

THE PRISONERS OF HARTLING

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The prisoners of Hartling by J. D. Beresford

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J. D. BERESFORD

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OF HARTLING**

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BY
J. D. BERESFORD

'There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt.'

Ecclesiastes v. 13.

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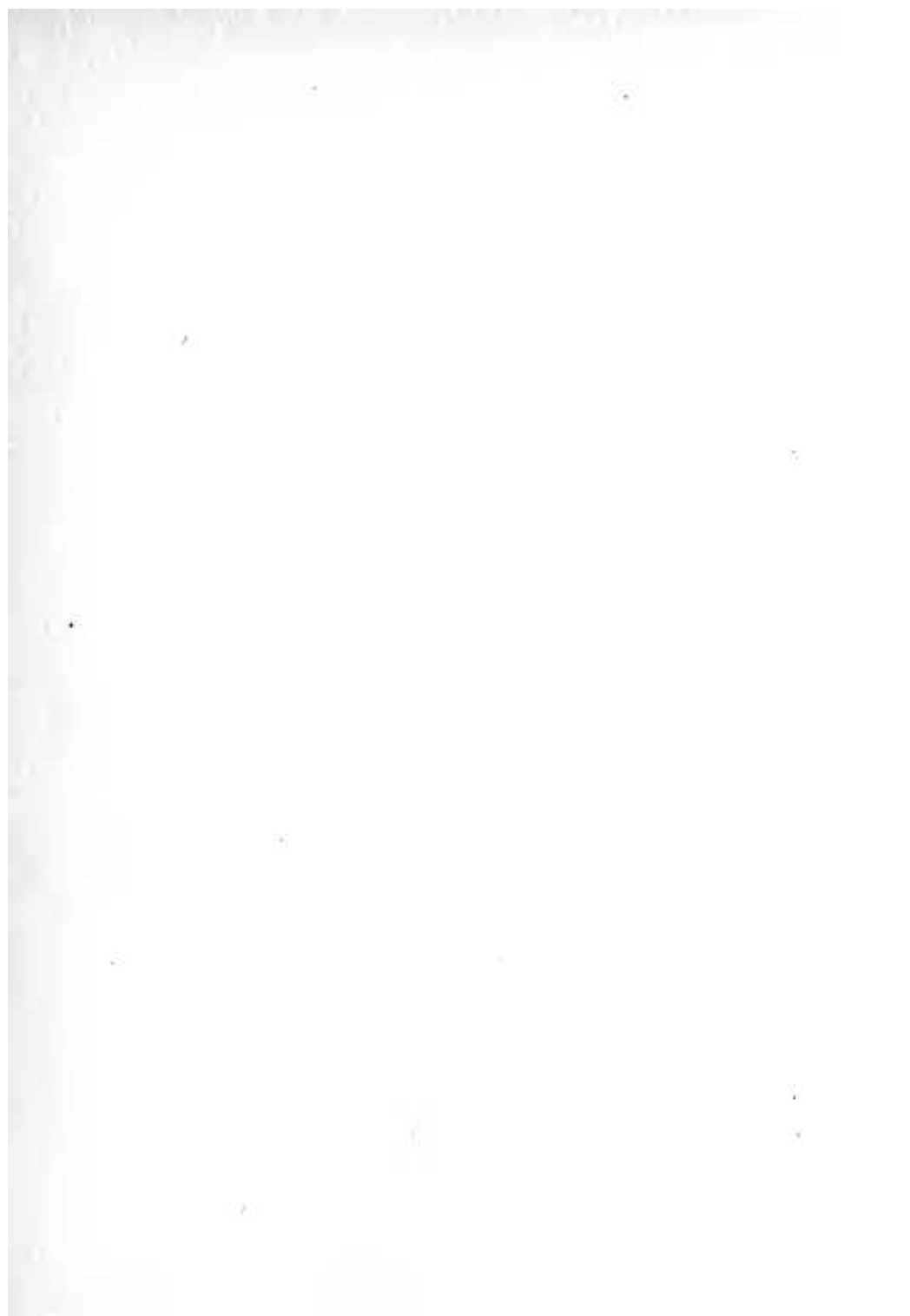
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To
H. H. BASHFORD



THE PRISONERS OF HARTLING

I

DOG'S life, old man, a dog's life; you can't get away from that."

Arthur Woodroffe's voice was quite cheerful as he framed this indictment of the life of a general practitioner in a poor neighbourhood, but his companion frowned and shook his head impatiently.

"You are still re-acting to the pernicious influences of that damnable war," he said. "You're hankering after the intoxication of saving wounded under fire; exciting stunts of that sort; Sbana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus. You've got to learn to be content with Jordan. Risk your life in more homely ways saving the sick in Peckham. Same thing, really; only you don't get orders for it. And of course . . ." he hesitated, pushed up his gold-rimmed spectacles, and stared hard at his friend and paid assistant. "Any way, what is it you're hankering after, my good chap?" he concluded.

Woodroffe looked critically round the little room, and then at Somers glowering down at him from the hearthrug. "More space," he said briefly; "and more . . ." He seemed to jibe at the word that was obviously in his mind.

"More beauty," Somers suggested.

"If you like," Woodroffe agreed carelessly.

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"Something of that sort. I'd like to get about the world a bit, too."

"As medical attendant to a hypochondriac millionaire?"

"Or some job abroad; or . . ."

"What you really want, my lad, is an independent income and lots of leisure," Somers commented.

"You can't say I've ever been a slacker, Bob," Woodroffe said.

"No, but you'd soon pick it up if you had got enough to live on without worrying."

Woodroffe considered that before he replied.

"Don't believe I should. Go in for research or something. Hate having nothing to do."

"There's always hunting and golf, and bridge and billiards, and cricket, and so on," Somers said.

"Life of a country gentleman. Also, you might marry and beget a family, and go in for politics. Quite a strenuous life it seems, for a lot of 'em."

"Bit of a change wouldn't it, after the life of a panel doctor in Peckham," Woodroffe remarked; "but I don't think it's my style all the same. I'd like to *do* something, something useful. And by the way, old thing, if you're taking on Nellie Mason, I'd advise you to turn in. I saw her this morning, and she's pretty near her time. Rotten job it'll be, too. But I'll take her on if you like. A fat primip like her would be good for my character."

"No, I'll take it," Somers said. "I promised her I would. She thinks you're a bit young. All the same, I'm not going to bed yet. I want to have this out with you. It's interesting, for one thing. I suppose nothing particular has upset you lately, has it? Nothing that's set your mind roving."

"I don't know. Yes. In a way. Had a letter

this morning asking me to spend a week-end with a wealthy sort of connection of mine in Sussex—or Surrey, is it? Hartling's the name of the place."

"Never heard of it, nor of your connection with wealth," Somers said.

"It's a bit distant," Woodroffe explained. "My aunt, my mother's sister that is, married the old man's son. His name's Garvice Kenyon. Ever heard of *him*?"

Somers shook his head.

"It'd be a bit before your time," Woodroffe acknowledged. "The old chap must be about ninety. I've only seen him once. I went there to stay with my mother when I was a kid of about nine or ten. Some idea of keeping up the connection, I suppose. But after my father got that living in Yorkshire, we dropped out. I don't remember much about the place or the people. General impression of grandeur, and so on, that's all. Mighty fine place, I believe."

"How did you pick 'em up again?" Somers asked.

"Well, I haven't picked 'em up again yet," Woodroffe said. "But I sat next to old Beddington at that public dinner you took me to a fortnight ago, and in the course of conversation—the sort of tosh one does talk to your next door neighbour on those occasions—he happened to mention that he was going down to see old Kenyon. So I claimed the connection for the sake of something to say. After that Beddington talked a lot about Kenyon; in fact he told me more than I had ever heard before. And, well, I suppose in much the same sort of way he must have talked to old Kenyon about me, when he was down there. Anyhow, this morning I got a letter from my aunt—forwarded from Holt's—Beddington probably told 'em I'd been in