The Gate of Angels Study Guide

The Gate of Angels by Penelope Fitzgerald

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

Fred Fairly - the son of a minister - received a post as a Junior Fellow in one of Cambridge's colleges, St. Angelicus. Fred is a physicist focusing on the exciting intellectual work of his day. In addition to mentoring younger physics students, the conditions of his appointment include the tuning of musical instruments, and he must practice celibacy (his college had been founded some 500 years earlier by a disputed Catholic pope). He meets Daisy Saunders after a bicycling accident on Guestingley Road. The two, both unconscious, are taken in by Mrs. Wrayburn, wife of a Cambridge professor. The novel follows Fred and Daisy. Never having spent a half hour alone with a woman before, Fred falls in love with her, but he has no way of locating her. Daisy is an impoverished young woman from South London, who has been working towards a nursing position at Blackfriars Hospital until, trying to do a good deed, she is undone by a cad of a newspaper editor.

It is this disaster that brings Daisy Saunders to Cambridge. After the bicycling accident, Fred recuperates in a nursing home and Daisy, looking pale, goes back to London. When she returns to Cambridge, she quickly apprehends Mrs. Wrayburn's difficulty in caring for her husband. Daisy takes over the household chores in an informal exchange for a room (she also secures a job at Dr. Sage's hospital for lunatics). As soon as Fred learns of her return, he asks Daisy to take a walk with him in the country on her day off. They do; he proposes marriage; she says she'll consider it. The accident that has brought Fred and Daisy together became a matter of concern for both Dr. Matthews, an author of ghost stories, and the local police. The police are concerned by both Dr. Matthews' interest and the number of unknowns in the case.

The police investigation of the bicycling accident led to a trial, with Fred, Daisy and Mrs. Wrayburn being summoned as witnesses. To Daisy's dismay, while she is on the stand, the police introduce the third cyclist, Kelly, whom she denies knowing. Kelly, determines to do Daisy ill, testifies that he is waiting for her to come to him at Pett's Hotel--some rooms are rented by the hour--because he knows she has no money. This being a 1912 university town, all are of course horrified by the scandalous implications: Daisy leaves the courtroom without looking at Fred or anyone else; Fred waits in a cafe outside the courthouse for three hours until Kelly emerges, after which Fred vaults across the street and punches him unconscious. To his good fortune, a friend, Skippey, happens by and the two of them calmly walk down the streets of Cambridge--carrying the unconscious man's body between them, not questioned by anyone--discussing the famous Michelson-Morley experiments. After depositing Kelly's temporarily inert body in the Botanical Gardens, Fred attends his collegial duties and then takes a cab to Dr. Sage's hospital, where he waits for Daisy, who gets off work at "half-past six."

Like his Cambridge peers, he is horrified both by the idea of Pett's Hotel and Daisy having lied under oath (he thinks though his anguish will be ended if she will only say she does it to spare him embarrassment). Daisy responds indignantly to his inquisition--and the two part, her telling him not to return and closing the hospital door behind her. Fred makes it back to Cambridge in time to have sherry with Dr. Matthews at seven,

after which he attends a lecture about how Rutherford came to disagree with his mentors about the nature of the atom. Daisy, after saying goodbye to Mrs. Wrayburn, heads towards Guestingley Road on her route back to London and the unknown of no job and no money. She is given a ride part way, misses the last bus, begins walking, meanders--and finds herself back in Cambridge, outside the gate of St Angelicus, which stands open, for the third time in its history. She starts to walk by but enters, hearing someone's cry of distress. After she lifts the old blind Master of the college back into his chair, she leaves, closing the door behind her, the entire event having lasted no more than 5 minutes. This is just long enough that she will encounter Fred Fairly walking back from attending an obligatory lecture about observable disagreements.

Part 1, Section 1

Part 1, Section 1 Summary

The wind is so strong that afternoon that the bicyclists look like sailors in peril. The storm has blown down many of the willow trees along Mill Road: the horns of the cows in the pasture between the cemetery and the workhouse have willow garlands between them; a few cows even lie on their backs, still chewing. It is an odd site for Cambridge, the city housing the university and so home to "logic and reason." Fred Fairly is working to not be overtaken by the other bicyclists (the ones who have not been blown over by the wind). The year is 1912, and Fairly's bicycle, a Royal Sunbeam, is thirteen years old. It leaves a thin wire pattern on the road. He overtakes another cyclist who, from behind, he thinks he knows: when passing him, he realizes he is a lecturer in Physiology of the Senses, someone he knows slightly. The man shouts out that the beasts cannot get up. The two swerve to avoid a crumbled hat being blown across and down the road. Three other riders pass them--one, Skippey, pulls back alongside them. The wind makes conversation nearly impossible. At Christ's Pieces, Fairly turns right towards his own college, St Angelicus.

The jokes about this college--founded over 500 years earlier--have some basis in reality. Nowhere is this more evident than in the current bicycle shack, which has been built so as to be exposed to the weather on all but one side (a problem compounded by the volunteer Tutor whose special bicycle always takes up more than a single space). Fairly hangs his bicycle on an iron hook and walks through the gates of the outer wall of the college. Once inside the outer walls and in the inner courtyard, he scarcely feels the wind. He cuts a diagonal across the commons towards his own rooms. On the way, the Master of the College asks him if he has recently been injured in an accident--and if so, is he so unwise as to have gone to the hospital? Fairly reassured the Master, who then extended his arm in a ceremonial manner. The two are then joined by the Senior Tutor.

The Master informs the Tutor that he has recently heard the unmistakable mewing sound of recently born kittens--a serious problem since no females of reproductive age are allowed on the college's grounds (although birds like starlings are "difficult to regulate"). Finally reaching his own room in the northwest corner, Fairly shakes his cap and hangs it on the rack. On his way to the top floor, he passes Beazeley: the two reached an agreement some five years ago, when Fairly has been appointed Junior Fellow--that he does not need someone to stoke his fire or fetch his messages (since he could easily do for himself, he has no need for a servant).

Beazeley, nevertheless, on this occasion, tells him that he has three urgent messages. Fred, thinking himself fortunate to have been appointed Junior Fellow, takes off his wet clothes and makes toast (he has missed dinner). The first message Fred opens is from the Master he has just encountered (an odd little message, explaining why he challenged him although knowing perfectly well who he is). The second is from Skippey: he has written asking Fred if--since Thorpe has let down the Disobligers' Society--he'd

join tonight's debate arguing in favor of the existence of the soul. An ardent unbeliever, Fred could only conceive such arguments with difficulty--but, despite that and finally being dry, he does feel obliged to Skippey (having years earlier helped him out, loaned him some money). The third note, written on paper torn from a notebook, by Holcombe, an acquaintance, rattled on that Fred's position as Junior Fellow left him with no choice on the subject of women (whereas choice is itself essential to one's humanity). After he finishes reading this truncated note--Holcombe stopped his tome when he ran out of space--Fred takes his own writing paper out of the cupboard. He begins, "Dear Miss Saunders."

Part 1, Section 1 Analysis

Fred is athletically competitive, not a whiner, someone who prefers looking after himself to being waited upon. The idea of the university as the center of knowledge and reason contrasts with the storm scene, where the cows are garlanded with willow branches, conversation impossible, and cyclists look like sailors in peril. This notion of the university as reason is also echoed in Fred's being asks to argue a position he does not endorse, i.e., the existence of the soul. The university in general and St Angelicus in particular are devoid of women--except for some miscreant newly born kittens and Fred's thoughts, in the form of the letter he begins to "Miss Saunders." This salutation concludes the chapter, further contrasting the stereotyped reason of man with the stereotyped mystery of woman.

Part 1, Section 2

Part 1, Section 2 Summary

Two things distinguish St Angelicus. The first it shares with St Andrew's: it was founded by Pope Benedict, who, two years after his election in 1394, was dethroned. To the embarrassment of European nobility, Benedict continued holding very public audiences and stubbornly--he was over 90--did not die. His one earthly pleasure was said to be the quince preserves made by the Benedictine nuns who tended him. One Benedictine nun was persuaded to poison him: he vomited and so was saved, dying "with dignity" five years later (after she had been burned at the stake). During the war of the Spanish succession, however, marauding French soldiers dug up his body and cut off his head. His head was later rescued from a ditch by a pious peasant. It became an object of religious veneration. The second thing that distinguishes Angelicus is its size, as the smallest college in Cambridge. Built in the fifteenth century, it resembled a fortress. Although in scale a toy fortress, it is, with walls three and a half feet thick, a very strong one. Over the gates of the college is its crest: two angels asleep, waiting for a day of judgment (upon which Benedict XIII will undoubtedly be shown "indisputably correct"). The college houses its servants, its Master and the six Fellows. The college's statutes prohibit the Fellows from marrying and living anywhere else. For Fred, being a Fellow means serving in an assistant or deputy capacity without being paid specifically for doing so.

Part 1, Section 2 Analysis

Angelicus is distinguished among Cambridge's colleges by having been founded by a disputed pope and being its smallest. The college is presented as having changed little during its five centuries. The final authority of the papacy is questioned by the mention of a pope whose legitimacy is successfully challenged (not to mention his body having been dug up and beheaded by soldiers). The college is presented as not being quick to change, something of an artifact from the past. This resistance to change is contrasted with the subject matter of the last note Fred opened before he began writing, about personal choice.

Part 1, Section 3

Part 1, Section 3 Summary

Fred met Professor Flowerdew--to whom he owes his position as Junior Fellow--at a gala for those recently awarded First Class degrees in science. The afternoon's music and refreshments were ruined by the downpour. The professor does not like parties in any case. He invited Fred into his office in the Physics Department: after climbing a narrow stairway and walking along a corridor whose walls were covered with photographs, the professor asked Fred what he knew about him. Little to nothing, said Fred. The professor, however, knew Fred to be a "bright fellow" who came from a rectory family. Fred, who stammered his pleasure at being noticed by the professor, said his next goal was to study under Wilson and learn his methods. He confessed his excitement at having seen Rutherford in the very building where they sat, the Cavendish (where it is rumored the physicists made equipment out of cardboard).

Flowerdew thinks that history will prove Rutherford correct: the earlier view, that Nature or an invisible god has created everything with a purpose in mind has, after all, been widely held for centuries. He points to a photograph on the wall beside him (Fred does not know who it is). Flowerdew says it is a picture of Mach, taken on the occasion of his retirement from the University of Vienna physics chair. Mach, he continues, has told the world to regard the then unobservable atom as a "provisional idea," concluding that there is a continuity in scientific thinks. The professor looked down at Fred--who looked hungry--telling him that there's no point in returning to the party, because the chemists will have eaten all the sandwiches.

He then proffers to tell Fred what will happen to physics over the course of the next century. The physicists will begin by constructing physical models--already there are some fine ones--which, because they won't work, they will replace with more tractable mathematical expressions. This won't help them either (because their premises are faulty). They will conclude that energy is hard to predict (based on their failures). They'll ultimately conclude that the laws of energy are disorderly (and postulate yet smaller bits of matter). Flowerdew asks Fred what he thinks of such a disorderly law: chaos, he responds, to which the professor rejoins that the only chaos will be in the physicists' minds (and be, like atoms, unobservable). Flowerdew then insists that physicists are no more than "gossips" when they don't rely on empiricism, the evidence of their senses. The professor mentions how some of the university positions have been funded for good reasons--like the military paying for scholarships to train future spies in foreign languages. Some posts are filled for no practical purpose, he himself having been "fortunate" to be awarded a professorship in Observable Physics.

Fred is aghast that "luck" or fortune can have anything to do with the conduct of inquiry and science, especially at the Cavendish--to which the professor responds that he is thinking of moving his lab to another building. What, cries Fred, asking him if he isn't interested in the work of Rutherford, Planck, and Bohr. Flowerdew notes that he follows

their work, in both the English and German journals. He explains that when he thinks of them, he sees the sadness of old men whose gods have deserted them. He concludes his interview, noting that he could use an assistant to help him with his students and that he can offer one hundred pounds a year plus a Junior Fellowship at St Angelicus.

The professor then explains its attendant duties, which include keeping the fifteenth century musical instruments tuned. When Fred protests he's never seen such an instrument, the professor suggests forgetting about them for the moment. Fred appreciates that the professor is not a vain man--and that the intellectual role he played is of the one against the many, a position he assumed because he knows too much, not because he knows too little. The professor tells Fred to think it over, to get back to him later.

Fred later goes on a walking holiday in the Alps with two friends. They stop at an inn in the Alps, after which they hike to the bottom of a glacier. One of his friends, a chemist, descends, telling the others he has fallen in love with the innkeeper's daughter. The other begs Fred to come with him to Manchester, where Rutherford is now working, where everything is happening: it is at this moment that Fred decides he will accept Professor Flowerdew's offer.

Part 1, Section 3 Analysis

The narrator notes that many afternoon events in Cambridge are ruined by downpours, because most believe there is little risk and so heedlessly expose themselves. The growth of knowledge is valued in Cambridge (Mach has, for example, urged his colleagues to regard the atom as a "provisional idea" until--and if--it can be observed). The contrast here is also between periods of what Kuhn called "normal" and "revolutionary" science, when knowledge does indeed cumulate--and when paradigms or ways of seeing the world are overturned: after Einstein's 1905 papers, physics certainly goes through such a paradigm shift. Professor Flowerdew's position is, for his time, on intellectually solid ground (as is Mach)--incorrect but solid appearing at the time. It is ironic that their intellectual moorings only appear substantive. When Fred says he's never seen a fifteenth century instrument, the professor tells him not to think about them, and renders them unobservable simply by not thinking about them.

Part 1, Section 4

Part 1, Section 4 Summary

English King James the 1st said of Cambridge that one should "pray at King's, dine at Trinity, and study at Jesus"--to which he once added, "and sleep in peace at Angels." Given its size, dining at St Angelicus is different than at the other Cambridge colleges: all the wines--the sherry, the port, the claret, the champagne--and brandies are served at the same table in the same room (and all the meals concluded with canned sweet fruits, such as those which has failed to poison Pope Benedict). Only one guest at a time is usually invited. Dr. Matthews, the Provost at James, is a frequent guest (a "medievalist" and paleographer, he wrote ghost stories for relaxation). On those occasions when he doesn't have a new story to read, there is music: at places like King's they often just talked the night away (being philosophers, they has no need for relaxation, unlike the Fellows at Angels, who are all mathematicians and scientists).

Fred keeps tinkering with the fifteenth century instruments but actually tuning them seems impossible (he is not himself persuaded that they should even, if tuned, be played together). The musical entertainments are not valued by Dr. Matthews, who is completely tone deaf and prefers looking at old manuscripts (the opposite of the Master, who is blind but not hearing-impaired). The table talk at this particular meal turns to the tall and narrow gate on the southwest wall: it is as old as the college itself, but there are no instructions as to its use (or even a record of its cost). It has been found standing open only twice: the first time, in 1423, on the death of Pope Benedict and the second, in 1869, when the first women's college has--unofficially of course--been allowed to open. Dr. Matthews enjoys describing the old manuscripts he's seen in the college's library, in particular an exquisitely illustrated book of hours, with drawings of devil and monster tails coiled around the heads of heretical alchemists and arithmeticians. Dr. Matthews smiles, observing that, were this the fourteenth or fifteenth century, all the Fellows around the table will have been regarded as heretics, being scientists and mathematicians.

Part 1, Section 4 Analysis

Dr. Matthews and the Fellows of Angels amuse each other. They, men of science and the future, think him "musty." He, in turn, smiles at the pursuit that is leading them nowhere--even, perhaps, backwards. His observations about it having been the heads of the alchemists and arithmeticians that were pulled off are all too true, modern science having its roots in medieval alchemy. Even the modern word "empiricism" is a seventeenth century synonym for quackery and chicanery. It is an interesting scene: modern--for 1912--men of science in a college founded by a discredited medieval pope talking about illuminated manuscripts and doors whose purpose could not be fathomed with a "medievalist" like Dr. Matthews.

Part 1, Section 5

Part 1, Section 5 Summary

Fred has been a Junior Fellow for a year and thinks it only right to tell his father about his own lack of religious conviction--not a task he relishes, because his father is a minister (and the history of his family contains many heated feuds over matters of religion). Fred does not want to distress his father but thinks informing him is only "decent politeness." He determines that the best time to broach the subject with his father is six in the evening, a time when his father regularly waits in his study for parishioners who do not come (they came every other time of the day but then). Fred remembered back to his childhood, when he and his two sisters would crawl along the ground so as to observe their father waiting for the parishioners who came at other times--without being seen.

Fred thinks it will probably be best to tell his father right away that he has been an unbeliever since the beginning of that summer (although he is a "conditional" unbeliever, since he has no evidence). He remembers the many discussions with his father which ended up with him raising his voice and his father lowering his--but countering every intellectual point Fred scored with a religious counterexample. What, he knows his father will ask, will you accept as "evidence," in response to his stating he could no longer accept anything just on faith. As soon as something is completely described--like human anatomy--it is completely explained. Fred imagines himself pacing in his father's study, eventually sitting in one of the not too comfortable chairs, his father again pressing him on the point of what he will accept as proof that Christ rose from the dead. How best, he again asks himself, to explain that he has become an empiricist, a believer that ideas which could not be physically tested are not as worthy as those that could be. His path from earnest choirboy to ardent young scientist has been gradual.

Determined to tell his father what he thinks, Fred gets up early and bikes to the station. He takes the train to Blow Halt, where he is known as "Mr. Fred" and, earlier, "Master Freddie." Getting off the train, he notices that the front gate to the Rectory is grown over with blackberry vines. He walks up Church Road, towards the Rectory, which, built in 1830, stands at the top of a rise. He has only now decided that he will discuss the issue with his mother and sisters separately. Except for its new back gate--a gift to his father's predecessor--nothing in the Rectory is in good working order (and outside everything is overgrown). He hears a bark inside the house, followed by his sister Julia running out to meet him. Julia takes him to the morning room, where he sees everyone sewing piles of violet, green, and white cloth, banners for the forthcoming Birmingham march, the colors of the women's suffrage movement. His sisters and mother are adamant about women being given the right to vote.

Fred explains that he fully supports giving women the vote. He then asks whether anyone is interested in his reason for arriving unannounced: He has come to a decision,

he tells them, and wants them all to know. He enters his father's study and begins stammering out sentences. His father takes him by the hand and tells him that he has expected--ever since he got his appointment as a Junior Fellow--that he would sooner or later come to the conclusion that he has no use for the "soul." All he asks, his father tells him, is for him not to tell him his reasons (the women, he explains, have already excluded him).

Part 1, Section 5 Analysis

While still unsure how to discuss the topic with his father, Fred is completely certain that anything, once completely described, is completely explained--and that his mind has no room for the ephemeral comforting thoughts of his childhood. He is also certain that his father will counter all his intellectual arguments--and is taken aback that his father has anticipated his lack of religious beliefs and does not want to hear his reasons.

Part 1, Section 6

Part 1, Section 6 Summary

His father is right: he no longer has any use for the "soul." That, of course, is why Skippey has asked him to debate in favor of it at the next meeting of the Disobligers' Society. He looks down at the sheet of paper in front of him: "Estoy in mis tece" reads the letterhead. "Dear Miss Saunders," begins his salutation. He concludes it is too late to write what he has intended. Donning his coat, he heads back to the bicycle shed. None of the university societies ever meet in St Angelicus, because it is too small. Fred is about a half hour late (and reproves himself for the time spent staring at the blank paper on his desk). The first speaker has already seated himself. Skippey whispered that it has not gone well: perhaps because the speaker feared treating immortality as a joke, he has spoken in a voice so low as to be for the most part inaudible. Holcombe--not a Fellow anywhere but a mere demonstrator at the chemistry lab--strides into the room, looking for Fred, whom he locates easily enough. Fred is not pleased to see him, to hear him remind him that his note has cut off at "there seems no point in your getting to know any young women at all"--and that he will like to add "of the marriageable class." Skippey perseveres, announcing that Fred will be speaking opposing the motion.

The distinguished voice of Dr. Matthews, the Provost of St James and frequent dinner guest at St Angelicus, asks that the motion be repeated: no one knows why he is attending the debate (although all know him to be religiously devout). Fred dutifully puts forth arguments which he thinks absolute nonsense. Holcombe interrupts with a question, which Skippey claims he should answer. Dr. Matthews speaks out, acknowledging that his speaking from the audience might violate the rules of the Disobligers' Society--but that he has never expected to hear the soul described as something "made up." He and Fred leave together. Back in his room again, Fred tears up the paper on his desk and begins a new letter: "Dear Daisy."

Part 1, Section 6 Analysis

Skippey hasn't counted on Holcombe. Fred hasn't counted on Dr. Matthews. Fred mouths arguments he thinks have no value, teleological reasoning like if the body has a soul, then a soul has to have a body and grass is green because it is a color pleasing to the human eye. Dr. Matthews is, in contrast, a man of faith. Fred, the man of reason, after enumerating the arguments he doesn't believe, again tries writing to Daisy, this time beginning with her first name.

Part 1, Section 7

Part 1, Section 7 Summary

Fred thinks that, were Holcombe to walk into his room this very moment, he would not be able to tell him whether Daisy is of the "marriageable class" or not (he doesn't know how to get in touch with her so he is writing for the pleasure of it). Three weeks ago, bicycling in the twilight along Guestingley Road, he had been closing on the two cyclists ahead of him--one appeared to be a woman--when a horse and cart suddenly appeared in front of him. The next thing Fred remembered was waking up in a comfortable bed covered with a white quilt. He thinks the woman in the bed beside him must be the other cyclist (they appear to be in a nursery). She asks about her companion: he does not know. He cannot find his clothing. Fred hears a man's voice--the voice of Cambridge--asking about the people who have disturbed him. A woman's voice, that of Mrs. Wrayburn, responds that the farmer's son has brought them both in together (and that she has of course not wanted to disturb him). Fred introduces himself. Daisy, being mistaken for his wife, announces that she is not "Mrs. Fairly" (she is "Daisy Saunders"). Fred is moved to a nursing home elsewhere--but still looked after by Mrs. and, oddly, Mr. Wrayburn (St Angelicus has forwarded his toothbrush).

Fred asks the Wrayburns about Miss Saunders. Mrs. Wrayburn responds that, although she has looked pale, she has offered her thanks and left for London, noting that she'd see a doctor if she needed one. Mrs. Wrayburn lays some grapes and silver grape snipping scissors on Fred's nightstand, telling him to return the scissors at his convenience. Mr. Wrayburn tells him his wife wouldn't have mistakenly thinks him married if she'd have known he was a Fellow at St Angelicus. The Wrayburns had telephoned the police after the accident, of course. There have been interviews. His and Daisy's wrecked bikes are still by the side of the road. No trace could be found of the driver of the cart, which bothered Fred not at all: he only wanted Daisy found.

Part 1, Section 7 Analysis

The voice of Cambridge is a male voice--and a well-to-do one: both Fred and Daisy have been knocked unconscious: he recuperates in a nursing home while she leaves almost immediately for London. The accident seems just that, an accident. The police, though, find the various answers--cannot find the driver, cannot find Daisy, cannot identify the other cyclist--unsatisfactory (Fred only wants to find Daisy). Mrs. Wrayburn says they hadn't expected thanks, but Mr. Wrayburn says they'd never expected it more. The narrator concludes the first section with Fred wanting Daisy found--his voice dominating the tumult of other voices.

Part 2, Section 8

Part 2, Section 8 Summary

Daisy lives in South London. She is used to crowding, there being too little space for the people present. Her childhood has been a plenitude of smells--coal, vinegar, gin, dung, "chloride of lime from the backstreet factories, and baking bread every morning." Her mother was very poor when she is young: when they went to market, it was always to the stalls on the cheap end, where they would purchase "cow-heel, which didn't turn as quickly as most kinds of meat." They moved around, never taking rooms twice on the same street. Daisy--an only child--watched after young children while her mother capped bottles at the Falcon Brewery. Their fortunes changed somewhat when Daisy's mother's sister, unexpectedly died and left them five years worth of income, 5 pounds a quarter. Mrs. Saunders continued working at the brewery so she could send Daisy to the Free School on Latchmere Road. When she was 15, Daisy began working as a clerk. That meant crossing the bridge over the Thames into London. Daisy wears her Aunt Ellie's wedding ring, which is inscribed "Whatever there is to be known, That shall we know one day." The bridge crossings are a series of games without rules, one improvised, from wearing a wedding ring to running. She is earning 12 shillings a week. Her mother lost her job and began suffering from an unexplained malady. Daisy quit her job with Lambert's to work at Sedley's. There are a lot of people out of work at the time, more than she'd remembered in her 15 years.

In the spring of 1909, the Selfridge Department Store opened. Circulars were printed announcing that all were welcome to the grand opening. Daisy volunteered to take her mother, who, although she was thrilled, took care to accept her daughter's offer casually. They took the tram and then ran up the stairs to get the front two seats on the left side of the bus. When they entered the new store, Mrs. Saunders, with her daughter at her side, felt second to none. On the bus home, Mrs. Saunders asked Daisy what she made of the new department store with all of its stuff displayed for all to see. She didn't think the department store would last; neither did Daisy. When they arrived home, Mrs. Saunders pulled a "rat"--an artificial hairpiece--out of her umbrella. She confessed she didn't know why she stole it--except as a present for Daisy--since it didn't match their hair color. Three days later she died. Daisy felt the greatest pang at having been at work when her mother had her heart attack. The solicitors expressed their regret and informed her that the 5 pounds per quarter allowance lapsed on her mother's death. She has decided she will move elsewhere.

Part 2, Section 8 Analysis

Daisy did not ask the doctor whether the outing brought on the heart attack since she knew she wouldn't get a definitive answer. She does get a definitive one though from the solicitors, namely that the rent payments lapsed on her mother's death and that she's unlikely to have contact with real "ladies."

Part 2, Section 9

Part 2, Section 9 Summary

Daisy decides to apply at Blackfriars Hospital for a nursing position. She arrives to a waiting room at the hospital full of--except for one older woman--young women like herself, wearing navy blue suits, cuffs turned up to hide the wear. She sees an applicant exit the interview room head bowed. Daisy is the last to be called. The Matron interviewing Daisy tells her that, if her references are not currently in order, she can return the coming Friday. After the interview, Daisy changes back into her regular boots and begins walking home. The older woman at the hospital catches up with her--and explains that she is single and has a child, that she's well over 35 and still, unfortunately, fertile. Mrs. Martinez says she wants to talk about the sorrows of mankind but asks to borrow money (Daisy obliges). Daisy begins lining up her references. The old priest at the Catholic Church is happy to write her a reference letter. She must, as she feared, get a reference letter from Mr. Sedley, her earlier employer: he asks if she's changed her mind and she says no; he says he doesn't feel like writing a reference letter and that she can stick that up her "Khyber." She goes over to Lambert's and manages to wheedle a reference out of him. Blackfriars Hospital accepts her references. She is advised to bring a pair of shoes a size larger than she normally wears. She spends her last night at the place she has shared with her mother reading a nursing manual.

Part 2, Section 9 Analysis

Daisy spends the last night of her old life reading about what she wants to become her new life. She learns rapidly that she must call all the doctors and medical students "sir" (only the "lady" nurses can call them "doctor"). Her difficulty obtaining references--and her reason for wanting to become a nurse--stems, at least in part, from her being a young woman with little defense against predatory employers.

Part 2, Section 10

Part 2, Section 10 Summary

Daisy quickly learns the routines as a Nurse Probationer at the Blackfriars Hospital: windows facing the world open an inch and a half and the windows opposite are open 6 inches; apoplectics are to be placed on their faces and abdominal cases on their backs. She is physically self confident before and becomes even more so. However, when Dr. Sage asks her whether she drank beef tea as a child, she makes the mistake of answering him.

Part 2, Section 10 Analysis

At Blackfriars Hospital, medicine consists of leeches and lozenges. Blackfriars Hospital compounds its own medicines. Daisy, a strong and capable young woman, is equal to the task.

Part 2, Section 11

Part 2, Section 11 Summary

On January 16, 1912, James Elder throws himself into the Thames. Despite the fog, he is noticed by a ship's captain, who holds his head above water until someone rescues him. He is first taken to the police station and later transferred to Blackfriars Hospital. The other nurse on the night shift warns Daisy of "number 23" (swallowing Thames water often led to typhoid although it took days to tell). James Elder becomes semiconscious and cries out for a woman named "Flo." Daisy insists she is not Flo, but James Elder wants her to hold his hand. He says he does not want to call her "nurse" but "miss"--and that he has no family and no money. He is afraid that Flo will read about his attempted suicide in the newspaper and insists on Daisy fetching him one. A constable comes by the next day--suicide is a crime--but the Blackfriars Matron, as usual, refuses to let him see the patient. He leaves, mumbling to himself that most attempted suicides heal rapidly with a little beef tea and a few days' rest. Dr. Sage writes out his orders, but James Elder refuses everything. Dr. Sage's view is that everyone knows when he or she is hungry. The Matron is grateful Dr. Sage cannot be on duty 24 hours out of every 24--he is not in favor of women having the vote; he is in favor of no one having the vote.

Part 2, Section 11 Analysis

James Elder is hidden from the other patients behind a screen and so becomes for them a source of speculation. That he takes no food or liquids is particularly intriguing since, except for the patients who are dying, food is the most interesting topic of discussion. The Matron states her views--but out of hearing of Dr. Sage.

Part 2, Section 12

Part 2, Section 12 Summary

On Wednesday, her half day off, Daisy walks down to the river: she misses it and her twice-daily crossings. She only allows herself long enough to watch a barge go by before heading toward the Borough Library (which is connected to the public washhouse by the municipal fumigation rooms, where books could be disinfected after outbreaks of disease). She interrupts an old man who is sitting behind a pile of daily papers. She asks to read a few (and says she'll return them right away). She is used to reading newspapers, because she is a seeker of jobs. She next makes her way to a newspaper office and says she wants to see the editor (the newsmen notice she is good looking but not a "lady"). She wants them to run a news piece on an attempted suicide by a James Elder. The newsmen are disinterested in the story: one of them, Kelly, points out that, although her motive is obviously to save the man, she has violated confidentiality laws by coming to them. Daisy replies that there are many newspapers in South London and, on her way out of the office, is glad she was not asked to take off her coat and hat. Kelly catches up with her, apologizes--and then tells her she irritates him. Daisy responds by saying she's going to a nearby church--Kelly is aghast that "a smart girl like her, a nurse" really believes in "that stuff."

Part 2, Section 12 Analysis

When she is at the library, Daisy reads a newspaper article--written by Kelly--about a kitten who survived an explosion by landing on a lady's hat. Kelly apologizes and then insults Daisy. She leaves him to enter a church. News is not newsworthy, and appearances are deceiving.

Part 2, Section 13

Part 2, Section 13 Summary

When Daisy gets back to the hospital, she found that number 23 has been discharged (a woman named "Floreen Harris" has come by, spoken with the Matron, and hailed a cab). A day later, Kelly's newspaper prints a story about a mysterious "ministering angel" concerned about the attempted suicide of a James Elder. Daisy is quickly made to understand that she must leave by Monday (a concession since it is known she has no home). Her fellow Probationers chip in to buy her a parting gift (Daisy is grateful for the traveling salt and pepper shaker with its picture of George V). Daisy is determined to get an audience with Dr. Sage at his Cambridge practice. Kelly follows her, saying he is filled with remorse at her being out of a job and will make sure no harm comes to her in Cambridge. He mentions he knows a hotel. Daisy retorts that when she came to his office he doubtless thought her easy.

Part 2, Section 13 Analysis

It is an old story: Daisy has no skills anyone wants (she has loved nursing though). Kelly tells her to get used to it--and the fact that he wants her for a few nights. He puts his arm around her, and she thinks neither deserves any better than the other does.

Part 3, Section 14

Part 3, Section 14 Summary

Fred looks down at his different attempts at writing Daisy. He doesn't want to discard any of them out of fear of not being able to contact her at all. He has asked her nine questions and received eight responses--spent a half hour in her company--and is resolved that he must marry her. He makes a note to speak to Professor Flowerdew right away, perhaps later since he knows the professor to be in some distress because the concept of mass was entering the physics department. (The Professor does not know about Fred's recent cycling accident). Fred concludes that now is not a good time to inform the Professor that he must soon resign: he does not believe in a god or a divine purpose for life--but, if there are such, they will give him Daisy. Mr. Wrayburn, some weeks later, visits Fred at St. Angelicus on a matter of some "delicacy." He notes that Daisy was the only person ever to arrive at his home in a laundry van. When Fred asks him if Daisy is back, Mr. Wrayburn says he thought he'd made that obvious. Fred says no, "you cretin," and Wrayburn says that Daisy has now taken a room in his attic. "Lock the doors," says Fred.

For Daisy's part, there is no mystery: She is in Cambridge, because Dr. Sage is the only one she knows who might give her a job. She is at the Wrayburns, because she knows no one else--and other than a shilling beyond bus fare back to London, she has no money. She finds Mrs. Wrayburn in some distress the next morning and notes that she has a big house to run and apparently no servants to help her run it.

Part 3, Section 14 Analysis

Taking the conservation of mass and constancy as principles bothered the Professor. God, the soul, the atom--they are united in the Professor's mind by being unobservables (elementary particles are merely a "comforting weakness"). Fred has fallen in love with Daisy. Back at St. Angelicus, Mrs. Wrayburn is distressed over the voluminous pile of dirty dishes. She and Daisy happily, quickly understand each other. Daisy will stay in the room in the attic and relieve Mrs. Wrayburn of the duties of the house.

Part 3, Section 15

Part 3, Section 15 Summary

Mr. Wrayburn regrets his hospitality of the night of the accident. All he knows is that that a not totally explained young woman now lives in the attic and her hours at Dr. Sage's hospital are "half-past eight to half-past six." He also regrets having told Fred of Daisy's arrival (although the only thing he has done--although he has done it immediately--is to invite her for a walk on her day off). Mr. Wrayburn grumbles to his wife about the lack of chaperones, to which she responds that, although she thinks she will become quite fond of Daisy, she is not in charge of her--and does not even officially employ her for that matter. Who, Mr. Wrayburn worries, then, is in charge of her?

On the way to their country walk, Daisy and Fred notice a house for sale. Walking inside it, they notice scraps of paper on the floor. Fred comments on the Cambridge custom of sending notes and hopes his don't some day end up as scraps of paper on an otherwise empty floor. Fred is appalled to realize Daisy doesn't realize what she means to him. He explains that he wants everyone to know--but that, no, he's never taken out a girl he wanted to marry before. They agree they'll never get to Great Chisill, the goal of their walk, but they do not mind. He asks her to marry him and she says that she won't say no, that she'll consider it.

Part 3, Section 15 Analysis

Daisy says that women live off their imaginations, because that's often all they have. Daisy recognizes that Fred is offering to her the best of himself but approaches him warily. Mr. Wrayburn is worried that no one is in charge of Daisy.

Part 3, Section 16

Part 3, Section 16 Summary

Mr. Wrayburn continues to complain and fear for the worst (although he is subsequently Fred's dinner guest one night, and Fred has been the only one thus far to take Daisy out). He attempts to talk to Daisy while she is sorting washing. He uses the example of the opera La Traviata to let Daisy know that she isn't good for Fred, that he'll lose his Fellowship if he marries. Daisy asks what happens to Violetta. When he says she died of consumption--but that's hardly the point--Daisy exclaims that there is no history of consumption in her family. She points out that Fred could have told her this had he wanted--that he probably will not want to, Mr. Wrayburn says, is his point. Fred, in the meanwhile, receives a surprise visit from his family, to whom he says he's in love. Fred introduces them all on an outing. Playing golf, he looks at his mother, his sisters, and at Daisy, thinking he loves them all and that they will figure out how to love each other. Later, his mother and sisters discuss Daisy. His mother can't imagine her in the Rectory, but Hester can imagine her selling Votes for Women, and Julia thinks she is splendid His father and Professor Flowerdew are Fred's guests at dinner that evening: his father is gratified that, while the Professor holds out no hope for the material universe, he does speak highly of Fred.

Part 3, Section 16 Analysis

Fred has surprised his family with a visit to the Rectory; they surprise him with a visit to Cambridge. Fred realizes when introducing Daisy to his family--she's a nurse from London--that that's about all he knows about her. Mr. Wrayburn continues to fret over the disorderliness of the situation with Daisy (how she inexplicably happened to materialize into his life and Fred's--and Cambridge).

Part 4, Section 17

Part 4, Section 17 Summary

Dr. Matthews has been thinking about Fred's accident ever since the recent meeting of the Disobligers' Society: there is too much that made no sense. Where did the man on the cart go? This naturally becomes the subject of his new ghost story. The police are nervous about his preoccupation, knowing him to be consulted by the powerful in London. The police cite a nearby farmer for having rented out an unsafe cart, which resulted in injury to Mr. Fairly and Miss Saunders, as well as damage to their machines. The farmer replies that he will be in court on the appointed day, with his solicitor. Fred, Daisy and Mrs. Wrayburn are called as witnesses. Mr. Wrayburn is not called, which is good, he says, because he is a very "busy man." He is in fact surprised they have shown such good sense.

Part 4, Section 17 Analysis

The police fear Dr. Matthews' interest, not realizing he has turned the events of that evening into a ghost story. Mr. Wrayburn thinks the police have acted sensibly in not calling him because he is a "busy man," not thinking they haven't called him because has nothing to say of any relevance. The police cite the farmer, because they can think of no one else to charge in the context of thinking they have to charge someone.

Part 4, Section 18

Part 4, Section 18 Summary

Each time Fred sees Daisy he is taken by all he has forgotten in the intervening minutes. Waiting in the courtroom, he notices she is pale but not how pale until she gets up on the witness stand. The police make ready to call a new witness: the journalist Kelly. Daisy denies knowing him. He identifies the driver of the cart as the farmer the police has charged. When asked what he did after he saw the driver of the cart flee back to the farm, he said he had rented a room for himself and Daisy Saunders at Pett's Hotel (he knew she would come to him, because she had no money). He says he has not come forward before because he does not want to embarrass Miss Saunders--but that he does now.

Part 4, Section 18 Analysis

Kelly suddenly appears, because the police have summoned him. Why he so wanted to do Daisy harm is harder to understand--unless, perhaps, it is simply because his plan of her coming to him because she has no money has not panned out. Perhaps, though, it is jealousy that she has somehow managed not only to survive his having sabotaged her job at Blackfriars--but also to thrive, with her own room at the Wrayburns and a day job at Dr. Sage's hospital. Perhaps Kelly just wanted Daisy for a few nights more.

Part 4, Section 19

Part 4, Section 19 Summary

Daisy left the courtroom for Dr. Sage's hospital without looking at Kelly--who has been looking directly at her--or Fred. Fred goes to a teahouse across the street and sat for three hours thinking about nothing (you're a scientist, he finally reminded himself, there is no "nothing"). He asks the manager of the teahouse whether someone being questioned by the police will come here--no, not here, but by here, she says: he must want to talk to his friend very much, to have waited so long. Fred says that he's not his friend and that he wants to hit him, not talk to him. Kelly finally leaves the police office, strutting as though every young woman is his, worth less concern than his jacket. Fred bolts, dodges several vehicles and grabs Kelly by the collar, spinning him around. Kelly spits in Fred's face--so "you're the schoolteacher"--and tells him to move aside. Fred punches him. Kelly goes down as though it is only his jacket that has been holding him up.

As luck has it, Skippey walks by, stops and points out that there is a man lying on the pavement in front of Fred. Showing surprising practicality, Skippey decides where to move Kelly's body (he takes the feet and Fred the arms). They make their way down the street, Skippey calling over his shoulder about his new problem (he wants to replicate the Michelson-Morley experiment but, although everyone seems to be rolling in money, no one seems to be reading his application letters). No one questions the two as they walk down the street, discussing an important experiment in physics, Kelly's unconscious body between them.

Part 4, Section 19 Analysis

Fred, for all his Rectory upbringing and Junior Fellow at St. Angelicus position, sees Kelly well enough for what he is (a predator). Being a man of science, Fred realizes he can't think about "nothing" and that he wants to hit Kelly. Fred is later stunned by Skippey being helpful and his working on the Michelson-Morley experiment (Skippey is not satisfied that they offered a complete proof, that their experiment should be repeated using more finely calibrated instruments). They deposit Kelly on the soft grass of the Botanical Gardens, which are just closing as they arrive.

Part 4, Section 20

Part 4, Section 20 Summary

When he arrives back at Angelicus, Fred calls the Botanical Gardens and speaks with the head gardener, who tells him about a man who was found in the grass and then bolted over the gate. He reads his mail, including another note from Holcombe. Holcombe assures him that his Miss Saunders is not of the "marriageable class"--especially not after today's court scene--and, since he himself has trouble finding women, and whereas he is practical (and is certain the same is true of Miss Saunders), etc.

Fred has to deliver a 10-minute lecture to his introductory physics students. He puts on his gowns and walks over to the Cavendish. He tells his students that all their papers from his last assignment were bad--and that good ideas are commonplace ones that are not always welcome. After class, two of his students catch up with him: They consider him a role model of the young scientist and cannot help being worried that, after his lecture, he is in some personal distress. Fred thanks them, tells them both their papers are very bad, and that he will talk with them personally, later.

Part 4, Section 20 Analysis

A 10-minute lecture is not much, especially at the introductory level. Fred's astute students notice that he, atypically, uses science metaphorically in his lecture.

Part 4, Section 21

Part 4, Section 21 Summary

After the lecture, Fred takes a cab to Dr. Sage's hospital looking for "Nurse Saunders." The receptionist is about to turn him away when Dr. Sage enters, telling Fred--and the receptionist--that she is here and that she is a "ward-maid." Fred has to be back for a seven o'clock meeting in Cambridge. Daisy finally leaves the hospital. She at first explains that she isn't a nurse and that Dr. Sage knows what happened at Blackfriars, so she has no need of explaining. Fred says that that is not why he has come. He tells her that Pett's Hotel is "horrible," that rooms can be rented by the hour there. Daisy replies that that's handy for some. She has intended to go there but has not made it there. He asks how she could have come to Cambridge with someone like Kelly (he wanted to get her alone by the back door to ask her). Fred asks whether she loves Kelly ("Lord, no"). Why Fred asks, did she say in court that she didn't know him? He hopes the answer is that she lied to protect his feelings. She responds that she lied, because she was afraid that Kelly would show up. When Fred says he punched him, Daisy defends Kelly, saying he's not such a bad sort although he doesn't have Fred's "advantages." She tells Fred not to see her again, not to come to Dr. Sage's Hospital, because she will be gone. She enters the kitchen and closes the door behind her.

Part 4, Section 21 Analysis

Fred wants Daisy to explain what happened in the courtroom. Daisy is defensive, even defending Kelly, who has brought nothing but grief to her life. Fred, perhaps because he knows so very little about her life, does not understand.

Part 4, Section 22

Part 4, Section 22 Summary

At half-past seven, Fred calls on Professor Flowerdew (he has just has sherry with Dr. Matthews who has, out of curiosity, been in court that morning--and told him about the seedy man and pretty but dishonest young woman). Fred has come as part of his formal duties, to escort Professor Flowerdew to a lecture about how Rutherford has come to disagree with his old mentor on the nature of the atom. The professor decides not to attend and orders Fred to tell him about the meeting as soon as it concludes. Professor Flowerdew confesses he may have to apply at Oxford--the state of physics having become somewhat unobservable--and vows that Fred shall not be punished for his stand in the history of ideas. Daisy, after leaving Dr. Sage's Hospital, says good-by to Mrs. Wrayburn, who quite agrees with her that she can't stay in Cambridge after the court scene. Daisy gives Mrs. Wrayburn her aunt's ring, and Mrs. Wrayburn has the grace to accept it.

As Daisy nears Guestingley Road, she notices a cart pull out of Turner's farm--just like in the accident--except this time well lit and driven by a woman, who later says she couldn't tolerate any more of the farmer. Daisy catches a ride on the cart. When they arrive at Chesterton Road, Daisy thanks her. She plans on catching a bus the rest of the way back to London. She has missed the last bus and begins walking. She meanders. She finds herself back in Cambridge. She comes to a tall door standing open. "Like all the kept-out," she is looking for a way in. Realizing though that it must be one of the colleges, she turns away. On hearing a cry of distress, however, she immediately walks through the door to the source, an old blind man. She lifts him back into his chair, which maybe takes five minutes. She closes the door behind her. It is enough of a delay, though, that she will meet Fred Fairly walking home from the lecture.

Part 4, Section 22 Analysis

The Gate of St Angelicus has been found standing open only twice before: the first time, in 1423, on the death of Pope Benedict and the second, in 1869 when the first women's college has--unofficially of course--been allowed to open at Cambridge. It stands open this one evening in 1912. Daisy Saunders would have passed it by except for the cry of an old man. She is there long enough that she will meet Fred Fairly walking back from a lecture pertaining to observable disagreements about "unobservable" particles.

Characters

Fred Fairly

Fred Fairly is the son of a minister who became a Junior Fellow at St Angelicus. An athletically enthusiastic and somewhat competitive young man, he prefers taking care of himself rather than being waited upon. He decides to accept his position as Junior Fellow while sitting near a glacier in the Alps with a friend, who is urging him to go to Oxford, where everything is happening. Fred is a conscientious young man who thinks it only fair that he tell his father he, a scientist, can no longer take anything on faith (his father is not surprised--but does not want to hear his reasons, already feeling excluded by his wife and daughters, who are working for women's suffrage). Fred's lack of faith is precisely why his friend Skippey, from Jesus College--then chairing its Disobligers' Society--asks him to formally debate in favor of the proposition that the soul exists (Fred has earlier loaned Skippey some money and so felt obliged to help him out forever after). Fred's intellectual pursuits--the physics of his day are exciting--are interrupted when he falls in love with Daisy Saunders, who has been injured, along with him, in a bicycling accident.

Daisy Saunders

Daisy Saunders is the daughter of Mrs. Saunders, a single mother who capped bottles at a brewery, sent her daughter to public school, and moved frequently. Daisy was born very poor and grew up somewhat less poor (her mother's sister died unexpectedly and left a small inheritance--her mother thought her sister was already dead.) Daisy takes a job as a clerk when she is 15. She is working for her second lecherous employer when her mother unexpectedly died. Daisy decides to become a nurse, impresses the Matron of Blackfriars Hospital during her interview (and manages to secure the necessary number of references). She works hard but, in the process of doing a good deed for a patient, comes to the attention of a lecherous newspaper editor, Kelly, who publishes a story that results in, as he knows it will, her being dismissed from Blackfriars Hospital. Daisy's character is shown in her response to the open gate in the southwest corner of St Angelicus College: She is about to walk by it when she hears a cry of distress from inside, to which it is her second nature to respond. She is the most compassionate character in the novel--and also the most vulnerable, being young and poor. She is not even economically at the rung where she can worry about the vote (although, being an intelligent and self-confident young woman, she would, given the opportunity). She is the kind of young woman anyone would expect to thrive--but she has difficulty doing so because of the obstacles repeatedly placed in her path.

James Elder

James Elder is a patient at Blackfriars Hospital, an attempted suicide. He is depressed and refuses all food and water--which does not concern Dr. Sage--but does concern Daisy, one of the nurses in the men's ward. When Daisy returns from having spent her half-day off trying to do him a good deed, another nurse tells her that a woman came for him in a cab.

Kelly

Kelly is a newspaper editor. Daisy visits his office to ask him to write a story about James Elder (to cheer him up so that he will begin accepting food and fluids). During their brief interview in his cramped office, Kelly tells Daisy--whom, he notices, is attractive and not a "lady"--that she is guilty of breaching patient confidentiality. After he prints his article, knowing that it will result in Daisy losing her job, knowing that she is otherwise penniless, he tells her she has no employable skills and is good enough only to spend a night or two with men like him.

Mr. and Mrs. Wrayburn

The farmer's son brought the unconscious bodies of Fred and Daisy--after the bicycling accident--to Mrs. Wrayburn's house on Guestingley Road. She sees them both to some degree of recovery (she has been a student, and Mr. Wrayburn is a very busy man). When Daisy returns, the two women come to a quick understanding of how they can help each other. Although Mr. Wrayburn does not quite approve of Daisy--it confuses and concerns him that no one is responsible for her--he does not exploit her. He is a professor at Cambridge who is disturbed by Daisy's unexplained appearance in his life--no one else has ever arrived in a laundry van. He is, to Mrs. Wrayburn's dismay, a man who takes his meals at home--which means an endless stream of dirty dishes. Although Mrs. Wrayburn tells her husband she'll likely grow very fond of Daisy, she, too, agrees that after the courtroom scene, Daisy should leave Cambridge.

Dr. Matthews

Dr. Matthews is a medievalist and paleographer, the Provost at James College and a frequent dinner guest at the St. Angelicus dinner table. A religious man, he writes ghost stories for his and others' amusement. He weaves the events of the accident that brought Fred and Daisy together into his newest story. Like the other professors at Cambridge, he is oblivious to the world outside the staid, seemingly rational, intellectual, and orderly academic life.

Dr. Flowerdew

Dr. Flowerdew is the Professor of Observable Physics who offered the recently graduated Fred his position at St Angelicus. He sees himself as one of the last outposts against the movement, within physics, towards unobservables like the atom (and, without observables, physicists are no better than "gossips"). After dining with Dr. Flowerdew at St. Angelicus as Fred's guest, Fred's father concludes that, while the Professor doesn't have much hope for the material world, it is nice he thinks so well of Fred. Indeed, the Professor later vows that even if he has to cede intellectual ground and transfer to Oxford--the concept of mass is entering the physics department--he will protect Fred's position. Flowerdew cites Mach for peer support--for regarding the atom as a provisional idea. For 1912, Flowerdew's intellectual stance--although history proved him wrong--made sound scientific sense: none of Einstein's theoretical predictions had yet been confirmed (and could not be tested until the next solar eclipse, in 1918).

Dr. Sage

Dr. Sage is one of the doctors in charge at Blackfriars Hospital (and the Matron, whose concern is the welfare of the patients, is thankful he can't always be on duty). Dr. Sage also runs a hospital in Cambridge, a lunatic asylum. Although the discipline of physics is, at the time of the novel, undergoing a paradigm shift or change in how the world is viewed, the same could not be said for medicine, which is still at the stage of leeches and lozenges (not all that more advanced than the teaching of Galen during the Middle Ages some 500 years earlier). After being fired from her probationary job as a nurse at Blackfriars, the only thing Daisy can think to do is to apply at his Cambridge hospital: Dr. Sage might be a quack, but he does not exploit Daisy.

Holcombe

Holcombe is a demonstrator in the chemistry lab at Cambridge. He first tells Fred that his position as Junior Fellow at St Angelicus leaves him with no choice on the subject of women (whereas choice is itself essential to one's humanity). Holcombe later adds that Fred has no need of meeting "marriageable" women, because being a Junior Fellow at St Angelicus means celibacy. After the courtroom scene, Holcombe tells Fred that Daisy is definitely not of the marriageable class--and to send her his way. It is obviously ironic that he initially writes of choice (in the context of Daisy having so few real choices). He appears little more than a better-educated version of Kelly.

Skippey

Skippey is a student at Jesus College, currently chairing its Disobligers' Society, a debating club. One of the messages Fred opens at the beginning of the novel is from Skippey: his speaker having backed down at the last minute, he wants Fred to take the

affirmative side in a debate about the existence of the soul. Towards the end of the novel, Skippey comes to Fred's rescue, happening by--and helping Fred devise and execute a plan for moving and then dumping Kelly's temporarily unconscious body in the Botanical Gardens.

Objects/Places

St. Angelicus College, Cambridge University

St. Angelicus is distinguished by being among the smallest of the university's colleges--and one founded 500 years earlier by a Catholic pope whose papacy was disputed but did not, conveniently for those seeking to legitimize an alternative pope, die quietly but instead held very public audiences. Although Pope Benedict eventually died of old age in his 90s, a nun had been bribed to poison him using the dried fruits which were his only indulgence. He vomited; she was burned at the stake; his body is later exhumed and decapitated by marauding French soldiers; every meal at St Angelicus concludes with dried fruit.

While gentlemen are typically served their wines and brandies in different rooms, at St Angelicus, because of its size, they are all drunk at the same table. The college has an inner courtyard with an old walnut tree. It is constructed like a fortress (unlike its relatively modern bicycle shack, which is poorly designed and built). One of the more curious features of the college is a tall and narrow gate on its southwest wall: although as old as the college itself, there are no instructions as to its use (or any record of its cost included in the old ledgers). It has been found standing open only twice before the novel began: the first time, in 1423, on the death of Pope Benedict and, the second, in 1869 when the first women's college was--unofficially of course--been allowed to open. The third time it is found open is in 1912, when Daisy comes to the aid of someone in distress: the time she spends inside the college--perhaps 5 minutes--is enough to ensure that she will encounter Fred Fairly, then walking toward the college.

The Rectory

Fred grew up in the Rectory in Blow Halt, where he was known as "Master Freddie" and later "Mr. Fred." Built in 1830, the building stood at the top of a rise. Except for its new back gate--a gift to his father's predecessor--nothing in the Rectory is in good working order (and outside everything is overgrown).

South London

Daisy grew up here, moving often, never rooming twice on the same street. She was accustomed to crowding, too many people with too little space. The smells of her childhood were coal, vinegar, gin, dung, "chloride of lime from the backstreet factories, and baking bread every morning." When Daisy and her mother went to market, it was always to the stalls on the cheap end. When she was 15, Daisy took her first job as a clerk, which meant crossing the Thames twice daily.

The Men's Ward, Blackfriars Hospital

Daisy worked as a Nurse Probationer here: its routines are windows facing the world open an inch and a half and the windows opposite, open 6 inches; apoplectics are placed on their faces and abdominal cases on their backs. Although medical knowledge is still at the "leech" stage, the Matron of the hospital has high standards.

Guestingley Road

The bicycling accident that brought Fred and Daisy together occurred here, almost directly outside Mr. and Mrs. Wrayburn's house.

Dr. Sage's Hospital

In addition to being a resident physician at Blackfriars, Dr. Sage ran his own lunatic asylum in Cambridge.

Themes

Appearances and Realities

The empirical nature of science is contrasted with studying unobservables. There are several types of unobservables in the book: some are scientific theories that haven't or can't be falsified (they are only "comforting weakness" until they are). Another is religious faith (and the host of intangibles accompanying it). As to the former--science, physics in particular--one of the novel's central ironies is the revolutionary turn physics took after Einstein published his special theory of relativity in 1905 (the time of the novel is 1912). The narrator speaks with today's knowledge--Einstein is correct--while one of the novel's characters, Professor Flowerdew, voices the concerns of the physicists who remain unconvinced. Like the real scientist Mach, he urges his colleagues to regard the atom as a "provisional idea." It isn't until the solar eclipse in 1918 that Einstein's theories are empirically tested (it takes months of lab work before the British Royal Society concluded that his predictions have been empirically confirmed or documented, i.e., the calculations based on a photograph of the event offered observable confirmation of what has, until that time, been only a theoretical prediction). As to the latter, religion, there are numerous unobservables: faith itself, people's ideas of souls, gods and even popes.

The unobservables of science and religion are usually depicted as at odds: Fred, a physicist, eschews accepting anything on faith (obviously a different stand than that taken by his father). Dr. Flowerdew--who holds a professorship in Observable Physics--notes that, for centuries, people has believed that Nature or an invisible god has created everything with a purpose in mind (that view is today called "intelligent design"). Physics is also depicted as being internally at odds (as indeed it is at the time: Flowerdew wryly notes that physicists will begin by constructing physical models which, because they won't work, will be replaced with more tractable mathematical expressions (such expressions, being synthetic, are in a sense unobservable). These new physicists will conclude that energy is hard to predict (based on their failures). They'll ultimately conclude that the laws of energy are disorderly and continue postulating ever smaller bits of matter (the former did not happen; the latter has).

Also unobservable is what occurs in physicists' minds: chaos based on faulty premises is what Flowerdew thinks (he follows Rutherford, Planck, and Bohr in both the English and German journals). Another unobservable is luck, simple chance and mischance. Fred rejects the idea that "luck" or fortune can have anything to do with the conduct of inquiry, science. It is, though, luck--in the form of a bicycling accident--that brings Fred and Daisy together (and luck that may bring them back together after the conclusion of the novel).

The Growth of Knowledge

The contrast here is between periods of what Kuhn called "normal"--when knowledge does indeed cumulate--and "revolutionary" science-- when paradigms or ways of seeing the world are overturned: physics certainly goes through a paradigm shift in this period. Professor Flowerdew's position is, for his times, on intellectually solid ground. The dining table discussions at St Angelicus feature then-modern men of science in a college founded by a discredited medieval pope talking about illuminated manuscripts and doors whose purpose could not be fathomed with "medievalists" like Dr. Matthews. Physics is by 1912 beginning a paradigm shift, a change in understanding of fundamental reality (not so medicine and religion).

Medicine is on a different intellectual timeline. Leeches are still the order of the day. Fred tells his father that human anatomy, once completely described, will be completely explained. Medicine, from our vantage point in the present, faced a lengthy uphill cognitive road (it isn't until after, for example, Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, that opthalmologists saw the back of the human eye). In a way, this--medicine being at best physics' cognitive cross-eyed step cousin--is ironic since, in 1848, John Snow stopped a raging London cholera epidemic by removing access to its Broad Street pump (the source of the contagion). It was difficult to refute his theory about the source of the contagion after he stopped the epidemic. In this sense, medicine had an earlier start than physics, which received no empirical confirmation of its world of unobservables until after 1918.

Religion

Flowerdew tells Fred that the "earlier" view, that Nature or an invisible god has created everything with a purpose in mind, has, after all, been widely held for centuries. Most regard religion as a matter of specific beliefs: The Benedictine nun accused of trying to poison the disputed pope was burned at the stake, and Fred's family history contained many heated religious feuds. Nevertheless, he thinks it "simple decency" to tell his father that he no longer takes anything on faith. He remembers the many discussions with his father which ended with him raising his voice and his father lowering his--and countering every intellectual point Fred scored with a religious counterexample. What, he knows his father will ask, will he accept as "evidence"? Fred has no use for the "soul" (and that, perversely, is why Skippey asks him to debate in favor of it at the upcoming meeting of the Disobligers' Society. Here Fred mouths teleological reasons saying if the body has a soul, then the soul has to have a body and grass is green because green is a color pleasing to the human eye). Kelly is aghast when Daisy enters a church, that "a smart girl like her, a nurse" really believed in "that stuff." Dr. Matthews is, on the other hand, dismayed to hear the soul described as something artificial or "made up."

If religion though is defined by deeds, Daisy is the most religious, most compassionate character in the novel (and the one most perversely--she is too poor to have "luck"--punished). During her time as a Nurse Probationer at Blackfriars Hospital, she goes out

of her way, on her only half day off, to do a patient a good deed (an act of kindness for which she lost her job). When, after she returns to Cambridge, she senses Mrs. Wrayburn's distress at all the dirty dishes it takes to maintain Mr. Wrayburn, her intuition is simply practical: she sees a need she could fill in exchange for a room in the attic. When, however, she hears the cry of distress from within the College of St Angelicus, her immediate response is to enter the gate to render assistance (there are no practical consequences that she could see).

Style

Point of View

This novel is told in the third person, from the perspectives of its two protagonists, Fred Fairly and Daisy Saunders. The reader experiences the novel from the point of views of these two primary characters.

Setting

The novel occurs in 1912 Cambridge and London. Fred's rooms are at St Angelicus College in Cambridge (he is one of its Junior Fellows). Daisy grew up in South London (and is close to or has no home during different parts of the novel). A scandalous part of Cambridge is Pett's Hotel, where rooms can be had by the hour. The more generally accepted idea of Cambridge, though, was described by English King James the 1st: "pray at King's, dine at Trinity and study at Jesus" (to which, the narrator notes, he once added and "sleep in peace at Angels").

Language and Meaning

The author's writing style is spartan. She is sardonic, noting, for example, that starlings are "difficult to regulate" (when it comes to enforcing the no women of reproductive age on the grounds of the College of St Angelicus rule). In her initial description of the college, she adds the mewing sound of miscreant kittens and then, describing the college's fortress-like outer wall and crest, adds that a "Day of Judgment will come and Benedict XIII will be shown 'indisputably correct.'" Similarly, she has the learned Professor Flowerdew tell Fred he needn't bother going back to the party, because the chemists will have eaten all the sandwiches. Just so, she describes Fred's father as feeling cheered that the Professor spoke highly of Fred--although he holds out no hope for the material universe.

Structure

This novel is divided into four parts: The seven sections in Part I--Fred's Three Notes, A Few Words about St Angelicus, How Fred Gets His Job in the First Place, Dinner at St Angelicus, At the Rectory, The Disobligers' Society, and Who is Daisy?--are told in Fred's voice. The six sections in Part II--Daisy, The Blackfriars Hospital, The Men's Ward, The Case of James Elder, Kelly, and Daisy Leaves London--are told in Daisy's voice. The three sections in Part III--No Mystery about Daisy's Movements, A Walk in the Country, and A Visit from the Fairlys--are told in both Fred's and Daisy's voices. The six sections in Part IV--Dr. Matthew's' Ghost Story, The Unusual Court Case, Kelly Laid to Rest, Fred's Advice to His Students, At Dr. Sage's Hospital, and The Gate of Angels--are also told in both Fred's and Daisy's voices.

The first part describes Fred's life and how he came to meet Daisy (luck). The second part describes Daisy's life and how she came to Cambridge (desperation). The third part outlines their brief romance and others' response to it (Fred loves his family and Daisy and leaves it to them to sort matters out between themselves). The fourth part begins with the courtroom trial and ends with Daisy being delayed by 5 minutes, long enough for her to encounter Fred walking home from a lecture (luck, perhaps, again: it is only the third time in 500 years that the mysterious gate has been found open).

Quotes

"Thorpe has let us down to-night on the Disobligers' Society. He says he is ill. He calls it influenza. We call it letting us down. It's lucky that you've recovered from your accident, because we want you to speak for us in the debate to-night. The motion is 'that the soul doesn't exist, has never existed, and that it isn't desirable that it should exist.'" Section 1, pg. 14

"Skippey, ignoring both interruptions, went on. 'Fred Fairly holds, as I do, that we have no supernatural protectors or supernatural enemies. All that we can do has to be done by ourselves, and for ourselves, on this earth where we find ourselves placed. Afterwards, I mean after our present bodily life is over, there is nothing, or rather we have no reason and no right to expect anything.'" Section 6, pg. 45

"That meant crossing the river, along with a hundred and fifty thousand other Londoners, twice a day. The journey was compared at that time by sociological observers to a great war or catastrophe in a neighboring land from which the fugitives, forbidden to look back, scurried over the river bridges by any means available to them, only checked by fear of falling underfoot .... when the tram lurched round the corner, drawing up sharply, the crowd rolled onto it like a swarm of bees. You had to attack and be among the first." Section 8, pg. 63

"Over-prescriptions brought drama to the patients' tedious day. Too much antimony made them faint, too much quinine caused buzzing in the ears, too much salicylic acid brought on delirium, too much strychnine made them unable to swallow (and they twitched violently), too much mercury made them dribble, too much iodine made them sneeze uncontrollably, with too much antifebrin their skins turned dusky blue. When they were disinfected internally with carbolic acid their urine became olive green." Section 10, pg. 81

"'You mean you'll pay for one night at a hotel that don't ask no questions,' said Daisy, whose eyes were full of tears. 'Two nights, Daisy, three nights. You want to get used to it. What else can you do? I can't see there's anyone else who wants you. I want you, though, Daisy Saunders. It's nothing.'" Section 13, pg. 100

"She looked down at the sink, loaded down with all that was necessary when a husband had his daily meals in the house. Like most of her friends, she had prayed not to marry a clergyman, a general practitioner, or a university lecturer without a fellowship ... professions that meant luncheon at home." Section 14, pg. 108

"Whatever you do, gentlemen, don't, as scientists, believe you are anything extraordinary. Don't allow yourself for a moment to feel anything like contempt for those whose minds work differently from your own. Their minds in fact don't work differently from your own. Don't tell yourself that their ideas are commonplace. It's very good for an idea to be commonplace." Section 20, pg. 154

Topics for Discussion

Why did Fred feel obliged to help Skippey out? What arguments did Fred advance that he didn't believe? Did Skippey intimate that the first debater was inexperienced or intimidated?

Was Skippey's summary a relatively accurate description of what Fred really believed? Although Fred was annoyed by Skippey' asking him to argue opposite what he believes (with almost no preparation time)--Skippey is a better friend to him than Holcombe. Why? How?

How is Daisy's life like the narrator's description of her twice-daily crossings of the Thames (when she worked as a clerk, before she worked at Blackfriars)?

Why was the knowledge of the physicists--including Professor Flowerdew (whose stance came from knowing too much rather than too little)--so much more practical than that of the physicians?

How do the real choices Daisy have contrast with the goals of the women's suffrage movement? How is what Kelly is proposing different from what Fred proposes later?

Why might Mrs. Wrayburn be more likely to "grow extremely fond" of Daisy than Fred's mother? Why are Fred's sisters more enthusiastic about Daisy than his mother?

What unites the unobservables of physics, medicine and religion?

Whose are the real voices of Cambridge?

Will Fred and Daisy encounter each other on the sidewalk? What will happen next?