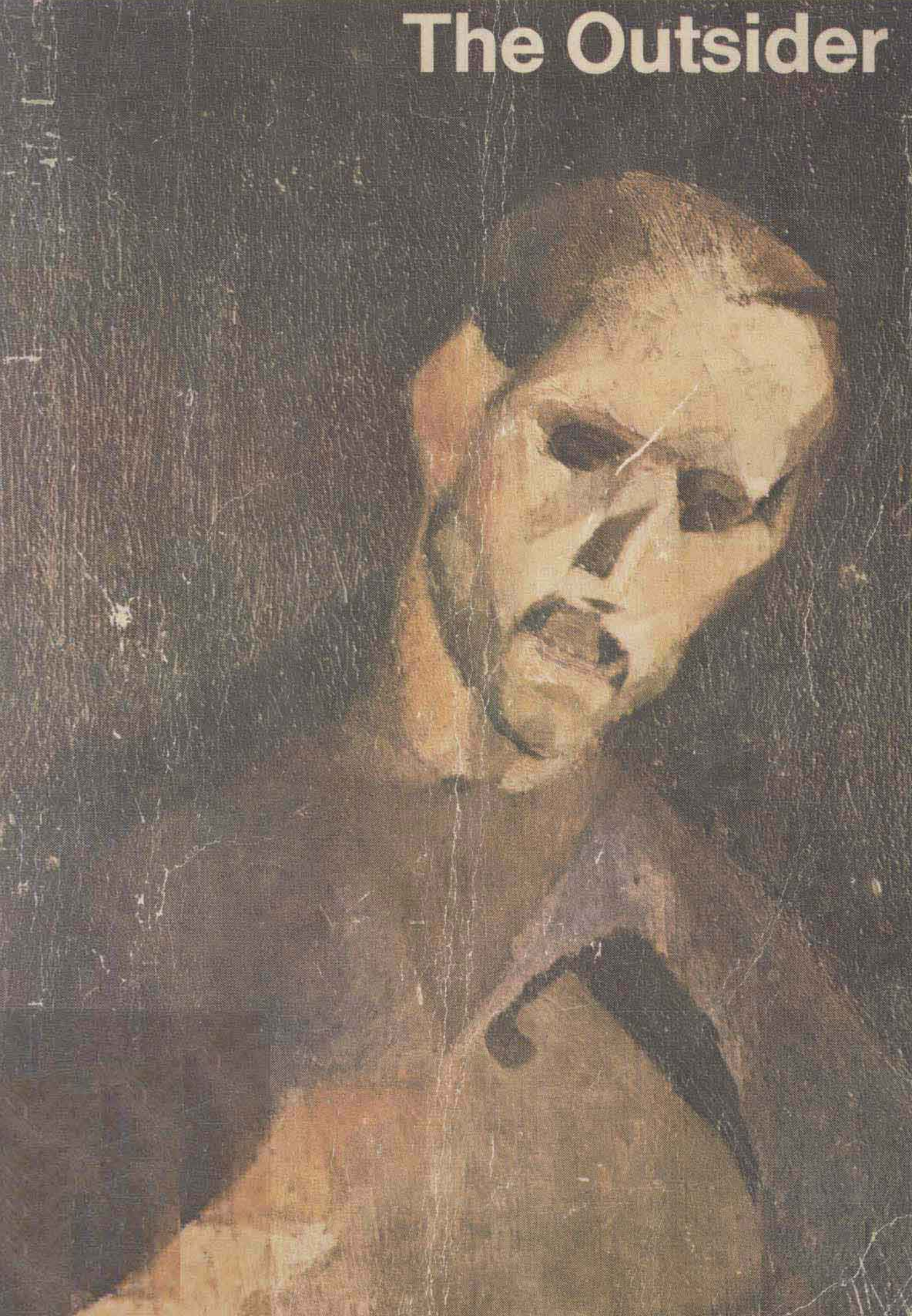


Penguin Modern Classics

Albert Camus

The Outsider



THE OUTSIDER

Albert Camus was born in Algeria in 1913 of Breton and Spanish parentage. He was brought up in North Africa and had many jobs there (one of them playing in goal for the Algiers football team) before he came to Metropolitan France and took up journalism. He was active in the resistance during the German occupation and became editor of the clandestine paper *Combat*. Before the war he had written a play *Caligula* (1939), and during the war the two books which brought him fame, *L'Etranger* (*The Outsider*, 1942) and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (1942). Abandoning politics and journalism he devoted himself to writing and established an international reputation with such books as *La Peste* (*The Plague*, 1947), *Les Justes* (1949), *L'Homme révolté* (1952), and *La Chute* (*The Fall*, 1956). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957. In January 1960 he was killed in a road accident.

ALBERT CAMUS

THE OUTSIDER

Translated by

STUART GILBERT

With an Introduction by

CYRIL CONNOLLY



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INTRODUCTION

To the First English Edition (1946)

The Outsider is the first book of a writer, now in his middle thirties, who played a notable part in the French Resistance Movement, who edited the daily paper, *Combat*, and whose name has been closely linked with Jean-Paul Sartre in the forefront of the new philosophical and realistic school of French literature. As well as this novel, Albert Camus has produced between 1942 and 1944 two plays, *Caligula* and *Le Malentendu*,¹ and a book of essays, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.² But he has an even more distinctive quality which colours all his work. He is an Algerian.

What is an Algerian? He is not a French colonial, but a citizen of France domiciled in North Africa, a man of the Mediterranean, an *homme du midi* yet one who hardly partakes of the traditional Mediterranean culture, unlike Valéry whose roots spread from Sète by way of Montpellier to Genoa; for him there is no eighteenth century, no baroque, no renaissance, no crusades or troubadours in the past of the Barbary Coast; nothing but the Roman Empire, decaying dynasties of Turk and Moor, the French Conquest and the imposition of the laws and commerce of the Third Republic on the ruins of Islam. It is from a sultry and African corner of Latin civilization that *The Outsider* emerges, the flower of a pagan and barrenly philistine culture. This *milieu* has a certain affinity with the Key West of Hemingway, or Deep South of Faulkner and Caldwell, with those torrid American cities where 'poor whites' exist uneasily beside poor blacks. In fact the neo-paganism which

1. *Two Plays*, London (Hamish Hamilton), 1946.

2. *The Myth of Sisyphus*, London (Hamish Hamilton), 1955.

is common to both civilizations, together with Camus' rapid and somewhat colloquial style, have caused some critics to consider *The Outsider* merely as a French exercise in the American 'tough guy' manner. But the atmosphere is not really similar. *The Outsider* is not at all a morbid book, it is a violent affirmation of health and sanity, there are no monsters, no rapes, no incest, no lynchings in it; it is the reflection, on the whole, of a happier society. Monsieur Sartre, asked in a recent interview if his friend Camus is also an 'existentialist', replied, 'No. That's a grave misconception. Although he owes something to Kierkegaard, Jaspers, and Heidegger, his true masters are the French moralists of the seventeenth century. He is a classical Mediterranean. I would call his pessimism "solar" if you remember how much black there is in the sun. The philosophy of Camus is a philosophy of the absurd, and for him the absurd springs from the relation of man to the world, of his legitimate aspirations to the vanity and futility of human wishes. The conclusions which he draws from it are those of classical pessimism.'

We possess a valuable piece of evidence which bears out this theory. In 1936 and 1937 Camus wrote two or three essays which have since been reprinted as *Les Noces*. No writer can avoid in his first essays the mention of the themes which are crystallizing for his later work. Two melodies emerge in these papers, a passionate love for Algiers and for the harsh meridional ecstasy which youth enjoys there, and also an anger and defiance of death and of our northern emphasis upon it. These are the two keys to *The Outsider*.

Le bourreau étrangla le Cardinal Carrafa avec un cordon de soie qui se rompit – il fallut y revenir deux fois. Le Cardinal regarda le bourreau sans daigner prononcer un mot.

STENDHAL, *La Duchesse de Palliano*

This quotation at the head of *Les Noces* might stand as a motto for the novel.

In his essay *Summer in Algiers*¹ Camus introduces us to the kind of *milieu* we will meet in the later book.

Men find here throughout all their youth a way of living commensurate with their beauty. After that, decay and oblivion. They've staked all on the body and they know that they must lose. In Algiers, for those who are young and alive, everything is their haven and an occasion for excelling – the bay, the sun, the red and white checkerboard of terraces going down to the sea, the flowers and stadiums, the fresh brown bodies. . . . But for those whose youth is past no place exists, no sanctuary to absorb their melancholy.

Farther on he gives a brief account of the ethics of these athletes.

The notion of hell, for instance, is here no more than a silly joke. Such imaginings are only for the very virtuous. And I am convinced that the word virtue is entirely meaningless throughout Algeria. Not that its men are without principles. They have their moral code. We don't 'chuck' our mothers, we make our wife respected in the street, we are considerate to the pregnant, we don't attack an enemy two against one, because it's 'cheap'. Whoever doesn't keep these elementary commandments 'is not a man' and the business is settled.

There are words whose meaning I have never clearly understood [he continues], such as the word sin. I know enough, however, to see that these men have never sinned against life, for if there is a sin against life, it is not perhaps so much to despair of life, as to hope for another life and to lose sight of the implacable grandeur of this one. These men have not cheated; lords of the Summer at twenty through their joy of living, though deprived of all hope they are gods still. I have seen two die, horrified but silent. It is better so. That is the rude lesson of the Algerian dog-days.

1. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, London (Hamish Hamilton), 1955.

So much for the ambience of *The Outsider*. When we study its philosophy, the limpid style disguises a certain confusion. According to one critic, the Outsider himself represents the drying up of all bourgeois sources of sensation, and the complete decadence of renaissance man; he is a 'poor white'. According to another, Maurice Blanchot, he grows out of character in the last pages, when he becomes too articulate, and thus destroys the unity of the book. I don't agree with either. Meursault represents the neo-pagan, a reversion to Mediterranean man as once he was in Corinth or Carthage or Alexandria or Tarshish, as he is today in Casablanca or Southern California. He is sensual and well-meaning, profoundly in love with life, whose least pleasures, from a bathe to a yawn, afford him complete and silent gratification. He lives without anxiety in a continuous present and has no need to think or to express himself; there is no Nordic why-clause in his pact with nature. The misfortunes into which he is led by his lazy desire to please and by his stubborn truthfulness gradually force the felt but unspoken philosophy of his existence to emerge into the open, and finally to express itself in words. To understand this last outburst we must study Camus' attitude to death. In his essay on the Roman ruins of Djemila he makes clear how much he admires the fortitude of the pagan ending, even as he shares the sure-set pagan passion for life. 'What does eternity matter to me? To lose the touch of flowers and women's hands is the supreme separation.' In his long essay on suicide in *The Myth of Sisyphus* he introduces his conceptions of the Absurd. 'Everything which exalts life adds at the same time to its absurdity,' he says in *Summer in Algiers*, and comes to the conclusion in the *Myth* that 'the Man under Sentence of Death is freer than the suicide - than the man who takes his own life'. The Suicide is a coward, he is one who

abandons the struggle with fate; the Condemned Man, however, has the chance to rise above the society which has condemned him and by his courage and intellectual liberation to nullify it. The egotism of suicides with their farewells and resentments is sometimes grotesque, the dignity of a brave man on the Scaffold never. In his own words, 'The precise opposite of the suicide is the man who is condemned to death . . . The God-like disponibility of the condemned man before whom the prison gates open one day just before dawn, his incredible disinterestedness about everything except the pure flame of life within him, here I am quite sure that Death and Absurdity are the principles which generate the only rational Liberty - that which a human being can experience with body and soul.'

Having said all this, I will leave the reader to form his judgement. The Bourgeois Machinery with its decaying Christian morality, and bureaucratic self-righteousness which condemns the Outsider just because he is so foreign to it, is typical of a European code of Justice applied to a non-European people. A few hundred miles farther south and 'a touch of the Sun' would have been readily recognized, no doubt, as a cause for acquittal, in the case of a white man accused of murdering a native, but part of the rigidity of the moribund French court is the pompous assumption that Algiers is France. On the other hand it is a failure of sensibility on the part of Camus that the other sufferer in his story, the Moorish girl whose lover beats her up and whose brother is killed when trying to avenge her, is totally forgotten. She too may have been 'privileged' to love life just as much, so may her murdered brother, for they too were 'foreigners' to the Colonial System, and a great deal besides. But the new paganism, I am afraid, is no kinder to women than the old.

Nevertheless something will have to happen soon and a

new creed of happiness, charity and justice be brought to men. *The Outsider* is only a stage. He is a negative destructive force who shows up the unreality of bourgeois ethics. It is not enough to love life, we must teach everyone else to love it, we must appreciate that happiness is consciousness, and consciousness is one, that all its manifestations are sacred, and it is from these newer schools of novelists and poets in all countries that one day we will learn it.

CYRIL CONNOLLY

PART ONE

I

MOTHER died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can't be sure. The telegram from the Home says: *Your mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow. Deep sympathy.* Which leaves the matter doubtful; it could have been yesterday.

The Home for Aged Persons is at Marengo, some fifty miles from Algiers. With the two-o'clock bus I should get there well before nightfall. Then I can spend the night there, keeping the usual vigil beside the body, and be back here by tomorrow evening. I have fixed up with my employer for two day's leave; obviously, under the circumstances, he couldn't refuse. Still, I had an idea he looked annoyed, and I said, without thinking: 'Sorry, sir, but it's not my fault, you know.'

Afterwards it struck me I needn't have said that. I had no reason to excuse myself; it was up to him to express his sympathy and so forth. Probably he will do so the day after tomorrow, when he sees me in black. For the present, it's almost as if Mother weren't really dead. The funeral will bring it home to one, put an official seal on it, so to speak. . . .

I took the two-o'clock bus. It was a blazing hot afternoon. I'd lunched, as usual, at Céleste's restaurant. Everyone was most kind, and Céleste said to me, 'There's no one like a mother.' When I left they came with me to the door. It was something of a rush, getting away, as at the last moment I had to call in at Emmanuel's place to borrow his black tie and mourning-band. He lost his uncle a few months ago.

I had to run to catch the bus. I suppose it was my hurrying like that, what with the glare off the road and from the sky,

the reek of petrol and the jolts, that made me feel so drowsy. Anyhow, I slept most of the way. When I woke I was leaning up against a soldier; he grinned, and asked me if I'd come from a long way off, and I just nodded, to cut things short. I wasn't in a mood for talking.

The Home is a little over a mile from the village. I went there on foot. I asked to be allowed to see Mother at once, but the door-porter told me I must see the Warden first. He wasn't free, and I had to wait a bit. The porter chatted with me while I waited; then he led me to the office. The Warden was a very small man, with grey hair and a Legion of Honour rosette in his buttonhole. He gave me a long look with his watery blue eyes. Then we shook hands, and he held mine so long that I began to feel embarrassed. After that he consulted a register on his table, and said:

'Madame Meursault entered the Home three years ago. She had no private means and depended entirely on you.'

I had a feeling he was blaming me for something, and started to explain. But he cut me short.

'There's no need to excuse yourself, my boy. I've looked up the record and obviously you weren't in a position to see that she was properly cared for. She needed someone to be with her all the time, and young men in jobs like yours don't get too much pay. In any case she was much happier in the Home.'

I said: 'Yes, sir; I'm sure of that.'

Then he added: 'She had good friends here, you know, old folks like herself, and one gets on better with people of one's own generation. You're much too young, you couldn't have been much of a companion to her.'

That was so. When we lived together, Mother was always watching me, but we hardly ever talked. During her first few weeks at the Home she used to cry a good deal. But that was only because she hadn't settled down. After a month or

two she'd have cried if she'd been told to leave the Home. Because this, too, would have been a wrench. That was why, during the last year, I seldom went to see her. Also, it would have meant losing my Sunday – not to mention the fag of going to the bus, getting my ticket, and spending two hours on the journey, each way.

The Warden went on talking, but I didn't pay much attention. Finally he said:

'Now, I suppose you'd like to see your mother?'

I rose without replying and he led the way to the door. As we were going down the stairs he explained:

'I've had the body moved to our little mortuary – so as not to upset the other old people, you understand. Every time there's a death here, they're in a nervous state for two or three days. Which means, of course, extra work and worry for our staff.'

We crossed a courtyard where there were a number of old men, talking amongst themselves in little groups. They fell silent as we came up with them. Then, behind our backs, the chattering began again. Their voices reminded me of parakeets in a cage, only the sound wasn't quite so shrill. The Warden stopped outside the entrance of a small, low building.

'So here I leave you, Monsieur Meursault. If you want me for anything, you'll find me in my office. We propose to have the funeral tomorrow morning. That will enable you to spend the night beside your mother's coffin, as no doubt you would wish to do. Just one more thing; I gathered from your mother's friends that she wished to be buried with the rites of the Church. I've made arrangements for this; but I thought I should let you know.'

I thanked him. So far as I knew, my mother, though not a professed atheist, had never given a thought to religion in her life.

I entered the mortuary. It was a bright, spotlessly clean room, with whitewashed walls and a big skylight. The furniture consisted of some chairs and trestles. Two of the latter stood open in the centre of the room and the coffin rested on them. The lid was in place, but the screws had been given only a few turns and their nickelled heads stuck out above the wood, which was stained dark walnut. An Arab woman, a nurse I supposed, was sitting beside the bier; she was wearing a blue smock and had a rather gaudy scarf wound round her hair.

Just then the porter came up behind me. He'd evidently been running, as he was a little out of breath.

'We put the lid on, but I was told to unscrew it when you came, so that you could see her.'

While he was going up to the coffin I told him not to trouble.

'Eh? What's that?' he exclaimed. 'You don't want me to ... ?'

'No,' I said.

He put back the screwdriver in his pocket and stared at me. I realized then that I shouldn't have said 'No', and it made me rather embarrassed. After eyeing me for some moments he asked:

'Why not?' But he didn't sound reproachful; he simply wanted to know.

'Well, really I couldn't say,' I answered.

He began twiddling his white moustache; then, without looking at me, said gently:

'I understand.'

He was a pleasant-looking man, with blue eyes and ruddy cheeks. He drew up a chair for me near the coffin, and seated himself just behind. The nurse got up and moved towards the door. As she was going by the porter whispered in my ear: