one, but two dire characters. The first of these importunements was visited on me as I made my way to the professor's. I had just left a handkerchief shop (for the relentless need to wipe sweat from my brow quite exhausted my supply of hankies when I was scarcely halfway) when I heard a wheedly, nasal voice calling my name in the street.

Immediately a terrible panic flowed over me, as I found my disbelieving eyes settling upon the rascally Hibernian features of Hubertus Fripp. That renowned buffoon was wearing an almost unbelievably detestable blue-and-white striped suit, as well as a cockily angled straw hat that I found to be in very poor taste, considering. One of his companions -- of which there were three, all similarly attired -- was even carrying a banjo, perhaps the only instrument more detestable than the chthonic and maladroït guitar.

"Why, I do believe it is my old friend, Lord Gorshem! Ah, forgive me, I do mean Gosham, of course," Fripp remarked to me with an expression of feigned innocence, doffing his hat and twirling it at me in a manner I found extremely off-putting. "What brings you to this fair town of Coddlesley, pray tell? Is there, perhaps, a nearby market selling nautical trifles? Do your ancient and distressed feet require some new snake-oil liniment so that you can stay upright for another few weeks? Or might it be that your latest contraption has broken, and you have -- ha ha! -- trundled over to procure more parts?"

"I am here to exhibit a new device for the Faire," I retorted, concealing my disgust as best I was able.

"Oh, Henrius, how delightful!" Fripp crowed, clapping his hands. "I'll make certain that my fellows and I are in attendance when your latest blunder of an invention is revealed! Is it, perhaps, a device that can transform a doddering old relic of a by-gone era into something more useful? If not, I fear we shall

all be sadly disappointed!”

I was dumbstruck by this callous remark, and Fripp seized on the opportunity to unleash a number of additional mockeries, including an extremely unfair rendition of a dance I had attempted to popularize without success at last year’s faire. When he at last grew tired of mocking me, Fripp informed me that he and the rest of the Sevenses are also slated to make a presentation at tomorrow’s faire.

“It’s a wonderful entertainment that is certain to be enjoyed by all,” he said, sneering and returning his hat to his head. “I do hope that we’ll find you in attendance, for it’s sure to be a hum-dinger!”

“Is that the reason for your colleague’s distasteful implement?” I inquired, meaning the banjo.

“Oh, this little thing?” Fripp said, placing a hand to his chest. “Why, Henrius, the American banjo is all the rage right now! Although I don’t suppose a crusty old sort like yourself would know that. Yes, indeed, it shall feature prominently in our musical review, and with any luck I shall win a great many accolades, if I can be so bold. Why, it may even become a rollicking new trend. Expect to read about it prominently in the council’s newsletter!”

Before I could snap back with a witty reply of my own, one of Fripp’s ill-witted compatriots reminded him of their appointment at a nearby fashionable cafe, where I gather they intended to accost harmless passersby with the dire poetry for which their club is known. Fripp then excused himself and departed with a low and supercilious bow, leaving me stewing in my own anger on the hot pavement.

The remainder of my walk was blessedly uneventful, and the Professor is proving to be a gracious host, as always. He did seem very slightly put-off by my sudden and unexpected arrival, but I believe he is coming down with a cold of some sort and so I shall find it in my heart to forgive this lapse on his part. (For haven’t I received him numerous times at my own hall, with but minor notice? Why, I do believe I have! And more’s the point, I never arrive smelling of queer acids and aquabellum, as he has on several occasions.)

Of much greater concern to me was a troubling incident that transpired a mere half-hour after my arrival. No sooner had I settled into the professor’s spacious guest room than I heard a plaintive baying outside my window, like that of a wounded animal. I threw open the balcony door and discovered the

sad countenance of Ictor Pembroke lurking in the garden below, beclad in a ruff-sleeved frockcoat and droopy mourning hat done up in the Austrian style. His clothes were all be-covered in thorns and thistles from the professor's prize-winning rose bushes, and it looked to me as if he had been recently crying.

The sad little man flew into a tizzy the moment he laid eyes upon me and began raving about some urgent news or another. I pretended not to see him for as long as it remained un-ridiculous, then barked forth some excuse about dinner and went back in, leaving Pembroke panicking in the garden. I gather he has at last gone away, as he has not disturbed me further.

With my manservant missing and the faire imminent, I have neither the wherewithal nor the desire to humor Ictor and his manic ravings about dire signs and portents. No doubt he has read some prurient work by Byron or Polidori and allowed his emotions to run away with him. It is a wonder he can dress himself each morning with such overzealous and fantastical leanings.

I would like very much to continue this discussion of Ictor Pembroke's many failings, yet the day's adventures are far from concluded and I have scant time to dally. I can see now through the writing room window that the evening will soon settle over Coddlesley, so I must be off. Whiteglove Market is but a short walk away from the Professor's, and although I fear the ravenous clinging heat and the slings and arrows of my nemeses, I must be about my task!

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

23 August, 1904

(early morning)

I have always felt that the hours before dawn are a time of unsavory thoughts and deeds, neither of which ought be remembered or otherwise taken down. Yet so great are the mysteries and hobdiggeries that have been revealed to me that I feel compelled to record them post-haste, in spite of the early hour, lest I later come to mistake them for some half-remembered dream or flight of fancy. For tho I rest in the same seat as I did mere hours ago, wearing the same frock-coat and indeed even the same shoes and spectacles, I am a changed man! I feel as if I have crossed some vague precipice and entered into a new world of glorious knowingness. And if my words sound unbelievable, know that I myself have trouble believing them even as I put them to paper!

But enough of this gobshaw dillydallying -- there are facts and discoveries to be recorded! As a general accounting may aid me in remembering, I shall begin with the details of last night's search, commencing as it did at Whiteglove Market. As I have previously noted, a maddeningly wide array of trinkets and curiosities are to be had there. Why, I myself own a rare petrified mandragora root that I purchased on a previous visit to the market, and it occupies a prominent place in my curiosity cabinet to this very day. I could think of no better place for Speck to pawn my stolen goods, and so there I went.

Arriving just as the sun fully set, I quickly assayed the market's many battered stalls and within no time at all was flitting from booth to booth, casting my eyes across the wares of far-off lands and inquiring after my manservant (in the most delicate way, naturally, so as not to arouse suspicion). And yet even with this added discretion, my search was quick to yield fruit! The proprietor of a ramshackle shop trading in out-of-print and otherwise disregarded sheet music admitted to me that he had seen a man matching Speck's description mere hours before. Then at another stall just a few steps away, I stumbled by chance on an iconic raven-headed walking stick that I recognized at once as one of the items taken from my own collections!

There then commenced an extremely trying conversation between myself and the stubborn shop owner, wherein I attempted to convince him to return my stolen property. He was insistent that I should pay a fair price for it and would not be swayed by any argument, even when I explained the terrible

social calamity that would befall me if the stick were not returned (it being a favored gift from my venerable Auntie Petrillia, a woman not known for her easygoing nature or capacity to forgive perceived slights). I was ultimately forced to hand over quite a tidy sum for the walking stick, though I shall not record the precise figure for fear of later embarrassment.

In addition to the stick, the shopkeeper provided me with what seemed like valuable information about Speck's movements, although in retrospect it may have been a bit of a fob at my expense. The shopkeep vouchsafed to me that in the process of negotiating the sale, my manservant had several times mentioned the name of a notorious gentleman's club known to locals as the Chestnut and Pistol. I was told likewise that the club is a den of miscreants and thieves and so moves frequently from place to place, and so was devilishly hard to locate. However, in exchange for a small additional sum the shopkeeper was all too happy to provide me with the names of several associates whom he said would be able to direct me to its current whereabouts.

And so bearing this new information, I set about trying to locate this elusive and mysterious gentleman's club. Taken with thoughts of vengeance and Speck's comeuppance, I imagine I cut quite a rakish and dangerous figure as I stalked the streets of Coddlesley with my walking stick clutched madly in my hand.

Yet this new task was sooner said than done, as my inquiries turned up naught but a hogshead of dead ends and diversions. I made my way through the strange acquaintances of that damnable shopkeeper, visiting some dozen people in all -- including butchers, gamblers, drunks, a sail-mender, and even an unemployed actor -- yet nary a one of these supposed close friends would admit to knowing the shopkeep or, in fact, having ever heard of the Chestnut and Pistol Club!

In retrospect, I must admit that I may have been bamboozled, impossible tho it may seem for one of my prodigious intellect. I returned to Whiteglove market as night fell, intending to give my supposed informant a piece of my mind for having so badly mislaid me, but found that the stall was empty and the shopkeep was nowhere to be found. I was truly at my wit's end and, after several minutes of staring dejectedly at passersby, retired to a nearby bookseller's that I had noticed earlier. Night had by then settled over Coddlesley, along with a queer and curious mist that cast the city in mysterious shades of tan and grey, and I was rather pleased when I found that the bookshop was still open.

The front room of the bookseller's was dusty and filled with a clutter of disorganized volumes arrayed in stacks and piles on every surface (as all such shops ought to be, frankly). I spent some time browsing under the watchful eyes of a somewhat overly judicious assistant, then took a seat in a side room and immersed myself in the study of a volume of Thoreau, allowing my powerful mind to muddle over the day's distractions and formulate the next step in my plan.

I must have nodded off, because the next thing I knew I found myself suddenly alone in the store, with only the barest glimpses of moonlight to see by! A quick look around revealed that the shopmaster and his assistant were nowhere to be found, and the door was locked -- with me inside! I could only assume that the proprietor -- a wiry, rat-faced fellow with a cagey way about him -- had overlooked my presence in the side room in his haste to rush home, leaving me an unwilling captive in the store. I considered breaking the large shop window or forcing the door to escape into the street, but eventually conceded that both acts were well below a man of my station. The only honorable thing, then, was to lay up in the shop and await its opening the following day.

A brief reconnaissance of the shop turned up no food other than a few lozenges and naught in the way of sleeping arrangements. I was just beginning to construct a makeshift bed out of the complete works of Dickens when a sound in the store proper caused me to take notice -- a key turning in the front door's lock! I immediately thought that the shopkeeper must have returned for some reason, and rushed forth to the main room once again... where I encountered a singularly bizarre sight!

For there at the front door stood a group of cloaked and be-masked figures, each bearing a cavalry saber and opera glasses! They were soon joined by even more masked men coming in off the street, each greeting his fellows in hushed whispers and with strange handshakes. I quickly took care to conceal myself behind a shelving unit, the better to observe these strange goings-on without being discovered.

After exchanging greetings, the masked men made their way past my hiding place to the back of the store, where one of them used some form of hidden mechanism to open a well-concealed door that I had apparently overlooked in my hasty inventory of the shop. One especially tall and slim fellow in a rather preposterous hat held the door for his comrades as they passed through one by one.

I waited a few minutes to ensure that no further masqueraders were coming, then followed after the men, leaving behind the Thoreau with some regret. I soon found myself in a well-appointed and lamplit passageway. Its walls were hung with great swaths of bunting the color of blood, while the floor was as thick and richly carpeted as any I have walked on in my many years. Portraits of masked men adorned the walls, each bearing a small metal nameplate that was curiously blank. It was as if I had passed into another world, stumbling from those shabby mercantile trappings to the most ostentatious sort of society club.

I followed the sound of talking and merriment down the hallway until I came at last to a wide and luxurious anteroom. Concealing myself once more behind a luxurious doorframe, I saw numerous groups of cloaked men resting languidly upon couches and chairs, talking loudly and boisterously amongst themselves, mingling and drifting. The room was filled with what I can only assume were the rarest of antiquities and a great deal of fine furniture, and the whole astounding scene was overseen by a pair of grim-faced cellists who played joyless chamber music on a small plinth in one corner of the space. Aside from the cellists, every soul in the room wore a mask of some sort, in a panoply of designs and figures -- animals, mythological creatures, and some even stranger designs that looked like nothing so much as the foofuffery that passes for art these days.

I felt a sudden chill run through me as a shocking realization dawned in my mind -- for I knew all at once that I was gazing at none other than the hoary ranks of the Cemetery Society!

I retreated quickly to the relative seclusion of the hallway and began constructing a disguise that would allow me to pass unnoticed through their midst. Thinking at once of the classics, I wrapped myself in a large shroud of bunting from the walls to act as a makeshift cloak, then used one of my newly purchased handkerchiefs and a pair of spectacles to create a rather ingenious impromptu mask. Thusly disguised, I strode boldly forth into the sitting room and began mingling. Several Society members attempted to engage me in conversation or ask for secret codes and shibboleths, but I cunningly diverted their attentions by means of a great and sickly-sounding cough, accompanied by gestures at my throat, as if to say, "Good sir! I cannot speak, for I have come down with the typhus." One or two seemed puzzled and perhaps very slightly suspicious, but on the whole I believe they were utterly taken-in by my disguise.

I had earlier observed a curtained alcove in one corner of the room, and it was there that I now made my way. Several masked men shadowed me, no doubt concerned for my wellbeing in the face of my apparent illness, so I quickened my pace to a purposeful trot and strode directly towards my destination. Throwing the curtain aside, I barged eagerly forward into the small candlelit space... and came face-to-face with none other than Mr. Speck!

Speck was seated on a small but elegant semi-circular mahogany couch of the Basque variety, and seemed as shocked to see me as I was him. I wasted no time in turning the situation to my advantage.

"Return my possessions to me at once, you festering rascal! You clod! You mumper!" I cried, whipping the makeshift masque from my face. It was only then that I noticed the three cloaked Society men who were also seated in the alcove, watching with horror.

"Who is this absurd man?" demanded one of the cloaked men. Although part of his face was covered by a thin domino mask, I could see a well-styled handlebar mustache curling above his lip and a chin that I took to be of Spanish origin.

"I regret to inform you that this man is none other than my late employer, Lord Henrius Gosham," said Speck.

"Late employer?" I said, shocked. "Do you mean to say you are quitting? I won't stand for it!"

With my identity now in the open, the Spaniard suddenly became quite affable. "Ah, Lord Gosham!" he said, with all the obsequy his Catalan blood could stand to display, "Please forgive my outburst! It is a pleasure, a surprising pleasure but a pleasure nonetheless, to finally meet you. Rest assured that your books and other possessions will be returned to you, and soon."

"Keep your platitudes to yourself, you great oaf of the southern wastes!" I retorted, for I was at my wit's end after such a great and trying day. "I have been pursuing you all day, and it will take more than the empty assurances of a Spaniard to get me in your trust. It is clear that devious matters are afoot! You summoned my manservant without so much as a by-your-leave, and I shall hold you fully complicit in the thieving of my items!"

One of the other cloaked figures cleared his throat conspicuously. "You should calm yourself, Lord."

"Hold your tongue, Celamere," said the Spaniard. "Lord Gosham, would you care for a drink? We have only the finest of spirits here, and I am sure your refined palate will duly appreciate them."

I allowed the Spaniard to pour me a drink, my anger quickly abating in the face of such hospitality, and soon the lot of us were seated upon couches while I explained the details of my search to the masked men. The Spaniard stopped me here and there to ask for elaboration, and a great chuckle went through the group when I alluded to the shopkeeper and his cunning misinformation.

When I finished my tale, an uneasy hush fell upon the group. The Spaniard steepled his fingers and regarded me coolly, as if summoning the will to respond. After a pause, he finally spoke.

"You are a most singular individual, Lord Gosham, but you present my fellows and I with a problem."

"How do you mean?"

"It is a complicated matter. But permit me to explain."

The Spaniard then began a long and verbose monologue, which I will attempt to summarize here. I fear that I won't be able to adequately record the vast absurdity of his words, however, or the farcical story on which he attempted to sell me. Nevertheless, I shall do my best.

"You are a clever man, Lord Gosham, and so I shall begin by drawing back the veil and coming clean. We did indeed summon Mr. Speck away from you, and asked him to bring your father's journals to us -- although the other objects that he removed were by his own design. Nevertheless, I assure you that we had good reasons for doing so. I understand that our mutual colleague Mr. Drindle has given you some limited information on our joint endeavor, but if you will indulge me I would like to brief you in full, and then offer you a simple deal.

"My associates and I are men of class and character, and are important figures in the county's business community, although perhaps not so well-known to the public or to a member of the peerage, such as yourself. As

Drindle has no doubt explained, we concern ourselves primarily with certain imports and exports, the specific nature of which is of little importance. Suffice it to say we move valuable objects from place to place, ensuring a smooth exchange of ownership without unfortunate complications. We have other interests here and there as well, all bound up in a delicate ball. If I may engage in some brief poetry, our enterprise is rather like a monkey's fist constructed of dozens of separate ropes, each holding and binding up the other. Should any one rope become too frayed, or be pulled too tightly by inquisitive hands, the whole of the knot is at risk.

"You, Lord, are just such an inquisitive hand, and your tugging simply cannot be permitted to continue. We realized this quite soon after we involved ourselves with you in that card game months ago, through our cohort Mr. Speck. Speck, you see, has never truly been more than nominally in your employ, as he has always answered first and foremost to my colleagues and I. Never has this been more true than now, as we have recalled Mr. Speck in part to terminate his employment with you. A certain item was lost by Mr. Speck, you see, and we must make amends, and ensure that our plans are not interrupted.

"Before you object, permit me to explain the caper as it pertains to yourself. Your land and your family's manor are of great value to us, as they were to our departed predecessors. These predecessors did business with your father through a similar, but perhaps somewhat better orchestrated arrangement, using your property to bypass more controlled and observed waterways to and from the coastal waters. We set about reinstating this lapsed agreement, first by acquiring a parcel of your land and sending Mr. Speck to watch over you and investigate, then by guiding you cunningly to the discovery of your father's logbooks, the contents of which are of great value to us. Ultimately, we made you a party to our little conspiracy -- in an admittedly limited capacity, of course.

"Although we knew from the onset that you are a forceful and clever person, we quickly realized that we underestimated your lack of restraint and your dogged perseverance in the face of danger and obtusity. To correct this oversight, we dispatched another colleague of ours, whom you know as the Lady Abscissa, to inveigle you and keep you on as short a leash as was necessary to properly gestate our new enterprise. When it became clear that this too was impossible thanks to your basic bloodymindedness, Abscissa was instructed instead to ensnare your collegiate nemesis Ictor Pembroke.

"It was our plan to use Pembroke as leverage against you, but we did not

foresee that your misguided and overactive sense of honor would send you willy-nilly across the continent in pursuit of him, nor that Abscissa would prove unreliable and abscond with that ridiculous Franc in his flying absurdity. We likewise did not foresee the floods, which have... complicated certain matters for us, to be sure. Do you follow so far, Lord?"

"I've never encountered a more convoluted band of masqueraders in my life!" I declared, my head spinning. "But what is the meaning of all this? What is the point?"

"The point, Lord, is that you have backed us into a corner. We require the use of your property, but you are -- if you will forgive my saying so -- too great an idiot to have stalking about, asking questions and confounding our plans."

The Spaniard paused, and folded his hands on the table. "And that brings me to the very generous offer to which I earlier alluded. We do not wish you harm, not necessarily, but we are more than willing to go down that vile path if needs be. Our suggestion, then, our very strong suggestion, is that you take a trip, quite a long one, and leave us to oversee your estate. You will be well taken care of and compensated beyond your wildest expectations, particularly in light of your family's low and lapsed standing in the rolls of high society. Certain modifications shall be made to your estate, but it shall be kept up at no expense to yourself. You will even be permitted to visit from time to time, should you so desire, although under supervision. And that is our offer. If you refuse, we may be forced to resort to... unkind means."

Now, I was a member of numerous secret societies in college and am quite well versed in their peculiarities, and I can spot an initiation ceremony when I see one! In fact, this whole falderol about grand conspiracies and high intrigue was not nearly as preposterous as some other ones I've endured. They often involved the hoodwinking of the new initiate to instill the proper air to the proceedings -- but unfortunately for the Spaniard and his cohorts, I'm rather too clever to fall for that sort of claptrap at my age.

"Ah!" I declared, with a laugh. "You Cemetery Society chaps spin a ripping good yarn. Lovely joke, yes, let's taunt the newcomer with odd threats. But really, my good man, how am I supposed to know the proper responses and whatnot? Isn't there some sheet or script I was meant to be given beforehand?"

"I'm sorry, did... did you say Cemetery Society?" asked Celamere, with a look of great puzzlement. "And what in blazes are you on about, man?"

“I mean, it’s a great privilege to be offered membership in your ranks, but I wasn’t even blindfolded! Really, you fellows could do better.”

“If I might explain--” began Speck, but the Spaniard cut him off with a sudden gesture, adding, “You have done quite enough already, Mr. Speck! You would be wise to remain silent, if you value your standing.”

“I mean, of all the ridiculous contrivances!” I continued, ignoring their bickering. “That bit about Abscissa? Utterly preposterous! Who could believe such an absurd thing? But, look, if it will make the proceedings easier, I’ll gladly play the part of the duped initiate, say the words, and all that. ‘Oh-ye, Jubelum, recognize the penitent soul, that he may be illuminated!’ Is that what you’re looking for?”

“Lord Gosham,” replied the Spaniard, with a very convincing and menacing tone, “I assure you that I have never been more serious. If you think this is some sort of joke, you are sorely mistaken.”

Despite his admirable commitment to the role, my initial inclination was to keep right on laughing in the Spaniard’s face until he dropped his act and spoke to me like a normal fellow. But it was now clear to me that this whole escapade had simply been a means of luring me to Coddlesley a day early so that I could be properly inducted into the Cemetery Society before the faire. And as absurd as this whole initiation was, I was a bit concerned that my natural wit was rubbing my hosts the wrong way, so I resolved to play the good sport and humor the Spaniard and his compatriots.

“Oh, very well, very well! Here, here, let me try again,” I said, putting up my hands and trying to get into the spirit of the thing. “Ahem! I consent to your mysterious voyage, Grand Master, but I ask that I have some time to put my affairs in order!”

The Spaniard gave his compatriots a questioning look, then shrugged and turned back to me. “As you wish, so long as you recognize the gravity of this situation. But be quick about it, and pack only the necessities. And please, do not call me Grand Master.”

“Oh, yes, sorry,” I replied, then was struck by a sudden inspiration. “I shall pack only the necessities, Wise One! My most prized possessions and earthly treasures shall be placed in... in the Mysterious Black Trunk of the Moors, that I may enter the world of sacred mysteries!”

“Hold on now, what’s this about a trunk?” said Celamere.

“The Mysterious Black Trunk of the Moors!” I repeated, adopting a most theatrical tone. “Recovered from the floodwaters, according to... according to prophecy! ... Look, I really am sorry if this isn’t up to snuff, you really ought to have given me a script beforehand.”

Now, I must say I was quite pleased by the improvisation about the trunk, but it was not so well received by my hosts, and indeed Celamere turned white as a sheet. “The trunk! He’s talking about the trunk!” he cried. “Good god, does this idiot have the documents? Tell us where it is at once, you great bloody fool!”

He seemed, I must say, rather put off by what had been a simple jape, and I was just about to try explaining the situation when my manservant suddenly interrupted.

“Oh, it’s in a safe place, lords,” said Speck, with a rather nasty sneer. “Among the safest, I should think. In fact, Lord Gosham... Lord Gosham has left it with the local constabulary! I don’t suppose this should cause any problems, of course... assuming he remains unaccosted.”

“You’ve... given it to the police?” the Spaniard asked, turning to me.

I had done no such thing, of course, but now that Speck had joined in I felt compelled to follow his lead. “Yes, that’s right! Wouldn’t any man, confronted with lost property?”

The Spaniard and his companions fell silent, while I observed that Speck had a most curious expression on his face. I began to suspect that I had passed the initiation.

“Ah,” the Spaniard said, at last. “Lord Gosham, I... apologize... for my earlier tone. You have us at something of a disadvantage, I am ashamed to admit. It would be in all of our interests to keep the item in question as far from prying eyes as possible. Perhaps... an equitable exchange can be made, to preserve all our interests? And prevent this little business arrangement from falling apart?”

“Certainly!” I said, relieved to at last be reaching the end of this bizarre initiation. “My requests are simple. Do away with all this silliness and make

me a full-fledged member. Key, cubbyhole in the coatroom, reserved table and all that. And I should very much like my own secret name, what? I'll leave that last one up to you."

Celamere leaned forward. "What is this man talking about? Membership of what?"

I threw up my hands in exasperation. "Why, of your club! Of the Cemetery Society!"

"There's that damnable name again! What the blazes is the Cemetery Society?" insisted Celamere, turning to the Spaniard.

"Celamere, you really ought to calm yourself," the Spaniard snapped, then turned and regarded me with what I felt was unnecessary drollness. He seemed to mull over his thoughts for a good several moments, then sighed. "Lord Gosham, we would of course be happy to accommodate you in our, ah, our society."

"And I request that I be returned to Lord Gosham's employ, and on a permanent basis," added Mr. Speck suddenly, and with a curious expression. "And there may be other... requests, to be discussed in private, at a later date. Yes?"

The Spaniard looked very glum indeed at this, but nodded in assent. And that, sadly, largely concluded my initiation into the Cemetery Society and my meeting with its mysterious masters. After some perfunctory remarks from the Spaniard and a brief but forceful chat with Speck on the topic of loyalty to one's employers, I was dismissed with a hasty sort of curtness. Additional inquiries about the the Society and its particulars were rebuffed by the Spaniard, although I am assured that additional details will be forthcoming and some sort of ceremony shall soon be arranged to properly inaugurate me into the ranks of membership.

We exited the alcove to find that the large anteroom was now entirely vacant, the other mysterious denizens of the club having departed during our conversation. The Spaniard and Celamere departed immediately, leaving Speck and I with the third and final masked man. He lingered in a lazy and ostentatious fashion near a bookcase, picking up and then putting down individual volumes, as if momentarily struck with a passing interest in many topics at once. At last, he came over to us and gave Speck a curt nod, then turned to me with a curious expression.

"Bloody well done," he said with considerable and surprising gusto, and it was only then that I realized he'd been silent during my little ordeal. He looked quite young, and wore an impish expression. "It's nice to see these fellows taken down a peg or two. Their heads can get rather large, don't you think?"

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean," I replied, in earnest.

"Oh, yes, I'm sure. Do take care, Lord Gosham."

And with that, the final member of the Cemetery Society departed, leaving Speck and I alone in their elegantly appointed chambers. Speck ushered us out, and we made the short walk back to the Professor's in silence, moving through night-besotted Coddlesley like a pair of ghosts.

It was but a short walk back to the house, and soon Speck and I were paused awkwardly before the Professor's door. I rather felt like I should say something, as our great adventure was seemingly drawing to a close -- yet it was Speck who broke the silence.

"I owe you, perhaps, an apology," he said, and held out his hand. "For a supercilious bourgeoisie landmaster, you are not so bad as all that."

I gladly shook the offered hand, and clapped my manservant on the back. "I'm glad you think so, Mr. Speck! You'll be staying on at Mossthorpe, then?"

"It is possible I can tolerate it a little longer," he allowed. And with that, Speck returned his hat to his head, bowed, and walked off into the mist-covered streets, bound for whatever strange lodgings he calls his own.

And now I rather fear I must be getting to bed. The Faire is but a few hours away, and although I am sure to be tired, these adventures have left me in considerably high spirits and with great hopes for my invention, which remains as yet untested. I am sure that the rascal Hubertus Fripp and his compatriots in the Sevenses have something up their sleeve, but I am fully confident that my ingenuity will get the best of them.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

23 August, 1904

What a glorious, triumphant day it has been for me! My inventive genius has finally received the attention and recognition it so obviously deserves, my enemies have been vanquished once again, and a measure of respectability has been restored to the family name!

It all began this morning, with the demonstration of the newly redevise rotational bells by my good friend and colleague Professor Adolphus. I am to understand that the professor and his assistant tinkered with the contraption until the small hours of the morning, but clearly their labors were not for nothing; for as I was guided into the rose garden by the professor's assistant, I saw that the mechanism was housed in a freshly built wooden scaffold and now included some sort of small petrol engine. I must say I was immensely impressed and pleased with the professor's ingenuity.

Adolphus asked for an extra hour to commit some final adjustments to the design, chiefly to the awl harness and double-back armature, but I insisted that the bells be transported to the pavilion at once. It was but an hour or two before the faire, and I harbored a dark fear that my enemies might get a headstart with the judges, who are known to be easily swayed by kind words and other social machinations. (The impressively corpulent Councilman Fleithers was almost certainly won over by the gift of several rumcakes at last year's faire, to give just one example.)

The professor argued quite vociferously about the need for adjustments, yet I eventually won out and sent Chip to fetch a group of workers to transport the bells. In the meantime, the professor and I boarded my carriage and rode to the faire, which this year was held in the central courtyard of Coddlesley College.

We arrived in short order and I began strolling about, taking in the sights and surveying the competition. I saw any number of queer displays, including a tincture said to improve the seeing at nighttime, an aged doctor who claimed he could diagnose diseases of every variety with an examination of the patient's gums, and an enormously fat man who could run with great quickness despite his girth. There was also a fellow who demonstrated his ability to consume everyday and yet normally unpalatable objects, such as broken glass or a book of William Blake's incoherent scribblings. I did not see how any of these contraptions would somehow bring about the betterment of mankind, however, so I foresaw little difficulty in besting them.

When I came at last to the judge's pavilion, I found that my earlier suspicions had been correct; for there before the judging table was the rascal and charlatan Hubertus Fripp, engaging in humorous banter with Councilman Fleithers. I missed a great deal of their conversation in the general din and gallimaufry of the faire, but I was certain I heard my name spoken several times -- accompanied on each occasion by uproarious laughter from both the judge and Fripp!

Realizing that Fripp was attempting to importune my good name, I barged into the conversation from the side, throwing my hat upon the judges' table and rapping my knuckles soundly on its surface to announce my presence.

"Oh, hello Henrius," said Fripp, adopting an expression of total innocence and acting of the sudden as if he had not been making light of me mere moments before. "I was just telling Councilman Fleithers here about my act -- a sneak preview to whet the appetite, if you will!"

The councilman lolled about in his seat, and brought his lugubrious gaze to rest on me. "Mr. Fripp was saying that he'd like to go first in the day's presentations, and he assures me his act is a definite crowd-pleaser and will set a happy tone for the day," he stated, with rather too much acceptance for my liking.

Fripp's machinations were clear: by superceding me in the order of presentation, he hoped to steal my thunder and perhaps even make jokes to the audience at my expense, thereby rendering moot my own great discovery (a ruse that has served him well on several previous occasions, most memorably at a party thrown by the Duchess of Westwicket). Mentally setting aside my sudden realization that the councilman's new glasses made his eyes look quite small and gave him the appearance of a distressed bulldog, I leapt to my defense.

"Ah, crowd-pleaser tho it may be, I feel my presentation should be the one to start the proceedings. For, you see, it is surely of the greatest value -- representing not only the finest ingenuity of man, but also a potential to greatly improve society!"

We went back and forth like this for some time. Fripp retorted that his act would more adequately capture the spirit of the faire; I pointed out that invention had always been the chief focus, not entertainment. Yet with each point that my nemesis conceded, he redoubled his efforts with a new line of

thought and attack!

After several minutes of our bickering, the judge interrupted. "You both make persuasive arguments, but I fear I cannot choose!"

And it was then that I saw my opening! "Perhaps, then, a gentlemanly game of chance and wit could determine the prime position," I said quite innocently -- although I knew Fripp was a fiend for wagers, it being one of his many failings.

"Yes, yes, anything to be done with this," said Fripp, feigning great exhaustion. "No doubt you have some folly in mind. Whatever it is, I accept!"

I smiled a cunning smile. "Then I shall show you a number of coins, holding them out to you in my hand, and you must tell me how many coins I am holding. You may look for as long as you desire, but you may not touch them. Do you accept?"

My nemesis tilted back his head and laughed to the sky. "Hah! What an absurd wager!" he declared.

"But you do accept?" I pressed.

"I do! I do! If I cannot tell you, you may go first!"

"Then I shall shew them to you now," I said, and removed two coins from my pocket. Yet before Fripp could get a proper look, I placed the coins between my thumb and forefinger and began agitating them back and forth in a precise manner. This is an old trick of the gypsy swindler or "moon man," and is usually done to gull a fellow on some small bet, the deception being that the lout, or "mark," perceives many more coins than are in fact present in the hand. This is known to those dugrous fellows as bobbing the copper, or taking Hartfordshire's penny.

Fripp became very agitated and insisted that I stop moving the coins about, yet I pointed out that I had not stipulated that I would show the coins clearly to him, and the judge was forced to concede that this was indeed the case. After much more hemming and hawing, Fripp eventually guessed that I held three coins and thereby lost the bet. I admit that this was a bit of hard-handed trickery on my part, but I cannot feel real remorse for a man like Fripp.

It was in this way that I soon found myself before the gathered crowd of the faire, holding my hat in my hands and explaining at length about the terrible burden musicians place on our good country. “Are they not a nuisance?” I asked. “Are they not foul, and unwashed? And do they not possess any number of other objectionable qualities?” The crowd was forced to accede that this was so, for I spoke very loudly and with great force and ignored the various naysayers, who I suspect were placed in the audience by my rivals in any case. I then made my way to the other side of the stage to bring the device to life.

A great wooden lever had been installed off to one side of the platform for me to pull, although according to the professor this was more for theatrical than practical reasons. I grasped the lever with both hands and turned my gaze once more to the crowd; yet before I could start the machine, I was grabbed about the shoulders from behind and pulled back!

“No, Henrius! Don’t do it!” cried a voice that I recognized at once as belonging to Ictor Pembroke!

“What are you on about, man?” I demanded, grasping him by his collar and shaking him robustly.

“It is a trap!” he wailed, flailing about. “Hubertus has tampered with the machine! I saw it with my own eyes whilst I wandered backstage, contemplating life’s tragedy and lost in a haze of sadness and forgone misery over my terrible trials! He has removed some essential piece!”

“Nonsense!” I declared, and threw the lever. The device sprung at once into life, and my heart was lifted! The heavy metal hammers within the casing picked up speed, spinning ever faster and beginning to strike the finely-tuned metal gongs in such a way as to make a most pleasing sound. A hush went over the audience as Wagner’s Tannhauser Overture sounded over the gathered assembly, the soothing and inspiring tones of that master composer briefly silencing even Ictor’s frantic pleading.

And yet... and yet perhaps I had been too hasty to judge Ictor a fool! For mere seconds into the display my device was thrown all a-tawdry, as some piece inside the device gave way with a loud and boisterous crack, and all at once the glorious Wagner was no more! Yet still the bells whirled on uselessly, now emitting a terrible grinding that was both irritating and upsetting to the stomach.

And then a sudden flare of ghastly banjo music caught my attention, as Hubertus Fripp and the Sevenses charged the stage, already in the midst of song! Their caterwauling and my very visible failure sent the audience into applause and cathcalls at my expense, and I fell to my knees in despair, while alongside me I heard Ictor begin shouting and yelling.

“Charlatans! Saboteurs!” he hollered at the Sevenses to little avail, for I could see the awful din that passes as banjo music was winning over the crowd despite its obvious horribity. And all the while the rotational bells remained on-stage as a reminder to my failure, spinning faster and faster.

“Oh, ho ho, give a sad nod for poor Lord Gorshem, as he has tried his best once again!” Fripp called out with a laugh, waving in my direction. I felt then as low as I have ever felt, and were it not for the sudden blessing that was unexpectedly laid upon my brow I fear I would now be more downtrodden and pathetic than even Ictor could imagine!

For Fripp chose that very moment to stride cockily over to my ailing invention and give it a sound kick on the foreshanks. This had little visible effect at first, and yet mere moments later the rotational bells began to shake violently and emit a rising, buzzing wail. Fripp had only enough time to evince a look of horror before he was knocked aside by the sudden bursting-open of the device, as with a loud crash a multitude of metal hammers and wooden beams were sent flying in every possible direction.

When I dared to open my eyes, I saw that the stage was badly ruined and Fripp had been thrown several feet backwards and sent sprawling on his bottom. He appeared unharmed, yet my attention was drawn at once to his suddenly bald head -- as it was revealed in front of the entire Pendleton Faire that Hubertus Fripp has no hair to speak of, save for an expensive wig that he vainly used to conceal his shame and which had been knocked off by the force of the malfunction.

It was only then that I saw Ictor staggering about the stage, clutching his arm and hollering. I was puzzled at first, then came to realize he had suffered a wound at the hands of the malfunction. By the time I reached him he had laid down upon the platform.

“Ictor!” I called. “Are you alright? Should I call a doctor?”

“Did you see? Did you see?” he raved, struggling to rise. “I saved you! At last, it is I, I who am the hero! Oh, dearest Henrius, my only true friend, we

are as two fellows adrift on the waters of life, our fates forever intertwined by cruel madame luck!”

“That’s as may be, Ictor, but I believe you are bleeding!”

“I am fine, I am fine,” he insisted, then lapsed into unconsciousness. I am told that he was attended to by the gum doctor shortly thereafter, and shall likely make a full recovery. Which is just as well, for I cannot bear to think of the ridiculous ordeal his funeral might have been.

And so it was that I came to win the Grand Prize, and secure my triumph! It is true that I was awarded the prize in part because the malfunction of the bells destroyed so many of the other exhibits, but even without that development I feel confident I would have persevered in the end. Most regrettable, however, is the fact that the prized bottle of Frontenac has been destroyed. Alas, once again my appreciation of that fine beverage is not to be. My only hope is that another bottle may perhaps be offered up once more next year.

The professor is quite chuffed, as am I, yet even as I write this I can feel the hound of sleep gnawing fitfully on my mind, and I think I shall soon turn in. I am excited for tomorrow, when I shall make my journey back to Mossthorpe and there begin preparations for a suitable victory party, to be held later this month. It shall be a tasteful and intimate affair, with perhaps some six dozen guests and not a soul more, and I look forward to it immensely.

Perhaps I shall even see fit to invite the Lady Rookbury -- although on second thought, perhaps not.

Lord Henrius Gosham of the County Pendleton

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About the Author

Kurt M. Schiller lives in Pennsylvania with an amazing wife, two cats, and a dog.