remained in his mind ever since. Had she not been obstinate—in her benevolent way—against the old superstition which he had acquired from his employers, they might have been eating separately to that day. Then her handling of her mother during the months of the siege of Paris, when Mrs. Baines was convinced that her sinful daughter was in hourly danger of death, had been extraordinarily fine, he considered. And the sequel, a card for Constance's birthday, had completely justified her attitude.

Sometimes some blundering fool would jovially exclaim to them: 'What about that baby?'

Or a woman would remark quietly: 'I often feel sorry you 've no children.'

And they would answer that really they did not know what they would do if there was a baby. What with the shop and one thing or another . . .! And they were quite sincere.

IV

It is remarkable what a little thing will draw even the most regular and serious people from the deep groove of their habits. One morning in March, a boneshaker, an affair on two equal wooden wheels joined by a bar of iron, in the middle of which was a wooden saddle, disturbed the gravity of St. Luke's Square. True, it was probably the first boneshaker that had ever attacked the gravity of St. Luke's Square. It came out of the shop of Daniel Povey, the confectioner and baker, and Samuel Povey's celebrated cousin, in Boulton Terrace. Boulton Terrace formed nearly a right angle with the Baines premises, and at the corner of the angle Wedgwood Street and King Street left the Square. The boneshaker was brought forth by Dick Povey, the only son of Daniel, now aged eleven years, under the superintendence of his father, and the Square soon perceived that Dick had a natural talent for breaking-in an untrained boneshaker. After a few attempts he could remain on the back of the machine for at least ten yards, and his feats had the effect of endowing St. Luke's Square with the attractiveness of a circus. Samuel Povey watched with candid interest from the ambush of his door, while the unfortunate young lady assistants, though aware of the performance that was going on, dared not stir from the stove. Samuel was tremendously tempted to sally out boldly, and chat with his cousin about the toy; he had surely a better right to do so than any other tradesman in the Square, since he was of the family; but his diffidence prevented him from moving. Presently Daniel Povey

and Dick went to the top of the Square with the machine, opposite Holl's, and Dick, being carefully installed in the saddle, essayed to descend the gentle paven slopes of the Square. He failed time after time; the machine had an astonishing way of turning round, running uphill, and then lying calmly on its side. At this point of Dick's life-history every shop-door in the Square was occupied by an audience. At last the boneshaker displayed less unwillingness to obey, and lo! in a moment Dick was riding down the Square, and the spectators held their breath as if he had been Blondin crossing Niagara. Every second he ought to have fallen off, but he contrived to keep upright. Already he had accomplished twenty yards—thirty yards! It was a miracle that he was performing! The transit continued, and seemed to occupy hours. And then a faint hope rose in the breasts of the watchers that the prodigy might arrive at the bottom of the Square. His speed was increasing with his 'nack.' But the Square was enormous, boundless. Samuel Povey gazed at the approaching phenomenon, as a bird at a serpent, with bulging, beady eyes. The child's speed went on increasing and his path grew straighter. Yes, he would arrive; he would do it! Samuel Povey involuntarily lifted one leg in his nervous tension. And now the hope that Dick would arrive became a fear, as his pace grew still more rapid. Everybody lifted one leg, and gaped. And the intrepid child surged on, and, finally victorious, crashed into the pavement in front of Samuel at the rate of quite six miles an hour.

Samuel picked him up, unscathed. And somehow this picking up of Dick invested Samuel with importance, gave him a share in the glory of the feat itself.

Daniel Povey came running and joyous. 'Not so bad for a start, eh?' exclaimed the great Daniel. Though by no means a simple man, his pride in his offspring sometimes made him a little naïve.

Father and son explained the machine to Samuel, Dick incessantly repeating the exceedingly strange truth that if you felt you were falling to your right you must turn to your right and vice versa. Samuel found himself suddenly admitted, as it were, to the inner fellowship of the boneshaker, exalted above the rest of the Square. In another adventure more thrilling events occurred. The fair-haired Dick was one of those dangerous, frenzied madcaps who are born without fear. The secret of the machine had been revealed to him in his recent transit, and he was silently determining to surpass himself. Precariously balanced, he descended the Square again, frowning hard, his teeth set, and actually managed

to swerve into King Street. Constance, in the parlour, saw an incomprehensible winged thing fly past the window. The cousins Povey sounded an alarm and protest and ran in pursuit; for the gradient of King Street is, in the strict sense, steep. Half-way down King Street Dick was travelling at twenty miles an hour, and heading straight for the church, as though he meant to disestablish it and perish. The main gate of the churchyard was open, and that affrighting child, with a lunatic's luck, whizzed safely through the portals into God's acre. The cousins Povey discovered him lying on a green grave, clothed in pride. His first words were: 'Dad, did you pick my cap up?' The symbolism of the amazing ride did not escape the Square; indeed, it was much discussed.

This incident led to a friendship between the cousins. They formed a habit of meeting in the Square for a chat. The meetings were the subject of comment, for Samuel's relations with the greater Daniel had always been of the most distant. It was understood that Samuel disapproved of Mrs. Daniel Povey even more than the majority of people disapproved of her. Mrs. Daniel Povey, however, was away from home; probably, had she not been, Samuel would not even have gone to the length of joining Daniel on the neutral ground of the open Square. But having once broken the ice, Samuel was glad to be on terms of growing intimacy with his cousin. The friendship flattered him, for Daniel, despite his wife, was a figure in a world larger than Samuel's; moreover, it consecrated his position as the equal of no matter what tradesman (apprentice though he had been), and also he genuinely liked and admired Daniel, rather to his own astonishment.

Every one liked Daniel Povey; he was a favourite among all ranks. The leading confectioner, a member of the Local Board, and a sidesman at St. Luke's, he was, and had been for twenty-five years, very prominent in the town. He was a tall, handsome man, with a trimmed, greying beard, a jolly smile, and a flashing, dark eye. His good humour seemed to be permanent. He had dignity without the slightest stiffness; he was welcomed by his equals and frankly adored by his inferiors. He ought to have been chief bailiff, for he was rich enough; but there intervened a mysterious obstacle between Daniel Povey and the supreme honour, a scarcely tangible impediment which could not be definitely stated. He was capable, honest, industrious, successful, and an excellent speaker; and if he did not belong to the austerer section of society, if, for example, he thought nothing of dropping into the 'Tiger' for a glass of beer, or of using an oath occasionally,

or of telling a facetious story—well, in a busy, broad-minded town of thirty thousand inhabitants, such proclivities are no bar whatever to perfect esteem. But—how is one to phrase it without wronging Daniel Povey? He was entirely moral; his views were unexceptionable. The truth is that, for the ruling classes of Bursley, Daniel Povey was just a little too fanatical a worshipper of the god Pan. He was one of the remnant who had kept alive the great Pan tradition from the days of the Regency through the vast, arid Victorian expanse of years. The flighty character of his wife was regarded by many as a judgment upon him for the robust Rabelaisianism of his more private conversation, for his frank interest in, his eternal preoccupation with, aspects of life and human activity which, though essential to the divine purpose, are not openly recognized as such—even by Daniel Poveys. It was not a question of his conduct; it was a question of the cast of his mind. If it did not explain his friendship with the Rector of St. Luke's, it explained his departure from the Primitive Methodist connexion, to which the Poveys as a family had belonged since Primitive Methodism was created in Turnhill in 1807.

Daniel Povey had a way of assuming that every male was boiling over with interest in the sacred cult of Pan. The assumption, though sometimes causing inconvenience at first, usually conquered by virtue of its inherent truthfulness. Thus it fell out with Samuel. Samuel had not suspected that Pan had silken cords to draw him. He had always averted his eyes from the god—that is to say, within reason. Yet now Daniel, on perhaps a couple of fine mornings a week, in full Square, with Fan sitting behind on the cold stones, and Mr. Critchlow ironic at his door in a long white apron, would entertain Samuel Povey for half an hour with Pan's most intimate lore, and Samuel Povey would not blench. He would, on the contrary, stand up to Daniel like a little man, and pretend with all his might to be, potentially, a perfect arch-priest of the god. Daniel taught him a lot; turned over the page of life for him, as it were, and, showing the reverse side, seemed to say: 'You were missing all that.' Samuel gazed upwards at the handsome long nose and rich lips of his elder cousin, so experienced, so agreeable, so renowned, so esteemed, so philosophic, and admitted to himself that he had lived to the age of forty in a state of comparative boobyism. And then he would gaze downwards at the faint patch of flour on Daniel's right leg, and conceive that life was, and must be, life.

Not many weeks after his initiation into the cult he was startled by Constance's preoccupied face one evening. Now, a husband

of six years' standing, to whom it has not happened to become a father, is not easily startled by such a face as Constance wore. Years ago he had frequently been startled, had frequently lived in suspense for a few days. But he had long since grown impervious to these alarms. And now he was startled again—but as a man may be startled who is not altogether surprised at being startled. And seven endless days passed, and Samuel and Constance glanced at each other like guilty things, whose secret refuses to be kept. Then three more days passed, and another three. Then Samuel Povey remarked, in a firm, masculine, fact-fronting tone:

'Oh, there 's no doubt about it!'

And they glanced at each other like conspirators who have lighted a fuse and cannot take refuge in flight. Their eyes said continually, with a delicious, an enchanting mixture of ingenuous modesty and fearful joy:

'Well, we 've gone and done it!'

There it was, the incredible, incomprehensible future—coming!

Samuel had never correctly imagined the manner of its heralding. He had imagined in his early simplicity that one day Constance, blushing, might put her mouth to his ear and whisper—something positive. It had not occurred in the least like that. But things are so obstinately, so incurably unsentimental.

'I think we ought to drive over and tell mother on Sunday,' said Constance.

His impulse was to reply, in his grand, offhand style: 'Oh, a letter will do!'

But he checked himself and said, with careful deference: 'You think that will be better than writing?'

All was changed. He braced every fibre to meet destiny, and to help Constance to meet it.

The weather threatened on Sunday. He went to Axe without Constance. His cousin drove him there in a dog-cart, and he announced that he should walk home, as the exercise would do him good. During the drive Daniel, in whom he had not confided, chattered as usual, and Samuel pretended to listen with the same attitude as usual; but secretly he despised Daniel for a man who has got something not of the first importance on the brain. His perspective was truer than Daniel's.

He walked home, as he had decided, over the wavy moorland of the county dreaming in the heart of England. Night fell on him in mid-career, and he was tired. But the earth, as it whirled through naked space, whirled up the moon for him, and he pressed on at a good speed. A wind from Arabia wandering cooled his

face. And at last, over the brow of Toft End, he saw suddenly the Five Towns a-twinkle on their little hills down in the vast amphitheatre. And one of those lamps was Constance's lamp—one, somewhere. He lived, then. He entered into the shadow of nature. The mysteries made him solemn. What! A bone-shaker, his cousin, and then this!

'Well, I 'm damned! Well, I 'm damned!' he kept repeating, he who never swore.

CHAPTER III

CYRIL

I

CONSTANCE stood at the large, many-paned window in the parlour. She was stouter. Although always plump, her figure had been comely, with a neat, well-marked waist. But now the shapeliness had gone; the waist-line no longer existed, and there were no more crinolines to create it artificially. An observer not under the charm of her face might have been excused for calling her fat and lumpy. The face, grave, kind, and expectant, with its radiant, fresh cheeks, and the rounded softness of its curves, atoned for the figure. She was nearly twenty-nine years of age.

It was late in October. In Wedgwood Street, next to Boulton Terrace, all the little brown houses had been pulled down to make room for a palatial covered market, whose foundations were then being dug. This destruction exposed a vast area of sky to the north-east. A great dark cloud with an untidy edge rose massively out of the depths and curtained off the tender blue of approaching dusk; while in the west, behind Constance, the sun was setting in calm and gorgeous melancholy on the Thursday hush of the town. It was one of those afternoons which gather up all the sadness of the moving earth and transform it into beauty.

Samuel Povey turned the corner from Wedgwood Street, and crossed King Street obliquely to the front door, which Constance opened. He seemed tired and anxious.

'Well?' demanded Constance, as he entered.

'She 's no better. There 's no getting away from it, she 's worse. I should have stayed, only I knew you 'd be worrying. So I caught the three-fifty.'