

"Rough-Hew Them How We Will."

By P. G. WODEHOUSE.



PAUL BOIELLE was a waiter. The word "waiter" suggests a soft-voiced, deft-handed being, moving swiftly and without noise in an atmosphere of luxury and shaded lamps. At Bredin's Parisian Café and Restaurant in Soho, where Paul worked, there were none of these things; and Paul himself, though he certainly moved swiftly, was by no means noiseless. His progress through the room resembled in almost equal proportions the finish of a Marathon race, the star-act of a professional juggler, and a monologue by an Earl's Court side-showman. Constant acquaintance rendered regular habitués callous to the wonder, but to a stranger the sight of Paul tearing over the difficult between-tables course, his hands loaded with two vast pyramids of dishes, shouting as he went the mystic word, "Coming-sarecoming in a moment-saresteaksareyessarecomingsare!" was impressive to a degree. For doing far less exacting feats on the stage music-hall performers were being paid fifty pounds a week. Paul got eighteen shillings.

What a blessing is poverty properly considered. If Paul had received more than eighteen shillings a week he would not have lived in an attic. He would have luxuriated in a bed-sitting-room on the second floor; and would consequently have missed what was practically a genuine north light. The skylight which went with the attic was so arranged that the room was a studio in miniature, and, as Paul was engaged in his spare moments in painting a great picture, nothing could have been more fortunate; for Paul, like so many of our public men, lived two lives. Off duty, the sprinting, barking juggler of Bredin's Parisian Café became the quiet follower of Art. Ever

since his childhood he had had a passion for drawing and painting. He regretted that Fate had allowed him so little time for such work; but after all, he reflected, all great artists had had their struggles—so why not he? Moreover, they were now nearly at an end. An hour here, an hour there, and every Thursday a whole afternoon, and the great picture was within measurable distance of completion. He had won through. Without models, without leisure, hungry, tired, he had nevertheless triumphed. A few more touches, and the masterpiece would be ready for purchase. And after that all would be plain sailing. Paul could forecast the scene so exactly. The picture would be at the dealer's, possibly—one must not be too sanguine—thrust away in some odd corner.

The wealthy connoisseur would come in. At first he would not see the masterpiece; other more prominently displayed works would catch his eye. He would turn from them in weary scorn, and then! . . . Paul wondered how big the cheque would be.

There were reasons why he wanted money. Looking at him as he cantered over the linoleum at Bredin's, you would have said that his mind was on his work. But it was not so. He took and executed orders as automatically as the penny-in-the-slot musical-box in the corner took pennies

and produced tunes. His thoughts were of Jeanne Le Brocq, his co-worker at Bredin's, and a little cigar shop down Brixton way which he knew was in the market at a reasonable rate. To marry the former and own the latter was Paul's idea of the earthly paradise, and it was the wealthy connoisseur, and he alone, who could open the gates.

Jeanne was a large slow-moving Norman girl, stolidly handsome. One could picture her in a De Maupassant farmyard. In the clatter and bustle of Bredin's Parisian Café



"PAUL."

she appeared out of place, like a cow in a boiler-factory. To Paul, who worshipped her with all the fervour of a little man for a large woman, her deliberate methods seemed all that was beautiful and dignified. To his mind she lent a tone to the vulgar whirlpool of gorging humanity, as if she had been some goddess mixing in a Homeric battle. The whirlpool had other views—and expressed them. One coarse-fibred brute, indeed, once went so far as to address to her the frightful words, "Urry up, there, Tottie! Look slippy." It was wrong, of course, for Paul to slip and spill an order of scrambled eggs down the brute's coat-sleeve, but who can blame him?

Among those who did not always see eye to eye with Paul in his views on deportment in waitresses was M. Bredin himself, the owner of the Parisian Café; and it was this circumstance which first gave Paul the opportunity of declaring the passion which was gnawing him with the fierce fury of a Bredin customer gnawing a tough steak against time during the rush hour. He had long worshipped her from afar, but nothing more intimate than a "Good morning, Miss Jeanne," had escaped him, till one day during a slack spell he came upon her in the little passage leading to the kitchen, her face hidden in her apron, her back jerking with sobs.

Business is business. Paul had a message to deliver to the cook respecting "two fried, coffee, and one stale." He delivered it and returned. Jeanne was still sobbing.

"Ah, Miss Jeanne," cried Paul, stricken,

"what is the matter? What is it? Why do you weep?"

"The *patron*," sobbed Jeanne. "He——"

"My angel," said Paul, "he is a pig."

This was perfectly true. No conscientious

judge of character could have denied that Paul had hit the bull's-eye. M. Bredin *was* a pig. He looked like a pig; he ate like a pig; he grunted like a pig. He had the lavish embonpoint of a pig. Also a porcine soul. If you had tied a bit of blue ribbon round his neck you could have won prizes with him at a show.

Paul's eyes flashed with fury. "I will slap him in the eye," he roared.

"He called me a tortoise."

"And kick him in the stomach," added Paul.

Jeanne's sobs were running on second speed now. The anguish was diminishing. Paul took advantage of the improved conditions to slide an arm part of the way round her waist. In two minutes he had said as much as the ordinary man could have worked off in ten. All good stuff, too. No padding.

Jeanne's face rose from her apron like a full moon. She was too astounded to be angry.

Paul continued to babble. Jeanne looked at him with growing wrath. That she, who received daily the affectionate badinage of gentlemen in bowler hats and check suits, who had once been invited to the White City by a solicitor's clerk, should be addressed in this way by a waiter! It was too much. She threw off his hand.

"Wretched little man!" she cried, stamping angrily.

"My angel!" protested Paul.



"A FEW MORE TOUCHES, AND THE MASTERPIECE WOULD BE READY."

Jeanne uttered a scornful laugh.

"You!" she said.

There are few more withering remarks than "You!" spoken in a certain way. Jeanne spoke it in just that way.

Paul wilted.

"On eighteen shillings a week," went on Jeanne, satirically, "you would support a wife, yes? Why——"

Paul recovered himself. He had an opening now, and proceeded to use it.

"Listen," he said. "At present, yes, it is true, I earn but eighteen shillings a week, but it will not always be so, no. I am not only a waiter. I am also an artist. I have painted a great picture. For a whole year I have worked, and now it is ready. I will sell it, and then, my angel——?"

Jeanne's face had lost some of its scorn. She was listening with some respect. "A picture?" she said, thoughtfully. "There is money in pictures."

For the first time Paul was glad that his arm was no longer round her waist. To do justice to the great work he needed both hands for purposes of gesticulation.

"There is money in this picture," he said. "Oh, it is beautiful. I call it 'The Awakening.' It is a woodland scene. I come back from my work here, hot and tired, and a mere glance at that wood refreshes me. It is so cool, so green. The sun filters in golden splashes through the foliage. On a mossy bank, between two trees, lies a beautiful girl asleep. Above her, bending fondly over her, just about to kiss that flower-like face, is a young man in the dress of a shepherd. At the last moment he has looked over his shoulder to make sure that there is nobody near to see. He is wearing an expression so happy, so proud, that one's heart goes out to him."

"Yes, there might be money in that," said Jeanne.

"There is, there is!" cried Paul. "I shall sell it for many francs to a wealthy connoisseur. And then, my angel——"

"You are a good little man," said the angel, patronizingly. "Perhaps. We will see."

Paul caught her hand and kissed it. She smiled indulgently.

"Yes," she said. "There might be money. These English pay much money for pictures."

It is pretty generally admitted that Geoffrey Chaucer, the eminent poet of the fourteenth century, though obsessed with an almost Rooseveltian passion for the new spelling, was there with the goods when it came to profundity of thought. It was Chaucer who wrote the lines:—

The lyfe so short, the craft so long to lerne,
Th' assay so hard, so sharpe the conquering.

Which means, broadly, that it is difficult to paint a picture, but a great deal more difficult to sell it.

Across the centuries Paul Boielle shook hands with Geoffrey Chaucer. "So sharpe the conquering" put his case in a nutshell.

The full story of his wanderings with the masterpiece would read like an Odyssey and be about as long. It shall be condensed.

There was an artist who dined at intervals at Bredin's Parisian Café, and, as the artistic temperament was too impatient to be suited by Jeanne's leisurely methods, it had fallen to Paul to wait upon him. It was to this expert that Paul, emboldened by the geniality of the artist's manner, went for information. How did monsieur sell his pictures? Monsieur said he didn't, except once in a blue moon. But when he did? Oh, he took the thing to the dealers. Paul thanked him. A friend of his, he explained, had painted a picture and wished to sell it.

"Poor devil!" was the artist's comment.

Next day, it happening to be a Thursday, Paul started on his travels. He started buoyantly, but by evening he was as a punctured balloon. Every dealer had the same remark to make—to wit, no room.

"Have you yet sold the picture?" inquired Jeanne, when they met.

"Not yet," said Paul. "But they are delicate matters, these negotiations. I use finesse. I proceed with caution."

He approached the artist again.



Original from THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
"THOSE WHO DWELL IN DARKNESS AND
HAVE GRIMY THUMBS."

"With the dealers," he said, "my friend has been a little unfortunate. They say they have no room."

"I know," said the artist, nodding.

"Is there, perhaps, another way?"

"What sort of a picture is it?" inquired the artist.

Paul became enthusiastic.

"Ah! monsieur, it is beautiful. It is a woodland scene. A beautiful girl——"

"Oh! Then he had better try the magazines. They might use it for a cover."

Paul thanked him effusively. On the following Thursday he visited divers art editors. The art editors seemed to be in the same unhappy condition as the dealers. "Overstocked!" was their cry.

"The picture?" said Jeanne, on the Friday morning. "Is it sold?"

"Not yet," said Paul, "but——"

"Always but!"

"My angel!"

"Bah!" said Jeanne, with a toss of her large but shapely head.

By the end of the month

Paul was fighting in the last ditch, wandering disconsolately among those who dwell in outer darkness and have grimy thumbs. Seven of these in all he visited on that black Thursday, and each of the seven rubbed the surface of the painting with a grimy thumb, snorted, and dismissed him. Sick and beaten, Paul took the masterpiece back to his skylight room.

All that night he lay awake, thinking. It was a weary bundle of nerves that came to the Parisian Café next morning. He was late in arriving, which was good in that it delayed the inevitable question as to the fate of the picture, but bad in every other respect. M. Bredin, squatting behind the cash-desk, grunted fiercely at him; and, worse, Jeanne, who, owing to his absence, had had to be busier than suited her disposition,

was distant and haughty. A murky gloom settled upon Paul.

Now it so happened that M. Bredin, when things went well with him, was wont to be filled with a ponderous amiability. It was not often that this took a practical form, though it is on record that in an exuberant moment he once gave a small boy a half-penny. More frequently it merely led him to soften the porcine austerity of his demeanour. To-day, business having been uncommonly good, he felt pleased with the world. He had left his cash-desk and was assailing a bowl of soup at one of the side-

tables. Except for a belated luncher at the end of the room the place was empty. It was one of the hours when there was a lull in the proceedings at the Parisian Café.

Paul was leaning, wrapped in gloom, against the wall. Jeanne was waiting on the proprietor.

M. Bredin finished his meal and rose. He felt content. All was well with the world. As he

lumbered to his desk he passed Jeanne. He stopped. He wheezed a compliment. Then another. Paul, from his place by the wall, watched with jealous fury.

M. Bredin chucked Jeanne under the chin.

As he did so, the belated luncher called "Waiter!" but Paul was otherwise engaged. His entire nervous system seemed to have been stirred up with a pole. With a hoarse cry he dashed forward. He would destroy this pig who chucked his Jeanne under the chin.

The first intimation M. Bredin had of the declaration of war was the impact of a French roll on his ear. It was one of those nobbly, chunky rolls with sharp corners, almost as deadly as a piece of shrapnel. M. Bredin was incapable of jumping, but he uttered a howl and his vast body quivered like a



"HIS ENTIRE NERVOUS SYSTEM SEEMED TO HAVE BEEN STIRRED UP WITH A POLE."

stricken jelly. A second roll, whizzing by, slapped against the wall. A moment later a cream-bun burst in sticky ruin on the proprietor's left eye.

The belated luncher had been anxious to pay his bill and go, but he came swiftly to the conclusion that this was worth stopping on for. He leaned back in his chair and watched. M. Bredin had entrenched himself behind the cash-desk, peering nervously at Paul through the cream, and Paul, pouring forth abuse in his native tongue, was brandishing a chocolateclair. The situation looked good to the spectator.

It was spoiled by Jeanne, who seized Paul by the arm and shook him, adding her own voice to the babel. It was enough. The éclair fell to the floor. Paul's voice died away. His face took on again its crushed, hunted expression. The voice of M. Bredin, freed from competition, rose shrill and wrathful.

"The marksman is getting sacked," mused the onlooker, diagnosing the situation.

He was right. The next moment Paul, limp and depressed, had retired to the kitchen passage, discharged. It was here, after a few minutes, that Jeanne found him.

"Fool! Idiot! Imbecile!" said Jeanne.

Paul stared at her without speaking.

"To throw rolls at the *patron*. Imbecile!"

"He——" began Paul.

"Bah! And what if he did? Must you then attack him like a mad dog? What is it to you?"

Paul was conscious of a dull longing for sympathy, a monstrous sense of oppression. Everything was going wrong. Surely Jeanne must be touched by his heroism? But no. She was scolding furiously. Suppose Andromeda had turned and scolded Perseus after he had slain the sea-monster! Paul mopped

his forehead with his napkin. The bottom had dropped out of his world.

"Jeanne!"

"Bah! Do not talk to me, idiot of a little man. Almost you lost me my place also. The *patron* was in two minds. But I coaxed him. A fine thing that would have been, to lose my good place through your foolishness. To throw rolls! My goodness!"

She swept back into the room again, leaving Paul still standing by the kitchen door.

Something seemed to have snapped inside him. How long he stood there he did not know, but presently from the dining-room came calls of "Waiter!" and automatically he fell once more into his work, as an actor takes up his part. A stranger would have noticed nothing remarkable in him. He hustled to and fro with undiminished energy.

At the end of the day M. Bredin paid him his eighteen shillings with a grunt, and Paul walked out of the restaurant a masterless man.

He went to his attic and sat down on the bed. Propped up against the wall was the picture. He looked at it with unseeing eyes. He stared dully before him.

Then thoughts came to him with a rush, leaping and dancing in his mind like imps in Hades. He had a curious sense of detachment. He seemed to be watching himself from a great distance.

This was the end. The little imps danced and leaped; and then one separated itself from the crowd, to grow bigger than the rest, to pirouette more energetically. He rose. His mind was made up. He would kill himself.

He went downstairs and out into the street. He thought hard as he walked. He would kill himself, but how?



"THE IMPACT OF A FRENCH ROLL ON HIS EAR."

His preoccupation was so great that an automobile, rounding a corner, missed him by inches as he crossed the road. The chauffeur shouted angrily at him as he leapt back.

Paul shook his fist at the retreating lights.

"Pig!" he shouted. "Assassin! Scoundrel! Villain! Would you kill me? I will take your number, rascal. I will inform the police. Villain!"

A policeman had strolled up and was eyeing him curiously. Paul turned to him, full of his wrongs.

"Officer," he cried, "I have a complaint. These pigs of chauffeurs! They are reckless. They drive so recklessly. Hence the great number of accidents."

"Awful!" said the policeman. "Pass along, sonny."

Paul walked on, fuming. It was abominable that these chauffeurs— And then an idea came to him. He had found a way.

It was quiet in the Park. He had chosen the Park because it was dark and there would be none to see and interfere. He waited long in the shadow at the roadside. Presently from the darkness there came the distant drone of powerful engines. Lights appeared, like the blazing eyes of a dragon swooping down to devour its prey.

He ran out into the road with a shout.

It was an error, that shout. He had intended it for an inarticulate farewell to his picture, to Jeanne, to life. It was excusable in the driver of the motor that he misinterpreted it. It seemed to him a cry of warning. There was a great jarring of brakes, a scuttering of locked wheels on the dry road, and the car came to a standstill a full yard from where he stood.

"What the deuce——" said a cool voice from behind the lights.

Paul struck his chest and folded his arms.

"I am here," he cried. "Destroy me!"

"Let George do it," said the voice, in a marked American accent. "I never murder on a Friday; it's unlucky. If it's not a rude question, which asylum are you from? Halloa!"

The exclamation was one of surprise, for Paul's nerves had finally given way, and he was now in a heap on the road, sobbing.



"CONSCIOUS OF A DULL LONGING FOR SYMPATHY."

The man climbed down and came into the light. He was a tall young man with a pleasant, clean-cut face. He stooped and shook Paul.

"Quit that," he said. "Maybe it's not true. And if it is, there's always hope. Cut it out. What's the matter? All in?"

Paul sat up, gulping convulsively. He was thoroughly unstrung. The cold, desperate mood had passed. In its place came the old feeling of desolation. He was a child, aching for sympathy. He wanted to tell his troubles. Punctuating his narrative with many gestures and an occasional gulp, he proceeded to do so. The American listened attentively.

"So you can't sell your picture, and you've lost your job, and your girl has shaken you?" he said.

"Pretty bad, but still you've no call to go mingling with automobile wheels. You come along with me to my hotel, and to-morrow we'll see if we can't fix up something."

There was breakfast at the hotel next morning, a breakfast to put heart into a man. During the meal a messenger dispatched in a cab to Paul's lodgings returned with the canvas. A deferential waiter informed the American that it had been taken with every possible care to his suite.

"Good," said the young man. "If you're through, we'll go and have a look at it."

They went upstairs. There was the picture, resting against a chair.

"Why, I call that fine," said the young man. "It's a cracker-jack."

Paul's heart gave a sudden leap. Could it be that here was the wealthy connoisseur? He was wealthy, for he drove an automobile and lived at an expensive hotel. He was a connoisseur, for he had said that the picture was a cracker-jack.

"Monsieur is kind," murmured Paul.

"It's a bear-cat," said the young man, admiringly.

"Monsieur is flattering," said Paul, dimly perceiving a compliment.

"I've been looking for a picture like that," said the young man, "for months."

Paul's eyes rolled heavenwards.

"If you'll make a few alterations, I'll buy it and ask for more."

"Alterations, monsieur?"

"One or two small ones." He pointed to

the stooping figure of the shepherd. "Now, you see this prominent citizen. What's he doing?"

"He is stooping," said Paul, fervently, "to bestow upon his loved one a kiss. And she, sleeping, all unconscious, dreaming of him——"

"Never mind about her. Fix your mind on him. Willie is the 'star' in this show. You have summed him up accurately. He is stooping. Stooping—good. Now, if that fellow was wearing braces and stooped like that, you'd say he'd bust those braces, wouldn't you?"

With a somewhat dazed air Paul said that he thought he would. Till now he had not looked at the figure from just that view-point.

"You'd say he'd bust them?"

"Assuredly, monsieur."

"No!" said the young man, solemnly, tapping him earnestly on the chest. "That's where you're wrong. Not if they were Galloway's Tried and Proven. Galloway's Tried and Proven will stand any old strain you care to put on them. See small bills. Wear Galloway's Tried and Proven, and fate cannot touch you. You can take it from me. I'm the company's general manager."

"Indeed, monsieur!"

"And I'll make a proposition to you. Cut out that mossy bank, and make the girl lying in a hammock. Put Willie in shirtsleeves instead of a bathrobe, and fix him up with a pair of the Tried and Proven, and I'll give you three thousand dollars for that picture and a retaining fee of four thousand a year to work for us and nobody else for any number of years you care to mention. You've got the goods. You've got just the touch. That happy look on Willie's face, for instance. You can see in a minute why he's so happy. It's because he's wearing the Tried and Proven, and he knows that however far he stoops they won't break. Is that a deal?"

Paul's reply left no room for doubt. Seizing the young man firmly round the waist, he kissed him with extreme fervour on both cheeks.

"Here, break away!" cried the astonished general

manager. "That's no way to sign a business contract."

It was at about five minutes after one that afternoon that Constable Thomas Parsons, patrolling his beat, was aware of a man motioning to him from the doorway of Bredin's Parisian Café and Restaurant. The man looked like a pig. He grunted like a pig. He had the lavish embonpoint of a pig. Constable Parsons suspected that he had a porcine soul. Indeed, the thought flitted across Constable Parsons' mind that, if he were to tie a bit of blue ribbon round his neck, he could win prizes with him at a show.

"What's all this?" he inquired, halting.

The stout man talked volubly in French. Constable Parsons shook his head.

"Talk sense," he advised.

"In dere," cried the stout man, pointing behind him into the restaurant, "a man, a—how you say?—yes, sacked. An employé whom I yesterday sacked, to-day he returns. I say to him, 'Cochon, va!'"

"What's that?"

"I say, 'Peeg, go!' How you say? Yes, 'pop off!' I say, 'Peeg, pop off!' But he—no, no; he sits and will not go. Come in, officer, and expel him."

With massive dignity the policeman entered the restaurant. At one of the tables sat Paul, calm and distraught. From across the room Jeanne stared freezingly.

"What's all this?" inquired Constable Parsons. Paul looked up.

"I, too," he admitted, "I cannot understand. Figure to yourself, monsieur. I enter this café to lunch, and this man here would expel me."

"He is an employé whom I—I myself—have but yesterday dismissed," vociferated M. Bredin. "He has no money to lunch at my restaurant."

The policeman eyed Paul sternly.

"Eh?" he said. "That so? You'd better come along."

Paul's eyebrows rose.

Before the round eyes of M. Bredin he began to produce from his pockets and to lay upon the table bank-notes and sovereigns. The cloth was covered with them,



"WITH MASSIVE DIGNITY THE POLICEMAN ENTERED."

He picked up a half-sovereign.

"If monsieur," he said to the policeman, "would accept this as a slight consolation for the inconvenience which this foolish person here has caused him——"

"Not half," said Mr. Parsons, affably. "Look here"—he turned to the gaping proprietor—"if you go on like this you'll be getting yourself into trouble. See? You take care another time."

Paul called for the bill of fare.

It was the inferior person who had succeeded to his place as waiter who attended to his needs during the meal; but when he had lunched it was Jeanne who brought his coffee.

She bent over the table.

"You sold your picture, Paul—yes?" she whispered. "For much money? How glad I am, dear Paul. Now we will——"

Paul met her glance coolly.

"Will you be so kind," he said, "as to bring me also a cigarette, my good girl?"

