



If Winter Comes

A.S.M. Hutchinson

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To take Mark Sabre at the age of thirty-four, and in the year 1912, and at the place Penny Green is to necessitate looking back a little towards the time of his marriage in 1904, but happens to find him in good light for observation. Encountering him hereabouts, one who had shared school days with him at his preparatory school so much as twenty-four years back would have found matter for recognition. A usefully garrulous person, one Hapgood, a solicitor, found much. "Whom do you think I met yesterday? Old Sabre! You remember old Sabre at old Wickamote's?... Yes, that's the chap. Used to call him Puzzlehead, remember? Because he used to screw up his forehead over things old Wickamote or any of the other masters said and sort of drawl out, 'Well, I don't see that, sir.'... Yes, rather!... And then that other expression of his. Just the opposite. When old Wickamote or some one had landed him, or all of us, with some dashed punishment, and we were gassing about it, used to screw up his nut in the same way and say, 'Yes, but I see what he means.' And some one would say, 'Well, what does he mean, you ass?' and he'd start gassing some rot till some one said, 'Good lord, fancy sticking up for a master!' And old Puzzlehead would say, 'You sickening fool, I'm not sticking up for him. I'm only saying he's right from how he looks at it and it's no good saying he's wrong.'... Ha! Funny days.... Jolly nice chap, though, old Puzzlehead was.... Yes, I met him.... Fact, I run into him occasionally. We do a mild amount of business with his firm. I buzz down there about once a year. Tidborough. He's changed, of course. So have you, you know. That Vandyke beard, what? Ha! Old Sabre's not done anything outrageous like that. Real thing I seemed to notice about him when I bumped into him yesterday was that he didn't look very cheery. Looked to me rather as though he'd lost something and was wondering where it was. Ha! But—dashed funny—I mentioned something about that appalling speech that chap made in that blasphemy case yesterday.... Eh? yes, absolutely frightful, wasn't it?—well, I'm dashed if old Sabre didn't puzzle up his nut in exactly the same old way and say, 'Yes, but I see what he means.' I reminded him and ragged him about it no end. Absolutely the same words and expression. Funny chap ... nice chap.... "What did he say the blasphemy man meant? Oh, I don't know; some bilge, just as he used to about the masters. You know the man talked some rubbish about how the State couldn't have it both ways—couldn't blaspheme against God by flatly denying that all men were equal and basing all its legislation on keeping one class up and the other class down; couldn't do that and at the same time prosecute him because he said that religion was—well, you know what he said; I'm dashed if I like to repeat it. Joke of it was that I found myself using exactly the same expression to old Sabre as we used to use at school. I said, 'Good lord, man, fancy sticking up for a chap like that!' And old Sabre—by Jove, I tell you there we all were in a flash back in the playground at old Wickamote's, down in that corner by the workshop, all kids again and old Puzzlehead flicking his hand out of his pocket—remember how he used to?—like that—and saying, 'You sickening fool, I'm not sticking up for him, I'm only saying he's right from how he looks at it and it's no good saying he's wrong!' Rum, eh, after all those years.... No, he didn't say, 'You sickening fool' this time. I reminded him how he used to, and he laughed and said, 'Yes; did I? Well, I still get riled, you know, when chaps can't see—' And then he said 'Yes, "sickening fool"; so I did; odd!' and he looked out of the window as though he was looking a thousand miles away—this was in his office, you know—and chucked talking absolutely....

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