

DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON

PILGRIMAGE

with an introduction by Gill Hanscombe

Dimple Hill



VIRAGO

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Title: Dimple Hill: Pilgrimage, Volume 12

Date of first publication: 1938

Author: Dorothy M. Richardson

Date first posted: Aug. 22, 2018

Date last updated: Aug. 22, 2018

Faded Page eBook #20180881

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DIMPLE HILL

**BY
DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON**



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Published 1938.
This edition published by Virago Press 2002.

DIMPLE HILL

TO
JOHN COWPER POWYS

CHAPTER I

Why pounce upon the cathedral? There it stood, amidst its town, awaiting them, three little people about to join the millions over whom in its long life it had cast its shelter and its spell. In strolling about, they would come upon it, see it from various points of view, gradually wear down the barrier between it and themselves, and presently, either together or alone, venture within its doors. But for Florence and Grace there would be no venturing. Boldly, all eyes, they would march in, and immediately begin to poke about amongst its vitals. Privately she decided for going alone, sloping secretly in and seeing and feeling it, as far as her intermittent scepticism allowed, in the way of the ascetic young man, the sight of whom, sitting in the railway carriage aloof and meditative over his missal, had reminded her that they were bound for a cathedral town.

In that moment, abandoning Florence and Grace and the mood of gay unity in which they had all set out upon the suddenly improvised week, of holiday for them and, for herself, the easily spared extension of her few days' visit, she had entered the gateway of her six months' freedom. The task of keeping them entertained lost both its charm and its importance. They became the symbols of all she was leaving, and when, as silently she gazed at the journeying landscape, that group of flaming poppies had darted by, she had commented on them in a phrase addressed to the consciousness of the young man, bringing his eyes across the carriage and,

with them, a vision of the cathedral within whose twilit interior lived a stillness akin to that wherein spirits recognize each other, as she and the young man had recognized each other; although, in order that the recognition might take place, she had precipitately assumed a vestment to which she had no right.

But as the tide of her opposition flowed across the breakfast-table towards Florence now withdrawn into silence, and Grace who had made the suggestion and was awaiting agreement, she recognized it for annoyance with their remembered technique in the handling of excursions. Exactly as on this first morning the town's most prominent feature was rousing them to headlong activity, so on that far-off day whose frustrations could still torment her, they had been moved immediately to toil, through fierce noonday heat, to the church on the high hill, thereby setting at an impossible distance the little valley by the sea that the enchanting toy railway had brought so conveniently near, and whence, serenely, in the cool of the late afternoon, they might have climbed to the church and surveyed its famous brasses with eyes already satisfied.

Because the suggestion had caught her unprepared, just as the charm of the little railway, winding, like an erratic tram-line, at the level of the road, in and out of the scattered hamlets, made way for the charm of the little valley, visible, as they alighted, in the near distance with a sailless windmill on its ridge and, at its feet, the sea not yet hazed by the sun, she had failed not only to state but even to assemble in her own enchanted consciousness the objections to their plan for ruining the day. But when, in the late afternoon, the baked little town still enclosed them and the green valley, unexplored and to be forever regretted, mocked them from afar, it was Florence who had bemoaned their failure to take refuge there

with the lunch-basket whose contents had been consumed, in the silence of exhaustion, amongst the roasted tombstones. And Florence, to-day, would offer no resistance to a planless wandering.

But when, in the hope of making it acceptable to both, she groaned, with the force of an annoyance they would not perceive, and with the expansiveness that never failed to arouse their hope of entertainment, a tribute to the length of days ahead, thus identifying her visibly blissful state with the prospect of spending seven days in their company, the figure of Grace on holiday, miraculously seated at breakfast in strange lodgings and yet placidly moored within her accustomed enclosure, became a summary that removed all desire to influence her movements.

There she sat, dutifully pondering her morning's adventure, radiating the serenity born of her unreflective acceptance of all the orthodoxies, and fostered by a security that supported her belief in the indefinite persistence of her enclosed world. And this it was, just this serene, unquestioning security, so clearly revealed by the unaccustomed surroundings as the basis of her existence, that had made the Banbury Park villa, ever since her suppliant affection had first drawn one hither, so deeply restorative. On countless week-end visits, on Christmas Eves, and at Easter and Whitsun holidays, reaching their remote doorstep with what had seemed the last of one's strength, one had punctually felt, hearing the tick-tock of footsteps approaching along the tiled passage and seeing the door open upon one or other of them, or upon all three come eagerly out to welcome, the beginnings of renewal and the ability to share, if only for the first evening, as a beatific convalescent, the family relish, rich and racy, of the ritual of daily life and its recurrent rewards that brought, to each moment of the day and

into each corner of the rather dark small house, the radiance of festival achieved or imminent.

So complete on each occasion was the transference from weariness and lonely responsibility to surroundedness and irresponsible ease, that with the resounding slam of the little front door, accompanied by the metallic, evocative rattle of its empty letter-box, her daily life became a past upon which no future opened. To return, towards the end of the visit, and to offer, seen afar in clear focus, with its tints refreshed and its features newly attractive, in the midst of some too-prolonged excursion amidst incidents brought forth for her inspection from where they lay recorded in terms she could not accept, as if in answer to her need for escape from a stereotyped universe, a sudden incredible refuge.

So that her response, when the eagerly mingled voices died away and the enclosed Sunday twilight vibrated with the demand for it, radiated joy whose source remained unsuspected; and the small shock of her voice, bringing into the room the present whence she had been looking into their past, abruptly restored to them the sense of their surroundings and of the rapidly fading light, calling for movement and for the zestful introduction of the evening portion of the long, shared day. But in the moment before the globes of patterned, tinted gas-light drove the afternoon into the past, the dim radiance from outdoors, since now she was seeing it from the centre to which she had returned, no longer filtered in upon endurance but signalled, bringing joy, from its own vast distances; and when she and Grace were left alone, all that she had told in response to gently eager questioning, was lit, for herself as well as for Grace, by an unquenchable radiance.

No one else, sitting there at the table, could embody so long a stretch of the past. All the years from Wordsworth House

days onwards lay embalmed in the treasure-house of Grace's faithful memory. Inseparable, too, from the sight of her, a visible background of dissolving views freed from their anchorage in space and time, was Grace's home, in the stateliest of whose upper rooms the whole of one's life, as known to oneself, was stored up.

Other guest-rooms, in houses sheltering a ceaseless conflict of ideas, so that nothing within them seemed quite real and no one currently alive, reverberated, when one reached them at the end of swiftly passing evenings, with various kinds of sound and fury or with the echoes of a keyed-up gaiety to be continued on the morrow. So that whatever was contemplated in the upstairs solitude, whether the world at large or one's own life within it, looked both dreary and meaningless.

But in the stately, old-fashioned spare room at Banbury Park, itself a retreat from the superficially dynamic world of external change and new ideas, even down to the way it owed its deep refreshingness to continuous zestful housewifery and the gleam on its furniture to methodical hand-polishing, one had seen one's life from afar, whether with quiet or with fevered mind, as part of a continuous reality whose challenge came, directly, to oneself and whose hidden meaning, just because at times it was so unbearably disturbing, was secure and was what at other times made each distant detail suddenly miraculous. From no other spare room could she have seen the world as it had opened before her in that first moment of realized freedom. With no other companions could she have remained, throughout the days preceding this setting forth, with all her surface being sound asleep and her essential self looking forth upon its own, so long withheld and now at last accessible.

Sitting there unchanged, the always gentle recipient of her

being, Grace innocently reproached her for ever having felt that the descent upon Banbury Park would be a ludicrously humiliating end to the weeks of anticipation during which her departure had remained, alluringly featureless, upon the horizon. The eager invitation, taking her by surprise in the midst of her preparations, had reminded her of the necessity of selecting a destination. But long before her shopping was finished and the glossy new cabin-trunk and hat-box, incredible symbols of freedom, were beginning to fill up, she had realized that in no other spot on earth could she so deeply savour the bouquet of her release. Arriving on their doorstep late at night, she had been too weary to feel the bliss of escape. But when in the morning, as she stood, ready to go downstairs, before the wide mirror in which hitherto had been reflected her image entangled with a thousand undetachable associations, she saw only her solitary self, there had come that all-transfiguring moment during which in the depth of her being she had parted company with that self, masquerading under various guises, with whom she had gone about ever since leaving home, and joined company with the self she had known long ago.

The little rose-buds of the Limoges ware on the dressing-table came vividly to life, for ever memorable. Strong and cool, with a strength that welled up unobstructed from the roots of her being, and a coolness that was one with the morning freshness of the little garden towards which the Limoges roses had turned her eyes, she had swung to the tips of her toes, as if to come level with the being within her outrunning all her faculties to greet the illimitable life ahead. And as she went downstairs, the thought returned that had so often beaten gladly to and fro while her release was delayed from day to day by the need to leave everything in order and

the timid new secretary more or less launched upon her hazardous career: it was still only July. Never, since childhood, had she known freedom in July.

‘All right, Grace,’ she said, no longer feeling them jailers about to march her methodically round and round a prison yard, but rather embodiments of the past, prolongers of the anticipation of the ocean of beatitude wherein, at the end of this short week, she would be ready to plunge; alone. ‘You shall go and examine the inside of the cathedral and I will stand about outside, and stare.’

Florence’s accepting giggle reminded her how easily the two of them could be kept entertained and how, while day by day they were occupied with their objects of interest, she would be able to wander, near at hand, alone. It took her eyes across the table, at that moment richly irradiated by a shaft of sunlight, town sunlight, densely golden, to meet those of Florence and find there the penetrating gaze she had so often encountered in turning suddenly toward her from the midst of some lively to and fro of narrative and response at the Banbury Park dinner-table. But to-day, instead of sinking back into her dark eyes the moment Florence knew it to be observed, it remained, transforming the occasion, making it as deep and as interminable as itself.

‘I could spend a year staring,’ she quoted automatically, and for a moment took refuge in Kenneth Street, years ago, with Mag and Jan, in whose presence the words had first been put together. Returning from this vain flight, she found Florence’s gaze, veiled now by a scorn so lively as to lift a corner of her delicate mouth, still fixed upon her. ‘Couldn’t you?’ she demanded, unable to banish from the insincerely ingratiating tone the tremor of self-consciousness.

‘I’ve never thought about it,’ said Florence. Huskily, with

dropped eyelids, and cheeks flooded with scarlet: shame, of self-betrayal, or for one's attempt to escape a challenge.

'I'm never going to think any more,' said Miriam, and felt the words become true as she spoke them, and saw in the far distance the sunlit scene, approaching. But between her and her bourne, obstinately barring the way, stood the figure of Florence, the one figure, of all those set intimately near her in the past, from whom she had been held away by a barrier she had no desire to shift. Incredulously inquiring of the form seated across the way, ensconced as if forever, or at least until its challenge should have been met, in a strange room grown suddenly, leeringly familiar, Miriam found the eyes once more upon her, unchanged, as if they had never left her face.

'You never worry about anything, do you, Miriam?' Florence's judgment, accumulated during the years and at last, and only because, for the first time, one was not her guest, coming easefully forth; to remain, unless now it could be dislodged or in some way transformed, a marginal note, set by a disinterested observer forever against one's own version of one's record at Banbury Park. Stung into defence, Miriam turned from Florence's disturbingly half-true picture of herself as a fickle, insincere, easy-going creature evading all issues, to that of the kind of young woman Florence would approve: mature, calculating, making terms with circumstance, planning to outwit it, playing for security. Facing back to Florence's demand for worry, she hit out:

'There's nothing, really, to worry about. I mean to worry about *completely*, or we should all be mad.'

Florence was pulled up, puzzled. A little ashamed of her attack, a little frightened and ready to believe one's profanity accountable by something she did not understand and ought, perhaps, to respect.

‘Well, let’s go, Miriam darling. It’s past ten, already.’

Stretching her arms, punching, with closed fists, right and left into the unresisting air, she let Grace’s phrase, for her so meaningless with its accent on the passage of time, go to and fro in her mind, erasing the features of the strange collision with an unknown Florence.

‘Come along, my sweet,’ murmured Grace, at her side now, urgent and responsible.

‘Had we any napkin rings?’ she inquired, to gain a moment for greeting, in solitude whatever lay ahead of this week of small comings and goings.

‘Here’s yours, Miriam.’ Florence spoke hurriedly and was handing the veined and shiny bone ring with grave, eager glance, as if it were valuable property she delighted to find and restore. ‘Ought we to take umbrellas?’ On the last word her voice was again husky, but this time with the huskiness of her irritable breathing apparatus, stirred by mirth unsure of itself but ready, if encouraged, to break forth into the asthmatic laughter that would fill her eyes with tears.

‘Is Florence *quite* insane?’ demanded Miriam, glaring into space and listening, her guilty heart throbbing its tribute to a Florence content to be puzzled, willing to withdraw her condemnation and credit it to her own insufficiency, for the laughter belonging to the ancient jest brought forth as a peace-offering.

CHAPTER II

The little old woman, murmuring an almost inaudible good morning, set down what she had brought, and turned away without having once raised her eyes above the level of the table.

The greeting Miriam had intended to smile across the room the moment the expressionless face should turn her way was left unspent, and pity, rising as the dismal figure turned away towards the door, gave way, the moment the door was closed, to a gleeful self-congratulation. The impression received during the first queer interview, as she stood on the door-step shouting her few questions and responses, was blessedly confirmed. Like the ancient thick-walled house, whose air of quiet contemplation she shared, the old woman had turned her back upon the world. Speaking as if for years speech had been unfamiliar, yet serenely, without either the emphasis or the anxious or resentful accents of the deaf, she had seemed to offer, as her contribution to the world she faced at her front door, her own serenity. Her low, effortless monotone, her avoidance of all but the necessary minimum of interchange, had invited one to be as remote as herself. Her affliction would be a cloak, a protection from indoor exposure, the only exposure it is usually impossible to evade. She was a guardian, making perfect this arrival into solitude.

With her disappearance humanity vanished, leaving no echo within the room, making no break between to-day and last night's darkness in whose unfathomable depths she had lain

thankfully awake—no sound but the intermittent breathing of the wind in the wide chimney, the slight stirring of the window-curtains, as if, to call her attention to the stillness, ghostly fingers gently touched them—until the sudden coming of unsummoned sleep and the morning's soft grey radiance.

Sitting down to breakfast, she looked out at last across the desolate scene invisible last night, so powerfully drawing her to itself when first she had come upon it, standing with the girls at the turning of the road from the village, that immediately she had put it away, saying no word, hoping they did not find it worth comment, turning aside and saying hurriedly that if the old grey house took lodgers she would go and stay in it, and seeing again, set for ever indelibly within, the sudden view of the house and its background of mud-flats and grey sky.

‘Oh, Miriam dear, would you? It looks so dreary!’

‘Grey, yes, I'm English.’ And she had looked at them, finding them small and far away, seeking words to keep things going, to distract their attention from her sudden absence, the completeness with which in that moment the week had come to an end and she had left their company. ‘So is O'Hara. Isn't she?’ For Florence, though as little able as Grace to understand a passion for this grey scene, would gladly do her utmost towards convincing herself of its perfection. And now, singled out because her penetration was the more to be dreaded, she flushed with deep pleasure and drew near, her eyes full of that half-shy, half-envious supplication that always seemed to say: ‘If only you would recognize it, I am far more attractive than Grace.’

Returned from their first glance at the scene as it showed from the house which before had been part of it and now, itself only a window, left it empty, a vast expanse ending in a

wedge-shaped ridge low against the low sky, her eyes sped once more across the flats, now beginning to disappear beneath slow sea-water, and reached the misty ridge and found trees there, looking across at her from their far distance so intently that she was moved to set down the thin little old spoon raised to crack the shell of the egg whose surface, in the unimpeded light, wore so soft a bloom. Last week's room, where she and the girls had sat at breakfast feeling themselves ensconced so far away from the world, was in a city deep and dark, filled with human darkness.

'Trees,' she said, aloud.

Secret tears surprised her, welling spontaneously up from where for so long they must have been waiting to flow forth, and now finding their course obstructed by the smile risen to greet their message: for the first time since childhood she was alone with summer trees. There they were, at hand day and night for as long as she chose, no longer held off by the wistfulness with which she had gazed in the company of others, imploring them to yield their secret, known long ago. With the sea, she had kept her old self-losing intimacy. And with stars, and the depths of the sky. But all these were impersonal. And the trees of London, even while, surrounded by streets, they preserved their secret being, were a little social and sophisticated. But these trees across the way, alone and silent like the woodlands she had passed through with parties whose talking voices kept their own world about them, looked into the depths of her, the unchanged depths awaiting them since childhood.

Moving the things upon the table to make room for her elbows, she looked across again and found the trees further off and a little averted; suggesting that she should finish her meal and join them in the open.

The need to escape from the rain-sodden grassy levels about the house carried her to the only refuge in sight, a muddy lane hiding all she had come out to see. Once within it, she hesitated, tempted to turn back, retire to the house and the window-framed view, and wait for the afternoon and the ebb of the tide. Here, in the lane, she had the illusion of being in suburbia with all the world at hand. Away behind, there could well be the ragged edges of building plots and, at the lane's end, a sophisticated village with a good service of buses to town. The birdless, flowerless hedges looked cowed; outskirts hedges accustomed to traffic and unable, in its intervals, to recover their wealth and assert their ancient power.

No country scene could be more unlike the destination she had pictured herself reaching, by some unpondered route, immediately on leaving town. All these weeks it had accompanied her, filling every background, richly reflected into the inner twilight of her being: vast echoing woodlands, their green alleys and sunlit clearings traversed by streams with flowery banks and, in between, green open country, unfenced and uninhabited, beneath high blue skies. Still, it was a lane, with its own little quality, however surrounded. The short stretch left behind lay now between her and all that her eyes had made her own. Ahead, an indefinite length of the tame corridor asserted its strangeness and independence, bringing self-consciousness, embarrassing her gait by drawing her attention to its surprising weakness, of which, in strolling about with the girls, she had been unaware.

And now, this chastening realization was transforming the dull indifferent lane to an actively benevolent hospice. Feeling like a phantom, needing all her strength to keep upright and

progressing amongst the gentle, powerful presences all about her, in the mud, a healing salve beneath her feet of mingled earth and rain, in the dismal hedges, drenched and dulled by the same rain, giving a rank, sweet fragrance to the air beneath a grey sky pressing so low as to be visible without an upward glance, she smiled a wan secret greeting towards these kindly witnesses of her disarray and set herself to her task, the only task now demanded of her, to press forward through the soft, dense south-coast air that was a tangible substance, in-pouring, presently to steady her footsteps and bring poise to her body.

There would be barely time to cross the flats and get back again before the in-coming tide should sweep over the little causeway. To-morrow, the causeway would be clear only in the morning. And the morning belonged to the lane and to the anticipation of walking, in the afternoon, in the face of the wind across the vacated floor of the sea, whose return belonged to the evening and the sound of its bells to the night.

For this afternoon, what tryst could one make? To go, leaving the edge of the world, up the road to the village, would be to move away from enchantment. Away up there, amongst the cottages, with the sea left behind, the air would be thin and dry. There would be people. Village people, circling unaware. She remembered the ancient churchyard, where Florence had remarked that every one in the parish lived to be ninety. But to prowl there would be to step back into last week, the other side of eternity. To go anywhere, yet, away from this corner where strength had begun to return, would be to leave that strength behind.

To-day the sheen upon the buttercups was dry; their own live varnish. And the grass, though still, under the low grey sky, a dull deep green, was polished and dry. Dry enough to sit upon, for the sand had drawn away the rain, making available this handy small slope dotted with flowers and out of sight of all but the sea and the ridge. Summery, like the lane this morning, dried and recovering its frilliness, preparing for people who were looking forward to August. Already belonging, together with the tree-trimmed ridge and the silky emerald weed on the mud-flats at low tide, to summer visitors. This magic angle at the edge of the world, seeming at first so desolate and so unknown, a solitude indefinitely available, was a cherished spot, busily ripening for those who knew it well.

August visitors, still held afar by a space of endless days and nights. Before they could arrive, she would be away within the wooded distances of her first vision, with August only at its beginning and, behind it, still inconceivably far away, September that for years had been the whole of summer, its glad beginning and its mournful end. And, behind September, untold months.

Only to-day had the possibility of reading in the open suggested itself. Looking back, she could recall no outdoor reading, save in the Bonnycliff garden, with people always at hand or imminent, and the echoes of conversation just past, and the certainty of more conversation just ahead, preventing all-forgetful absorption. But with infinite hours available, not a moment need be lost.

Opening the book at random, she heard the voice of Michael, and saw his face, lifted, its grave eyes fixed on hers to hold her attention: 'You will, I assure you, find here not only a

most-admirable stating of the thinkings of your Emerson, but also a most-clear presentation of the world-view depending therefrom. Believe me it is a good book. You will see. The fellow has even something of Spinoza.'

Remaining for years untouched, it had been packed only because her intention of reading it, still faintly alive, had been roused from its lethargy by the prospect of leisure. Everything coming from Michael had been good; even the alien unacceptables. 'Your great Buckle, the first to make a really thought-filled and perceptive history of civilization. You shall immediately read this author. It is indeed most-strange that in your country he is relatively unknown; and good that your Grant Richards should have the inspiration to publish at minimum buying-cost these most-nice little pocket volumes.' ... 'Yes, I can possibly agree in a manner that, being English, the English themselves have no great *need* of this man. But every Russian student knows him. More perhaps than any other one man save Tolstoy, is he the bible of the Russian intelligentsia, creating revolutionaries by showing that only in those countries which have escaped from religious and political despotisms has civilization been able to develop.' Mill's *Influence of Women*, proclaiming women as the sustainers and preservers of inductive reasoning. Tolstoy? Shedding darkness as well as light. Sad, shadowed sunlight, Turgenieff. Perfection. But enclosed, as all great novelists seem to be, in a world of people. People related only to each other. Human drama, in a resounding box. Or under a silent sky.

Something was pressing eagerly up beneath the realization of being blessedly free to keep the printed page awaiting full attention for as long as she liked: Raskolnikov. Boxed in, but differently. Travelling every moment deeper and deeper into

darkness; but a strange Russian darkness, irradiated. Dostoievski does not *judge* his characters? Whatever, wherever, they are, one feels light somehow present in and about them; irradiating. *Schuld und Sühne*. German translations are in general very faithful and good, Michael had said. *Guilt and Redemption*, much more Dostoievski's meaning than *Crime and Punishment*, suggesting a handbook of jurisprudence.

Again the book slipped askew, drawing her attention to the grassy slope, this afternoon's gift, already strange and remote and needing fresh recognition, upon which the small book lay between her propped elbows. Rolling over, she sat up, seeing again the world that had vanished in the middle of the chapter with Michael bringing up the rear, bowing as he made way for his book, smiling as he swept round to depart on the end of his bow, his most courtly, ambassadorial smile, with a triumphant what-did-I-tell-you in his eyes and at the up-curving corners of his Jewish mouth.

Hypo had implied that the prestige of these last-century figures was at once enviable and beyond their deserts.

'But Emerson saw *everything*. The outside, as well as the inside things you don't believe in.'

'Saw life steadily and saw it whole,' he said instantly, with his jest-greeting grin. 'Yes, life in those spacious days stood still enough to be looked at, comfortably, from solidly upholstered arm-chairs. Everything was known and nothing was ever going to happen any more. The stillness, dear Miriam, was so deep that a book appeared almost *audibly*. There was no end of space for it to expand in and it did its own publicity, multiplying itself across the literate regions of the globe. All these chaps, you know, your Arnolds and Emersons and Carlyles, all the prominent men in that stagnant old world,

had no *end* of a show. There they sat, a few figures, enthroned and impregnable; voicing profundities. No one will ever get such a show again.'

The spaciousness, he felt, had been unfairly squandered on the wrong people. For him, their profundities, going the round uncensored by science, were nothing more than complacent, luxurious flatulence, disguised in leisurely, elegant phraseology.

But was Emerson ever consciously a great man? He could lose himself watching the grass grow, and would never have called delight in the mere fact of existence 'a turnip emotion.' He saw that commerce was dishonest and calculating, but accepted the market-place as well as the shrine, while Hypo detested the one and suspected the other. But Emerson, with a private income and a mystical consciousness, remained unperturbed.

A stately house, within the serene immensity of New England, and all his needs supplied, he was for ever free, once he had decided that the sacraments were a gracious ceremonial and retired upon a life of cultured contemplation, to read and meditate and exchange long, leisurely letters with other meditators all over the world. A slender, but not an austere figure, arm-chaired, behind whose rather hawk-like profile sat the determination to exclude all but accredited invaders and remain, thought in hand, aloof from even his nearest relatives. Detached, in order to be able to focus. Rising, moving across the room to a cliff of books, taking down a volume, reading, with held-in eagerness, a swiftly discovered passage, replacing the book and turning again towards the well-known chair, his place on the invisible battle-field, pausing on the way, window-lit, to gaze nowhere, with thin, flexible lips firmly set, below keen eyes smiling delighted welcome for a thought-link

forming itself within the serenely tumultuous mind.

Did he keep it in one place, or did he move from room to room the book wherein he set down, under appropriate headings, the crystallizations of his thought the moment they appeared, until there stood, ready to hand, the material of the essays?

Hypo would approve that cunning little trick. 'Put that down, Miriam. Don't forget. One of the most important, perhaps, next to clear thinking, *the* most important of the permanent responsibilities of the writer is the business of catching himself at his best. Nothing, *nothing*, should be allowed to stand in the way of that. Exalted and luminous moments may occur unexpectedly. But you'll find, if you keep an eye on yourself, that certain circumstances are particularly favourable to the precipitation of felicitous phrases. The meditative moments before sleep, for example, or on waking, after a good night. Then there are the valuable precipitates one finds in one's mind on waking in the small hours. Always have pad and pen at hand, to catch these things as they fall. Talking can be creative, too. Lots of good things are struck off in talk. After-tea talk, for example. That's why writers retire suddenly to their studies.'

Yet Mrs Boole finds harmful, both to the giver and to the recipient, the direct expression, whether in speech or in writing, of a deeply moving thought; believes one should allow it to pass into one's being and there work itself out.

'Ah yes, my dear,' pater had said immediately, 'Emerson is for the young. Now when I was a young man of thirty ...'

Because I was trying to imagine what it must be to look

back on thirty as youth, his repudiation sank into me without resistance, and I forgot to remind myself that he still, after a lifetime as a physicist, believes in direct intuitive perception. How can't there be direct perception of ultimate reality? How could we perceive even ourselves, if we did not somehow precede what we are?

Turning back to the early pages to discover the author's name, she became aware of her surroundings and of herself once more peering forgetfully into a book, seeking light amongst recorded thoughts. Yet those bringing her the greatest happiness, the most blissfully reassuring confirmations, had been found in the books of men who, professing thought and its expression to be secondary activities, had nevertheless spent their lives thinking and setting down their thoughts. Precipitating doctrine. If they really believed what they so marvellously expressed, would they go on turning out elegant books?

Returning to her chapter, once more indifferent as to the author's name, she read, glancingly, from phrase to phrase, losing threads when quotations from the essays brought back the surroundings wherein they had become inhabitants of her consciousness; and presently found the page clearer, the text blacker, and looked up to see the sky grown high. Behind the thinned clouds, a radiance waited to break through. For how long had she sat here, travelling again all over Emerson's world, finding again its reassurances, the stronger for being given back to her in phrases that were more directly powerful than Emerson's, although dependent upon his inspiration, because they were less mannered, and free from the haunting

shadow lying over the page the moment one returned to it from a pause filled with the eager movement of delighted recognition: of sadness, nostalgia for an essential something missing from Emerson's scheme, whose absence left one alone with serenely burning intellectual luminosities in a universe whose centre was for ever invisible and inaccessible. Listening within its silence, one heard only his poetic voice, moving from pitch to pitch, persuasively, logically, almost relentlessly optimistic.

A familiar quotation, one that for years she had carried about like an amulet and in the conflict of ideas had long since forgotten, appeared upon the page in a context that had not prepared her for its coming. Before she could place it or recall the conclusion towards which it had always been a point of departure, it had struck down through her and vanished, leaving only the shock it had brought, a physical shock passing through her body, carrying with it all she knew and was, so that she found herself looking up to take astonished counsel with her forgotten surroundings and discovering, upon the upper foliage of a group of trees in the dense mass at the far end of the ridge, a patch of bright colour in a golden light so vivid that for a moment she seemed to discern, as if they were quite near, each of the varnished leaves. Risen to her feet, she found the radiant patch more distant and less bright, a small splash of brilliant colour such as she had seen a thousand times before, picked out from a spread of dark tree-tops by a ray of haze-screened, shadowless sunlight. But the rapture that had seized and filled her emptied being at the first sight of it still throbbed to and fro between herself and that far point upon the

ridge, and still she felt the sudden challenge of that near, clear vision, like a signal calling for response; and like a smile, of amusement over her surprise.

‘I know,’ she heard herself exclaim towards the outspread scene whose grey light could no longer deceive. ‘At last I *know!* I have seen the smile of God. Sly smile.’ Urging with tremulously apologetic fingers the book that with such faithful punctuality had served its turn, out of sight into a convenient pocket, she saw upon the jocund, sympathetically listening grass-blades at her feet a vestige of the vanished radiance and looked thence into her mind and found there, bathed in its full light, the far-off forgotten world from which she had fled and, with a last glance at the sunlit trees, turned to run and seek it there.

Joy checked and held her as she flew up the rising ground, stilled for a moment her craving for the sight of a human form, turned her running to a dance, swung her arms skywards to wave to the rhythm of her dance and pull upon the very air that it might lift her.

Scarcely touched, the upturned faces of the many flowers took no harm.

Approaching the solitary house, she went quietly. Between her and the luminous human multitude welcoming her from far, familiar surroundings grown as new and as strange as was every step of this oft-trodden little pathway, between her and her man, the unknown sharer of the transfigured earthly life, quietly going his way amongst those distant friends, there waited in the battered old house, as within a shrine, the first of the new, heaven-lit humanity, a part of her own being, confidently approaching its end.

‘Yes, he’s doing well, my grandson. He’s in the cathedral choir.’

The remembered, bustling life of the sleepy old town, clamorous in its market-place and narrow, resounding streets, invading the small, quiet room, robbed it of its ancient peace. But when again Miriam turned to consult the old lady’s eyes she found in their depths a warmth that was not all pride in the satisfactory grandson, and the room’s deep peace returned as she exchanged with Mrs Peebles a shy, appreciative smile.

With everything on the table, and the tea by this time thoroughly infused, the old lady was feeling it was time for her to disappear. But before she went, moving soundlessly with her remote, sleep-walking air, she bent to give the tea-cosy a small, adjusting pat; a silent sign, a tribute to their meeting.

Just having stood there, without any *manner* for the old lady, remaining relaxed as if alone, rather than keyed up to sustain an invasion, had been enough. The moment she had come in with her laden tray and found one standing unarmed and available, though not even looking her way, Mrs Peebles had known the barriers were down.

During the second rustling subsidence of the congregation, she sought relief from her uneasy solitude in the memory of her one visit to a Quaker meeting, recalling the sense of release and of home-coming in the unanimous unembarrassed stillness, her longing, as she had sat breathing in the vitalizing atmosphere produced by these people gathered together to submit themselves communally to the influence ruling their individual lives, to exchange her status of visitor from another world for that of one born amongst them. Perhaps it was the

completeness of that one experience that had made her so easily forget it and fail to seek a renewal.

During the reading of the first lesson, she recalled her regret when at last one after another of the gathered Friends had broken into speech, remembering particularly a dapper little man who had delivered a lecturette on natural science and an old man who had prayed, simply, in broken phrases that seemed to carry away into the presence of a healing sympathizer, the woes of all the world, and how his voice had suddenly acquired volume until it was howling, into the ear of a far-distant Deity, Old Testament descriptions of Jehovah.

And it was the absence, here in church, of intervals of stillness that was preventing the sense of unity and home-coming.

Meeting, as she came through the porch only a few moments after it had occurred to her to seek the church, the familiar dense mustiness coming forth to blend with the outer air, she had been back for a moment in her childhood's glad sense of two interdependent worlds, each discoverable at the heart of the other. But when she stood at the aisle corner of the pew into which she had been shown, she felt even weaker and more exposed than in first confronting the silent presences in the little lane, and had wondered with the available edge of her mind whether this feebleness were the result of the shock of immersion in a remembered world and the discovery that this immersion was of the body only, while her spirit sought in vain here for a home for the joy of yesterday; gasping, almost, for breath in the heavy atmosphere wherein these subdued people were going through their performances, under the leadership of the parson, an automaton with an assumed voice and accent, and a mind tethered elsewhere.

During the sermon, her mind flew, seeking, amongst the

recognizable types whose faces and bearings had impressed themselves during her first swift survey. Tranquil, unquestioning 'church people,' finding within the strongholds of their orthodoxy both comfort and peace. Most of them loved the grey old church, the casket of their religion, whence one day they would depart for the last time bound for a heaven where still would be heard the language of the English Bible and Collects, the music of Purcell and Hopkins, Barnby and Smart, and the singing of hymns, Ancient and Modern. She felt nothing of her old desire to smash their complacency, to make them realize the unfoundedness of most of their assumptions and the instability of the privileges they took for granted. Only a blind longing for admission into the changeless centre of their enclosed world, the dwelling-place of the urbanity that made the sons of these people, scattered all over the earth, the pioneers of a world-club in a manner unattainable by the angry social reformers.

CHAPTER III

The worlds from which one after another she had retreated, gathered round her redeemed from bondage to time and place, each, now, offering a brimming cup her unsteady hands had been unable to hold, each showing as a most desirable dwelling-place. And this desirability was not quite what Lucie Duclaux had meant when she had said, sitting in her lean grey cloak, with her narrow feet on the kettle and her lace-trimmed toque aslant above her rational eyes, that she could now live anywhere and with anybody; meaning she believed herself to have mastered the art of managing people and steering clear of open collisions. The desire to commit oneself came from the sense of having, at last, an available identity.

And even now, though she could imagine herself built into Fräulein Pfaff's school, tolerantly collaborating with her in handling successive drafts of girls from prosperous English families and, in the end, taking over the school herself; or staying deedily on with the Pernes and becoming, at last, approximately, a modern Perne; or even staying with the Corries until she had learned their world and become a flexible part of it; and finding, in any one of these careers, each moment full to the brim; and though yesterday she had been able wistfully to imagine herself, at fifty, a serene, stout Mrs Michael with grown children and a husband equally stout and serene, it was an immense relief to watch Michael move away at last beyond recall.

This first batch of letters must have lain for days in those lodgings before going on to Banbury Park to be forwarded together with the rest. Sorting them according to their dates, she read them once more and saw, hovering in the background of the scenes they evoked, the figure of Amabel's elder brother, the immediate progenitor of the little drama, unconscious both of his handiwork and of his symbolic significance. There he stood, far away in the unimaginable distances of India, tall and handsome, wealthy and secure, watching the London life of the babe who had toddled at his side in a sun-bonnet during the last of his Oxford vacs; amiably tolerating her foolishness in taking up with 'the shrieking sisterhood,' regarding it as the sowing of a harmless oat whose growth would be cut off for good and all when, at the end of his next leave, he carried the adored small girl, now his proudest and most cherished possession, back with him to Simla. Taking her part meanwhile. Coming to the rescue when the rest of the family, going up in flames with one accord, made her penniless and ordered her home, with the modest allowance that had made possible her full, rich life at Tansley Street. Until he heard she had achieved Holloway. Then the horrible change, justifying Hypo on the subject of the conventions: 'Don't forget, Miriam, that Mrs Grundy is a man. Always has been. Every father, every brother, every husband, every man born upon this unhappy planet, is a potential Mrs Grundy.' And leaving Amabel in the hands of her family, a beggar sentenced to imprisonment, with a generous dress allowance, either at home or in Simla, until she should marry.

With a borrowed railway fare, she had fled back to London. And found this queer, new tea-shop on the very first day.

'You see your Amabel, rather scared, but oh, believe me, thumping with happiness, her nose to the window-pane. The

shop was empty, meaning, I know now, that the waitresses were doing the morning jobs in the kitchen part. Behind the counter, a woman watching a kitten, *on* the counter, lapping milk as if she, I mean the woman, who had her elbows amongst the buns and rather gorgeous red hair, never did and never would have anything much else to do. I tilted my hat at a better angle, the little one you like, with the one rose that you said brought to life my check frock, yes, the blue and white one with the little frills—you see me?—took a deep breath and swam in. “Good morning. Do you happen to want a waitress?” Mira, even with my deep breath I was breathless, with a sort of unexpected horror. *A really* awful moment to get to the other side of. She said “I might!” My dear, she’s Irish, and before we’d done talking I was one of her waitresses, we found. It’s in the Strand. They have another in Piccadilly. Quite new, and rather like that place in Baker Street your Mr Hancock found so embarrassing to sit still and be waited on by ladies in. But rather less refeened. No palms. Striped, satiny wall-paper and tub-chairs. She’s a lady. Her crockery needs to be seen to be believed. And so are most of the waitresses. And thank God there’s not an atom of that lady-pluckily-gone-into-business-and-isn’t-it-fun-and-don’t-I-do-it-charmingly atmosphere. We are, I tell you, *chic*. Remote, therefore, as well as *gai*. We wear lilac gingham and high heels. Before the lunch rush, if you can believe, we have—whiskies and sodas. I’m the youngest as well as the newest and they make me wait on Mr Raphael Phayre, who comes here regularly, almost every day. They all detest him and, considering his books, he is really rather a remarkable old bird. Brings various ladies. One day, he was accompanied only by a satin slipper, which he posed, on the table, while he had his tea. One can’t exactly mother him, nor, quite, laugh at him. There’s something venerable. Pathétique.

He told me, rather charmingly, I might have sat to Rossetti if I'd been born a few decades earlier: "His loss, my dear young lady, his abominable loss."

The thought of her there irradiated the Strand, enriching its daylight and bringing meadow coolness into its fevered commercial atmosphere. And even into Flaxman's.... 'Mrs Bailey was sweet when I gave up my room. Refused to let me pay for my weeks away, and would have let me have your old garret. But Flaxman's is cheaper. Top attic, five bob, in the next house to your old rooms. Yeats is still opposite. A landlady quite mad, but a darling. Has a herd of gawky fowls in the back yard, all with names. Occasionally there's an egg, but most of them are bald and doddering. She keeps them till they die of old age. I am *chez moi, sous les toits et le ciel*. I adore it. I've put geraniums on the sill.'

And in that far-away, troublous London, the abode, for oneself, of so many frayed, loose ends, at this moment and for ever Michael was safely within Amabel's all-penetrating radiance. Did he realize, would he in a lifetime learn to realize, even half of his amazing good fortune? 'Miriam, even now is it too late? To sit with you for an hour, to hold your hand and see your eyes, is more to me than a lifetime with this charming girl.' For the present he believed this and suffered in believing. The Russian in him believed it, knew, in spite of his Jewish philosophy, something of the unfathomable depths in each individual, unique and irreplaceable, making it forever impossible to substitute one person for another, or to lose the life existing between two who have experienced prolonged association. And the Jew in him so far saw Amabel only as charmingly qualified to fulfil what he still regarded as the larger aspect, the only continuing aspect of himself, his destiny as a part of his 'race,' the abstraction he and his like so

strangely conceived as alive, immortal, sacred, and at the same time as consisting of dead and dying particles with no depth of life in them, mere husks. 'The whole, Miriam, is greater than the parts.' That had sounded unanswerable. But now I see the catch in the metaphor. Too late to make it clear to Michael. Amabel, indirectly, without reasoning, will shake his rationalism.

Are all the blind alleys and insufficiencies of masculine thought created by their way of thinking in propositions, using inapplicable metaphors? 'See these silent wonderful.' Are all coherent words, in varying measure, evidence of failure?

Very rationally, presenting himself at the evocative door with, poor darling, that defiantly songful expression looking out at one from the student photographs and still inhabiting his face whenever he braced himself to a difficult undertaking, he sought out Mrs Bailey to demand the heedlessly, cruelly, uncommunicated address, of which Mrs Bailey, too, was still in ignorance. Standing there at a loss, disappointed by a Mrs Bailey both amiable and regretful and, secretly, devoured by a wide-branching curiosity, he recalled Amabel, held his ground, made his further inquiry, and, probably that very evening, paraded pathetically outside the tea-shop at closing-time; a lonely little figure in the frock-coat and silk hat of his precarious City importance, his portfolio of legal documents under his arm; caftan and silk cap, praying-shawl and phylactery assembling themselves for any imaginative observer about the form whose expression and outline had grown, during his years of independence, so consciously Hebrew.

And when at last Amabel emerged, probably with two or three others, blossoming into the weary dust-laden July-afternoon Strand, and certainly laughing in the way he had

found, during that one encounter, so inconsequent and so irritating, and suddenly silent and dumbfounded, calling up all her controls to grasp and handle the situation, he surely will have begun by saying, hat in hand and features working beneath the pressure of his embarrassment: 'Good afternoon. You will most-certainly be surprised to see me,' and will immediately have gone on to announce into the depths of her uncomprehended, all-accepting, heaven-thanking smile, whose inward wild rejoicing encircled the earth: 'I came to ask you how is Miriam and where is she, do you know? Perhaps I shall walk with you to your home; yes?'

And Amabel, returned more swiftly than light to the moment that was still at its beginning when she found herself walking up the street at his side, hearing, in the sound of their mingled voices, the echoes of the future, would have held away the weariness so swiftly coming upon him in any conversation failing to reach his central interests, exercising her power to visualize and to interpret with an art so perfect that he would be unaware of it, and would identify the pleasantness of the hour with his relief in getting news of me.

Her joyous blessing lay ready for post, needing only its stamp. Looking out across the harbour with her eyes on the half-remembered village post office, unvisited save by Florence in search of local photographs, she saw the whole district reduced to a single eyeful, set compactly in its place in contiguity to other districts, bereft of depth and of long vistas, of mystery and glamour. While she read the letters, moving from scene to scene, watching the drawing together of the two who had severally supplied her richest experience of human

relationship, it had become a site. Even the flower-dotted hillock seemed now to disown and dismiss her. And the London interposed between herself and her surroundings was no longer hers, belonged now to the two who for so long had given it life and of whom at a single stroke she was deprived. Onward they went, hand in hand, smiling, towards a future wherein she had no part.

This was jealousy, showing its mean little face and clutching hands. So late. Only a few months ago, bewailing Michael's inability to perceive Amabel, she had put aside, to preserve it from danger, even the thought of her enchanted hope. Seeing it realized, she grudged the attendant happiness. But even as she felt this jealousy's deep-seeking manipulations, the vision of Amabel alone and unchanged, however surrounded and accompanied, sent it to its death. With an almost audible snap, the last link parted that had held her to the past. Released, she could seek those to whom she belonged. But they made no sign, and the open spaces of her first vision of freedom no longer attracted.

Gathering up the letters, she found them aged, the long-pondered opening scenes of a drama wherein she was to collaborate only as an interested spectator. The last sheet, Michael's second little note, fluttered to the floor and lay, face downward, revealing, upon its unexamined reverse side, a straggling paragraph and, beneath it, what appeared to be an address. Retrieving it to acquaint herself with the latest of his ill-considered schemes, or with the data of some embarrassing demand, she read the hurriedly scribbled words: 'If you are seeking a quiet place for your writing, why should you not go to the family of my fellow-boarder here, which lives only a quite small journey from where you are and is willing for boarders? There is a mother there and a sister, or some sisters,

I am not sure, and it is in quite deep country, a sort of farm.’ Under the address, three illegible words expressed the wearied collapse of Michael’s effort. Would Amabel succeed where she had failed, make him realize how prejudicial to his British career was his impatience of the written word? ‘They ... are ... *Greeks?*’ Jews, then. Greek Jews, in the heart of the country? The name, prefacing the address, *Roscole*, sounded neither Greek nor Jewish. Ros ... *corla*. Cornish? ‘They are ... *Quakers!*’

Far away within the cool twilit deeps of her innermost consciousness, she went up a pathway towards a farmhouse within whose doorway stood a little group of grey-clad Quaker women, smiling a gentle welcome. Michael’s gift. A little Quaker stronghold at the heart of all she had first come forth to seek. Itself as remote as the deeps of country wherein it was set.

The little plop with which the note to Amabel and Michael fell into the letter-box, should have brought, with its finality, her heart to her finger-tips. But they remained steady, clasped about the letter that was to open the way to the richest depth of shared life imaginable upon earth, and thrilled with joy as they lifted and let it fall.

CHAPTER IV

All but one of the passengers got down at the village, taking away into its rain-dulled twilight, with themselves and their packages, dense odours and the sound of heavy breathing. And the slow, wide, richly inflected voices with which they had greeted each other and talked together. Leaving the dim enclosure a haunted place. So much speech come down into, so heartily, yet leaving the far distances of their individual lives, visible in their faces in repose, solitary and unexpressed. Following them imaginatively to their homes brought no relief from the burden of this visible solitude. Villagers. Farm labourers. People seen afresh who had been seen here and there in brief glimpses, long ago. The sound and sight of them was dreadfully, deeply familiar. Never before experienced close at hand. Fear used to come, as well as oppression and sadness, and, even in childhood, a feeling of guilt, at the sight and sound of these people living outside the gates, circling, all their lives, in immovable circumstances over which they had no control. And it was the desire to avoid the sight of them and the problems they suggested, and the challenge they unconsciously flung at the world dependent upon them, that had kept one, during these last weeks, away from village and villagers.

‘You never worry about anything.’

Craven fear, of facing what they faced, what gave them, even at their most rubicund and kindest, the moment they were not speaking, that expression of staring fixedly at

something unchanging, relentless, and inexorable. It was worse than the secretly stricken expression of the town worker who realizes himself caught for life in a machine that will yield him, grudgingly, only the minimum. He, at least, has a vicarious amplitude, the support of London all about him, its oblivion-bringing resources and the illusion of stability created by its bustling surfaces.

When the carrier had hauled out the side of bacon propped at the far end of the bus, she moved up and across to the corner that would be nearest to the green hedge and the low fields as soon as they were clear of the village, flitting self-contained within the moment between two lives, swift and invisible upon light, impalpable feet, her spirit already dancing within the nowhere and everywhere whither she was bound, whither days ago she had been translated; so that now, for the first time, life-obstructing speculation and excitement were excluded from the experience of arriving amongst strangers in a strange place. Towards which the bus moved off as she reached her corner and sat revealed, before the eyes of the remaining prisoner, now no longer alongside but visible in his place near the door, as an ignorant excited tourist, peering, when the last of the cottages had vanished, through the low, narrow strip of window as if, in the surrounding fields, there were something to be seen.

Looking across, as the emptied vehicle became a racing chariot, interposing its oblivious impatience and the din of its loosely rattling joints between herself and the jolted hedgerows, she saw, rigid and motionless in the far corner, something strayed from a waxwork show ... a tailor's mannequin ... a ventriloquist's dummy—topped by a soft felt hat, with a downy bloom upon its clean unhandled nap, set, rather than worn, upon the head and, like the rest of the

unassimilated garments, a size too large. Beneath it, twin bulges of smooth brown hair clasped, with a wig-like closeness, a round, paint-bright face whose wide blue eyes, expressionless, contributed nothing to the fixed smile that heightened the shock of encountering, in place of detached observation, this vacuous intentness.

The orbs came round, still unattained by the curving smile, and projected across the intervening space a gaze so wide and so all-embracing that for a moment she was lost in it, becoming both the instrument and the object of this horrifying glare.

‘A nice evening,’ she ventured, returning the smile. People like this, one person like this, was to be found in every village, always there, a common possession, unforgettable. He had caught her on the way from solitude to perfect human association, to remind her that country life included the visible, inescapable presence of every kind of affliction.

As if worked by a mechanism, the plump lower lip dropped to reveal the extremity of a tongue, repulsive herald to slow, difficult speech. But the soft ‘ath’ emerged as smoothly as the sound produced, in response to pressure, by a talking doll, and with just its abrupt, colourless tone. Smiling again, she turned away relieved. Friends with the local idiot, she could now compose herself to arrive in heaven.

The horses slowed for a hill. The steadied hedgerows flowed quietly. Discovering a catch upon the little square of window near her shoulder, she released and pushed the pane as far as it would go and met the outer air. Streaming from the misty rain-soaked meadows, visible whenever a gate passed by, it poured into her being, describing those meadows, miles of them covering the earth in all directions, solitary, averted in the dim light, breathing out secretly, unnoticed, the evening fragrance

of all that grew in them; claiming her, not as something added to the rest, but as her known companions, left behind long ago and now returned to and demanding forgetfulness of everything but themselves, for whom, they declared, she had mistaken the strangers at the top of the hill.

If she had heard of the Roscorlas as living in London, would she have sought them out?

The place was not in the least like a farm. A white five-barred gate, fastened back, a sweep encircling a bed of evergreens, grass-bordered, a square plaster house, two-storied, bleak, an enclosed glass porch nakedly protruding, asking, in order that it might blend with the house, a share of the ivy sparsely climbing the left side of the frontage as far as the sill of an upper window.

A small trigger, on the lintel of the outer door, pulled on a wire and jangled a bell not far within.

A tall lean maidservant suggesting Wiggerson; like what Wiggerson might have been in a very godly household fifty years ago. The bony form that dipped, swiftly, as Wiggerson used to dip in eager service amongst the wealth-provided luxuries wherein she had no share, to seize and carry off one's bag, was surmounted, in place of Wiggerson's muslin mob and gallantly flying streamers, by an oblong strip of starch-stiffened cotton lace laid, mat-like, upon the narrow head whose reddish hair, scraped smoothly into a small high bun that tilted the little mat downward from back to front, helped the scant freckles to heighten the pallor of the long lean face. When again this face was visible and the pale blue eyes once more met her own, Miriam received with joy their cold,

unseeing gaze. Announcing that Miss Roscorla was out and would be back in time for supper, the servant led the way upstairs, revealing upon brow and lips and thin cheek visible in profile as she rounded the angle of the short flight and was softly lit from above, the unmistakable look of conscious salvation.

It carried Miriam far away beyond the remembered Quaker meeting, wherefrom, indeed, she could recall no face bearing exactly this expression, back to Blewbury and the enigmatic vision of Great-Aunt Stone sitting blind and motionless in the clasp of the graceless parlour chair whose high back had the dreadful shape of a halved cylinder, plaintively querulous with all about her; crippled Aunt Emma on the other side of the fireplace, bent listeningly over her cross-stitch texts, distributing, without looking up, abrupt rallying comments and snappish rebukes; the convulsively talking uncles, coming and going and still, in late middle age, browbeaten and uneasy. And in them all, something that her eight-year-old mind, feeling its way, unhappy in the restricted surroundings, scared by the mysterious illiberality, had dimly recognized as an independent extension of each personal life, glad and free. A secret, new and strange, something not present in her own home, and outwardly expressed by this look shining from the face when in repose, this look of *conscious* salvation; the hallmark of the chapel.

Encountered in a Quaker household, although in this young woman, now silently departed, it might be merely a youthfully exaggerated imitation of a deportment, it was nevertheless disconcerting.

A Philistine room, furnished without deference to shape and colour and, surprisingly, dominated from the end wall facing the large brass bedstead, by an enormous portrait: a dark,

bouncing, handsomely dressed middle-aged woman whose swarthy face, topped by a heavily beribboned lace cap, was bounded on either side by large, low—hanging earrings—wealthy, a member of the mercantile aristocracy—sitting in judgment upon a world of incapables. Surely, not a Quakeress? When the candle was alight, she shone forth from shadows, filling the room with the din and bustle of the visible world. But immediately below her, at the wash-stand within whose rose-pink cake of fresh soap were safely stored the days to come, one escaped. And the dressing-table, set askew across a corner between wash-stand and window, proved also, since the eyes stared across the room and did not follow one about, just outside their line of vision. Nor did they bore one's back as one stood at the window which turned out to be the one reached by the climbing ivy, and gave on a wide, dim expanse ending, very far away, against a brightness along the edge of the dark sky.

Opening to a gentle knock, Miriam found at her door a small stout woman—the mother or the daughter?—from whose dark brown eyes, as she made her explanations and apologies, there shone a smiling radiance so transforming the homely face that she regretted the almost immediate movement into the room, resulting in its unseen transference to inanimate things. But when presently the dumpy, dowdy little figure drew up in front of an opened drawer and, looking within, said gently: 'That is petal-dust, to keep away moth'—immersed, at the end of her busy day, in the contemplation of a cherished, enchanting mystery, desirous of sharing it and, at the same time using its quiet presence as a test of the newly formed relationship—there was visible, upon the bent, candle-lit profile from which Miriam's eyes shifted to gaze at the fine brown powder scattered over the drawer's paper lining, and giving out a faint,

dry fragrance that called up a fleeting vision of sunlit flowers moving from their prime to fade and die into the makings of this beneficent dust, something of that same radiance. And while they stood side by side, united in silent appreciation, Miriam felt it enfold and set her adrift upon the borders of the world wherein this woman had her being.

It was the head of a girl, revealing, while its attitude laid bare the line of the neck between hair and low, stiff collar-band, the semblance of childhood; a middle-aged, inexperienced girl, selfless and out-turned, full of objective interest in all about her and attentive, grown, through long practice, permanently attentive to guidance coming from within and productive of that withdrawn, far-listening look that recalled the remembered Quakers.

When they turned together to the room's open space, the temporary cessation of audible interchange had produced, rather than the uneasiness that prompts a search for fresh conversational material, a time-expanding satisfaction and the sense, behind them, of an achieved, indefinitely durable past. It was easy, looking up at the alien flamboyance now confronting them from the wall with its splendour of indifference to things unseen, to make an apprehensive inquiry.

'That is Mrs Joshua Bullingham, the mother of our last pupil, who had this room.'

'Not a Quaker?'

'No, she's not a Friend. A Presbyterian lady.'

'And your servant, who let me in?'

'No. Eliza is a village girl, a Strict Baptist.' She had turned as she spoke, with a smile that was almost a chuckle of glee over one's confessed dismay, and a searching glance that betrayed her surprised interest in learning that one had at once spotted these two outsiders.

CHAPTER V

Outside her door, launched on the journey from her own world established in the room she had just left, to breakfast downstairs at the centre of the universe, she hesitated, remembering the window opposite the door whose knob was still in her hand. While she had hurtled from point to point, hoping not to be discourteously late for the very early meal, wondering whether the two Roscorlas took it in a silence that would deepen, by enabling it to be shared, the heavenly morning stillness, this window had let in brilliant light telling of a fine day. Last night's silent friends, the ivy-leaves framing the sill, she had remarked again and again in passing to and fro, but of the wide view she had been aware only as a glimpse of flat, rain-silvered pastures sunned to gold.

A whirr, coming up from the hall, followed by a single hammer-blow, woodenly soft and unreverberating, announced the presence there of a grandfather clock and the fact that she was a quarter of an hour late. Abandoning the door-knob, she went along the passage fenced by the balustrade on whose far side, beyond the well of the staircase and the further balustrade, was a door set opposite to the one she was now passing. At the end of the passage, facing the descending staircase, another door and, visible at the far end of the companion passage, in an alcove, a fifth door, shadowy, unreached by the morning radiance falling from the skylight.

Here was the hall with its two-doored glass porch. Doors right and left and, somewhere along the passage to the left, the

little room where last night Miss Roscorla had given her supper and talked of the Botinskys, of whom Michael had said so little, revealing a strange, half-malicious amusement over young Paul Botinsky's ignorance. Coming into the country for the first time in his life, how should he recognize its spectacles or plumb its secrets? Why should it be *funny* not to know an ox from a cow? Not to recognize growing corn? But she had revealed also her admiration for the frank simplicity of his request to be allowed to pray each day up in the drawing-room. 'He'd brought his little mat and his shawl,' she said, with affectionate approval. *Up* in the drawing-room. That, then, was the room with the shadowy doorway near her own. In the front of the house, looking out across the wide expanse.

The little room, where last night she had supped, stood open and empty, shut into a green twilight by a high brick wall a few feet from the window, and partly screened by the trunks and feathery down-dipping branches of larch trees. At the angle of the passage an open door showed a wide gravel pathway and more larches, between whose trunks a wooded distance sloped gently to rise again on the horizon in a slanting line upon whose upper end a windmill stood in profile, against the sky. Pure morning air came in and stillness, deep country stillness far from the sound of the sea. Yet sounding, even while, as one paused to look, the stillness seemed complete. Offering if, free from an urgent errand, one should step out into it, small near and distant sounds, clear, measuring the height of the sky, making denser the enclosed stillness of this many-roomed, strangely deserted house. Where, at this spellbound moment, was its life concentrated? To the right, a short passage offered another closed door from behind which, as she approached, a man's voice sounded, deep and leisurely, matching the stillness, shattering its promised peace.

The two men, subsided in their places facing each other at the far end of the table, recovered from the disturbance of their relationship as narrator and listener, created a world apart. Down here, the youth, returned with her cup of tea to his place at her side and now deftly assembling the rest of her meal, shut her off in the clear space created at this end of the room by the absence of Miss Roscorla who evidently had breakfasted at the head of the table to one's right, and of Mrs Roscorla, presumably taking her meal in her room and represented only by an empty place across the way.

Taking in, from the doorway, a long low-ceilinged room apparently full of men, Miriam had smiled ruefully to herself at the celestial joke. Sold, she was. But innocently. The power drawing her to this house, the remembered quality of Quaker women, instead of carrying her forward into the heart of peace, had led her back into the known world. Surely Michael must have known of these brothers? At the far side of the table, well away from her direct line of vision, was the tall one, dark and curly-haired, with features indistinct—for this room, too, at that further end, was inhabited by a kind of twilight—who as she came in had risen with an easy, lounging, broad-shouldered movement from his place opposite the door, and had said, after greeting and introducing her in a deep, gently vibrant voice: 'My sister, I expect, will be here shortly.' Out of sight beyond the youth sat the short fair one who, half rising from his seat, had given a small rough hand and swiftly subsided. It was to him alone that the tall brother was addressing his interrupted narrative, sitting, as she could see without looking across, sideways, at leisure, cross-legged, his breakfast finished. Her neighbour, too, with an empty plate

before him, was meditatively sipping the last of his tea. A familiar surroundedness. After-breakfast leisure, minus the confronting hostess whose care and forethought made possible this care-free ease and this standing still of time; as she had known it on Sunday mornings at Tansley Street when the presiding Baileys had departed downstairs and the women boarders had vanished to their rooms. Only the men remaining, able to breathe in peace, each on his own centre in integrated morning mood, the party held together by the ceremonial furnishings of the table and securely apart by the impermanent nature of the gathering.

Behind the empty space across the way, a deep-set wide low window revealed a high-walled garden whose nearest blossoms, red-gold, standing high, so that they were visible just beyond the line of the sill, held the light of the invisible sun, filling the garden and projected by the terminal wall into the low-ceiled room, making this end of it a chamber of amber light. A cross-shaped thinning amidst the dense masses and a glimpse of a rose-garlanded trellis, suggested pathways.

While still her eyes dwelt upon the various loveliness gathering this portion of the room, with the bestowal of a reflected brilliance, into its own deep being, she grew aware that the room's other end was also somehow lit from without and turned and saw, outlined against the angle of the wall and what appeared to be a distance-narrowed greenhouse door, the seated form of the elder brother drawn upright, arms extended, powerful large hands, upon whose wrists the frayed sleeve-edges of an old Norfolk jacket lay tired and faded, set by the finger-tips upon the table, ready to hoist the big frame about to rise and depart—already, before she had finished her meal, become, at this moment the gift of those labour-coarsened hands, and while there rose in her as she read the expression of

the handsome head, a little shabby and unkempt, benevolent, but saved from mere benevolence by its air of customary pride, the demand that her welfare should be his immediate concern.

‘She rode down the middle of the street, with this great mass of hair falling nearly to the saddle.’

The room contracted to its linear measurements. Every object stood near and clear, lit by a morning light made cold and lifeless by those on whom it fell, absentees, to whom it made no appeal. The remote peace of this homely room, the message of the golden light shining in from the flower-filled enclosure, were being willingly sacrificed to far-away London, itself bereft of meaning, regarded merely as a show-room for exhibits, and where, quite recently, he had stood, upon some pavement-edge in Regent Street, gazing at the Harlene lady riding by in full view, along a street momentarily clear of traffic, impressed by the mere quantity of her flowing hair, oblivious of the travesty and the pathos defacing the street’s restrained dignity; his outward eye beholding an engaging picture, his inward, Godiva.

He had returned. In a few days’ time, or even at this morning’s end, he would be once more fully ensconced.

‘I know that apparition,’ she said conversationally, and felt herself launched, in relation to the household males, as one of those women who, during the day’s social gatherings, turning their backs upon their own territory, remain hospitably alert upon the outer edge of consciousness to welcome the versions and verdicts of the men-folk, to keep them at ease and in good conceit of themselves; an arduous, petrifying role, impossible to sustain.

‘That’s just what it was.’

The expression of his face, turned to her before he spoke, avenged her treachery by revealing the most dishonouring of

social animations: the innocent blind satisfaction of the male who discovers in a woman, newly met, whose ministrations have not, therefore, become a familiar unregarded sustenance, a flattering echo of his own imaginings. But while he spoke, judicially, in the manner of one bestowing prompt reward for deserving effort, she saw how haggard were the blue-grey eyes; puzzled, the stricken eyes of one steadily enduring uncomprehended sorrow. For which life occasionally supplied, was at this moment supplying, a relief whose public expression was held back by lips so firmly compressed upon his last word as to lift away from their corners the frayed ends of the lustreless brown moustache.

This handsome, battered giant was the household referee? The centre of meal-time talk, uneasy in silence? Even so, there was a deep difference between him and the average talkative male, a Quaker difference, perceptible in the weightiness of his simple statement and in his present air of waiting, with grave eyes still on her face, expecting her to take her time, to weigh, in her turn, the proffered statement, and keep the topic, which here at least, would not be regarded either as a test or as an opportunity for display, unembarrassingly hanging fire in a stillness, the first available fragment of the deep, shared stillness wherein she had hoped to plunge immediately on arriving in the house, and to find broken only by statements made in a language yet to be learned. But before anything could arrive in her mind that would sustain the disappointingly mundane theme, his eyes moved to a point just beyond her and came to rest there with a smile that opened his lips for speech which refused to come because words were beyond reach, routed by the objects of his radiant contemplation: an onlooker, and himself caught napping.

Turning, Miriam found Miss Roscorla at her side, come into

the room through an unnoticed door set in the alcove to the right of the fireplace and revealing, left open, a dark passage along which distant kitchen sounds sent their peace-shattering message. Though revealed, by her flushed face and slightly dishevelled hair, as bondservant to the tedious indispensable mysteries, Miss Roscorla stood, as if permanently free and available, taking in the disposition of affairs, a little wistfully perhaps, being a sister and sharer of the past rather than a wife and, therefore, to some extent, an alien; but also with pleasure, since she radiated a rich renewal of yesterday's intimate kindness, standing still for a moment in the midst of her busy life with a mind 'at leisure from itself' and from the affairs that gave to her presence, though her eloquent dark eyes were free of the shadow of preoccupation common to the eyes of housekeepers, something of their odious power to disqualify and to drive away the masculine morning mood and to substitute, for its vast leisurely perspectives, the prospect of immediate activity, already, Miriam observed through the corner of her eye as she stood responding to Miss Roscorla's greetings and inquiries, embodied in the figure of the elder brother, bent forward to gain from the edge of the table, upon which still his hands were resting, purchase for its huge upheaval, and now, upon the would-be decisive 'well' of one aware he should have moved long since, risen to its full height.

Settled in the decrepit deck-chair under the chestnut tree whose huge being made of this corner of the lawn a kind of retreat, its sturdy trunk between her and the backward immensity, its wide branches a roof beneath the towering heights of sky and an irregular crescent of shadow upon the invading sunlight,

Miriam felt the crowding impressions of the last twenty-four hours make way for a sense of the stillness fallen, now that she was still, upon her surroundings and their far, various perspectives, all, now that they were removed from sight and could be contemplated without shifting one's gaze from point to point, simultaneously visible as a whole wherein the garden, and the grounds sloping away so abruptly that their end could not be seen from the upper level, showed as an unenclosed part.

This morning's sunlit flats beyond the front garden seemed now a world apart, belonging to the rooms whose windows looked out on them, her own and the unexplored upstairs sitting-room together occupying the width of the frontage that described the house as square until, coming down through it, one discovered the spread of its hinder part, the wing holding the kitchens and the rooms above them, hidden from the front view of the house by that enormous dark-green tree to the right of the façade.

The undisturbed coo-rooing of invisible doves poured into the stillness a rhythmic unvarying pattern of sound. Busy. Yet suggesting peace. Secretly inviting her to stay and share, for far longer than the projected fortnight, their care-free protectedness. Up and down it went, up and down; five gurgling notes encompassing the octave, always with the same omissions and always failing perfectly to reach the upper note, accentuated without a pause and leading the return journey down the scale. But Densley had suggested altitude. She recalled his face, its professional gravity banishing the affectionately malicious smile greeting his discovery of her newly dawned determination to exploit, for the sake of its attendant possibilities, the verdict of a science she half despised: 'Not necessarily your beloved Oberland. Something

more easily accessible. Say Crowborough.' This retreat, though on an eminence, could not be called high, and Miss Roscorla had referred to the flats in front of the house as 'the marshes.'

From the door in the high-walled stable-yard came forth a man carrying a large boat-shaped basket with a low, curved handle. His tweed cap pulled aside and down at a snarling, football-crowd angle above a pallid, smoulderingly talkative face, a pink moss-rosebud in the buttonhole of his blue serge suit, he looked more like a shop assistant on holiday than a gardener as he sauntered, meditating, along the garden path to disappear behind the huge sycamore standing at the opposite corner of the lawn where the bank ended that separated it from the downward slope of the estate. Voices sounded from behind the stable wall, low-toned, unhurried, Quaker voices in question and answer, arranging the day's work. Richard Roscorla, Alfred; and the pupil, who now appeared at the gate and made off down the path, going headlong, without attention for the sunlit scene, to his chosen work. Stocky. So colourlessly fair that his hair and face, all of a piece in their tonelessness, faded into the pale tweeds that also were the colour of southcoast sand above the tide-line. His blue eyes, too, had been pale; crafty, dishonest nonconformist eyes, hypocritical; the eyes of the chapel-leading grocer or dairyman who sands the sugar or adds water to the milk. Distinguishable from the shifty Anglican or Roman Catholic eye by the absence from it, and from the mouth beneath, of a guilty malaise. Grown, during the after-breakfast moments while Miss Roscorla was interviewing the higgler, very strange new friends. Eyes inherited from a 'saved' family, looking out upon the world these elders had utterly condemned, with a quiet, steady interest. While she evaded a second encounter with

these revealing eyes, his talk had somehow moved forward from courteously eager descriptions of a liner snapped by him in dry-dock, begun the moment Miss Roscorla left the strange young lady on his hands, to his thoughts on marriage; and while she listened, glancing, off-guard with amazement over the reaching forth of this country lad, not long emerged from his co-educational Quaker school, to the idea of experimental marriage for an agreed, limited period, she recognized the embarrassing expression of the eyes, so oddly contradicting the boyish smile, for an inherited spiritual mannerism, and the next moment was half-enviously regarding his cherished schoolmates, seen as lately as last week when he and they had returned for the annual festivities: 'She sang *Killarney*....' A sidelong, shifty glance and a smile revealing faultless teeth and recalling the confident life-welcoming beam of Dr von Heber. 'And when any one sings *Killarney* really well, you feel there's nothing you wouldn't do for them.' And her mind, hovering wistfully over this co-educational idyll, had tried to imagine itself into the future of these young people growing up all over the provinces, away from London sophistications, although, indeed, they all read newspapers written by and for enclosed Londoners who unconsciously conceived of all humanity as equally enclosed and surrounded. Encountering for the first time provincial confidence—or was it Quaker co-educational confidence?—she had felt, when he told her his home was in Berkshire, like one taking possession of a newly revealed heritage.

He went down the path to his work as if heaven waited in the lower garden. Followed almost at once by Alfred Roscorla trundling a wheelbarrow. A small, slender form. Isolated. A lonely life. In the outdoor light his face, its freckled pallor heightened by the hatless dense thatch of close-cut wavy red

hair, showed sad, lined by suffering. But a radiance from within took this suffering in charge and redeemed also his faded tattered garments. Escaped from the hive, come forth alone to meet the day's demands yet looking, with his eyes on an invisible distance, like a sleep-walker, was he aware of the still lingering fragrance of this heavenly morning? Why sadness, on this lit face?

With his disappearance beyond the sycamore and the dying away of the sound of trundling wheels, the scene was silent again. Uninhabited, unwitnessed, lonely beauty. Somewhere away down the far slope, the men were at work, part of the world-wide army ceaselessly toiling through the centuries, without whom secure, smooth-lawned enclosures would never have come into being. Why were some exempt? Why such armies to support the exempted? Why, of these few, almost none worthy of exemption?

Threatened by the approach of the doctrines of Lycurgan socialism, marching upon her embodied in the persons of those she had heard give voice to them, she closed her eyes, hearing once more only the cooing of the invisible doves, seeing the wide lawn, tree-guarded at its corners, overlooked only by the serene face of the old house that already she could sketch from memory. Four upper windows beneath the overhanging eaves, or five? Drowsily opening her eyes to recapture the detail of this backward view of the house, now, with its inmates away down the garden and in the kitchens whose windows gave upon the hidden stable-yard, given up to her eyeless and deserted, its perfect self and the completion of this lawn-world that already, absurdly, she regarded as her own, as being for the first time perceived and inhabited, she was stricken fully awake.

Standing halted on the far side of the empty lawn, Richard

revealed, before he moved, exactly the leisurely strolling gait of his approach. Gun on shoulder, his rough russet tweeds suggesting autumn woods, what had he to do with these acres of mild, laborious fruit-growing?

The instant of his setting out, diagonally across the lawn towards her chair, aware of his surroundings, no longer regarding them with habitual eye, seeing them re-created by the presence of a stranger, seeing them as she saw them, experiencing their beauty as it had shown when first he beheld them fourteen years ago, dropped, as he stepped from his sunlight into the wide shadow of the chestnut, away into the far past.

‘Now that’s wise of you.’ Had Miss Roscorla told him of her breakdown? ‘Most folks endanger a holiday by doing too much the first day.’ She had not told him. He regarded her as a paying guest on a fortnight’s holiday and had come across to talk, to pass the time of day and to renew, in solitude, a promising acquaintance. Mistakenly. For she had drawn him at breakfast by a social trick. Not possessing the qualities he imagined existing behind it, she could neither hold him, nor pleasantly pass his time. Here he stood, at her disposal, Quakerishly silent, looking away across the view whose further reaches would be visible for him above the bank.

‘I never saw anything quite like your view,’ she said, ‘the way it spreads all round the horizon, and the huge distance across it to that green rim against the sky.’

‘It’s quite a way off,’ he said meditatively. Adroit, then, to move on. Abandoning his topic without any bucolic stammer of the mind, though certainly a trifle shocked, perhaps pleasantly shocked, in spite of his disappointment in discovering her failure to respond to his challenge in the recognized way of young ladies talking with ‘the opposite sex.’

‘Jack Cade,’ he went on, with a shadow of emphasis, and glancing to fasten her attention as he spoke, ‘walked along that ridge nearly five hundred years ago.’

Henceforth populous, a roadway domesticated within the world of every day, the desecrated ridge reminded her of her recent doubt, which, at this moment might be laid to rest.

‘It looks high. Much higher than we are here. But perhaps we are rather low.’

The reputation for feminine intelligence and social capacity, as he was accustomed to estimate such things, so firmly established by her little display at the breakfast-table as to bring him hot-foot to her side at the earliest opportunity, lay shattered and destroyed. He saw her now gauche, as well as stupid. Nevertheless, whatever should be the outcome of this inane departure, she would now play fair, would refrain from returning, in order to please him, to his valuable Jack Cade. His eyes had left the ridge, to make a little tour of the nearer ground. Always the slight pause. Never, in this new world, a hasty, or even a swift answer. Conversation within a medium wherein each speaker remained at home in full possession of his individuality even to its furthest reaches. But of course he could not know how much turned upon his answer.

‘It’s quite a bit higher than we are. We’re three hundred feet up.’

Not exactly, she told herself, in a hollow, but disappointingly far too low to come anywhere near Densley’s prescription. But if she should carry out her resolution to abandon London indefinitely, was she not free to waste opportunity as she chose? She listened for the voice of conscience to be drowned beyond rescue by this other voice.

‘From sea-level, not from the centre of the earth.’ His eyes, returned, met hers gravely above compressed lips while he

waited for her response. Summoning a smile, she saw his features relax and his eyes once more seek the distance.

‘We had a young friend of my brother’s here not long ago. A young fellow not much accustomed to country ways. When I told him the height of our hill, he asked: “Up from where?”’ M’yes. Again the compression of the lips, controlling the features to gravity and concentrating in the eyes his delight in sharing mirthful reminiscence. ‘Ye’d hardly credit it. Of course he wasn’t thinking; much. But he was as sober as a judge. The first time he came out here, the ducks were about; some of them on the top of that bank. “Why,” he asks, “do they go up there?” I told him I expected it was because they wanted to have a look at the view, and then he inquired didn’t they feel the sun on their heads. “I guess they do a bit,” I said, “I’ll be making them some little straw bonnets like they give the horses in London.”’

He paused for her laughter, but with eyes downcast to safeguard his theme, evidently not yet exhausted.

‘I waited a bit, keeping so grave as I could, and then suggested blue ribbons, to look pretty and match the sky.’

His deep chuckle and the cascade of her renewed laughter, for which it was so satisfying a support, came forth simultaneously and ceased together, a duet, unanimous and accomplished, bringing before her eyes as still it sounded upon the leaf-sweet air, their shared possession, the distant immensity, outspread boundless beneath its high, morning sky, upon which again his eyes were resting—seeing it again revitalized?—and whence now they turned to meet her own.

‘Too bad,’ he murmured, in the deep, caressing bass of repentant solicitude, with a smile in it that shone also from his haggard eyes. Adjusting the sling of his gun, he moved, to glance once more across the distance before taking leave. No,

merely to shift his weight from one foot to the other and remain standing there, halted, squandering his morning; but this time unwitnessed, invisible either from the kitchen window or from the lower garden where the workers were scattered.

‘You are going to shoot?’

‘I may. There’s a deal too many rabbits at the farm. Haying was late this year and we’ve a busy day on the ricks, so I’ll not be back till late and I’ll get a few, I dare say, when twilight falls.’

In speaking of the farm, he had looked away above her head towards the west, towards this morning’s distance, seen from the little doorway and before her eyes had met the splendour of the northern expanse, and seeming so far and so satisfyingly lovely with its slanting rim perfectly accented at the highest point by the profile of the windmill. Recalling her mind, already at work upon the labour of adjustment to his unknown, many-featured world, whose every event had for its stage a widespread ceaseless loveliness, she put her question.

When he had gone, strolling back across the lawn, the leisurely, experienced owner of the Mill Farm, two miles away as the crow flies, but a bit further off by road, its woods and meadows and the many crooked stiles m’sister found so difficult to climb, and had disappeared beyond the larches screening the eastern end of the house and the stillness, broken only by the cooing of doves, once more enfolded her, its quality had changed. No longer stretching out across the world and carrying her gently down towards an unpeopled sleep whence she would awake to renewed, impersonal adoration of her surroundings, its radius was reduced to visible limits, ceasing northwards where Jack Cade, life in hand to fight injustice, forever marched along the road concealed behind the

rim of the sleeve whose green draperies hung suspended from the sky-line; ceasing to the west upon the ridge sloping downward from Richard's mill.

Crushing down to its death her lingering sense of the iniquity of spending upon a hillock beside a marsh the months allotted for recovery, she felt time cease. Her stretch of freedom, seeming almost endless when in London she had contemplated and refused to endanger it by clamping down upon it any time—enclosing, time-shortening pattern, expanded now to infinity.

Through the wide gate she came out into the green world that last night had declared itself the triumphant rival of the strangers on the hill-top. Ahead lay the marshes, almost colourless under the sun and patched with the shadows of clouds drifting forward from the south, ending away to the right against a high, enclosing ridge of downs. Turning to walk down last night's hill, she saw waiting, not far away, a clump of trees, the first feature, the first companions to greet her in this renewal of solitude. As the road descended towards them the marshes and the distant spur of downs vanished behind the high hedge, leaving her, save for the oncoming trees, alone with the road. They spread out as they approached, became a row that presently showed widening spaces between each trunk and its neighbour. Elms. They passed by, seven, planted at regular intervals, their witch-arms inharmoniously, gracelessly dangling; gaunt forms attaining dignity only because they were tall. How did they come to be there, seven and no more, an unfinished sketch of one side of an avenue? Standing methodically apart from each other, professing night and day

to screen a small portion of an oblivious meadow, casting long morning shadows there and, in the evening, the same shadows from hedge to hedge across the roadway, they proclaimed nothing, offered no tree-message, nor any fellowship, either for each other or for the passer-by. Promise unfulfilled, sending one's eyes in search of further features, of some destination that would not disappoint. The vista offered nothing. With the elms away behind, she was alone with the densely hedged country road, a high road, well made, free from cart-ruts, neat and sophisticated. Along which, she remembered with displeasure, an occasional motor car was known to pass. Miss Roscorla told her little stories very well, with quiet gusto. Her description had set the old washerwoman visibly there, tall and erect upon the crown of the road, refusing to budge for the advancing 'machine saying brr, brr, in such an authority manner.'

No movement in the air, no savour. Noon stillness, and the empty road. Any suburb, exhaling scents from its watered gardens, would bestow a richer sense of the time of year.

At last a milestone, sunk deep in the earth amidst the long grass of the roadside, settled there askew, offering its slanting message, worn faint, though once deeply cut, to yet another of the thousands passing by during its centuries. Offering it most potently to strangers passing in solitude, to those for whom it was a bourne, sturdy company, the shadow of a wayside domicile. Standing just here at the fork of the road, it suggested more sharply than could the local grass and the short-lived wayside flowers the invisible unfrequented distances, proclaiming the rarity of a human presence with whose aid the traveller might learn his whereabouts.

If the market town and yesterday's railway station were four miles away, she had walked a mile, and the beginning of

yesterday's village must be just ahead, a few hundred yards along the unchanging corridor. Just the seven trees and this milestone. No other features. No visible hint of release into the green depths she had come forth to seek. Choosing the alternative road, sentinelled by high trees set close together, she found stately greeting rather than welcome. Avenue dignity enclosed her and a hush, suggesting privacy and the arrival, as soon as she should be round the bend of the road, of a lodge and high gates defending a tree-darkened drive sweeping along to disappear on its way to a stately, hidden mansion.

But round the bend, at the end of the second short stretch of avenue, it was a church that confronted her, filling the vista with its unwelcome challenge. Old, grey, beautifully proportioned, its grey-and-orange-lichened tower further softened by the full leafage of the high, surrounding trees, its façade patterned by black, spiring cypresses well placed amongst the ancient tombstones of its richly green churchyard, it reproached her. Silently it reminded her that the depths of her nature had been subtly moulded long ago by its manifold operations and could never fully belong to the household on the hill.

While she stood held up by this inexorable presence, disappointed of escape along this road to the deeper essence of the countryside suggested by the fragrance of the trees, the answer to its reproach reached her mind in the form of a congregation imagined straggling down this avenue on a Sunday morning. Well-dressed local families, coming as a matter of course, of lifelong habit, not to share in adventure of which they were a living part, not to move into a stillness at whose pulsating heart was to be found the source of their inmost being. Coming 'to church,' to a service wherein no single moment would be without its specified occupation.

Villagers, too, dependents, respectful in their Sunday best, meekly occupying the inferior sittings.

The folks on the hill lived all their lives in church. All their doings, whatever happened to them, took place in church. The crumbling old edifice, seen isolated from daily life, became a lovely shell whence life had departed.

A solitary bell-note, clear and sweet, sounded from the tower and stood upon the air sending forth, in wave upon wave across the quiet countryside, its gentle message. Dominating the stillness even while it faded, speaking a quiet assurance.

The midday meal was upon the table, the depleted party assembled an up-hill mile away.

Surprised, she consulted her plate as if the mystery might there become visible. Long ago, before she had learned that food could be a substance indifferently consumed to keep life going, its flavour had had this assaulting power, taken for granted; never bringing this present sense of a beneficent force, impalpably in-flowing, nourishing one's spirit rather than one's body. Yet this meal had been kept for her and should have lost its first fresh savour. Was it that in all the years since leaving home she had lived on food shop-staled rather than fresh from gardens? And that the vital, spiritual goodness of fresh garden food consumed in the houses of friends had gone unperceived because as a visitor one was expected to supply entertainment? Why then had the meals provided by the deaf old lady and consumed in unthreatened solitude, lacked this sacramental quality? Was it the gift of those by whom she was now surrounded, existing in the very air of the room where daily they were gathered together? For a moment, with the first

shock of perception, she had indeed felt that even in a potato grown upon their happy land some special virtue must reside. But now, withdrawn into inquiry, she was obliged to recognize, enfolding her more closely than the radiations of their remembered presences, the sense of being incorporated, far from towns and from sea, with the countryside whose life-breath, found and finding, even while she trudged the road vainly seeking admission to green depths, was now mingled with her own.

Here, indeed, was Richard Roscorla's promised rain, driven streaming against the panes by a boisterous wind that buffeted the ivy leaves, keeping them tap-tapping as if to call attention to their plight. The shut window, rain-dulled, hid the outside world. Moist earth-scented air, its sole representative, came in through chinks of the loose frame, enriching the sense of enclosure. In the chimney a gentle moaning. At the window the patter of the distressed ivy leaves. No other sound.

Wealth, not to be finding rain unwelcome. Not to care if it rained for days. To be revelling in the sound of 'awful weather.' Hitherto, rain, or even the threat of it, had been the sworn enemy of holiday, a cruel intruder banishing enchantment, leaving one exposed to awareness of the swift passing of allotted days, the ruthless approach of their impossible end. Last week, down on the coast, it had become for the first time a challenge to adventure. To-day, it was blessed exemption from seeing and doing. Descent, laden with treasure one could afford to forget, down into impersonality where past and future, vanished from their places, lay powerless to nudge and jostle, far away within the depths of a

perfect present.

Reading, from this secure ensconcement, was new experience. A passing sense of treachery, to the wellnigh unlettered life downstairs, tried in vain to dim the joy it brought. Conversational joy. Sitting back, after a few moments of this strange, hitherto insufficiently pondered communion, she recalled delight, on the first morning in Oberland, in the text of a local newspaper found on one of the green tables on the newly discovered promontory whence for the first time she had seen the length of the valley, its undulations of diamond-sprent snow, cleft along the low-lying floor by the motionless black serpent of its frozen river, and had turned her back upon the flanks of the great, heavily cloaked mountains across the way, upon their tawny summits, too sharp to lodge the snow, piercing upwards into the high blue, to answer the call of the printed page. Had that joy lasted? It had not been put to the test. She could remember no further reading in Oberland.

That sacred little newspaper lay forever beneath her eyes against the morning-lit, shabby green paint of the little iron-legged table, its leaves so thin and poor that the heavily leaded headings of its little columns seemed set there to give it weight, to prevent its flying away. And it had seemed strange that the Swiss, so industrious, having so much at home, being so self-contained, so unrelated, in their middle-European mountain fastness, to the rest of the world, should fuss with newspapers. No odour of culture, no rich flavour of well-earned decadence anywhere, since leaving Paris behind. Did it exist, even down in the lake towns? Could it, with mountains looking on and pure air everywhere? This doubt gave a strangeness to the discovery of intelligibility in the text, drew my attention for the first time to the miracle of intelligibility, the taken-for-granted, unconsidered revelation lying behind the

mere possibility of so arranging words that meaning emerges from their relationship.

And presently I ceased to look for meanings, took a phrase or a single word from its context and let it carry me into fresh contemplation of familiar realities. But the origin of that morning's joy had been sudden arrival in surroundings that made even advertisements read like lyrics. The deep joy of this afternoon is born of establishment not so much in a place as in a moment, the moment that began when I saw the motionless ridge alight and moving and that now I am inhabiting with people who have lived in it all their lives.

Yet the delight of this reading is profane, dependent upon a kind of culture alien to these people. Read downstairs in their company the text would lose much of its savour. Up here, unobstructed, it comes so near as to seem spoken rather than written; spoken by a cheerily booming voice that fills the room; unoppressively. Telling its absurd tale, not quite fantasy in the sense that implies a belief in the dullness of everyday life, but a fantastic intensification of everyday people, it speaks also a creed. But if he really finds everyday realities astonishing, always, in their recurrence, newly astonishing, why must he deliberately introduce these fantastic exaggerations? In order to make people attend, George Taylor said. Attend to what? To his philosophy. The philosophy of astonishingness. The astonishingness of doors opening when you push them. But what is much more astonishing than things behaving after their manner, is that there should be anything anywhere to behave. Why *does* this pass unnoticed?

Poetic philosophy. The horns of elfland faintly blowing, in the mind that yet believes the sound of a tin whistle to be the more moving.

What could more perfectly express unheard woodland

sounds; harebells, inaudibly tinkling as they sway? Yet in expressing nature in terms of fantasy, he robs it.

A tap on the door. Who was to discover her, not resting but revelling in a fashion that might be considered equally possible either sociably downstairs, or accessibly in that unexplored sitting-room next door? The door opened, upon a small tray and the red-haired maid, who crossed the end of the room without turning her eyes, and set the tray down upon the dressing-table.

‘Miss Roscorla’s having a cup and thought you’d like one and said to tell you tea’s at six.’

Thanking the departing figure, she sat up to look across. A small cake, too, golden in the grey light, and spiky. A home-made rock-bun. Little unneeded feast, announcing her a member of the household rather than a boarder.

Consuming the golden cake, sipping the tea whose fragrance had met her as she went across the room to fetch the tray, she heard the booming voice of Basil, discoursing in the balloon of the arboreal house-agent, give way to a friendly silence that shared her concentration on the difference between the consuming of very choice food that always produced a nostalgia for the kind of living where the best of everything should be a matter of course, and this homely fare so intimately announcing arrival in the place where one would be.

Tea-time, far away on the horizon throughout the afternoon, became a swiftly approaching reality. With introductions over, this second appearance amongst the gathered party would be the beginning of belonging to its intimate life. Carelessly she would go down, silently merge. The false impression created at the breakfast table, but upon Richard alone, and kept going during the encounter on the lawn, for, manlike, he had been unaware of being the sole speaker, had been carried away to

the Mill Farm. This meeting with the others during his absence would leave her ensconced against the next encounter. Seeing her again, he would surrender the young lady of his misled imaginings and would recognize, in place of an enlivener of the hours spent at home, a stranger kindred to the group and ready, even if not fully qualified, to share its vital silences. If in his absence no one should be moved to speak, and, so far, compared with him, they all appeared to be conversationally negative, responders rather than initiators, would the meal run its course, apart from the necessary small courtesies, in silence? Imagining it thus, eager to taste for the first time this perfection of social intercourse, eager to prove that her presence would introduce no disturbing element, she looked at her watch. Already it was ten minutes past the hour. For the second time, on this first day, disgrace. Wondering whether the absence of any sounding summons, bell or gong, were a Quaker custom, she set off on the journey that held her room so eventfully remote from the household's central life, holding back as she went along the upper landing and down the two flights, through the hall and along the dimly lit passage, the assaults of inanimate surroundings.

Rich adventure, after returning the welcoming smile of Miss Roscorla seated behind the tea-urn at the far end of the table, to go silently down the room with lowered eyelids, withheld and self-contained and *therefore*, as on the journey downstairs she had already discovered, in full possession of even the external goods of the present moment: of the room's unseen perspectives, of what lay beyond them, seen in this morning's sunshine and lying now, rain-sodden, in the shadowless purity of the storm-light.

Reaching her place, aware, in the atmosphere about her, of something of the peace encountered at her one Quaker

meeting, and that the morning meal had failed to renew, she took in the presence, across the table, of a lace-capped old lady whose fawn-grey ringlets beautifully framed a pale face surprisingly youthful in its contours and in the luminous beauty of the eyes smiling into her own.

‘You haven’t met mother, I think,’ said Miss Roscorla, smiling towards the urn her small, plump, work-worn hands were carefully tilting. Deepening her smile as Miriam half rose to make her obeisance, Mrs Roscorla gave her a small nod, a gay little nod that seemed to tell her she was an old friend and exempt from formalities, and also clearly expressing pleasure in occasions for nodding; and then, as if to signify the end of the audience and the freedom of those concerned in it to welcome the next event, turned her limpid gaze to another quarter of the table, bringing it back as Miriam apologized to Miss Roscorla for her unpunctuality, and saying, before her daughter had time to speak: ‘That’s no matter, we should have sent thee a messenger.’ And again her smile shone forth, congratulatory, suggesting a shared sense of gaiety and good fortune.

Though low in pitch, her voice was neither rumbling, nor gruff like those of so many old women who, according to the little man passionately squeaking from the back row at one of Amabel’s suffrage meetings, ‘ath thoon ath their pwoper and only valuable thervith ith fully accomplished, begin to approathe the vocal, *and mental*, level of mathculine adolethenth.’—‘Of course, my dear, we pounded him with laughter, but really, Mira, he was rather a darling, without knowing it.’

The old lady, stirring her tea with downcast eyelids whose firm moulding recalled the vanished eyes, and with the smile still alight upon her fragile features, so softly contoured that

they seemed to have been serene throughout her long life, was awaiting the next departure and would certainly soon speak again. But only in response. Statement or restatement. Setting the tone. Presiding. Already with her brief phrase she had done so much. With the subtle modulations of a voice that turned each word into a phrase, with parentheses. Representing the family, she had settled the trouble by an even distribution of responsibility, administering each share with a consoling pat on the back, had smiled the incident into its grave, and was now awaiting fresh material.

Whence? Was it she alone who produced within the air this faint thrill of expectancy? Miss Roscorla, having provided the late comer with tea, was cutting into the bun upon her own plate, absently, as if preoccupied, or simulating the mental preoccupation demanded by conversation, in the way of women who create the appearance of paying tribute to what is being said by deliberately assuming a manner suggesting distraction from whatever at the moment they happen to be doing. The ever so slightly lifted brows, drawing across her forehead that, by comparison with her mother's cliff of brow rising smooth and unwrinkled above the delicately arched eyebrows, seemed so low, almost imperceptible puckerings, might signify nothing more than preoccupation with ceaseless complex housewifery, from which yesterday's encounter in the upstairs room, and particularly the moment of contemplating the petal-dust side by side with a stranger so far not a witness of the incessant daily pressure, must have been a rare holiday. But she was keeping watch, out-turned, ready, if no one else should speak, to supply what the stranger would expect. Here, then, was the stranger's grand opportunity, while still Mrs Roscorla's words lingered on the air and the subsequent Quakerly pause had not run out.

Aware, away to her left, of a quietude so dense as to render unlikely any vocal contribution from that quarter, Miriam took leave of the ladies and turned her eyes, since merely to drop them would be to suggest retreat via embarrassment into loneliness and would instantly provoke some kind of rescue, towards the far angle created by the junction of the greenhouse door and the wall of the room, accessible across the empty stretch of table extending away on Mrs Roscorla's right. Immediately on reaching this refuge she felt upon her face a relaxation of the surface muscles, suggesting herself and her own state of a moment ago as the source of the obstructive little thrill upon the air. All the more fully, therefore, she received the shock of discovering the secret of the deep stillness of her neighbours to the left, whose territory she now overlooked sufficiently to perceive a magazine lying open upon the table at the far side of the pupil's plate and, propped in front of Alfred Roscorla's, another, whose exposed page displayed an illustration.

Two groups. The outdoor toilers, and the women of the house. In all her experience of family gatherings she had encountered nothing comparable to this conspicuous sexual division, belonging to life on the land. The toilers, returned indoors with doubly emptied being, asked only food, and escape from household enclosure to the world beyond the gates. Which of its aspects were claiming such absorbed attention? The two women, one the recognized president and the other the provider momentarily escaped from multitudinous tasks, were both out-turned and socially available. But separated from half the gathering, whose eloquent absence, permitted and condoned, was yet, in the presence of a stranger, a little embarrassing? Between the two groups, emptiness, wherein the grey light made its own assertion, pouring in over

the far-away morning, the vanished afternoon, stating this party's uniqueness, its wealth, running to waste.

The voices of mother and daughter, sounding together, showed her herself as seen by the speakers, staring directly along the space occupied by the readers, a witness of enormity. Recalling her eyes, she projected from them, in order to make them appear all-welcoming instead of half critically observant, an amiably meditative gaze suggesting one absent-minded, slow to take bearings. A look enabling her to turn with the dawning smile of one deeply pleased to find herself where she was, towards Mrs Roscorla in time to see that what she was saying, with eyelids serenely dropped and expression placidly intent, was apparently addressed to no one in particular.

'Thee's boots to Elphick, Alfred,' emerged clearly into the silence left by her daughter's deferential retreat.

In response to this assault from the feminine end of the table, Alfred raised his face towards the vacancy ahead of him. Seen thus in clear, extended profile, it was startling in its stern purity and gentleness. The thoughtful brow and delicate features were moulded by dominated suffering, their pallor enhanced by the soft light's obliteration of their thick powdering of sun-born freckles. With unseeing gaze, while his reluctant mind recaptured what had been said and scanned its meaning, he made his journey into the forgotten present.

'There wasn't,' he said at last, and paused and half-turned his face, with eyelids lowered, towards the head of the table, 'not a single soul at home.' Lingering for a moment, the peaceful, blessed moment of Quakerly deliberation, he turned back and leaned again towards his book.

'Well-now,' said Mrs Roscorla, and looked across at Miriam, and held her eyes with a smile, arch, gleeful, suggesting depths of entertainment, that must have been hers in

girlhood and that now, though uncontrollably it still expressed her sense of being good to look at, served to convey her message of universal congratulation.

‘Gone to hospital, I reckon,’ murmured Alfred into his page. ‘Perhaps they’d not had their post card.’

The pupil, too, spoke into the page over which he, was bent, but his voice was warmed by a smile that made his cryptic remark an offer of sociability.

‘There’s a young farmer near us here,’ explained Miss Roscorla, turning to Miriam, ‘whose uncle, a while back, was taken ill far from home and carried to hospital.’

Every one sat back to listen. Every face wore a smile, reminiscent, anticipatory, to be held in check until the arrival of the end of a well-worn yarn returned with its freshness restored by the presence of a new hearer. Compelled by courtesy, but with an evident relish for her task, quietly and evenly, with something of the deliberate quietude of the practised dry humorist, and at the same time a little diffidently, as if she were reproducing an effect usually exploited by someone else, Miss Roscorla proceeded with the narrative whose end was clearly going to demand evidence of mirthful appreciation. Distracted from the attention so well earned by the home-made cake whose smooth even texture, bland and cool in the mouth, broke without crumbling, so that the raisins, red-brown within its pale brownish grey, offered a pleasant slight resistance before mingling their sudden deep flavour with the mild sweetness of the rest, Miriam listened apprehensively.

“‘I lost the card that were for ’ee this morning,” said the postman. “‘Twere from y’r uncle in hospital. He’s doing fine.””

‘Imagine,’ she said, and flinched at the sound of her own

voice, feeling it break up the newly achieved unity and isolate her with the men, who alone would fail to detect its insincerity. ‘Just *imagine*,’ ah, that was better—I’*appétit vient en mangeant*—creating an expectant pause, space for the drawing of a breath and the mind’s insensible readjustment; and for an instant she found herself forgetting what was to be imagined, smiling forth, at large, her sense of having joined the party. Glancing across to consult the window, whose light seemed now to be lifting, she met the smiling gaze of a Mrs Roscorla prepared, with hands clasped upon the table and face jugged a little forward so that the fluted pillars of her curls, hanging free, exactly framed it, for imaginative flight in whatever direction might be indicated. Thus reminded, she recaptured her intention: ‘such a thing happening in London!’

‘No,’ said the old lady, without even a vestige of the Quakerly pause, gleefully snapping her eyelids above a wide smile that revealed to Miriam’s trained eye the excellence of her denture, ‘ye can’t imagine any such a thing happening in London.’

While silently, and vastly at leisure now that the excursion was so successfully concluded, they smiled across at each other, Miriam saw again the sly delight irradiating Miss Roscorla as she reached the climax of her little tale, heard her own laughter join the chuckles that had sped its passing, and felt again the warm downward plunge into a unity that now was offering itself as a part fulfilment of the hope with which she had come downstairs.

‘Well, I’ll have to be moving.’

Flushed and glowing, Miss Roscorla rose and turned to the

window, lingering there a moment and remarking on the beauty of the light, contemplating it while she gathered herself to pursue the labours that through all the years had formed a continuous background for the achievement whose story had filled the time since the men left the table. No need, now, with the sitting broken up, for response, for any inclusive verbal tribute. Her listening presence, silent save for an occasional question, and regarded by both women with a favour increasing as increasingly she became for them a mirror of the heroic past, had given them all they asked.

But when her daughter had vanished kitchenwards through the alcove door, Mrs Roscorla, now a frail form standing, with her hands on the back of her chair, outlined against the brilliance framed by the window behind her, seemed to await some sort of continuance. In the limpid young eyes still contemplating across the width of the table one's unoccupied available person, there was, as well as approval, an embarrassing childlike expectancy. There she stood, an immovable obstacle between oneself and the glowing light, this evening's light stating its independence of all one had heard, and that had subtly changed the outdoor scene by drawing across it the shadow of incessant anxious labour.

'I think,' she said casually, feeling the light win, draw her irresistibly away from the demands of the old woman, the lonely witness of a selfishness she was noting with the crafty intentness of old age, storing it up in a consciousness dependent now upon supplies from without: 'I'll go and see what the garden looks like after the rain.'

'That will be pleasant,' said Mrs Roscorla, still holding, as if for support, to the back of her chair, 'if thee has thee's boots on.' And she nodded, as if in dismissal, but with a smile in whose depths, away behind simulated approval, lay both

disappointment and reproach.

Escaped at this high cost, reaching solitude and the garden door, she found her eyes drawn up and up to measure the immense height, above the outspread scene, of pearl-blue sky. Its grey shroud, cleared away by the wind, lay piled along the eastern horizon, its bulging protuberances, that for the last half hour had been projecting their glow into the little walled garden upon which her eyes had rested as she listened, bright coppery gold in the light of the hidden sun now sinking, away to the north, towards the invisible sea. With deep delight she inhaled the pure freshness, the many rich damp scents pouring into her nostrils, noted the softened outlines, the sweet drip-dripping of rain-laden trees and roofs; with newcomer's delight, to which was added a touch of the proprietary satisfaction of a member of the household.

Going along the rain-darkened gravel path, the unknown path, this morning's busy thoroughfare upon the far side of the lawn, deserted now, inviting, she passed the angle of the high bank and reached the broad lower level where stood the many greenhouses. Set there in the evening light, forgotten, trustworthy, though still suggesting toil, they also announced themselves as the makers and keepers of the world whose inhabitant she had so gladly become. Fourteen years ago, long before she had come to London and been shut out from garden summers, this haven was already being made. With their own hands the brothers, country-bred, escaping the London that had broken and cast them forth, were building these houses. Digging their land. In the spring. With summer and autumn stretching away ahead, making the arduous life under this high sky amidst these vast clear distances, in contrast with the life in London, dark with the helpless darkness of small honest enterprise struggling in vain against unscrupulous speculative

commerce, seem like a prolonged holiday. Season by season, they had learned the ways of peaches and of grapes, of cucumbers and tomatoes, flowers for market; bees. And to this ripened knowledge, Richard, the haggard, situation-saving hero of all the tales she had heard over the disarrayed tea-table, was adding now the lore of the farmer, complex knowledge of the ways of cattle and of corn.

Apprehensively, not on their account, but for the peace of her own mind, she wondered whether they could ever be fully alive to the gardens about the house, to the original intention with which this place was built? House, large garden, a unity, complete. The wide lawn, sentinelled and shaded on three of its corners, by this morning's shadowy chestnut, the sycamore balancing it across the way, the high larches screening it from the approach to the back of the house and marching, single file, round into the front garden; the lovely little pleasance beyond the stable yard. Whether, when socialism came and every one was a worker, there would be any joy left uncontaminated? Women, Hypo said, were the great garden-lovers, and indeed they inhabited gardens, while most men, until old age, only visited them. Made them, and worked in them; for women. Men to make, and women to love that which is made. If Swedenborg is right, the 'uncreativity' with which men reproach women is explained and justified.

She remembered shrinking from the mere spectacle of the family in Barnes who did their own housework, and kept their garden in order, shrinking from the idea of house and garden thus inhabited; loved with a horrible difference. Coming to the tennis-club or to a dance, they came always partly tired, used up. Like men from offices, they could never be considered fully there. Were there only on leave, and one could see in their eyes the tethered look of servants. They enjoyed their

outings, a little too obviously and excessively, with the joy of those temporarily set free, never with the rapture of those inhabiting unthreatened territory.

To make. To love what is made. If making things is humanity's highest spiritual achievement, then women *are* secondary and the question for the Fathers should have been, not have they souls but have they spirits? But is making, pictures and bridges, and thumbscrews, humanity's highest spiritual achievement?

Becoming aware of having wandered back into problems forever left behind on the hillock by the ridge and that in this new world were without significance, she recaptured the question here being asked aloud. The answer was ready, reassuring. The sensitive creatures by whom she was surrounded were certainly alive to the beauty of their gardens. A treasured superfluity. Like the proletarian parlour so cruelly condemned by commonsensical half-wits. A temple undesecrated by the presence of the implements of toil. Kept always swept and available. Rarely used, but always operative, a refreshing harbour for the mind. But not for the body. These toil-worn Quakers, when their day's work was done, did not rest. Lifting his brooding face from *The Wonders of the Universe*, murmuring to the pupil, at the end of the gentle sigh with which he closed its pages, 'Well, you and me ought to be getting along to Lodge,' Alfred had had the patiently enduring look of one who refuses to a frail body its petition for rest.

Whence, under a clear high sky, this small sound of falling rain? It came from ahead, from somewhere beyond the greenhouses, an incessant soft pattering. At the end of the wide level, a path led downwards through a wilderness of grass and weeds, until she reached the end of the domain. Thus far, no further. The distance, so vast when seen from above, was

narrowed here by the folding together of the valleys, and the ridge, drawn nearer, stood higher in the sky. Just beyond the broken-down fence, the ground fell abruptly; and here, on the edge of the wild, was the secret of the rain. Just within the fence, a row of Dutch poplars, oddly urbane and seeming to squander here their formal beauty, announced, with a ceaseless gentle rattling of their myriads of small leaves, an almost imperceptible breeze. Alone down here on the neglected edge of the property, they lived unnoticed, according to their manner, vocal whenever the air stirred them, sending forth, into even the most flawlessly radiant summer's day, the sound of pattering raindrops.

Clear evening light, stillness; so fully inhabiting the room that one felt, coming in, like one being admitted to a lovely ceremonial.

The moaning chimney was silent, the tapping ivy leaves quiet in their pattern against the window, to which she was drawn by the wide gaze of the light. Pushing up the sash, she leaned out into air rich from its voyage across the drenched levels. Beyond deep green meadows, the distant marshes lay pale, glistening, every hillock and thorn bush and patch of scrub standing sharply out, each in turn asking to be gazed at until it should vanish into the darkness. Here and there, a wide, shallow pool lay silver or silvery blue beneath the high evening blue that on this side of the sky was cloudless to its edge, its colour thinning as it arched down over the further distance until, at the rim, where the sun had sunk nearly an hour ago, it was almost white. Reaching this far rim, her eyes found, zigzagging along the middle of its line, a black etching,

minute, sharp-angled. Buildings, upon the far edge of the marsh. On either side, a line, clean and narrow, dark indigo, impossible, unmistakable; the sea.

During the moment of being on that far-off strand with the sea stretching endlessly away before her eyes, everything else had vanished. Why so eagerly, the moment she had recognized it, had her spirit flown like a bird from the side of a cliff to that small distant shore, and why, now that it had returned and place and time were here once more, these deep, delighted heart-beats? Only this morning she had rejoiced in being ensconced, far from towns and sea, in unbroken verdure. But this discovery of the sea's nearness, the certainty of being able sometimes to see it from afar, seemed now to make perfect the circle of which this gentle hill-top was the centre, and that ecstatically eager flight, as towards an unexpected friend discerned amongst a gathering of strangers, was tribute, to perfection suddenly realized?

Her returned spirit, escaped during its absence from the pressure of some forgotten preoccupation, hovered blissfully over its immediate territory, descending here and there, noting the enticing gaps in her knowledge of indoor and outdoor scenes. Greeting their promise. The vast realm already her own, given over to her by the busy routine ruling the lives of those about her and kept intact by solitude's freedom to evade the dreariness of planned exploration, would reveal, portion by portion, its inexhaustible wealth.

For what bourn was she making, with her hand on the door-knob? The outdoor world was darkening to twilight and it was too early to go down to supper. But time to change, if indeed one were going to change. Here, back again, was the teasing, forgotten problem with which she had come upstairs. If there were no changing, save for Sundays, one would feel

conspicuous, worldly, unquakerly. The stuff dress Miss Roscorla had worn last night was not the one in which she had appeared this morning. But she had been out yesterday to the mothers' meeting. In the cabin trunk, still to be unpacked, lay the three new cotton blouses; the old white muslin blouse, and the pale mauve velveteen, mercifully not moulted when she had washed it and now more than ever delicately pale, the ivory silk with the real lace collar; all become new in new surroundings. The tweed she had on, already so experienced and to be, together with its coat and mushroom straw, the daily sharer of outdoor wanderings. Behind these, the dateless embroidered gown of visits and Lycurgan soirées, the pinafore scabious-blue frieze, with its three tops and little square coat and Liberty cartwheel; for Sundays. The Burberry and the thick Heinz chutney. Plenty of good effects, for a fortnight. Few, when thought of as spread over all the months ahead.

Deciding to hoard, she opened the door. There was a bourne close at hand within the realm of this upstairs world: the unexplored sitting-room, seeming so far off on the other side of the well of the staircase, yet whose door, though set further in, was next to her own.

Clearly this was the best sitting-room, the room of state, unfrequented and, in spite of the unexpected piano's sociable air, lonely. Though narrower than her own, it was a good deal longer and also, in spite of its three windows, darker. The light coming from the further of the two that gave on the front garden she found to be obstructed by the central mass of the dark dense tree. Turning to the near corner whither her eyes were drawn as she stood at the window by something gleaming at her from its deepest shade, she found, within a glass case upon a what-not, the skeleton of a bird, bone-white, unimaginably small and fragile, many of the bones no more

than threads. Who could have gathered up and set it, intact, upon its little mount, to speak, from within its sheltering frame, its loveliness into the unbeautiful room? Beside it on the what-not, cupped in serpentine rock, stood an egg the size of a small Spanish melon, its speckled surface coloured like a meerschaum. For all its symbolic expressiveness, dead, while the experienced little skeleton still seemed full of life.

The odd window, between the what-not and the piano set crosswise in the opposite corner, gave upon the little walled garden, and revealed its fourth wall to be a long lean-to greenhouse, above which were the windows of the wing that helped to darken this room that yet, even in its twilight and cumbered as it was with ungracious furniture, was making no impression of gloom. Taking in the chairs on either side of the fire-place whose mantelpiece supported a number of vases, two of them containing dried grasses, and a clock, silent, surmounted by a mild water-colour landscape, one a masculine chair, capacious, with arms, the other, for the lady of the house, elegantly and uncomfortably narrow and minus indulgent support, both protected by crewel-work antimacassars, the round table between the front windows, a little old writing-table near the end window, velvet-seated drawing-room chairs drawn up here and there against the walls, she left these desolate reminders of a life that no longer flowed through the room and returned to the little bird, so living in his death. Rigid in his glass case, it was he who gave the dark room its light. With the blinds up, even on moonless nights, he would faintly shine, stating immortal beauty.

Thud-thud. The footfalls of a cyclist alighting, clearly audible. Was it she who had pushed that window a little up, or had it been open when she came in? The gate clicked, yawned wide on its squeaking hinge, swung to again, latched. The

figure whose firm slow footsteps were crunching the gravel to the accompaniment of the ticking of a wheeled bicycle, was hidden by the obstructive branching of the dark tree, and in a moment the sounds were out of hearing round the angle of the house, leaving stillness and a deepened sense of evening. Heavy stillness in the room that seemed now to demand a reason for her visit, confronting her with a past of whose inward depths she knew nothing, and amongst whose inheritors, now assembling downstairs, she must presently intrude her alien presence. Making her way to the door, she felt the room withdrawn, satisfied by her acceptance of banishment, into the peace she had disturbed and heard, equally withdrawn, equally not concerning her, the sound of footsteps in the hall.

‘We finished the fourteen acre.’

Richard Roscorla, returned, his day behind him, weariness in his deep, gentle voice, restrained, endured weariness within the warm spread of its tone over the last word. Evening, the falling away at last of toil, the evening gathering. Indeed it was intrusion to claim a place within the intimacy of this engrossed, incessantly occupied family, to force upon it the exertion of paying, even in the smallest coin, tribute to one’s presence. This taking of boarders was the sister’s welcome contribution to the family budget, the visible extension of the unseen gift of all her waking hours.

But where could he be, speaking so near at hand?

Passing the top of the staircase on her way to her room, she looked down into the hall. There he was, standing, propped by one shoulder, with the unconscious grace of power relaxed, against the grandfather clock, his head inclined towards the upper panel of the door to the left of the entrance.

‘Yes; ’twas all done before the rain came.’ ... ‘No. The

wind's changed. It looks all right for to-morrow. Well, good night, mother.'

Lifted by the wind, the light lace curtains floated towards her as she opened her door. Roscorla curtains, loyally protesting witnesses, subsiding as the door closed, lying passive on either side of the framed landscape towards which she hastened, holding back her selfish exultation until she could lean out and pour it towards the all-accepting innocence of meadows and sky: daily, by nine o'clock, Mrs Roscorla was hidden away for the night in her hall bedroom. This evening's gathering, all the evening gatherings, would lack her presence, her out-turned watchfulness for recognizable signs of life; as she saw life.

She was ready to raise her head. Inexperienced in this form of grace before meat, she raised first her eyes to discover whether the other heads were still bent and found them all, as if with one consent, recovering the upright. As if here, too, as in every human activity there seemed to be, was a concrete spiritual rhythm; so many wing-beats of the out-turned consciousness on its journey towards stillness, a moment's immersion within its pulsating depths, and the return. To a serenity flooding her being and surrounding it, far richer than the same kind of serenity achieved in solitude. It held off the possibility of embarrassment and promised to deal effectually, even though the most tempting opportunity should arise and implore her to seize it, with the desire to make a personal impression.

Now that someone had stretched forth a hand and turned up the lamp, she saw upon each face a radiance recalling the look of a happy lover. She remembered it upon Gerald's.

Sometimes upon Bennett's. Every one had emerged from the silence luminous. Given back to themselves renewed, freshly available, they were in no hurry, since still their happiness held them, to break the silence within which it had been born. From herself, too, a measure of this glad radiance must be flowing, proving her no longer an outsider, but one who had come to them already qualified, by kindred experience, for membership of this small unit of the company of believers.

Balm, this home-coming confirmed by the fact that still, beyond the small courtesies belonging to the distribution of food, there was no talking. If she were not with them where they abode, someone, the one most sensitive to atmosphere, aware, within the stillness, of the uneasiness of an alien accustomed to ceaseless vocal accompaniment to the process of feeding, would have come to her rescue. Holding back, evading by a hairbreadth the onset of a complacency making her aware of the probability of its presence permanently menacing this knife-edge balance between two worlds, she turned her eyes to the light upon the centre of the table. The banished gloaming, though standing now apart outside the uncurtained window, was still part of the gathering, holding in its midst, as the leaf-and-petal-scented mist stole invisibly in, both the shared day and to-morrow waiting beyond a shared darkness. But within the depths of the lamplight, moving at the heart of its still radiance, was the core of the shared mystery; far away within the visible being of light.

‘There wasn't too full a meeting to-night.’

Hatred of the outrage and forgiveness for the speaker, struggling together, brought her sharply back to herself, the stranger from London admitted to this family circle by her ability to pay a guinea a week. Glancing at Alfred, she found forgiveness easily triumphant. This frail, innocent creature,

bent over his supper, serene, preoccupied, as unlistening as if he had not spoken, was the one most worthy to break the silence.

The ancient brass lamp that by daylight would show battered and tarnished, lent to the table something of its own dignity and stateliness. Its golden flood illuminated the seated figures, smoothing their garments, hiding defects, bringing out colour. But its beams fell too low, leaving heads and faces in shadow, as if already partly captured by the coming night. Only the figure of Alfred, the smallest of the party and sitting a little bowed, was clearly visible, wholly the guest of the light that fell full upon the luminous pallor of his face. Richard, upright, loomed gigantic, his face in dark shadow, the light falling directly only upon his tweed-clad breast, heightening its tawny warmth and finding upon it, incongruously small and fragile, a little frond of vetch dangling wearily from a buttonhole and revealing, beneath the arch of a curling tendril, a single tiny bloom.

‘It turned out a fine evening, you see.’

Clamped down upon his last word, Richard’s lips remained pursed as his grave eyes were raised to meet her own. A falsetto chuckle from Alfred called her eyes away in time to see him bent, shaken by his mirth, still further over his plate, and the pupil turned towards him, showing all his good teeth in a smile of benevolent delight. Consulting the face of Miss Roscorla, she found it down-bent, dreamy, set in smiling curves and turned, now, as if in response to her inquiry, with an expression of girlish adoration upon her brother, whose eyes, awaiting the return of the visitor’s, now met them with a penetrating smile, eyebrows ever so little Mephistophelically up. Like Densley’s. But what sounded from them was not Densley’s triumphantly delighted crow. Something more

gentle, palliating mirth, seeming to cherish her slowness.

‘Tis a pity more don’t come, all the same,’ said Alfred sideways smiling, with lowered eyelids, towards the company; forgivingly.

‘There was a wonderful sky, after the rain,’ Miriam said conversationally, repudiating impeachment, offering, in place of a receipt for it, her desire to share the remembered spectacle of the high pearly blue, dominating, with its serene independence, the coppery masses in retreat along its edge. Addressing Miss Roscorla, obtaining of the mask of her face, its outlines and texture, an impression so sharp and indelible as to tell her it was added forever to her mind’s gallery of portraits, she still saw the final warm radiance of Richard’s Mephistophelian smile.

‘*Wonderful*,’ he said immediately, and again his face wore this morning’s weighty gravity, and again, screened by muscular contractions, its expression of private satisfaction.

All at once, as if of itself, silence fell and gathered strength. The meal was over, and the talk that had outlasted it and had left in her mind a record, constructed from his brief references and the asides he had sent across the table when anything was said that might puzzle her, of Richard’s day at the farm. She saw him interviewing his foreman, the man with only one eye, ‘good enough to do the work of three’; working side by side with his labourers who got through more work, more quickly, on the supplied lemonade than others did on their beer, and didn’t at all mind the little extra money; wandering in ‘the little copse,’ which she saw as a lovely little solitude apart from the main mass of the woodlands, quiet, sunless, as to-day it must have been after the morning’s work and before the onset of wind and rain, sunlit, all broken light and shadow, lying in darkness, touched by dawn, known in all its states by the

visionary, appreciative eyes of the tweed-clad figure strolling thoughtfully, parenthetically.

Two things disturbed: the new artificial fertilizer sent down from town, threatening the fundamental welfare of the land, suggesting the kind of interference with natural processes inspiring gentle George Taylor's outburst against intensive cultivation—'Bad enough that they should poison the land. But its not only the *land* the fools are poisoning. They know not what they do'—and the punctuation of Richard's homeward ride by dismountings that revealed it a social progress.

The party was ready to break up. The earlier pauses, a little disconcertingly akin to those occurring in the conversation of people gathered together without the link of a unanimous vision, had been brief, throbbing with the almost audible to and fro of thought in pursuit of fresh material for entertainment. But the present silence was serene. In place of the sense of loss oppressing the air when silence descends at last upon a talking group and its members, fallen apart, deprived of the magnetic stream, realize each other as single individuals, lessened and variously pathetic or in some way, for all their charm, offensive, there was a sense of recovery, of return to a common possession, the richer for having been temporarily forgotten. And even now, for this pause, too, must in its way be brief, being the occasion's consummation and having, like the initial voyage into stillness, its own rhythm, there would be no brisk, escape-like departure of any one of the party. Leisurely dispersal would pay tribute to this animated gathering and greet those that lay ahead.

'Well'—Miss Roscorla was gathering up her table-napkin.

'Yes,' responded Richard at once, and his tone held the warm approval of one seconding a motion, and he looked into space, as if contemplating there a destination of which he was

glad to be reminded, with his hands against the table-edge, about to heave himself to his feet; ready to go, having waited only for this signal. Glad to go.

No one else was moving. Side by side, Alfred and the pupil sat related, the one a figure of weariness happily at ease, the other, buoyant in his stillness, smiling; both serenely keeping their places in the broken group. The sister, once Richard was upright and obscured by the higher shadow, followed with a glance of affectionate pride the tall figure turning, not going away, not making off down the room towards the door of escape into a mysterious freedom; turning, with its characteristic, gracefully halting swing of the body from feet to shoulders, towards the shelf near at hand in the darkened alcove between fireplace and window.

Richer, deeper than had been the surprise and comfort of his return to the seated group, bearing a huge and heavy Bible, old and much worn, protruding, as he held it inclined upon the table against one huge and sunburned hand while with the other he cleared a space for it to lie open, many bunches of leaves with tattered edges, loosened from the thick mass between the battered covers, was this tide risen as she waited while the thin leaves, gently turned, crackled softly in the breathless stillness, for the sound of the deep-toned voice. Or any voice. This it was, this sudden interpolation from some detached part of her surface mind calling to her to notice that this risen fiery tide of longing was for the sound, whencesoever it might come, of the read words, that was bringing such a depth of gladness.

Thirst; created long ago, before she could remember. Assuaged from her earliest years—a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate, round about the hem of Aaron's robe—and, during the years of repudiation of almost every church

reader's way of reading, still partly assuaged, and therefore unnoticed. And now awake and crying out, because at last she knew something of what lay behind the forging of the magic text.

The deep, vibrant monotone, simple, childlike, free from unfelt, tiresomely elucidatory expressiveness, leaving the words to speak for themselves, was the very sound of the Old Testament, the wistful sound of Hebrew piety, trustfully patient within a shadow pierced only here and there by a ray of light ahead. It gave the reading a power independent of the meaning of the read words which presently sank away, leaving only the breathing spirit of their inspiration, sending the hearers down and down into depths within themselves, kindred to the depths whence it came, till the emotion creating this scripture became current and the forms seated in the golden lamplight fellows of those who had brought it forth, sharers of its majesty; a heritage bringing both humility and pride.

‘The valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.’

The fuller tone, a little raised, the deliberate pause and emphasis, called her up and out and took her eyes across to spy upon the man who so naïvely had chosen just this psalm, the farmer's song of triumph; and upon the man in whose nature resided love for the poetry of that last line. His face was no longer haggard, a strong man's face, joyous, youthfully contoured as he closed the book.

How parched seemed lives whose day went by unpunctuated by the sound of this shared reading. How attractive almost any life of which it was a part.

And how different was this dispersal from what it would have been a little earlier. Every one, now, was ready for it, separated, freed, each a self with its own dignity. Having

admitted and communicated all there was to communicate, every one was comfortably silent, ready to go, and lingering a little to relish the quality of this separation. It would be possible, she felt, to stroll away without a word. It would be a tribute.

As silently he returned from replacing the Bible in its dark corner, Richard's face expressed his pleasure. He realized that the occasion had passed its test, given its guarantee.

'If you want a clean boy to-morrow, Rachel Mary, I must have a fresh bit of soap.'

Every one looked affectionately up at Miss Roscorla's boy, who received no answer but the adoring smile she kept for him alone. It made her almost beautiful. She moved now, decisively, to distribute the party, set it on its way towards to-morrow, before retiring at last to her room in the wing beyond the dark staircase.

CHAPTER VI

Gently closing the glass door, he disappeared without calling her eyes to follow up the path his departing figure.

She was left in full possession of this silent light in whose midst she sat perched upon the little step-ladder. Morning light, no longer sending its signal across the world, but concentrated here in a reached destination; softened and diffused by the hundreds of little panes and by the clustering translucent vine-leaves. The vines now seemed conscious presences, breathing out a delicately penetrating incense, more perceptible than it had been last night; become, with the help of stillness and solitude, an almost audible emanation.

At the end of the long moment that had fulfilled her desire to be alone in this house, set apart from the others by its size and the loveliness of its cultivated inhabitants, she was eager to begin. Lifting from amongst the scattered berries in the trug at her side the sacred weapons, the delicate crutch and the bright destructive scissors, she descended from the perch to whose height, when he had stepped off the ladder and stood at her side smilingly talking away her lack of confidence, she had gone gaily up; just to be there, grapes or no grapes, and had sat crouched, just short of endangering the bloom of the higher bunches, and had looked down and caught his look, appraisal, admiration, naïvely open, startling her into awareness of the rarity, for him, of even mildly attractive feminine spectacles; and subtly modified, as he made his little farewell speech, all kindly reassurance, by the gleam of an amusement he clearly

imagined her to be sharing. He believed her to have climbed to her perch fully aware that up there she would look both funny and nice.

Setting the trug on the floor, she chose a rung that brought several bunches within easy reach and selected a victim: a prize bunch, broad-shouldered, beautifully a not quite symmetrical triangle, tapering to a central point in a single berry. Just above, just out of sight unless she looked up to it, was the bunch he had thinned, his large, skilled hands guiding crutch and scissors with such astonishing delicacy, working swiftly until the bulging opulence was reduced to an elegant skeleton foretelling the final perfection.

Snip! She had begun. The abrupt metallic sound, shattering the stillness her movements had left undisturbed, announced the presence of an intruder. But she had heard also the flop of the fallen berry on to the wooden floor and ruefully pictured the far and wide scatterings to be arduously collected when her exacting work was done. There was no idler to hold the trug as she had held it for him. Placed as it was, it would catch a few of the berries. The rest could be left for someone else? Someone who might suppose she imagined them refuse to be swept up and destroyed. But Richard knew she knew they were not refuse.

In yesterday's twilight, at the end of the long tour, this house had been going its way towards darkness in a grey-green light, leaf-thickened. Showing her round, beginning with that unknown region beyond the hedge to the side of the lawn, where that row of beehives squatted in the shelter of a screen of sweet-peas grown so high and so full of tendrilled leaf and brilliant bloom that their supporting sticks were scarcely visible, taking her on along through the colony of chicken coops and foster-mothers, bending from his height to

demonstrate with outstretched finger the working of the little flannel-draped entrance whose cunning deceit gave to her stranded mind the relief of movement, on past the wide duck-run whence dropped those far-sloping strawberry beds, across which she had looked wishing him silent, wishing him away and herself alone with those flowers newly met ... *delphiniums*—but if he had not been there, they would still be nameless—and that at once had claimed to be a sufficient reward for her travels, he had kept this house until the last, when, weary of pretending to listen, and to observe the contents of the many houses, she was still with those flowers, trying to recall their many blues.

Perhaps this afternoon, far away in the future beyond this depth of morning, might bring, if that side of the garden were clear of workers, a chance of visiting them.

‘We called this the Jubilee House,’ he had said as he opened the door, ‘it having been built in that year,’ and she saw the vines and presently discerned the tight clusters of dull green berries, no larger than peas. While she had gazed down the long vista, seeking, in this ultimate spectacle, rest from too much seeing, snuffing the moist warm air, more faintly scented but seeming more subtly alive than that of the other houses, he had gone on talking, telling of Paul Botinsky’s amazement in discovering that the black grapes of the London shop-fronts could ever have resembled these small green currants, and then, as if for this stately palace a mere standing inside the doorway were insufficient tribute, had turned to close the door. Taking his hint, she had moved further into the green gloom and looked up through it at the multitude of little darkening panes protecting this concentration of hard-earned loveliness and had seen, flitting behind the leafage in a far corner, the marauder, somehow escaping notice and shut in when the

houses had been closed, and now disturbed by unexpected visitors.

That instant wherein she had cried out, gently, lest the wild beast, hearing her, should banish itself before he saw it, was the only one in their tour having depth, the only shared moment. Together they had gone down into it, blended, indistinguishable, she the pioneer's mate sighting the enemy, proud to announce in one word both its presence and her knowledge of its malevolence, he at her side in an equality of pioneer watchfulness.

'That's a *wren*,' he had said, the moment his eyes reached it, and the warmth of affection in his tone had told her, before he explained its beneficence, how welcome was this small, confidently flitting creature to its spacious lodging. But the tremor in his voice took her eyes to his face, to find it flushed and alight, confessing the pride his unsteady tone had betrayed. Pride in the spectacle the presence of the little bird, by taking both pairs of eyes simultaneously and forgetfully down the length of the vista, had brought into full prominence.

Strolling down the aisle, he had begun telling her about the thinning, the intensive labour, nearly a month late this year, and it was then, when she deplored the inevitable waste, that she had heard of Miss Roscorla's green-grape jelly. And at the door, he had halted, looking back, as if reluctant to abandon the storehouse of an achievement brought home to him afresh through the eyes of an onlooker.

Shifting the trug, she snipped again, carefully lifting a heavy stem with the polished crutch, fear, lest the stem should break, bringing for a moment her heart into her throat. As the most obviously superfluous berries fell away, she heard again the gentle meditative words accompanying his deft movements: 'You've got to imagine,' snip, 'the bunch fully grown,' snip,

‘the berries full size,’ snip, snip, ‘so you know,’ snip, ‘how much space to clear for each.’

Again and again, with inexperienced eye, she measured her half-depleted bunch. Girth must be preserved as well as width. Then should this undersized little fellow in the middle of the front be saved rather than one of his larger but less prominent neighbours? Would he grow to his full size and fill the space cleared for him if one of them were removed? Richard had made too light of the real difficulties. He should have stayed longer; have let her thin a bunch under his guidance. A view from the side might help. But to crane round would be to risk endangering the bloom of some neighbouring bunch. How had he managed to clear his bunch without moving from his place? By holding the main stem in the crutch and lifting it, *boldly*, this way and that. But even if she could bring herself to risk so much, no kind of lifting and turning would settle the problem of this small girth-making berry. The only thing to be done was to get down from the ladder, shift it and obtain a side view.

Seen from the side, it showed as standing altogether too far out destroying the frontal curve. Getting back face to face with the bunch, snipping out the little creature so laboriously outwitted, she recognized that the thin little stalk, grown too long in its striving towards the light, would have prevented it, when fully grown, from settling into the curve of the bunch that now, she observed with delight, was beginning to approach the shapely elegance of the one above. The soft light, playing freely through these two skeletons, singled out each berry and, though paling its colour, making it look wan and cold in comparison with those of the unassailed bunches, also gave it importance, individuality. With the triumphant solving of the last problem, her outfit of knowledge was complete. Flowing down into her hands, of which the tools now seemed

intelligent extensions, it made her work steady and confident. Too easy.

Surveying her three luminous skeletons, she found them creditable company for the one above. One, its perfect twin, the others longer, narrow-shouldered, differently elegant. The greater part of the morning still lay ahead, a mass of time to be shredded into moments by an unvarying occupation. Although there was nothing more to learn and she had now, as an everlasting possession, the eye of a qualified grape-thinner, each bunch in turn would demand the continuous concentration she had given so eagerly to the first two, and that during the work on that last bunch had been accompanied by the consciousness of spending the very substance of her being. Leaning sideways, she looked down the leaf-screened vista, populating it with the workers at present scattered over the garden, next week's intensive labour in this very house more or less prominent in their minds. Dark figures on ladders, in what for them would be merely a workshop, lacking, because they worked in a group, the deep magic that had drawn her within its doors. But perhaps finding in companionship another magic, small and ceaseless; homoeopathic doses of magic taken unawares, holding off the arrival of weariness?

Measuring with unwilling eyes the proportions of her fourth bunch, she transformed it in a single act of contemplation. If only the condemned berries would fall obediently away.... Lifting a shoulder stem, opening the scissors, the handle of whose inner blade had made across the side of her thumb a painful dint, she became aware of increasing light and warmth. If the sun, now nearly overhead, should break through its thinning veil? Confined in the steamy heat of this serre that had no claim upon her and seemed now to be gathering its forces to expel an intruder, would she be able to endure until a round

dozen of bunches should stand translucent, and the morning, which might have been endless, lay sacrificed for labour that now was making time move with a heavy, almost audible tread?

Setting down her tools and the berry-laden trug in the cool harbour of the little room, she listened to the voice sounding out through the open dining-room door and wondered what could have brought to this house the person it so vividly described: a brisk middle-aged woman brimming with common sense and permanently impatient with the lack of it in almost every one she met. A Cameron voice, developed in a Christian Philistia. Like Mrs Cameron, she had brothers, scattered about the world in positions of responsibility. A professional husband, perhaps promising sons. Had lived all her life in the world as interpreted by men. But there was a difference. The rallying tones of Mrs Cameron's breezy, laughter-filled, Diana-of-the-uplands voice were conscious and deliberate. Within their inflections Mrs Cameron, herself, heard something that reminded her of her favourite heroic poet. The voice of the mysterious visitor was unconscious. Innate. The voice of one accustomed to dominate, unaware of the extent to which she was the product of sunlit, provincial opulence.

It was just dinner-time. But to go immediately upstairs would be to risk missing the intruder. The warned workers had not yet begun trailing in from the garden. Passing her hand over her hair and once again her handkerchief over her flaming face, she went along the passage to investigate, wondering which of the Roscorlas was the victim, regretting the fatigue

that was taking the edge from her hope of sharing a carefully concealed enjoyment. Pushing wide the door, she came upon hostess and visitor seated on either side of the near corner of the table already laid for dinner: Miss Roscorla, flushed from her final dealings with the dishes for which the table waited, and a stout lady in a very good tailor-made and a florid picture-hat, askew, and rather too opulently trimmed for her rubicund face. A gentlewoman, a provincial Oberlander. Yet not quite. Something, undefined, was missing.

Introduced, she gave Miriam a brisk, kid-gloved handshake and, from wide blue eyes, a glance that stopped just short of meeting her own, so that she felt free, when she reached her chair at the far end of the table, to gaze as well as to listen. The woman had a calm, intelligent brow, suggesting ideas. But the rest of her face, so imperfectly controlled when compared with the Roscorla faces, seemed to show these ideas as moving in a circle from whose centre she was perpetually hitting out with the whole strength of her being. Shillingfold. One of the many names dropped by Richard in his account of his ride home. Perhaps the one that had brought his eyes across the table with a gleam in them of blended pride and amusement as he said, in parenthesis, 'one of our leading church ladies.'

'They're not only unseemly. They're misguided. I *want* a vote. I ought to *have* a vote. My *gardener* has. Why not *I*?' Sitting back, she crossed her knees, leaned forward again and fixed Miss Roscorla, who sat there at leisure, as if for eternity, and pleased, as if enjoying an edification on whose behalf even the feeding of her household must be indefinitely postponed, with a gaze that in profile seemed intended to prepare the listener to receive a tremendous impression: 'But I'm not going to *scream* for it.' And again she sat back, watching for the effect, in the complacent *that's-got-you* manner so often, at

Lycurgan discussions, reducing Amabel to almost unmanageable hysteria. And Miss Roscorla, although for a blessed moment her eyelids flickered and fell to screen private diversions over the spectacle of Miss Shillingfold emitting shrieks that would so notably outdo the average, was nevertheless attained. Impressed a little by the rhetoric and, of course, in agreement with this woman's disapproval of militancy, but also by something that had a permanent hold.

Withdrawing her eyes, she sat weary, unable to drag herself away, longing for the woman to be gone, angry with Miss Roscorla for so meekly suffering the continuance of this untimely intrusion.

'I must be off,' She was on her feet, about to vanish and leave no trace, and out there, coming down through the little garden on his way to the kitchen, was Alfred, the peaceful light upon his face rebuking one's disarray. But Alfred knew so little of what was at stake, lived enclosed in a too simple universe. 'I've spent the best part of an *hour* trying to instill a *little* common sense into that *unfortunate* Mrs Wheddon. Thriftlessness. *That's* the secret. With *most* of them.' A bow, a smooth-voiced murmur, she was gone.

The room is free of her. In a moment, the house will be; returned to itself, enclosed, inviolate. She exists only in their minds, not in their lives. Impressed, unresistant, Miss Roscorla is showing her to the door, but will return. And find me still here, rooted in wrath. Unable to move until I have expressed it. Back in my old world, my old rampant self. That *ancient* tag: my gardener, why not I! Sounding so effective when first it began going the round. How many of these peaceful, rational suffragists would face prison, face forcible feeding through a clumsily, agonizingly mutilated nostril? Would I? Have I the right to speak for the militants? For Amabel. Yes. But perhaps

Miss Roscorla has gone round to the kitchen. In a few moments every one will be assembled and the incident sliding away, covered by life, unquestioned.

Miss Roscorla came in, came down the room towards one, smiling and rubbing her little hands together, her way of saying 'Well, and how are we getting on after all this time?' Perceiving that something was wrong, she came quite near and stood still, looking up, still with her smile, that now held a question.

'What a voice!' Crude, but earning the reward of a tinkling laugh.

'She's like a drill-sergeant. I mean essentially, without knowing it.' And now the eyes were quizzical, but still kindly, still showing Rachel Mary prepared to listen, even at this ill-chosen moment.

'She's not always quite so vociferous. She can be quiet; when she likes.'

Not always. Suggesting intimacy, frequent meetings, approval.

'Doesn't she *know* that nothing can ever be changed, *no* reform come about, without some kind of unpleasant, enmity-creating agitation? The mild suffragists may keep on asking for votes and having orderly processions world without end. Isn't it the same in private life? If the woman of the house wants anything *done*, she may mention it, to the average man, again and again without result, until she endures the unpleasantness of making herself unpleasant, by using a sharp tone, or by being sarcastic. In politics, even *that* is useless.'

Kicking open the door, the maid appeared with a laden tray. Voices sounded behind her, coming along the passage.

'Friends don't see it quite like that,' said Miss Roscorla, and again looked up with her expressive, waiting smile, still

available, with the steaming dishes cooling on the table.

‘She’s a church worker, I suppose, a cottage visitor.’

‘Miss Shillingford’s a Friend, a born Friend,’ said Miss Roscorla and waited, with her eyes on one’s own, like Richard’s while he waited for one to see a joke, with a glint of kindly malice in their depths that became, while horror flew along one’s tingling nerves, apology, healing, full forgiveness.

Again the shock of their loveliness. Their situation on this piece of rough ground at the edge of the cultivated acres and with a waste patch sloping away behind them to meet the meadows, increased their power of suggestion; the way, in their banishment, they stood for leisure and elegance, and called up a long-lost world whose gardens, taken for granted, never realized as exceptional, were full of lovely growth.

But no other garden flowers, however lovely, imagined as set here in a row, would have quite this look of ultimate beauty. Lovely enough those massed sweet-peas. Enchanting, for a moment. But without the power of making one want to gaze forever, of vanquishing other claims, the claim of the panorama ending on Jack Cade’s ridge, and even of Richard’s distant farm, so alluring with its gently rising slope and terminal windmill. These moved, changed, were variously expressive. The delphiniums, drawing everything into themselves, made some final, unalterable statement.

It was not their shape. Lupins, though less strong and stately, and now, forever, almost colourless, had just this shape of steeples in the air.

It was their colour, the *many* blues.

Masses of roses, of different shades, make statements one

against the other. These make one claim, reinforcing each other. Masses of a single kind of flower, all one tone, however lovely, even the deeper lilac, even laburnum or red hawthorn, presently send one's eyes straying to a neighbouring colour. Marigolds? Fire and food, sending one away nourished and cheered. But these many, contrasted blues keep one's eyes moving from shade to shade, and back again, satisfied. A haze of bluebells in a wood, seen suddenly from afar? Enchantment, a hovering mist, almost a hallucination, impenetrable, without depth. And not blue.

Seeking amongst memories of blue flowers, she came at last upon lobelias, the little clumps of deep, deep blue that in childhood had always made her gaze and gaze and wonder what was their secret, and that now, set once more before her eyes, seemed to hold their own against these proud steeples. She remembered how even when she passed them at a run, late for school and with her heavy satchel thumping at her side, they would exert their small influence from where they sat low upon the earth around the border of the flower-bed at the centre of the sweep, and make urgency seem less pressing.

Imagining lobelias massed here far and wide in front of her, not in their one deep shade, but in all the delphinium colours, she caught her breath. It was colour alone that possessed this strange power.

And it was just that *one*, that deepest but not darkest, that bluest blue. Within it all the others were gathered, so that still one saw it as it passed upwards through speedwell to pure dense mauve-washed turquoise and down to the one approaching black. Returning, from any one of the other shades, to gaze into its central depth, one had the feeling of being on a journey that was both pathway and destination.

CHAPTER VII

Cap awry, soot-smear'd apron, arms, and cheek-bone, and, as she turned eagerly away to scurry through the hall, soot, thinned to grey by scrubbing-water, visible around the hem of her short skirt. Ultimate household grime, between which and the rest of the household, someone must for ever stand protective.

‘Eliza’s a spectacle, I’m afraid,’ chuckled Miss Roscorla setting down the tray, ‘she’s having her Saturday contest with the kitchener.’

Though not wishing, on this unexpected occasion that Miss Roscorla had so deliberately contrived, to think either of Eliza or of the kitchener, one yet had found oneself saying: ‘It’s queer. Something in servants; though they can’t all be alike. I have a sister who can clean *flues*, whatever they may be, in her best gown, with everything ready in the drawing-room for people expected to tea, when her maid is away on holiday.’

‘I admire that,’ said Miss Roscorla, her decisive tone warmed by an invisible smile that still lit her face as she turned and came across the room with the brimming cup. At ease, and leisurely. Yet not more leisurely than she seemed to be when one came upon her in the midst of kitchen turmoil.

‘She sighs, and say she could do *all* the work in *half* the time, and without turning the house upside down.’ Neither what Sally had said, nor her way of expressing herself, but carrying on the topic, sounding like the overheard talk of brisk, household women. ‘It’s nothing,’ Sally had said, looking

potentially eloquent, but finding, in the hidden reaches of her lonely housewife's mind, only crowding experiences, unanticipated and incommunicable; from imagining which, when drawn towards them by her eloquent silence, one had flinched away, wanting to ignore and forget. And now, to make suitable conversation, one seized and misrepresented her as the user of terse, condemnatory phrases and, in misrepresenting also oneself, threatened the afternoon's treasure, the sense of the sure approach of Sunday that had kept one haunting house and garden, within sight of the cheerfully keyed-up activities of the hired workers and within hearing of the kitchen din.

If it were not too late, for already, everything, indoors and out, seemed debased, if one could fully control the disturbance created by Miss Roscorla's unexpected little invitation, refrain from backward and forward references, a shared sense of the occasion would presently become perceptible.

'Everything points to to-morrow.' What confusion of emotions, if she happened to be looking my way, must Miss Roscorla have read in my face as from the far past that forgotten incident came back to me, luminous at last, and reproachful. The one thing left out from one's recollections of that long-ago week-end at Babington that so surprisingly had brought Mr Hancock cycling across from his distant riverside cottage, ostensibly to visit his long-neglected cousins and really, as they all delightedly believed and tried to make me believe, to meet the secretary he had not only seen that morning, but had travelled down with, and to-morrow would see again. On the Saturday, the day before he came, the little incident must have occurred that now shone out as clearly as the rest.

Down from the spacious house away above the town, full of

summer light in the midst of its sunlit garden—‘I’m glad to see it all again another year,’ Mrs Farmer said as she took me, London-weary, from path to path amongst flowers and bees, the wandering vicarage bees; and all these years she had seen again the coming of spring and summer—taken unwillingly by Beulah, who so repelled me, as soon as the house was left behind, by offering, out of the blue, three attendances at church in one day as evidence of Hilda’s growing sanctity, down into the High Street distressful with shop-imprisoned workers, wishing them away, wishing to forget them, round into a mean little side-street, into a small dark house, into a street-darkened room, low-ceiled and stuffy, to stand confronting, in banishment from youth and summer beauty, ‘one of our most devoted district visitors,’ a small, small-featured, small-minded and very refined elderly woman whose thin lips, while she held out for inspection a limply dangling, freshly ironed lace collarette, had produced the phrase that then had seemed, even in separating day from day, so repulsive, and that now zestfully offered itself as fitting the present occasion, and brought back with it the little woman’s smile, risen from the depths of her surviving youth, obliterating the sour lines that in repose made her face so disdainful. Between that moment and this, no distance, no separation. Yet the proffered words, even when thought of as exchanged between people whose minds ran parallel, seemed sacrilege, isolating what they touched, dimming its lustre that not once, during that church-dominated Sunday, had fully appeared. But what now lay ahead was a *Quaker* Sunday, the culmination of days punctuated by moments of silently shared recognition.

Settling herself on the shabby little old sofa, Miss Roscorla put up her feet. Here, in this daily brief afternoon rest in the sanctuary of this apparently quite superfluous little sitting-

room, was part of the secret of her endurance from dawn until midnight. At present, inhabited by two, its air dense with misrepresentations, it carried no suggestion of repose. Its furnishings, hitherto unnoticed, became dismally prominent in the light dulled by the presence, too near to the house, of the huge evergreen oak. This morning, when first one had discovered it, it had seemed the deepest, most secret niche in the homestead. Remote, although its door opened on the hall opposite to that of Mrs Roscorla's room; made remote by exactly the obstructive oak that screened it from the outside world and screened one's escape through the french window along the little path skirting the house and leading direct to the little walled garden.

'I think,' said Miss Roscorla, stirring her tea, and the longing to hear what she was about to say ran neck and neck with the desire to arrest her and to laugh, as so often, upon this opening for communication, one had done with Amabel, over a mutual conviction of the inadequacy of speech, 'Eliza rather enjoys making herself look like a sweep.'

And she sent across the room, for oneself alone, her loveliest smile, the one invariably projected from her place at the head of the table, down the length of the dining-room to meet the incoming Richard, a deep, deep radiance come forth to meet him and not again, so long as he was in the room, fully retiring. This smile was latent in her, in the core of her being, revealing it so irradiated, that this, whenever it was moved, was its inevitable expression. And her words had summoned Eve and a true tale. Eve, tired and triumphant in the horrible little room behind her little shop. Saying, 'I like to let everything get into an appalling state of chaos, and then to attack it and see things getting straight. Which you can't if you're always niggling.' And while I hesitated, taken up with the realization that at last

it was possible to think of the dead Eve, Miss Roscorla had gone on; talking of long tramps, the little shaw, the woods beyond the village, the places she had found long ago and wanted to see again. And the sound of her voice deepened the glow of everything she touched and I was sure that if she really did find time to join me on my walks, I should still see everything as I did when alone, as one could with a member of one's own family. And then came that moment that cast a darkness and left me desolate and the homestead chilled and darkened. But even then, when for an instant I tried to realize the Quaker point of view—all days equal, and Sunday distinct only as being the first day in the week—the light began to return; but lay only ahead, leaving the past excluded.

And this morning, gaiety; in each one of them, brimming quietly over. Partly because Sunday brings cessation, and the effort implied in becoming very clean and spruce made them all a little pleased with themselves and relatively frivolous; ready to smile, almost eagerly welcoming excuses for laughter. Consciously, enjoying to the full a permitted licence, they revelled in the irregularity and go-as-you-please of their Sunday morning. Unexpected, so that for the first time one had been the first to appear, save Miss Roscorla who had already breakfasted and vanished, and had helped oneself from the huge pie-dish packed with cold baked herrings and wielded the mighty teapot, feeling a little wan, finding even the reflected sunlight powerless to banish the sense, falling upon one in being alone in this usually populous room, of essential loneliness.

And the alcove door had opened, letting in Miss Roscorla transformed. Fresh and bloomy in a blue alpaca elevated to stateliness by a lace collar and an antique brooch whose dark, luminous stone, set in pale old gold, seemed to hold, like her

eyes that shone with a happiness that was something more than the quiet happiness of every day, the light of festival. Yet last night, at eleven, awaiting Alfred not yet returned across the marshes from his selling-round along the coast, and sure to bring a score or more of beach-bought herrings requiring at once to be gutted and washed, she had been pallid with a weariness too great to be banished by a little sleep.

Seeing her thus, one was back in the mystery of Sunday, reminded of Mrs Boole's psychologically sacred seven-day rhythm, her insistence on the necessity of reversing engines once a week that had moved Dora Taylor to spend her Sunday afternoons in reading sentimental stories helped out by chocolate cream. Back in the mystery and persuaded that she had shared one's young Sundays, sure that somehow she intimately knew them and that the interchange of commonplaces enclosed identical experience, so that to look into her eyes was to see perspectives vividly re-created. And when one's own voice, the inalienable, evocative family voice, sounded in the room, these far perspectives, ceasing to belong entirely to the past, came near, became something that was still in process of realization.

And when she had gone, the little garden, withdrawn into itself, unthreatened to-day by even the passing footsteps of a worker, became one with the garden at Babington and the Barnes garden, both of them empty and, as they had always seemed on Sundays, a little aloof. So that even when one went out to watch pater cut the sacred asparagus, before church, or, after church, carefully detaching a few peaches, one saw the whole garden in a single eyeful and from all angles at once, because the part one was in, belonging to itself and seeming to throw one off, sent one's mind gliding over the whole, alighting nowhere. And it was at these times that all the

different beauties were most apparent and most deeply bathed in unattainable light. Distance does not *lend* enchantment. It shows where it is. In the thing seen, as well as in the eye of the beholder. And I realized one of the Quaker secrets. Living always remote, drawn away into the depths of the spirit, they see, all the time, freshly. A perpetual Sunday.

‘There, dawns no Sabbath, no Sabbath is o’er, Those Sabbath-keepers have one evermore.’ Even after Harriett’s direct little mind had ridiculed the words whose meaning one had never considered, light shone from this hymn and from its bright little jog-trot tune, a tiptoe quick-march for Fra Angelico angels, and kept it, together with *Light’s Abode*, *Jerusalem the Golden*, and *O Paradise*, in a class apart.

And I wanted to get Miss Roscorla back again and tell her I understood why Friends make no separation of days and wondered whether, since only those who are not exploited by others can spend all their days sabbatically, Friends all work together, Friends for Friends, keeping their firms apart, unexploiting and unexploited, engaging only in honest trades? For most workers, especially for those helplessly employed in dishonest enterprises, only Sunday is at all comparable to a game or a dance whose rhythm lets one immediately into an eternal way of being. But only so long as the day keeps people upright and apart, as in a dance or a game; by having an invariable shape, and therefore in all its parts unfathomable depths. And I knew why even in my most agnostic days I felt cheated when spending Sunday with people who skate over its surface improvising means of passing the time, and why solitary Sundays in London, kept in shape by the audible surrounding world, the recurrent church bells and the sound of the traffic unburdened by the ceaseless heavy rumble of commerce, and admitting, between the passage of lightly

running wheels and echoing hoof-beats, stillness and distance, held a depth no other day could provide.

And I heard his footsteps coming down the passage, weighty, yet not heavy, suggesting his outdoor gait, its firm, lightly swinging lounge, each footfall provisional, as if prepared, in response to a demand it seemed consciously to anticipate, to remain sympathetically halted. And he came, bringing his wealth, his power of lightening the burden of every occasion, into a room where no occasion was in progress, free to breakfast in an accompanied solitude whose quality was now to be put to the test. But he began to speak as soon as he came into sight rounding the end of the table: 'Well, I see you're early, or I suppose I should say I'm *late*.' A social voice, with a bustling manner in it, not his own. Belonging to, invented by, a type to be met in all the circles of piety. Like that woman, really good and quite certainly booked for heaven, who filled a rather yawning pause by saying you *never* know which moment will be your next. People who delight, during the intervals of compulsory activity, in attributing a make-believe importance to very small actions, addressing themselves by name, asserting, with an irrepressible complacent flounce of body and spirit, their own identity, their certainty of salvation in the next world and, meanwhile, of ability, heaven helping them, to deal with this. Though not of their kind, he had acquired, for emergencies, the witnessed devices of their social behaviour and, in using one of these, felt their presence about him, banishing embarrassing solitude with a young lady.

The little Babington woman, or even Beulah, automatically conforming to the code dictating animation in talking with men, would have entered brightly into the game, would have said, 'My being early is I assure you, *quite* an accident.' or

something of the sort, smiling across and finding his incredibly, abominably changed appearance an improvement upon the week-day shagginess that had vanished together with the tawny Norfolk jacket. And the would-be frivolous back-chat of simple piety, though setting him at his ease, would always leave him solitary. As he wished, and did not wish to be. But I was too stunned by his appearance even to play the game of leading him towards material for anecdote and, while he began on his meal and the weather, prophesying thundery rain-storms, I was taking in, one by one, the items that would make it impossible for Amabel, if indeed she came down only for a Sunday, to re-realize him as tiger, tiger burning bright. For this Sunday edition of Richard was the shockingly handsome young man of the family album upstairs, the gleaming, bravura-moustached, sleek-haired calicot endimanché, diminished by age and toil. The ill-cut dark suit alone would not have accomplished the amazing reduction. But the thinned, down-plastered hair, flattening the skull and robbing the head of its dignity, the transformation of the straggling moustache ends into spear-points extending from side to side of a face denuded of its gentle stubble and shining with recent soap, destroyed him beyond redemption.

‘Thunder above. That’ll be Alfred; hurrying.’

Looking across I found his eyes on mine waiting for them to share his vision of the frail slight figure hurtling from point to point, causing the floor to rock. And I produced an unwilling glimmer, and his smile became a deep-chested chuckle; delight in sharing. And congratulation. A kindly teacher applauding a pupil’s achievement.

If Amabel could see him thus she would perceive, through no matter what disguise, the culture in him, its generous depth.

A rumbling, along the road behind, and, in a moment, the

carriage, pulled up at her side with its door already open. The first drops of the promised shower fell heavily upon her face as she climbed in, to the sound of Mrs Roscorla's eager welcome: 'That's right, *that's* right. Now thee's safe, and thee's pretty hat.' The chariot moved off, the din of its rattling joints and the downpour on the roof preventing further hearing and allowing her to escape into entranced contemplation of the deluge.

'Lovely,' she presently shouted towards them, in the hope of justifying her preoccupation. Miss Roscorla sat forward to share, but the old lady, her frail form bent within its burden of clothing and looking as if it must break beneath the weight of the heavy veil-hung bonnet, after directing toward the outer world a single wide-eyed glance, disappointed in her anticipation of something to be seen there that might explain the sudden outcry, kept upon Miriam's face her searching gaze, embarrassing in its lifelong singleness of vision, its unvarying statement. So far, apparently she was satisfied. Her habitual half smile blossomed full whenever her eyes were met, and was accompanied by a decisive little nod that seemed approvingly to pat the passing moment on the back and at the same time so eloquently to plead for acknowledgment of the vision she cherished with such deep strength of conviction that Miriam presently felt her prevail, win her competition with the outside scene, and make it pleasant to sit back and be told from the depths of the motionless limpid eyes how good life was upon the beaten tracks, and how well that she had been rescued from foolhardy adventure, brought home into the coach to be forgiven, rejoiced over, congratulated on being where and what she was. So that she noticed only when they began to draw up that the sudden rain had ceased.

With the village away behind, they were in a little lane leading to open country, drawn up outside the larger of two

adjoining cottages. Labourers' cottages, fronted by tangled gardens enclosed in battered palings. Huge in his ulster, Richard was clambering down from the box as she escaped into the road to look away towards the distant fields, trying to get past the disappointment of this too-modest substitute for her imagined rural equivalent of the once-seen London meeting-house, to keep in mind the Friends gathered inside, the nucleus of living reality with which in a moment they were to be merged. Mrs Roscorla was alighting, being carefully helped out by Richard. As if to meet her, the sun came out, its light falling full upon her face, radiantly smiling and secretly adream, the face of a woman delighting in the necessity of being for the moment central, delighting in her right to exemption and rich escort; the face of a bride.

Turning, Miriam found the cottages transformed. Against the deep grey of the retreating storm-cloud, their whitewashed fronts shone out patterned with green rose leaves and red roses and with the clean shadows of leaf and bloom.

The door opened to the sound of their arrival, was held open from within for them to pass. Entering just behind Miss Roscorla, Miriam found herself, all unprepared and expecting only a stranger, almost face to face, in the gloom between the two doors, with the forgotten half-wit of the carrier's omnibus, the dreadful ventriloquist's dummy.... Inescapable, a barrier not to be passed, driving her with his powerfully clear description of it, into the depths of helpless human solitude, bringing horror into the gathering she was about to join and that insisted on reminding her of his existence, of the inevitability of his daily presence somewhere within the radius of this small inhabited area amidst the wastes of downland and meadow. Part of the local household; all of them nightmarishly immovable and unvarying. Out of sight, she had forgotten him.

But, for these Quakers, even he was never out of sight?

Guiltily tiptoeing, Miss Roscorla led the way to the last row of chairs to the right of the gangway and stood back for Miriam to pass in first and gladly take the end seat within the shelter of the wall whose windows, rather high up, cast their light chiefly upon the other side of the room; upon the forms seated there in scattered groups, amongst them a little old woman just across the way who for a moment held her eyes, so still she was and so intent, and across the faces of the row of elders confronting the gathering from the raised platform. In their midst, Alfred Roscorla, his lonely early departure explained. Little Alfred ... was a minister, or an elder; perhaps both. Small and still, with arms folded and head inclined so that his chin rested upon his breast, he sat at ease, at home, perfectly yielded up to the central depths of his being. The pale mask of his face, shining out beneath the fluffy red-gold ridges that softened its deep lines and beautifully completed its shape, had in this place a look of unconscious dignity; telling her that in their pardonable tour of investigation her eyes would not rest upon him again. To his left, sitting very upright, a dapper professional-looking man in dove-grey, whose clear grey eyes gazed through gold-rimmed spectacles down the room above the heads of the congregation, unseeing. On the other side three women, their bonneted heads at varying angles, their eyes closed, already settled in meditation or in prayer.

The clock above the doorway at the far side of the platform, disconcertingly suggesting, with its loud, wooden tick-tock, a farmhouse kitchen, stood at ten minutes past the hour. Meeting had not long begun, there was yet time to join the opening stillness before it should bear fruit. But the little party could not fully subside until Richard, attending to horse and vehicle, should have come in, stealthily admitted by the ventriloquist's

dummy whom still, without turning her head, she could see at his post, a rigid form set sideways on the edge of a chair, listening, ready to rise at the sound of a footfall on the garden path. Even a Friends' meeting must have its outpost, scouts on the watch. Was he the permanent doorkeeper, given by this Quaker colony not only the sense of being a member of a kindly social group, but also the pride-bestowing importance of office?

Tick-tock, tick-tock. Richard was halted somewhere, talking; releasing someone into a momentary freedom from the direct pressure of daily life upon lonely individuality.

Imagining him set down in meeting, inactive and silent, solitary yet not alone, less alone and less protected than in the midst of social life, she was glad to be so far removed from where he would sit, and eager to escape still further, to join the travellers already launched, so that when he arrived she would be unaware of his presence. A last glance carried her eyes to the figure that had drawn them as she took her place, the old woman sitting a little ahead across the gangway, dressed, in spite of the oppressive warmth, in stout black serge and little elbow cape. Her white hair, confined in a coarse black net, lay in a bang across the nape of her neck. Above it stood the wide brim of her flat-crowned circular black straw hat, defying fashion, asserting antique modesty and respectability, yet triumphantly, by the superfluous width of its brim, proclaiming itself a hat. A village grandmother, bringing herself, her childhood and youth, her lifelong memories and gathered wisdom, to sit in company and make, youthfully truant from all that on her behalf could be summarized and put into words, her journey towards the centre of being. Intent and lost, knowing the way of escape, the points of departure from deceptive surfaces, she, with her ancient simplicity, rescued this small

meeting from the enclosedness it suggested when one remembered that these local people lived always in the white glare of village publicity, carrying about with them from the cradle to the grave their known personal records. More powerfully than her more sophisticated juniors, she represented the world which she had never seen, made this meeting one with the larger meetings and showed them for what they were, always the same; and always new.

Closing her eyes to concentrate upon the labour of retreat into stillness of mind and body, she recognized the iniquity of unpunctuality in attending a Quaker meeting. The room was utterly still. Half-way through the drawing of a deep releasing breath, she was obliged to hamper the automatic movements of her limbs that with one accord were set on rearranging themselves. Stealthily her body straightened to sit upright, her head moved to relax the supporting muscles of the neck and came to rest a little bent. Lifted by a powerful circular movement of her shoulders that before she could restrain it had caused a gentle crackling of starched blouse-sleeves, her arms released themselves, unclasping her hands and setting them, with fingers relaxed, one upon each knee, while her feet, approaching each other, drew in just short of lifting their heels.

Even a beginning of concentration held an irresistible power. The next breath drew itself so deeply that she could prevent its outgoing from becoming a long, audible sigh only by holding and releasing it very gradually. It left her poised between the inner and the outer worlds, still aware of her surroundings and their strangeness and of herself as an alien element brought in by sympathetic understanding of the Quaker enterprise and engaged at last upon a labour whose immediate fruits were making her regret that it had not been, consciously, from the beginning of her life, her chief concern. To remain always

centred, operating one's life, operating even its wildest enthusiasms from where everything fell into proportion and clear focus. To remain always in possession of a power that was not one's own, and that yet one's inmost being immediately recognized as its centre.

Already she was aware of a change in her feeling towards those about her, a beginning of something more than a melting away of resentment towards the characteristics of some of those she had observed as she came into the room, an animosity now reversing itself by a movement of apology towards the women on the platform and the dapper little man of ideas. Feeling now something more than a rationally tolerant indifference, something akin to the beginning of affection, she was free to take leave of them.

Why should it be only Quakers who employed, in public as well as privately, this method of approach to reality? Again, as at the beginning of the meeting she had attended in London and where she had been little more than an interested spectator, she considered the enormity of breaking into sound the moment a congregation is assembled and keeping on, with scarcely an instant's breathing-space, until the end. 'For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I—in *the midst of them*': to be immediately assailed by a torrent of words, confessions and protests, part-singing and the recital of poetic prayers, by readings aloud and at last by an address, compiled and delivered by one who may, or who may not ever, have suffered a moment's religious experience.

What prevents the spreading, throughout Christendom, of a practice born of belief in the presence of God; necessarily following on that belief?

Be still and *know*. Still in mind as well as in body. Not meditating, for meditation implies thought. Tranquil, intense

concentration that reveals first its own difficulty, the many obstacles, and one's own weakness, and leads presently to contemplation, recognition.

Bidding her mind be still, she felt herself once more at work, in company, upon an all-important enterprise. This time her breathing was steady and regular and the labour of journeying, down through the layers of her surface being, a familiar process. Down and down through a series of circles each wider than the last, each opening with the indrawing of a breath whose outward flow pressed her downwards towards the next, nearer to the living centre. Again thought touched her, comparing this research to a kind of mining operation. For indeed it was not flight. There was resistance from within, at once concrete and buoyant, a help and a hindrance, alternately drawing her forward and threatening, if for an instant her will relaxed, to drive her back amongst the distractions of the small cross-section of the visible world by which she was surrounded. And here, indeed, she was, up in her mind, open-eyed, everything about her very sharp and clear, though the room had darkened to a twilight.

A satiny flexible straw, pale warm fawn shot with dull gold and green and mauve, subtly blended so that where the light caught it all the colours appeared at once and one could see each in turn as predominating; an inexhaustible interweaving of soft brilliancies, deeply satisfying. A sophisticated, rather expensive Regent Street sort of straw, the basis of a hat costing guineas. Small silky flowers, bunched, repeating more definitely the shades of the straw. And then that ill-placed band of cheap satin ribbon, its hot brown colour ruining both flowers and straw. With velvet ribbon of a neutral fawn, dull, shaped close to the straw on its way to join the flowers set on one side only, instead of in uniform bunches on either side, and

the hat set at an angle to make of hat and hair and face a continuous design: lovely. A hat to keep itself in memory together with the summer of which it was a part. Quenched by the odious ribbon and standing, rather than set, upon the head, above rigidly crimped hair whose lengths were tightly pinned into a row of transverse sausages, it became a frightful proclamation. Beside it, any faded wreck, stuck on anyhow, would be a thing of beauty.

Moving stealthily in search of relief, her eyes fell upon the head-gear of the old woman across the way. That, too, had proclaimed itself a hat, independent of its wearer. But the little old woman was deeply a part of the gathering. And this other? Why, without knowing her, without even seeing her face, should one feel so certain of her lack of understanding cooperation? There she sat, however complacently conscious of the horror perched with lunatic independence upon her repulsive coiffure, within the fold, at least reverent and conforming, waiting, patiently, for the results of an uncomprehended process?

Reaching down once more into the featureless inner twilight, she found the outdoor world obtruding, assailing her ears with mid-morning chirrupings, the sudden chackle of a scared thrush in flight across the garden, sounds from distant farms and meadows. External contemplation, divorced from sympathetic imagination, had closed the pathway to recovery of the state whence a fresh beginning would be possible. Each effort to be still brought the outdoor world into her mind.

After all, this was her first Sunday. A stranger, unaccustomed to labour here, she might well be allowed to rejoice for a moment in the place itself, to be aware of the little temple as set in a green world, porous to the evocative sounds of its background; to be, for those who intimately knew and

could so easily forget it, just this once a delighted emissary? Who was she, that she should expect to find herself all at once in the presence of God?

Truant in the open, she saw, closing her eyes to the surrounding twilight, not the features of the scenes whose memory was the power that had drawn her forth to the gently clamorous sounds, but the corner of an unlocated meadow, rain-drenched and so near that she could perceive, as if she were some small field-beast in their midst, a forest of grass-blades, coarse, rank, July grass, the ribs and filaments of each blade clearly visible. Just grass, the least considered feature of all that had made the joy of a week's wanderings, yet now offering itself as a sufficient representative and a bourne, narrowing to a single clump, to a few large blades bent beneath the weight of their own growth; individual, precious. In every nerve she felt their chill touch. And now the whole of the unknown field lay clear, hedged and sloping, and she was above it, looking down upon a wide stretch of open country, sunlit, showing here and there a nucleus of remembered beauty.

With opened eyes she was observing the deepness of the room's grey light. Another storm-cloud. The hour was ticking itself away and here she sat, an outsider, using this unique depth within the depth of Sunday to exult in the memory of solitary joy and in the certainty of its continuance in the week lying ahead and showing, of its massed hours, only those that she would spend alone.

'O Lord—foundation and end of our being—bring amongst us the sense of thy presence and of thy love—help us to set aside all that would come between ourselves and thee—that we may merge our wills with thine—and go our way—in confidence—along the path that thou wilt show.'

The even, meditative, unemotional tone of the man in dove-grey was the tone of Quaker prayer? Again she recalled the old man who had prayed at the London meeting, beginning so beautifully, breathing out, to a lifelong friend, human sadness and aspiration, seeming to carry, in the tones of his gentle life-worn voice, the collected sorrows of the gathering—and then letting that voice fill out and bawl. The man on the platform, cultivated, humane, *spoke*. Quietly, without protestations, to someone very near at hand, implicated in human affairs, ready currently to collaborate with those who held themselves available.

She imagined the brief prayer spoken, as if the speaker were uncertain of its reception, with emphasis upon the leading words, so that they might carry to someone whose attention must be assailed and held; spoken poetically, in a manner revealing the speaker's satisfaction with his own choice of words; intoned, more or less unctuously; recited in church, like a collect, in musical or unmusical monotone, rather swiftly.

What would be the result of this lead from the platform, so comfortingly suggesting that for others, as well as for herself, the meeting had yet to begin? Silence. Wherein the little prayer reverberated. Suppose there should be no further contribution? None was needed. Supported by the kindred spirits amongst whom it was distributed, fulfilled, the prayer should presently disperse the gathering fully armed into its immediate world. There to confront cattle awaiting the terrors of slaughter, leaky mouldering cottages consuming life apace, distant towns where people starved, or died, hopelessly, by inches, of ceaseless exploitation?

And indeed, it was against such things, though so far she had heard nothing of Quaker vegetarians, that Friends raised their voices.

“For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressur.” A burly middle-aged man, outlined against the further wall in ill-fitting Sunday best, described by his clothes and his accent as a farmer or superior farm labourer. With an almost defiant upward fling of his massive head, he cleared his throat and proceeded in a deep quiet tone, the more impressive for the gesture preceding it: *“for it had been better for them not to have knawn the way of righteousness than after they had knawn it to turrn.”* These two sayings of Paul have been much in my mind this past week. Tur’ble sayings. Tur’ble truths. Both found to bear the same meaning. To destroy evil, the devil’s bad building, to keep on at it, not turning away. That is the will of the Lowerd. Betturr not to know that will than, knowing it, to fall away from trying to carry that will out.’

That first long silence, inviolate, had shielded and encouraged active labour. This second interval echoed with the two contrasted voices, one fragile, refined, suggesting the complex external protections whereon the very life of its owner was continuously dependent, the other, independent strength. Two widely separated natures, expressing different features of a common experience. One, the clear aim, the cost of attaining it, the other, an ever-present danger. For one morning, enough? Yet seeming to call for some kind of response, audible endorsement by the whole meeting as one person. A hymn? Excluded, though Miss Roscorla had confessed to hymns at evening meeting, introduced to attract outsiders. A concession. These morning meetings, the core of Quaker communal life, could not admit recitations. Yet the Bible was quoted? Two desires pressed equally. For more voices to sound into the stillness, for the stillness, already full of testimony, to remain unbroken until the end of the short hour.

The darkness, increasing since the farmer voiced his sturdy warning, seemed to press that warning home. And now, upon the roof, single drops fell heavily, increased, became a deluge.

‘Pawin’ wi’ rain!’ A child’s voice, clear and confident, addressing its universe. No whispered rebuke, no movement. The young parents, whom she had found before the voice ceased, remained peacefully upright on either side of the small figure. In craning round, she became aware of her forgotten neighbour, twinkling towards her own delight. Proud. Justly proud of the witnessed reception of the babe’s contribution, and of the babe, sustaining, mute and motionless, the long silences, at home and at ease, qualifying as a Friend.

Far away towards the downs, a low, prolonged cannonade.

‘Thunder. *Rumbledumbledumble.*’ The crackling of a cautiously handled paper bag. A biscuit, peacefully crunched.

‘*Dear Luard*’—a weak, low-toned, conversationally expostulating voice from the platform, from one of the bonneted women, ceasing, seeming to have no more to say, seeming, for an instant that kept Miriam pressing the edge of a sharp heel into a vulnerable ankle, merely to intend a gentle protest against the roof-battering torrent. ‘Send down thy *blessing* upon us this morning. Upon us *all*. We have gathered here to *receive* thy blessing, Luard...’ Going on and on, the thin dry voice gained strength and a little warmth, but still seemed continuously to expostulate. Listening only to its inflections which now were suggesting a genteel customer admonishing a careless tradesman, Miriam wondered how it could be that upon this woebegone female should have descended the honour of a place upon the platform. A break in the voice called her attention. ‘Especially, we would remember the little *chewdren*, Luard.’

Struggling in vain against a fierce loathing, she found

herself isolated with two assailants. On the one hand memories, rare but vivid, of outlying elders who, in thus distinguishing herself and Harriett from the surrounding adults, had inspired only nausea and reaped only contempt, and on the other a sly voice requesting her to note the difference between the masculine and the feminine contributions, and to admit St Paul justified in forbidding women to give voice in public.

For the helplessly squirming children, including the boy whose consciousness, the engrossing biscuit forgotten, would once more have become an intelligent ear, she could do nothing. For the insistent voice there was an answer laid up in the archives of her intermittent feminism. Searching the records, to the accompaniment of the intolerable intonations, she met resistance coming from within, seeming at first a sense of the unsuitability of the occasion and becoming, while she reminded herself that the occasion, already banished by her own anger, left empty space excellently available for a pressing matter, the misty dawn of a conviction, new and startling and bringing, as it cleared and took shape, a return of the sense of unity with those about her.

I no longer care.

Could this be true? Summoning the hitherto infallible inspirers of wrath, things read incredulously, opinions, roundly expressed or casually implied, she found that they failed to move her. Deprived of their old power, lustreless, deflated, they seemed now only the harsh and pitiful echoes of a world from which for ever she had escaped, the world, outside Quakerdom, where still they pursued their poisonous way.

The voice ceased. Unawares, her eyes flew to the tormentor. There she sat, at the end of the row, leaning back in her chair, weary, exhausted by joyless activity. A gentle face, reproachful.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

Into this third silence had come the lifting of the light, and now its full radiance restored the aspect of the room to what it had been at the beginning of the hour whose end was now at hand. The outer world reasserted itself, its clear sounds echoing into the height of its sky. Every one must feel its influence, the sense of emergence, the thinning of the enclosed atmosphere, the dispersal of concentration. Trying to recall the end of the London meeting, she remembered only the faces of the women who stood talking together, lingering to greet and converse, their look of deep controlled vitality. In their neighbourhood there was none of the atmosphere of essential isolation spread by even the most sociable churchwoman. Without being dignified, they had a serene dignity. Like Rachel Mary. Even in this little village meeting, the Quaker social rudiments were represented. If only on account of these, it was good to be here, to be in the midst of a community that was swayed by them. Even though the only woman to give voice created the impression of being a lonely, sourly puritanical Low Churchwoman.

Would there be another word, to lift the gloom she had left upon the air and that even the returned sunlight had failed to disperse?

‘We thank thee’—the voice of Alfred Roscorla, hardly above a whisper, seeming to emerge from the stillness rather than to break it—‘for thy nearness—during another week—for thy sure promise—always to be with us—close at hand—in all our difficulties—to give us—whenever we turn to thee—thy peace.’

‘She’s a kind soul, she does her best, but usually working a

little beyond her strength.’

‘She needs a *holiday*,’ said Mrs Roscorla, who had been eagerly waiting to speak. ‘Too much meetings and visitings.’ Having spoken her mind, she turned with a smile that said, ‘Let us forget her and enjoy our stroll home in this sunlight after the shower. Life is pleasant, as Mrs Bradley ought to know. I’ve no patience with her.’

Automatically, hardly realizing what she did, finding her standing alone and frail, swaying a little on her uncertain feet in the road to which she had made her independent way while still the others lingered talking, she had given Mrs Roscorla her arm. To that sudden blind movement, she owed her present position between mother and daughter slowly climbing the endless hill. By the time the far-off house should be reached, a lifetime of revealing association would be left behind. Forever she could have gone on talking to Miss Roscorla, from whom still emanated warm appreciation of her relief in learning that this halting little meeting was merely a tentative offshoot of Quakerdom, a scattering of local people drawn to Friends from church or chapel, drawn, she suspected, in the first place by the quality of the Roscorlas, the personality of Miss Roscorla, operating in her missionary days down here before the farm-life started. By the charm of a voice whose every sound was communication more eloquent than the words it so beautifully transformed.

Each of them had risen to her innocent-sounding allusion to Mrs Bradley, relishing, while the one gently defended and the other zestfully explained her, the presence of a companion sufferer to whom opinions might be confided without risk of leakage. But now, as she passed into silent contemplation of a possible world suddenly fully supplied with Quaker meetings drawing together all who were Quakers unawares, the link on

her left was snapped. The slight weight on her arm, alternately, to the irregular rhythm of the tottering footsteps, lifting and pressing, became a warning, powerfully demanding its restoration. Returning to what she had been a moment before, all ears for the responses to her own relief in learning that the dismal woman on the platform had joined Friends from the Plymouth Brethren, she found the warning gone, the link ready to be restored. By further discussion of local people? By making conversation whose deliberate contrivance would come between oneself and this present well-being; this heavenly sense of belonging, of being surrounded and secure?

If she could shake her mind free, topics would spontaneously arise. But effort brought only the realization, upon a tide of joy, that still it was only July. She decided for silence. Soon, the approaching milestone would offer a topic and then, as slowly they climbed the last of the hill, the elms would come into sight and provide material that would branch and grow. They rounded the bend and there, just ahead, lay the milestone and the fork, the turning-point of her first excursion. A vehicle, rumbling along from behind, was almost upon them. An event. The old lady must gently be propelled a little nearer to the grass-fringed roadside. Already Miss Roscorla had dropped behind. Pressing the frail arm to her side, she turned and smiled, while making the necessary sideways movement, freely down into the bonneted face, making the most of the adventure of moving a few steps upon the surface of a shared earth in order to escape the impact of something moving more quickly along the same path.

That's right, said Mrs Roscorla's answering smile, brilliant, almost roguishly expressing her approval and appreciation. A carriage passing and we moving aside. A pleasant adventure. *That's right*. Then, turning her eyes once more to the roadway:

'There they are,' she said gaily.

Looking ahead, Miriam recognized the family coach and, with a smiting self-reproach, the figure of Richard, the forgotten Richard who, as far as she was concerned, might have spent his morning in another world. Turned full round in his place on the box beside Alfred who was driving, supported by a hand on the rail behind him, he was looking back, unsmiling, at the three walkers. Looking directly forth from the centre of his solitary being, as though unwitnessed and alone. With a pang of apprehension, solicitude on behalf of the man who was being deceived, she saw in his face his reading of all he had seen, in approaching, in going by, and now, as he fronted and focused the group whose centre was the young lady: looking 'a picture' in the scabious-blue gown, its shoulder-straps set firmly upon the creamy lace that rose to her neck and moulded her arms to the wrists, supporting upon one of those lace-clad arms the beloved frail figure. Meeting hers, his eyes moved immediately to his mother and back again to rest upon her own, seeming so near and so engulfing that for an instant nothing else was visible. Released as he turned away, she found herself alighted, on the further side of that irreversible moment, amongst London friends arrived upon the scene incredulous, protesting; powerless. They vanished, driven away by confident glad laughter, leaving her alone with Richard's relatives, needing somehow to employ her swiftly moving breath.

'The clouds seem to have vanished quite away,' she said and heard the tremor in her animated voice and turned to search the face of the chief witness, present with all her faculties serenely about her during that age-long moment. For the second time to-day she saw Miss Roscorla transformed. Upon her cheeks was a rose-red flush, removing the years.

‘Yes,’ she said evenly, and the pulsating interval brought no message, dropped no hint as to the nature of the onlooker’s experience—‘the thunder seems to have passed quite off.’ She looked, as if inquiringly, away across the meadows beyond the further hedge, and kept her eyes upon them as she walked; collecting herself.

‘Alfred’s a good driver. They’ll soon be home.’ Serenely, in an unchanged world, the old lady was watching the distant carriage climb the gentle rise.

‘Yes,’ she responded, ‘they haven’t far to go,’ and knew that her voice, emphatic and insincerely judicial, confessed, to her other companion, her thankfulness for the diversion. Returning, she caught Miss Roscorla’s face turned fully round, silently regarding her. Catching at the elms, the promised topic, now mercifully visible in the distance, she launched forth.

‘I’ll ask you,’ said Miss Roscorla, the moment she rested from the labour of stringing sentences together and driving into them the semblance of an animated interest, ‘a question. You’ll notice as we pass them,’ and now her voice, relievedly escaping into a neutral topic, might have been one’s own, ‘that they’re not quite evenly planted. Can you tell me which two are furthest apart?’

Here they were, the desolate trees, suggesting for years past, to Roscorla eyes, only this simple catch.

‘I’m afraid I’ll have to disappoint——’

‘Ah, she’s guessed it!’ chuckled the old lady, stumbling a little in her eagerness. ‘Now isn’t that the first person who’s guessed it, Rachel Mary?’

‘Well, no. I think just one or two guessed it.’

‘Ah, yes. One or two, I expect.’

She seemed to be reading from afar the known features of a

dream. The voices, the words, even the small sounds in between of slow footsteps upon the ascending ground, were familiar, as if recited, and recognized as they fell.

Easeful silence while she listened in this dream-world, identified with its players, for the next familiar sound.

‘We’ll have to show you,’ said Miss Roscorla, and her voice came isolated, from to-day, with quiet confidence and cheeriness, restoring novelty, ‘some of our further woods; before the autumn comes.’

She had spoken firmly, from the context of her private speculations.

The open window had filled the room with rich moist air. Wealth, solitary, forgotten, accumulated up here during the eventful evening. Leaning forth, she met the unexpected deep scent of cloves, somehow wandered round from the near corner of the little walled garden. On any of the earlier evenings it would have drawn her spirit forth. To-night it competed in vain with the life of the day.

Leaning further out, she fixed her attention on the scent alone. Its character had changed. No longer a garden scent, it seemed to come from interiors. Sunday interiors decked with flowers severed from their roots, lavishly spending their perfume as they die. Vividly it recalled from the past a single forgotten experience as a stop-gap Sunday-school teacher, the embarrassments of inexperience set to instruct unembarrassed inexperience, in enclosed air that held, prominent amongst its stifling odours, the pungent fragrance of crushed and body-warmed lemon thyme and the oily-sweet aroma of red carnations. And now this same rich scent came from to-day,

shut her in with visions of Sunday tea-parties in farm and cottage.

At these flower-scented festivals, every seated figure was touched by a glint of regal individuality, independent, for an hour, of the concerns wherein to-morrow each, grown smaller, would be absorbed.

With triumphant indifference, these images held themselves before her in the outer darkness, declaring themselves, if she should pursue her present path, henceforth inseparable companions of the scent of cloves.

With the curtains drawn and the night shut out, she faced the flood solitude had released. Strangely prominent in the scenes closing in on her, even in those wherein he had played no part, was the figure of Frankie. Challenging the light, accentuating the darkness. And yet it was he who had brought the day's deepest satisfaction.

Every time she had seen him he had been apparition. Sitting in the carrier's omnibus, a punctually placed reminder, forgotten as soon as he was out of sight. In meeting, a hint of the ceaseless presence in village life of things one would rather forget. At the Roscorla tea-table, an affront, a spectre denuding the richest feast of the day. Yet after the pang of acceptance and of realizing that of such, of those not invited elsewhere, would be the Roscorlas' chosen guests, his presence had brought this strange happiness.

Frankie's alien *completeness*, which they, in their kindly, active pity, failed to recognize, was somehow akin to every happy state?

When they all sat down together, restored to each other with Sunday still wielding its full power and the known burdens of each life temporarily lost, their combined wealth, emphasized by the presence of a stranger, magnetized the air. Meeting

Frankie in the midst of them, it was easy to find things to say, not directly addressed to him, whose meaning he could apprehend. To feel impelled to say them, even in growing aware, in the presence of a surprised audience unaware of themselves as sources of inspiration, of appearing to be deliberately playing a charming part. Charming the pupil, who sat half turned, glowing towards one's geniality; and Miss Roscorla, who was grateful as well as pleased; and Mrs Roscorla, because the concrete little pictures, reduced to their utmost simplicity, not calling for reflection, dramatized by emphasis on single words, and that yet, helped by vocal modulations that made one listen as if to a voice not one's own, seemed to bring the whole of truth, visitant, into the very air, proclaimed the old lady's central unconscious belief: that every one knows everything worth knowing and is immensely to be congratulated. And Richard ... pleased and approving, well satisfied to take a holiday from his task of being general entertainer, descending into speech at need, in support of the role that was spontaneously playing itself.

The richest depth of social experience is to be had only in relation to those who, while exercising a poignant appeal, make no demands?

But she knew she could not permanently respond to this appeal. That she would feel, if Frankie were always there, impatience with the obstructed mind, disgust, seeing it in motion, for the shambling body.

And now she could see only Alfred Roscorla, his quiet pale face shining with an unearthly radiance. Alfred it was who had brought Frankie home to tea, enduring, all the way up from adult school and all the way down to evening meeting, his solitary companionship.

Could one even have kept the tea-table conversation

somewhere within the restricted circle of Frankie's vision, if the afternoon had been different?

'A pleasant afternoon.' And so perhaps it appeared to Richard as he came strolling down the garden in his Sunday leisure. Nothing had changed, but the whole domain seemed saddened, depressed, lifeless. The effect of what psychologists call 'reaction,' which somehow ought not to be. Even when he reached one's side, things remained sad. Overwhelming in their sadness. 'Pleasant.' So mild, and yet too great a tribute. And too small.

'If you were thinking of taking a walk, you might like to stroll across to the farm.'

Joy and disgust, inextricably mingled. Not the farm. Anywhere but the farm, anything but toil-suggesting spectacles. Coming from him, even the idea seemed a kind of Sabbath-breaking.

'Isn't it a very long way?'

'A tidy step by road, but not far across the fields.'

A useful piece of farmer's lore. But would one remember at such a crisis, and have the courage to crouch in a ditch, if such were handy, and face the bull, looking up at him, until he grew weary, or someone came along?

Another narrow track, a corridor between rustling walls of grey-blue oats, another stretch of wandering single file in easy silence.

The small, squat farmhouse, set amongst its barns and haystacks and warmly sunlit, yet seeming desolate, incomplete, with only a foreman living there. Meadows and meadows, each with a different loveliness, linked by the crazily sloping stiles. Strength, behind the hand that steadied and steered at the same time. Long intervals of strolling on and on, feeling, although he seemed content to walk in silence, that one ought to be asking intelligent questions and, all the time, the lovely setting, aloof, each prospect sending with the first glimpse, its intimate message, its demand to be seen in solitude.

‘Yes, it’s pretty stuff. Sainfoin.’

‘But what a lovely beneficent name! *Holy hay.*’

Spoken gently, affectionately, so that it seemed to caress the opulently successful meadow, the ancient word, so strange upon his lips and yet so fitting, unable, even when anglicized, to lose either its beauty or its descriptive power, broke the spell of desolation lying, even here where the lovely old windmill looked straight down upon the valley, over the uninhabited farm, summoning thither the spirits of those who in early-Christian Europe had single-heartedly given to this herb its still-persistent name. But there was tiresome amusement, the shadow of a grin behind the look of aroused, gratified awareness, as he turned and gravely met my eyes.

‘Is that so-now? I never knew it. It’s true enough. Sainfoin makes good fodder.’

And when he had grasped the connection between sain and wholesome and holy and I asked him to agree that it was a pity

holy had become so specialized and narrowed down, he spoke swiftly, heartily, as if from deep conviction: 'That's so. There's no sort of doubt about that.'

Walking in high-heeled shoes across the stubble over which he strolled so easily, feeling at a disadvantage, a hobbling townswoman out of place upon the raw surfaces of masculine labour, I yet felt, the moment he apologized for the crossing that was to shorten the way, glad to be there rather than anywhere else, to be realizing the powerful exacting life of cultivated fields, even though the realization meant that henceforth this lovely farm, seen from afar, would proclaim the price of its beauty.

'You may find it strange, me being here every day in the week, that I like sometimes to stroll over on a Sunday.'

'The farm has two faces for you, a week-day and a Sunday face? I mean, when there is no one here you can see how lovely it is?'

'Well-now, since you've asked me, I suggested us coming over this way because I certainly think the views hereabout are as pretty as any in the neighbourhood, barring the one from our garden.' Pretty views. Pleasant weather. As if to such things only moderate feelings must be accorded. 'But there's a queer thing,' slowly, judicially, and looking round to pin my attention. 'Any farmer'd tell you'—and I saw that it still gives him pride to call himself a farmer—'that Sunday's the only day you can see the place, take stock and make your plans.'

'Nobody there to distract and remind you of the difficulties of working with hired labour.'

'I guess that's it.'

And when somehow I was asking him if he'd come to the farm when, on a Sunday, he felt depressed, meaning that in its lonely uninhabited state it was depressing:

‘Well—*no*. I’ll tell you what I do when I’m depressed. Something for somebody else. As quick as I can. There’s nothing like it for curing depression.’

And I regretted missing the opportunity of telling him that no labour should be hired, that the payment of wages rather than shares created a wrong relationship. And we reached the sacred little copse, the mystery of its company of trees and of the sunlight striking through, silently, yet making one listen.

‘Yes. It’s a pretty little wood. I eat my lunch here when I can command a clear half hour. You can generally find a more or less dry spot. There’s a good deal of pine, as you see, and not much undergrowth.’

The farmhouse and its meadows, the distant woods grown near, the little copse seen in its intimate loveliness, all too near to be felt, sending one in search of a vanished bourne. Everything recedes as you approach, unless you come in solitude, unaccompanied even by memory.

Yet after going back across the fields, forgetful of surroundings, putting together, turn and turn about, competitively, a map of London and at last agreeing, in the serious voices of people discussing an invalid, that no one who had once lived in the country could ever again want London for more than a brief interval, the walk round the wan and desolate farm became an achievement, and the last bit of the way, the lane leading into the road just above the house, had the enchantment of a sudden plunge from enclosure into air whose scents are almost tangible. Every hedgerow flower a promise and an invitation.

And it was the certainty, when we joined the others at tea, that Richard too felt this sense of achievement, keeping him poised and, even in his silence, expansive, that made it easy to talk for Frankie and helplessly to appear, for the second time

to-day, in a charming character-part.

And the third time; at evening meeting. Conspicuous amongst the stocky Sussex peasantry, two rows ahead across the gangway, at the near end of the row, Richard seemed nearer, being visible, than when at morning meeting he had sat alongside, with mother and sister intervening. But also most comfortably far away, cut off from his own party which he could see only by turning fully round. An impossibility, once meeting was settled, even for an unprominent Friend. Yet difficult to banish, not only because he was so visible, but because of that strange, disquieting remark. If, for him, in a meeting that does not soon produce spoken words, there is 'nothing to do but sit and think,' he cannot be called a Quaker. Is just a charming Irishman, fascinating in the way the Irish mysteriously are, brought up on Quaker tenets and conforming without understanding what is implied?

Concentration, in the gentle, diffused light of lamps and afterglow in competition, was easier than in this morning's livid storm-light. Presently he vanished, from sight and from memory.

If the hymn-books had not been insufficient for the crowded meeting, the old lady would have had one to herself and Miss Roscorla, too, would not have been sharing, head turned in the direction of her brother, with her neighbour. And if someone had not selected from the strange collection, apparently compiled from the hymn-books of every denomination, one of the few Ancient and Modern, Richard, when he looked round, would have seen me peering for the words in the badly printed little book.

The decrepit harmonium, incredibly wheezing out the tune beloved from childhood, sent me back to All Saints' on summer Sunday evenings when the altar flowers, massed

beneath the neat unwavering flames of the high tapers, drew into one's mind the bliss of to-morrow, its flowers and sunlight, waiting, so near at hand. The familiar words returned, no longer a mere filling, whose meaning remained unnoticed, for the lovely little tune, but real, winged, bearing one up. So that when impossibly he turned, the scene was set for him in a way no cunning contrivance could have bettered. The young woman, holding the shared book so that the frail old eyes could comfortably follow the words, stood upright in the becoming glow of a near lamp, singing, from memory, with all her heart; arresting what might have appeared as a casual sweeping glance directed towards his people, part of a movement permitted by the general upheaval of the meeting for song.

And without turning my raised eyes, to which at that moment everything ahead although unseen was clearly visible, I was aware, turned to follow his gaze, of the faces of the village girls in the row behind him, and that of his sister, she also, turned upon me to inquire. It was only for an instant that his eyes rested, showing, as clearly as if I were looking directly into them, a calm grave scrutiny, determined, careless of onlookers. For an eternity during which everything vanished, leaving us alone in Space.

In eternal life.

Here, amongst the Roscorlas, the sense of everlastingness is about one all the time. And the sense of indestructible individuality. With any one of them, such a moment would be possible; though without the marvellous sense of support and earthly security.

It is true. Such an experience is possible in relation to Rachel Mary. When we are together, we are conscious mainly of each other, of something unchanging and trustworthy far away within the personal depths. Such a moment, with man or

woman, is a spiritual experience, moving body and soul.

What ought I to do? Tell these folks I am not what I seem, am, from their point of view, a wolf in sheep's clothing?

Richard is not a child. With all his simplicity, he is more worldly than the others, broken, as Rachel Mary hinted, by some great unhappiness, capable of a measure of understanding.

CHAPTER VIII

Setting down the pail with a business-like bang upon the grimed floor of the little summer-house and rolling up her sleeves, Miriam felt herself a companion of Eliza and wondered how far the girl realized the wealth and security of her situation. Year in, year out, amidst scenes of inexhaustible ever-changing loveliness, with no responsibility beyond the creation of cleanliness, she shared the zestful, varied life of the household.

‘She’s nothing but a slap-cabbage.’ Whoever was thus contemptuously disposed of, Miss Roscorla made no comment and the girl, when Miriam reached the interior of the kitchen, was still volubly talking, filling with her voice the room in which she was so fully at home, bustling about, supported by and obviously revelling in the confusion all about her of piled breakfast things, vegetables brought in fresh and dewy from the garden and the preparation, upon one half of the large table, for a tremendous jam-making; delighting, too, in the quiet presence of Miss Roscorla, in pouring forth to her as she worked, in being youth to her middle age and in knowing herself immensely important and valuable.

‘I’ll get there, soon’s we’ve finished this afternoon, and if they don’t like me without me best dress, they can look at something else.’ And she vanished, with hurried footsteps, but dancingly, with the poise belonging to consciousness of recognized ability, into the back kitchen.

‘I want, Aunt Mary, a pail; and a scrubbing-brush.’

Coming forward to meet Miriam in the middle of the vast kitchen floor, she stood there smiling, at leisure, rubbing her little hands together in the manner of one who says, 'Well, and what can I do for *you*?' as if to shelter their meeting in this very public thoroughfare, by giving to it, in the eyes of witnesses, even if these should be only their surface selves, the air of important business, while she sent forth, standing so near that Miriam felt it enfold her like an embrace, the all-obliterating smile that carried with it herself and her resources.

'You shall have them,' she said, and stood there, at ease and available, ignoring her clamorous surrounds and also, for the moment, the unexpected demand, in favour of this momentary isolation of their two selves, their brief common past and the brightly hovering future gathered so richly together, here, at the busiest centre of the homestead.

Longing to hug her, aware that the time had not yet come, unable to project into her own eyes enough of her inward self to respond to Rachel Mary's fullness of expression, Miriam swung her arms into the air, making of them a broken arch above the little figure. 'What,' she cried, 'are you doing?' And poured down towards the upturned, smiling face the joy irradiating her as she realized the intensification, in standing thus closely confronted, of the promise of to-day and of the memories, heaped in rich confusion upon the background of her consciousness, of the days lived through under this beloved roof.

'All sorts of little odd jobs,' chuckled Miss Roscorla and still held her place.

'There was an earwig,' she began, dropping her arms and watching lively childlike interest dawn in the face before her, and heard heavy, firm footsteps, approach along the garden path towards the door of the back kitchen.

‘Ah, well, the earwig can wait,’ she said, ‘and I’ll come back in a minute for the pail and brush. I’m going,’ she mouthed voicelessly, under the shelter of Eliza’s voice promising Richard his cleaned boots sooner than he would be ready for them, ‘to scrub, if you don’t mind, the summer-house and sit in it.’

‘Don’t tire thyself.’

Escaping along the passage, and through the open alcove door, skimming down the sitting-room and out into the greenhouse within whose moist warm air, faintly flavoured with whitewash, mosquitoes sang and ripening peaches spread their increasing perfume, she still felt upon her burning cheek, fallen there just as Richard appeared framed in the doorway at the kitchen’s further end, the affectionate touch of Rachel Mary’s toil-roughened finger.

The delight of being a postulant Eliza, triumphant in the kingdom of cleansing wherewith all other things were given, was already losing its power. Her desire to inhabit this remote dilapidated little interior, dawning the moment she had looked in upon its dust-smothered ivy and festoons of spiders’ webs, returned in strength to demolish the enterprise of achieving cleanliness for its own sake. There was comfort, shared and happy, in seeing the dust of years move out into the open, into its rightful place, to proceed there, refreshed by dew and rain, once more upon its own adventure. And comfort mingled with solicitude in seeing startled spiders scamper away to weave fresh webs elsewhere. But now that the wooden seat was clean and the webs that hung too near were brushed away, enough was done. The enclosure, habitable, still retained its appearance of untouched security and its peace, dwelling there so long alone and now to have an undisturbing guest.

Making her way up through the house in search of writing

materials and the rickety little bedside table upon which presently would fall the garden light coming in through the ivy-draped entrance, she found it suddenly, strangely, aloof, an unknown dwelling-place wherein she was a stranger. A shaft of sunlight falling through the skylight upon the upper landing brought back all that Amabel had drawn from her and shaped and set up and rapturously blessed: a tale told long ago of someone who was not quite herself.

Coming back along the deserted landing, feeling her way step by step down the stairs that were hidden by the projecting table whose tilted top held, precariously slanted, all she needed for the newly acquired workroom, she found herself once more closely besieged, moving thus slowly through the silent, evocative house, by memories of moments wherein the whole of her being had been caught up. Holding them off, helped by the sense of traversing a public highway, she went forward step by step until the hall was reached and, with the sound of distant voices, the full security of public life.

To escape encounter, she carried her burden through the little hall sitting-room and out across the sheltered space created by the shadow of the huge dark tree. Here memory vanished and her lonely purpose filled all the future. But in the sunlit neutral territory around the unfrequented little summer-house, the past returned with the full power of the independent life given to it by Michael and Amabel.

Until Michael's coming, the moments now once more assailing her had stood, whenever she was alone, motionless upon every horizon, asking questions; provisionally. Without learning of their existence, Michael had made them move, and had begun to answer some of their questions. Bringing to mind workaday London and, with his dingy office clothes and the grime accumulated upon his person during a morning in the

city followed by a railway journey, the very odour of London's summer streets, he had startled into active being, during those moments of piloting his pathetically incongruous figure from the meadow-girdled railway station to the carrier's wholesomely dusty little omnibus, her nascent determination to escape at all costs from gloom and grime. His two days of lyrical enthusiasm for his surroundings, which in the course of a single week would have given place to an impatient longing for libraries and a rich provision of newspapers, expressed only the satisfaction of a hunger town life could not satisfy. But his instant appreciation of the Roscorlas—'There is something in this Celtic nature far outdoing the character of simple English types; *most*-subtle in its charm. But still, well, I can still say, with the reservations of which already you know, *good old Johnny Bull*'—was indestructible.

It must have been from her bedroom window in the wing that Rachel Mary had witnessed the little scene she had described so gently after he had gone. Overnight, Michael had cast his spell upon them. Sitting there in their soft lamplight, glowingly beautiful, delighting them with his rich dignity and simplicity. Revealing to them, even while he told his little anecdotes and asked his naïve, direct questions, the reserves of intellectual force speaking independently from brow and eyes. Bringing them fresh experience in his reading of the psalm. Not the pensive, devout recital of an ancient text embodying permanent truths, but the passionate intoning of a poem, so that it seemed an improvisation, carrying the tide of the reader's current emotion.

Looking from her window, early on Sunday morning before any one was about, Rachel Mary had seen 'Mr Shatov' out on the dewy lawn alone, believing himself unobserved ... *dancing*. A lonely little Jew, jiggling about on her lawn, solemnly,

clumsily, and yet with an appealing grace, the heavy bulk of his body redeemed by the noble head, face uplifted to the sky, beard-point extended in the alien Sussex air; rejoicing before the Lord, with the tablets of the Law invisibly held within his swaying arms. Was it because she saw me so nearly weeping that tears rose in her eyes also, behind the glint of amusement? Did she see his pathos?

Amabel, too, had won her. ‘She’s a proper Irishwoman; broad-shouldered, and she knows how to laugh.’ Nostalgia, felt throughout half a lifetime amongst the chill, unresponsive English? Yet all the time, and although there was so much space indoors and out to whirl about in and fill with her laughter, Amabel had seemed confined. Without having been told in advance of the vastness in every direction of the outdoor scene, without being asked to admire, she had begun by seeming to ignore and then had judged it. ‘How,’ she had murmured dreamily, ‘can any one *exist* in the country without servants and a carriage?’

In face of the picture she called up, of a country life wherein, upon a taken-for-granted background of undisturbing and subservient natural beauty, leisurely people of a single class have easy access to each other, both bustling Eliza and the family coach ceased to exist. Beyond that one remark she made no comment, said no word about the Roscorlas, kept me ceaselessly in London, living through the events of her last days in the tea-shop—drawing belated exoneration from knowing that at last she, too, knew what it was to feel broken at the end of the day’s work and, in the morning, still broken, longing only for cessation and stillness. ‘You must have *hated* me, my dear, when I used to sail in to wake and make you talk at five o’clock’—hearing of her fate at the hands of her family, even the adoring Indian brother, foiled of his desire to launch

her in the only world he knew, sitting down within its still high-walled security to cast her off with a single phrase; really believing he would rather see her dead than married to a Jew. And the group at home, made up of his counterparts, their unconsidered immunity partly resting upon exploitation of the country wherein he was so prominent a figure, repudiating, banishing her for life, not because she proposed to change her religion but because she was placing herself, socially, outside the pale.

She had recounted it all, had seemed sincerely to regard it, as a farce playing itself out in the background of the scene whereon she made her preparations for triumphant emergence as a Jewish matron.

Just as she was leaving: ‘Mira! He’s a *darling!* You’ll be utterly happy.’

‘Then they don’t make you want to fly for your life?’

Laughter, carrying off thought or its absence; carrying off the excitement of her return to her own centre.

And through the sound of her laughter I looked ahead, to see and state for her the worst of what I saw.

‘You see, Babinka, I make mean calculations. On one side, I should *live* upon the people occasionally turning up who more or less think and read—I mean beyond *Mrs Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* and *Longfellow*—and wouldn’t be embarrassed by free discussion of ideas. You see although, now, I’d sooner confess to a mermaid’s tail than to any sort of mind, I found myself *making* these calculations. You see? *Now-then.*’

She hesitated, and there rushed into my mind those many pictures of a Richard she had not seen. Richard tending his sick mother, and, when I strained my ankle, spending all his leisure in keeping me entertained, reading *Longfellow*, playing

spelicans, and winning with the inconceivable delicacy of his large rough hands, the hands that this morning steered the earwig down, bit by bit through carefully folded pleats in my muslin sleeve until it fell upon the ground. Richard wanted in the village, whenever there was trouble.

‘No, Mira.... There’s only one thing I couldn’t stand. My God, those *awful* silences!’

And she glared, reminiscently, and as if into the face of some ultimate horror, into space, standing there on the step of the omnibus, her visit safely over; restored to me, unique, irreplaceable, removing with the *strength* of her repudiation of what most attracted me, my last doubt.

‘I’m going to *hit* Mike, as soon as I get back, as *hard* as I can punch.’

And I went back and found Rachel Mary waiting where we had left her, paying tribute, by remaining there unoccupied and by the radiance of her welcome, both to the departed Amabel and to our restoration to each other. It was as though the forty-eight hours had been a week. We knew, now, that the gap was closed, that we had grown, during the long scattering of concentration, nearer to each other. For a moment we were silent. No embarrassment. No need for speech. And when I carolled ‘It’s so nice to have friends, so nice when they come and so nice when they go,’ she tinkled appreciatively. But when I risked telling her the story of the hard punch, feeling as I spoke that she was listening to the sound of my voice addressed to her alone, as well as for the distant sound of Amabel, she spoke eagerly, without weighing her words, glowing with delighted approval that seemed glad to escape: ‘She’s a proper Irishwoman ...’

And they stood alone, Rachel Mary and Amabel, so strangely assorted; in league.

Here, amidst the dust-filmed ivy leaves and the odour of damp, decaying wood, was the centre of her life. The rickety little table was one now with its predecessors, the ink-stained table under the attic roof at Tansley Street, first made sacred by the experience of setting marginal commentaries upon Lahitte's bombastic outpourings; and the little proud new bureau at Flaxman's, joy for her eyes from the moment of its installation, new joy each day when morning burnished its brass candlesticks and cast upon its surface reflected pools of light; and, later, depth, an enveloping presence in whose company alone, with an article for George Taylor being written on the extended flap, she could escape both the unanswerable challenge of the strident court and the pervading presence of Selina, and becoming, when it went back with her to Tansley Street, the permanent reminder amongst easy and fluctuating felicities, of one that remained, so long as its prices were faithfully paid, both secure and unfathomable.

The ancient summer-house, again a visible surrounding, the private property of the Roscorlas, strangers whose ways were not her ways, in whose domain she had pursued, for the whole morning, this alien occupation that had banished them to the ends of the earth, to return now, bearing with them a challenge she had no strength to meet. Soon she must join them, convalescent, too weary to play her established part. Weariness might be explained. Already they had had a writer beneath their roof. But he had been a bird of passage, uninvolved, remaining apart. Finding here, surrounded by purposeful,

unimpinging activities, a peaceful, romantic perching place. His preoccupation known in advance, he had not arrived and been accepted in one guise and then suddenly presented himself in another.

And there was nothing, in this mass of hurriedly written pages, to justify the havoc-working confession. They represented a chase, soon grown conscious of its own futility, after something concealed within the impulse that had set her down to write, bringing fatigue and wrath over her failure to materialize it in the narrative whose style was worse than that of the worst books of this kind. These tracts of narrative were somehow false, a sort of throwing of dust that still would be dust even if its grains could be transformed to gold; question-begging, skating along surfaces to a superficial finality, gratuitously, in no matter what tone of voice, offered as a conclusion.

Perhaps if she put it away and forgot it, it might one day be transformable into something alive all over, like the best of the articles for George Taylor, interesting to write and to read apart from the idea being handled, and best in those parts that ran away from the idea and had to be forcibly twisted back until they pointed towards it, or cut down to avoid the emergence of a contradictory idea.

Bob Greville. It was Bob, driving so long ago a little nail into her mind when he said, 'Write the confessions of a modern woman,' meaning a sensational chronicle with an eye, several eyes, upon the interest of sympathetic readers like himself—'Woman, life's heroine, the dear, exasperating creature'—who really likes to see how life looks from the other side, the women's side, who put me on the wrong track and created all those lifeless pages. Following them up, everything would be left out that is always there, preceding and

accompanying and surviving the drama of human relationships; the reality from which people move away as soon as they closely approach and expect each other to be all in all.

CHAPTER IX

Encompassed by the sound of Rachel Mary's voice, the future lost its power of putting unanswerable questions. In her presence was fullness of joy; in a new silence.

Eloquent of her desire, pressing somewhere far away beneath the sense of companionship born of investigation of each other's point of view, to make, if the way should open, the ever-hovering communication, that yet, shining from her face and sounding in every word she spoke, need not be made.

Pausing, Rachel Mary called her attention to a dragon-fly, 'the devil's darning needle,' shuttling from point to point above the sunlit stream. Irradiating the universe.

A noisy old perambulator, pushed by a labouring man, rattled across the end of the lane. Raised by the sound, their two pairs of eyes were watching the aperture. No one else appeared. The man was alone.

'Now that,' said Rachel Mary, 'is a thing you'd never see in Ireland.' Pride sounded in her voice, approval of the ways of the country of her birth. Disapproval of the sight she had just witnessed?

'Irishmen,' asked Miriam, sensing in advance the reply that spread the flat landscape, opening as they approached the mouth of the high-hedged lane, drearily from end to end of the world, 'are contemptuous of women and what are called women's jobs?'

After a more than usually prolonged Quakerly pause, 'I think,' said Rachel Mary, 'there's a little contempt.' Her voice

was uncertain, her eyes downcast. She had spoken the truth. Regretfully?

Abandoning the stricken landscape, Miriam departed on a mental tour. Picture after picture emerged from the past, sources of the deposits of convincing statement any one of which, she felt sure, remembering her own release as the light went up, now here, now there, until the pattern of thought stood clear, would appeal to Rachel Mary. But the deposits, so long neglected, had lost their first lustre and become, save for a word here and a phrase there, indecipherable. Home was approaching, clouded over, and there was no time for anecdote and exposition.

‘Queer,’ she said, catching at the first handy fragment, and aware of her companion’s face turned, swiftly, expectantly, and saw, beyond the single projected statement, the way to a small clear line of thought, not the best of the evidence, but able to keep the matter within the safe borders of generalization, ‘how men *fear* to lose caste, seem to be nothing, most of them, apart from what they *do*. Perhaps fear accounts for their contempt?’

‘Well, I shouldn’t exactly call it *fear*.’

‘Ignorance?’

‘Perhaps sometimes there may be a little ignorance.’ She *had* a stop in her mind in regard to masculine assumptions, but in her selfless life had never paused to put it into words.

‘Well, you know, nowadays, men are being challenged out of their own mouths, by their own researches. Science is beginning to say that when of the two parents the father is the stronger character, the family will contain more girls than boys. Well, there is your large army of brothers and my little army, four, one died in infancy, of sisters. I don’t know, of course, which of your parents was the stronger, but my father,

at any rate mentally and nervously, was vastly stronger than my mother. Whose life was saddened by his scepticism. Which frightened her because she had an unbounded respect for his mind and did not realize how much it was formed and led by the sayings of eminent men of the moment. Now listen, Rachel Mary. If science is right in this account of the proportions of the sexes, then, since there are always more male than female births, women carry the palm. Of course science may presently cancel this theory. Meantime there is a fact that points the same way, although it is always, even by scientific people, called inexplicable, or, which is the same thing, a mysterious provision of nature. In the period succeeding a war, during which thousands of men are killed, the percentage of male births goes *up*. Which, if their theory is right, is what might be expected and not at all mysterious or to be laid to the account of nature's wisdom. You see? The best men, especially where there is conscription, what is called the flower of the nation's manhood, is wiped out, the daughter-producing party is diminished, and there will be a larger percentage of sons than ever. You see?'

After a moment's thought, she turned with her adoring smile. Its departure left her face clouded. One of those rare women, the salt of the earth, she judged silently. While every century rings with the voices of men, of all sorts, complacently bellowing their judgments of women. She was *troubled* by masculine pretensions, but would sooner die than complain.

'While we do' ... her voice had tailed away, and then, after a pause, had murmured indifferently, as if they were not worth naming: 'the little jobs.'

Standing small on the meeting-house platform, her little muffin hat askew unawares, she had looked so sweet. And so fierce as she described one by one the horrors of the

drunkard's home, witnessed during her missionary years in London. 'Terrible, isn't it?' Rhetorical pause, and then, still sweetly fierce, 'But that's not the worst.' Going wherever she was called, shielded by her little grey cloak and bonnet, she had seen life 'in the raw.' Had passed through terror. In that moment of becoming aware, after she had helped the woman through her dying and closed her eyes, of the human vultures all about her, waiting. 'Putting up a prayer,' looking round to find, standing in the doorway, her tallest brother and the policemen who had fetched him on seeing her enter the alley into which they ventured only in couples.

And then, her chosen work given up altogether, and *all* her time given to her brothers. 'My brethren had need of me.'

'You have built your whole life into the lives of your brothers,' said Miriam meditatively, taking in, bit by bit, what daily through the years this must have meant, 'and they are not even aware of it.'

Herself overwhelmed, she looked round at the little figure plodding along at her side, making the ground holy, and saw that Rachel Mary's eyes were full of tears.

In a moment, her self-command regained, she was speaking again: 'I don't think I've ever told you I'm fond of music'—then the thunderings of Beethoven, and the gaieties and intensities of the Chopin waltzes and nocturnes, had reached her, sounding down through the open sitting-room window to her kitchen in the wing, as something more than an alien noise? Her voice had been low-toned, confessional, but now, in deploring the leaving of this love untaught and in describing the change in the attitude of Friends that had come too late to affect her own upbringing, she spoke cheerfully in her usual tone.

Recalling the young women met at quarterly meeting,

comparing them with Rachel Mary, Miriam wondered. In being submitted to the whole of secular culture, they had lost something that only Puritanism can supply? Brisk and tolerant, entirely out-turned, they seemed without depth; too sure of themselves.

‘I’ve never had a musical sister-in-law,’ said Rachel Mary, and looked away across the hedge on her further side and paused, as though awaiting, to a remark addressed to it alone, an answer from the landscape. ‘I have always wanted one,’ she added gently.

Soundlessly, in the deep hush created by the low-toned confession, the heights and deeps of the long weeks, showing now as a brief period in Rachel Mary’s life, unremarkable and, in their essence, not to be distinguished from any other group of weeks, were swept away. Ahead, vanishing into the far distance, lay an untellable number of days as level as the marshes now come into view beyond the low hedge as they climbed the rise. Directing towards these days her hitherto averted eyes, Rachel Mary had also revealed their bleakness, lit and warmed only by the glow of a confessed alliance; a hidden bond of mutual love and support.

CHAPTER X

Mr Mayne, bringing his deck chair across the lawn. For more talk. To get the whole point of view set up and look at it, quietly and undisturbed. At the argumentative age, yet seeking truth rather than the opportunity to score a point. A Quaker, with a difference. A Quaker intellectual, having a free edge that escaped the circle down here? Yet they all liked him, presenting him a little eagerly, in advance of his arrival, as pitiful with his poor health, and fortunate, therefore, in being well off, and then, proudly and unanimously, as something of a wonder. Coming innocently across the lawn, eager for talk, he knew nothing of the havoc he had wrought.

Trying to remember what had led up to yesterday's fatal remark, she recalled the general pleasantness of the atmosphere during those last moments before she became for them a kind of monster, the satisfaction radiating from all quarters of the table as she talked with the formidable guest; feeling at first glad to be able to help them in the business of entertaining him, and presently a half-impatient interest in his mental equipment.

'The difference between trade and commerce.' Happy ground, since it was the early Quakers, who, while still the ancient chaffering went on, had asked one price and refused to bargain, creating a new world in trade and gaining the trust even of those who would trust nobody. A pleasant moment, bringing the sense of sharing with the descendants of those who had brought it about, the contemplation of a beneficent

revolution.

And while he began to consider this difference, sitting with bent head and an air of suspended judgment, and the others, hearing the comparison between trade and commerce for the first time, waited for some kind of elucidation, she had been invaded by thoughts of the Stock Exchange, the 'capture of markets' that meant ruin for those who lost them, and had remembered the glowing face of Philip Wicksteed as he held forth about the iniquity of dealing in money until he had made her know that so as long as any one was starving it was wrong to have even a post office account; a mean little nest-egg.

'Money ought not to be saved.'

Only that. Just an encircling statement for him to think over. And even as she spoke there had dawned at the back of her mind a picture that challenged Wicksteed's caricature.

Ensnared in meditation, Mayne had not noticed the quality of the stillness about the table. Its lively disapproval had reached and wakened her with the force of a blow. Full realization of enormity had come before she looked up to see the flush upon Alfred's pale face, Rachel Mary's discomposure, Richard stern and stormy, with clamped lips. All eyes averted, save those of Mrs Roscorla, whose wide depths, as they gazed across the table, held hatred as well as scorn.

Yet only last night, when, stimulated by the visitor's presence and reunited by his early departure to his room, they had all sat talking together in the little back sitting-room and young Benson, speaking irrelevantly from the midst of his own thoughts, had suddenly said, 'I'd love to see Miss Henderson meet Joseph Judd, I wonder what she'd do,' Rachel Mary had replied triumphantly, in almost ringing tones: 'I'll tell you. She'd look—*straightoverishead*.'

Perhaps the damage done by her insane remark was less than she feared.

‘I like this tree better than the one in the front garden.’

Under the eye of Alfred making, more slowly than usual, his way down the path, looking across as he went, Mr Mayne unfolded and set up his chair near enough to her own to share the shadow of the chestnut.

‘That front one is an evergreen oak, a most queer tree. It sheds its leaves in the summer, making a litter when everything else is more or less tidy.’

Richard’s description of the habits of the dark tree, no longer just heightening her objection to it, became a piece of country lore, part of her reappings during the weeks that had translated and built her into the life down here and that now appeared as a wealth of knowledge qualifying her to be, in relation to this urban young man, a faint shadow of the departed Richard, for whose absence life had punctually provided compensation, a brief return to the world whose inhabitants spend their leisure in discussion.

Departing this morning, unseen, by the early omnibus, Richard had carried away with him, if indeed, escaping from home, he should cast any backward glance, the picture of herself unveiled, innocently revealed by this young man who now sat so confidently at her side, as a young lady with the most extree-ordinary ideas. By this time he was already settled in London, deep in the suburban home of the younger married brother, deploying his charms, bearing himself in his light, pleased way, belonging to no one, never coming quite forth from where he lived and suffered alone.

Bereft of his presence, so all-pervading and so comforting that even the very worst of the local disasters lost, once they were confided to him, their first power, the two villages and

the surrounding country became one with their further neighbours, subject to a fatality that no one had the power to redeem, seen by this young man as a charming bit, amongst many other charming bits, of Sussex.

‘It throws a darkness.’

‘Like all evergreens. I don’t like them, don’t want green all the year round. Bare trees let in light, besides being in themselves so lovely.’

‘It’s a lovely old homestead.’

“So odious and so dear.” Do you read Emerson?’ The quotation, slipped out unawares, brought vividly back the scene from which it was inseparable: the evening light falling wide through the window of the little hall sitting-room upon the figure of Rachel Mary darning socks, lingering, because the reading held her interest, far beyond the time for preparing supper. Richard, his cleaned gun propped in the corner behind him, sitting further from the light, with crossed legs and Quakerly hands set one upon the other on the topmost knee, listening, his face in shadow. Lifted, as the page was turned upon this phrase, revealing him at first startled by the strangely mated words and then, as they lanced the blind abscess of his unacknowledged thought, uneasy, stretching forth a hand, as the reading went on, to touch and shift the cleaning rags left upon the corner of the table; carrying off his discomfiture.

‘I know some of the essays, but I’ve not met that. Does he really put it so?’

‘He was probably middle-aged when he wrote that. Youth, desiring only freedom, does not yet know that home is dear. What struck me, when I first encountered it, was the increased power of the contrasted adjectives. Not having for years given any thought to any kind of home and lumping all homes together as prisons, my interest was purely academic. And I

imagined that the dear was thrown in with the odious to make an effective statement. It would have greatly surprised me to discover that the Emerson I knew should find home *dear*.'

'I think I don't quite realize Emerson as a person.'

'A poet, and a mystic. Also a man. And fair-haired. That is important. The fair-haired people invented scepticism. Philosophical scepticism. Philosophy of cut-off-from-the-roots *ideas*.'

'Do explain a little.' Rather like the intonation of Cambridge Vereker.

'The Westerns.'

'Ah, I see what you mean.'

'Particularist. Vikings. Not the Latins. Whose scepticism is quite different. Formal and jocular. By the way, I've seen a man, who may be said to have a happy home of which he is the pride, react to "odious and dear." A masculine reaction. Secret. I have shared it, again and again, in the presence of unsuspecting wives.'

'You believe most homes are not happy, most married people that is to say?'

'Even when they are, I am sure they all stand in their own light, in a way that is perfectly preventable. In a single, frightfully important, disregarded detail. Which perhaps may be the origin of *épergnes* and other high centrepieces. Have you ever been made uncomfortable by the efforts of a quite nice husband to avoid meeting his equally nice wife's eye across the table, or even to avoid seeing her there? In restaurants, it is even more striking. The two come in, exhilarated, out for the evening, both enjoying the sense of escape from home into the wide world. They sit down, at a small table, confronted, with each other as the sole immediate prospect—obstructive. Even if they are on the best of terms,

you will see the man glance here and there, anywhere to avoid the sight of his wife, the compendium of dailiness—you remember Kipling: “the same, same face of my wife”? If they are not, the spectacle of the man’s angry embarrassment is most painful, and the woman’s efforts to conceal from surrounding humanity the true state of affairs, quite horrible to contemplate. *Why*, that is what I ceaselessly want to know, do *all* these people, either at home or abroad, sit *confronted*? And not only engaged couples and husbands and wives. Think of the amount of happiness needlessly destroyed by the construction of our trains and omnibuses. It is not only because they are comfortable that corner seats are so popular, but because they afford a partial escape from gimlets. Everywhere, people should be side by side, facing the spectacle, meeting in it. Confronted people can’t meet more than once, you know.’

‘I think that is true, though I have never put it to myself in that way.’

A steady swishing, away behind. Someone cutting the hedge. She wondered, as their talk moved from point to point, who was the invisible auditor of this resuscitation of forgotten interests. In every direction the young man’s standards seemed to be aesthetic. These younger Quakers were more interested in arts and crafts than in ethics?

Eliza, advancing down the lawn, crying out from a distance. The carrier, a package, something to pay.

Left alone, she listened to the swish, swish of the hedge-cutter, a busy accompaniment to the lazy, ceaseless coo-rooing of the doves, and heard it cease. A moment later, pushing a barrow of weeds, Alfred Roscorla came through the gap in the hedge, turning the barrow as if to cross the lawn immediately in front of her. Why, with the dump behind the duck-run close to where he had been working, take his refuse on such a long

tour?

Pulling up just short of her chair, 'It'll be near dinner-time, I reckon,' he said, dropping the handles. Never before, though she had spent a part of almost every morning beneath the chestnut tree, had he paid her a call.

'Warm work,' she said as he mopped his brow.

'It is that,' said Alfred with his smile, eyes downcast, that seemed never to appear save at his own expense. 'I reckon it's near dinner-time,' and he glanced up at the sky.

'I wish I could tell the time by the sun. So much nicer than consulting a watch.'

'You can generally tell to near a minute or two.' Returning his handkerchief to its place, he glanced away down the garden. Looking for a topic?

'What a pity all that lovely stuff has to be cut down. The fool's parsley, I mean. I've been revelling in those great level plates of bloom standing nearly as high as the hedge. Or is it sheep's parsley? I once heard the smallest kind called Queen Elizabeth's lace.'

'That's a pretty enough name. Cow-parsley, we call this.'

'I like wild flowers better than the garden ones.'

'There's some do, I know. That's all very well, if you don't happen to be in business. That's making seed, that cow-parsley. We can't have it spread all over.'

Pausing, he stood there with downcast eyes. Waiting for the talk to go on. Alfred, who never spoke more than the necessary words. Who knew the deepest truths.

Hanging impatiently about while, half an hour after he had asked her to be ready, he lashed the last pots of geraniums to the rack of the high-piled wagonette. Seeing in advance the enchanted day. The drive through the leafy lanes and out across the sunlit marshes amongst fierce roaming cattle

recalling the story of the cyclists riding home from the coast after dark, racing, heads down, ahead of the thundering hoofs. Richard, riding behind, keeping the beasts at bay with his waved bicycle lamp. And the lore of the lonely Looker in his hut on the far side of the marshes, and his belief that one day the sea would come back to claim its scattered pebbles and cockle-shells. The emergence at last upon the deserted coast road, and the sea; sandwich-munching whilst Trustworthy strolled with loosened rein along past the martello towers squatting amongst clumped sea lavender and yellow horned poppies. Alfred's brief disjointed responses to scattered outpourings. The approach, with world beyond world left behind, of the sophisticated little town. The afternoon alone, while Alfred did his rounds, amidst blissful, pitiful fortnighters on the crowded front, facing the blue and gold of the summer sea. The pier, the sunbaked, dusty front full of glare and noise, seen from the pier, suddenly beautiful in the distance. Tea, flavourless, in one of those smart new tea-shops, all varnish and bright colour. Freshness arriving with the dropping of the sun and the coming of saffron and rose upon the rock pools. Waiting for Alfred in the little gaslit temperance inn on the outskirts. The pleasant security of sitting side by side with him, two sleepy adventurers facing the night coming in through the open door, frugally consuming gritty buns and flour-thickened mauve cocoa while Trustworthy tossed her bag outside. The drive out of the town and along the edge of the marsh-mist and up through it across the marshes where the seated cattle loomed like islets. The deep home lanes, lit by glow-worms. Suddenly remembering, on that first afternoon at the seaside, that one had ceased, ever since escaping from town, not only to smoke, but even to think of smoking. 'Friends don't smoke?' 'Well, there's some do. But you're not *used* the same way if

you smoke.' You are no longer a clear, clean vessel?

He had been a witness, lately, of so many conversations, wanted to join, to have his share? Searching his face while she felt for a topic, she saw its muscles contract for his difficult speech and waited, ready to respond, even to the most uninspiring fragment, from depths in herself that Richard could never reach.

'I thought I'd tell you,' he stammered, and hesitated—what could be coming so to break up his half-averted face, that was fixed now in an expression wherein fear and anxiety stood mingled? His eyelids flickered up from eyes that flashed an uneasy half-glance in her direction on their way to the sycamore across the lawn, on which they came to rest as if what he was about to say stood placarded there. 'Our friend Luke Mayne's got a young lady. I thought I'd best tell you.'

'Oh, yes?' she murmured lamely, striking out into the ocean of bewilderment whose waves had closed over her head. If she knew Mayne was engaged, she would refrain from speaking to him, unless others were present? Or was Alfred heroically, yet not without private amusement, warning her not to lose her heart? But in the world where fiongsays are regarded as private property, and also as butts for unconsciously foul facetiousness, a world that perhaps, unawares, was now all about her, was she not set apart as 'walking out' with Richard, and therefore immune from such a danger?

'Well, I was wondering what she'd think, you see,' and he ducked his head as so often she had seen him do before the gales of affectionate family mirth at his expense, and gave vent to the helpless little chuckle with which he was wont to admit the onslaught justified. 'It'll be dinner-time, I'm thinking; I reckon I'd best be off.' Seizing the handles of his barrow, he wheeled it briskly away across the lawn.

What she'd think, if she saw you, an available, unappropriated, and therefore justifiably anxious and hopeful young woman, talking to her young man?

Richard—was a privileged person. To *his* goings-on, though they were to be deprecated, Alfred attached no Importance.

With Richard still away, and Luke Mayne no longer at her side, the toil-roughened hands of Alfred and the pupil, seen moving amongst the things on the spread table, had a new beauty. They alone kept her world about her in peace and security.

CHAPTER XI

At least the ducks should have daily with their mashed meal this well-loved and all too rare addition costing nothing but labour and helping to keep the gardens clear of weeds. Strolling in the deserted domain alight with the glow of sunset, going from point to point in search of the best growths, she gathered the nettle-tops, joyfully, her hands safe in their leather gloves. When she passed their run with her high-piled pannier, the ducks gathered quacking, aware of her burden, eager, dull-eyed for lack of water, the tormenting lack supposed to forward their cruel fattening.

The last ray of the setting sun lay red upon the inside wall of the potting-shed, a living presence.

Passing in masses through the chaff-cutter, the crushed nettles gave forth their odour, delicately potent, prevailing over the familiar odour of shut-in sun-baked straw and dust. This nettle scent was in league with the open, with the ray now fading from the rough grain of the ancient wood. Watching until it was no longer there, she came out from the enclosed shadowy warmth into the clear shadowless light of evening, satisfied.

Rain chores softly down amongst lime leaves. Which bend to its touch. It whips the laurels and rebounds. Or slides swiftly off their varnished surfaces. Amongst beeches it makes a

gentle rattling, a sound like the wind in the Dutch poplars. The hiss of strong rain on the full leafage of the wood. Its rich drip, drip, in the silent wood. The rising wind opening the tree-tops, sending down sudden sheets of light; like lightning.

Awake, deep down in the heart of tranquility, drinking its freshness like water from a spring brimming up amongst dark green leaves in a deep shadow heightening the colour of the leaves and the silver glint on the bubbling water. A sound, a little wailing voice far away across the marshes, dropping from note to note, five clear notes, and ceasing. This was the sound that brought me up from dreamless sleep? Again the little wailing sound, high and thin and threadlike and very far away. But so clear that it might be coming from the garden or from the deep furrows of the stubble-field beyond the hedge. It has come out of the sea, is wandering along the distant, desolate shore. Nothing between us but the fields and the width of the marshes. There it is again, leaving the shore, roaming along the margin of the marsh, in and out amongst the sedges, plaintive.

It has reached the grey willows huddled along the dykes. Shrill and querulous amongst their slender leaves.

Many voices, approaching, borne on an undertone, shouting and moaning, dying away into lamentations. Reaching the hedgerows, filling them with a deep singing. The evergreen oak quivers under the threatening breath, harplike in all its burdened branches. Stillness.

Tumult, wild from the sea, sweeping headlong, gigantic, seizing the house with a yell, shaking it, sending around it the roaring of fierce flames. Rattling the windows, bellowing down the chimney. Rejoicing in its prey.

The wind, is the best lover.

Things had come so near. Even this dingy old evergreen oak, the least valued of her possessions, was individually beloved. Stretching up her arms to it in the last of the last twilight before his home-coming, she knew that she wished Richard would not return. Everything, since he left, had fallen to a new depth within her. Nothing disturbed this ceaseless communion. And the Sunday in the midst of these uninterrupted days had been the best of the Sundays. Concentration had never been so easy, nor the sense stronger, although that party of visiting Friends had altered the external aspect of morning meeting, of being in touch with fellow labourers.

If an opportunity offers, I must ask Rachel Mary this very evening, whether the impulse to speak is always accompanied by that amazing experience, seeming like a sudden touch upon one's inmost being, electric; discharging all round one just above the waist a zigzag so clearly felt as to call to mind, within the infinitesimal period of its duration, the illustrated advertisements of electric belts. So startling in its nature and so new, bringing the sense of being, for the fraction of a second, oneself the dynamic centre of advancing life, that it delayed the mind's descent into words and brought instead the shamed, thwarted feeling accompanying the missing of a ball at tennis. And the words, when finally they came, were spoken, while still one hesitated, by someone across the gangway. Exactly as Rachel Mary had said when explaining what happened if a Friend suppressed his message.

And it was on that same Sunday, in the midst of the Richard-less party supplemented by the visiting Friends, that I

confessed what an eye-opener had been my one experience of a Friends' business meeting and declared that all the world's business should be transacted on similar lines, and Rachel Mary said, when they showed surprise in discovering me an outsider: 'She's a Friend in all but name.'

And at once I felt cooped, and wanted them gone, these Saxon Friends who seemed to miss something the Roscorlas did not miss, and my mind went back for a moment to life as it had been before Richard left. To the currant gathering, out on the slope under the dense, low sky. Not a moment to lose in the race with the storm. The copper glow shone out in the north when the basket was only half full, and then a faint stir and a moment's freshening of the sultry air and then stillness again and the mutual livid stare of earth and sky. The pile of fruit, chill in the leaf-lined trug, growing slowly. Heavy drops tapping the bushes and ceasing. The first pale flicker, making one put down the trug to free a second hand and gather, frantically. Presently a vivid streak, zigzagging, and a crash. The incessant dance of mad daylight all about one. The wheels of the storm rattling across the vault. The joy of finishing, of loading the basket before Richard arrived to race me up to the house where every one was assembled.

Early morning light filtering through the larch trees, lying across the globed peaches gleaming pale, cheek by cheek, gaining colour under the widening stream of day until they shone full as the hothouse sunlight had left them, rose-washed velvet, crimson fading into rose, rose into green, creamy purple blanching to pale primrose. Learning to lift them without pressure, to grade and pack them in their nests of cotton wool.

The auction at Wetherby's. The whole neighbourhood collected in the vast meadow round about Wetherby's extravagant outfit, still as good as new. The effort to forget

oneself and one's interests in order to please Richard by being interested in slag-distributors, swath-turners and threshers, rib-rollers and reaper-and-binders. The longing to see and hear them at their work rather than lying there for horrible sale at the hands of the nimble-tongued auctioneer, inflaming acquisitiveness by distributing nips of gin. No one noticing the passage of the clouds, the ripening of the afternoon light; save perhaps those village girls hovering on the outskirts of the moving crowd.

Pride in Richard, everywhere greeted and welcomed, serene and steady where the others were muddled and basely excited. The pleased grin of the auctioneer when he made his only bid and the crowd thickened and drew close and the bids rapped out and up in quick succession. Richard, one foot upon the prize, elbow propped on the bent knee of his gaitered leg, bidding steadily until the new chain-harrow was his own.

CHAPTER XII

More than the light of the unscreened kitchen lamp, more than its warmth, filled this corner. With his say said and the mended satchel hanging from his hand, Richard still lingered. She was penned, between his obliterating presence and the figure of Rachel Mary standing close at hand, turned towards the little table busily occupied, but aware; waiting for a voice to sound, her own, or Richard's, gently, acknowledging and expressing, as it broke the silence fallen with one consent upon the three of them, the wealth of this shared embarrassment.

'We shall want any number of nose-bags,' she breathed, addressing the lamplit wall, half-prepared to see it miraculously open before her.

'Thee'll be tired, Richard, with thee's journey and all.'

Turning she beheld the small figure confronting them, perilously propped against the edge of the larger table. Gone to her room after the supper she had stayed up to share in honour of Richard's return, uneasy, made uneasy by his wandering attention, his silences and random replies, she had come back, ancient and haggard, frail and tottering and determined; to watch and protect.

'We'll need heaps of nose-bags,' said Richard, so gently that his tone could hardly have carried across the room, and moved nearer, so near that only a few inches divided them as they stood side by side facing the hapless little figure. Flouted. His mother, flouted and defied. Realization, throbbing in the air,

keeping every one silent; deepening the golden glow.

‘It’s been a very delightful day. I hope it has not tired thee overmuch.’

‘Never shall I forget the sight of the blessed Bunny sitting on the ground with his legs solemnly inserted under the tablecloth, making mountain ranges between the plates.’

‘It was his first picnic.’

Stretched at full length upon the hearth-rug in Rachel Mary’s room with her hands clasped behind her head, Miriam felt the day come into its own with the descent at last of the stillness its crowded hours had failed to provide. Only those two moments alone with Richard. Needed all the time, playing the leading parts from the moment of the belated start until they were all packed into the wagonettes for the return. He had broken away to show her the horsetails, isolating her, standing apart with her, gathering and breaking a jointed stem, murmuring its age-old story, putting the gay little picnic in its place with his picture of this plant in its prime, a vast tree, almost the sole growth in the misty swamps wandered through by prehistoric monsters. And to show her sundew, its single starry bloom shining from the midst of the dark bog.

Trying to rouse herself, to recall, for the conversation Rachel Mary seemed to expect, the day’s more impersonal incidents, she found the way barred. Happiness was upon her like a sleep, sharpening her perceptions, depriving her of the power of directing them. The figure of Rachel Mary moved about the room, dreamlike, approaching, receding, unreal and yet intimate, a part of her own being.

Rachel Mary was ready to go downstairs. Must break, now,

this long, confessional silence. Was approaching, looking down, shedding upon one's recumbent form her deepest radiance.

Getting to her knees, Miriam spoke, swift breathless words coming as if dictated. 'Let me go,' she said, and her voice surprised her with its passionate pleading, 'send me away before it is too late.'

Bending, Rachel Mary dropped a kiss upon her cheek. 'I like,' she said, 'to see thee in that gown.'

CHAPTER XIII

‘Dew not *forget* me,
Dew not forget me,
Sometaimes think of me still.’

The voice of London, wavering drunkenly up from the room below,

‘*When* morning breaks,
And the thros-*sul* awakes,
Re-*mem*-ber the *mide* of the *mill.*’

Two voices this time, not quite together, sopranoing yearningly up to the final *dew* of the refrain.

‘Wah. They’ll stop presently.’

‘I don’t mind them, I love them.’

‘Mira! My God, how can we leave it all?’

The voices ceased, the house was still. Even the courtyard was now silent. Flaxman’s courtyard, transformed by Amabel’s presence. The moonlight fell across it uncontaminated, pouring in through the high uncurtained attic casement, patterning the little bed with its bars and with the shadows of Amabel’s geraniums and lying white upon her upturned face. The evening had been a song of triumphant reunion. Reaching Donizetti’s, whirling confidently in through the frosted door she had compelled herself to enter for the first

time all those years ago faint with hunger and rigid with determination, she had seen only the risen figures of Michael and Amabel that presently were seated one on each side of her, hemming her in, delighting in her recovered presence and in a witness for their joy. Sitting thus between them in the dim little resort in the heart of London, she had felt herself more abundantly than in the Twopenny Tube, where every one had looked so pallid and ill-knit, a product of the woodlands and meadows.

‘*Whatt* is this strange plant you wear?’

‘Honesty.’

‘Honesty, Mike! Mira’s honesty.’

All the evening they had fêted her.

‘You know, Mira, we find Emerson *trite*.’

Her first words, spoken hurriedly, the moment they were alone. So much for your Emerson, and Michael, who used so enormously to admire him, agrees with *me*. In place of your Michael, who has ceased to exist, another has come into being.

At first I was shocked, and too angry to retort, and then, since Amabel must be right, looking quietly back at Emerson, looking at his quality, while she took the parcels from the mad old landlady, for the first time fully in the face, I saw what she meant. Saw him disappear, his scholarly urbanity perpetually checking his poetic insight, keeping within decorous bounds what, unleashed, might have reached out to ecstasy.

And now this outcry calls me down and down to share the agony of the depths whence Amabel watches the disappearance of her world.

‘Why can’t we stay as we are forever?’

‘I know.’

‘Let’s get away. Get up and go, you and me and all we have.’

‘I know.’

Completeness of being. Side by side, silent, with the whole universe between us, within us, in a way no man and woman, be they never so well mated, can ever have. In a few hours, Amabel will be isolated, for life, with an alien consciousness.

Bright morning light, pouring in. Only a few moments ago, moonlit night had looked in upon a death. From the far side of the room the hollow snore of a tin kettle preparing to come to the boil high up in the air above a spirit-lamp on a wooden table. The voice of garret life, quickening every nerve. Too soon. Other voices were speaking upon the edge of one’s sleep-cleared mind, demanding to be heard before one moved.

Emerson is luminous. Amiable, reasonable, humanistic; incomplete.

Far away in his own world where last night in talking of him to Amabel, one still had seemed to dwell, Richard stood remote, inaccessible. Inconceivable in the world whither during sleep one had been translated. Reduced to nothing. Indifferent. Apart from his surroundings, Richard is nothing to me?

The snoring of the kettle fell to a soft fierce hiss.

‘Is that my breakfast?’

‘Mira! Could you have said anything more perfect?’ Folded arms pressed against her own arm lying, sleep-lightened, disembodied, outside the coverlet.

‘*Mira!* Turn your face to the light. Let me look.’

Amusement stood behind the horror in her voice but, behind the amusement, no preoccupations. The old, unappropriated Amabel was there, whole, in the centre of the moment.

‘My dear, I *am* sorry. It’s only a small one, but I wouldn’t have had it happen for a peck of pearls. I hoped you’d escape.’

‘Doesn’t matter. An adventure.’

‘My dear, she told me, poor old thing, just after I got here, that there might be a few. Oh, Mira, I am sorry. It’s the mattress. She couldn’t afford another. But she *told* me. *God*, I’ve been happy here!’

Up on her feet again, she was standing in the middle of the floor, looking at the perspectives the room recalled, sharp and clear beneath the shadow of parting. Farewell, farewell to youth. Recklessly she was plunging ahead, parting life’s clumped and screening leafage, breaking through. Always and everywhere breaking through, serenely eager, eagerly serene, alive within each moment, alive to its meaning.

Detaching a hanging garment from its nail on the wall, she turned, holding it outspread.

‘Look!’

Soft crêpe, pale dove-grey, little billows of white chiffon at neck and sleeves, held curtainwise, bare toes beneath, radiant face above, showing her lifted to a pinnacle of delight. Amabel’s wedding gown, miraculously achieved. The right note, in all her incarnations, somehow miraculously achieved.

‘Isn’t it sweet? From Tony, designed by me. Tony’s coming, my dear, to see me married. Can you believe it?’

The smart parson brother, relenting, separating himself from the family to countenance the marriage, at a registry office, of the family rebel to a foreign Jew.

For ever we shall be walking together, swinging our sponge-bags, down the Euston Road in the morning light.

That little chuckle came from the attendant far away down the deserted corridor. Pallid, inert even at the beginning of her long day in the steamy heat, she had tolerated, since no one

was there to object to it, the unnecessary din echoing up to the high roof. The wing of Amabel's bright spirit had brushed and gained her as it swept by and now, seeing Amabel's sponge soar up over the high partition, she chuckled her approval.

The large handsome face gleaming from the darkness behind the bouquet spraying in through the low doorway was proud, sacerdotal; but not dishonest. *Crack!*

'Oh, Tony, I'm so sorry! I ought to have warned you.'

No need to have made him climb the winding stair. Yet it was good. The silencing, in his person, of the whole family before the vision of Amabel, their lovely jewel, unashamed of the setting to which they had condemned her and that now was taking his eyes, as he stood for a moment rubbing his outraged skull, upon an incredulous tour.

The mad old landlady, out on the pavement, out in the sunlight of yet another of her small store of remaining days, all wild eyes and a curtsy for the grand gentleman and the unexpected coin, but paying tears for Amabel's kiss and the flower recklessly torn from the bouquet's abundance.

Michael and Amabel side by side at a counter with an aspidistra at its either end. Facing them from behind the counter, a man with the manner, at once dignified and ingratiating, of an elderly shopwalker. Tony, large and decorative in the mean enclosure, embarrassed, knowing, no more than one did oneself, whether, during the preliminary moments, one should speak in ordinary tones or, as in church, in subdued murmurs.

CHAPTER XIV

‘Tickets,’ announced the secretary, peering down the hall over the tops of his glasses, ‘will be half a crown and two and six.’ Realizing his mistake before the general laughter broke forth, he led it and sat down, beaming his delight. The old, cosy, family party atmosphere, so deprecated by Wells.

Now here was the man she had always wanted to hear and had somehow always missed and now was regarding with a detachment not far removed from indifference. No one henceforth could show her the socialist mind, whether scholarly and philosophical, poetic or witty, grown all over with the sweet herbs of kindness or flaunting the proud red blossoms of righteous indignation, as anything but a desert, offering a fine view of a mirage, a promised land that in its turn would be revealed as desert too.

Nobility sat here, and faithfulness, unremitting, unembittered, side by side with bitterness and the desire for vengeance.

When this man’s persuasive eloquence should have spent itself and those who held slightly different or altogether different conceptions of the best route towards the human commonwealth should have fired the bolts they were busily weighting and polishing, only a fragment of this last evening in town would remain to be got through. A touch on her arm, from behind. A protruded hand, holding a folded slip of paper. Turning, she saw only a stranger, his eyes fixed upon the lecturer.

‘Are you alone? I have to catch the nine o’clock slip from Charing Cross. Perhaps we might leave together. Hypo.’

Looking round once more, she discovered him two rows away, already preparing to depart.

‘I had no business to be there. Was at a loose end after Amabel’s wedding. I’m sending in my resignation.’

‘Wise Miriam. So am I. Retiring from futility.’

‘Not so much futility as blindness. You see them as standing still, marking time. I feel they are marching, in increasing battalions, in the wrong direction.’

‘What are you doing with yourself? Where are you hiding? Like you, I went to that old meeting to fill a spare hour. Was groaning under its emptiness, looked up and, behold, Miriam. That, you know, was pleasing.’

Strange that life’s secret shape should select, of all people, Hypo to hear her first outpourings on Quakers and Quakerism. Meaningless, for him, the picture she was composing from material brimming in her mind, swiftly, urged by the pressure of the brief moments. Yet he seemed to attend.

Shutting the door of his compartment, leaning forth, elbows on the lowered window, ‘I think,’ he said, ‘I must come down and have a *look* at your Quakers.’

‘You wouldn’t see them. Coming deliberately down, with a prepared spy-glass, you wouldn’t see them.’

The train was moving. Leaning forth, he projected his husky voice: ‘*What* a silly thing to say, Miriam. What a *damned* silly thing to say.’

‘Good-bye!’ she cried, and strolled away up the platform,

towards the house on the hill brought so near by her talk, and kept near by the evening freshness that had crept even into the enclosed air of this great station. Suppose he had come, bringing his poverty to confront their great wealth? It was to his poverty that something in her discourse had appealed. Could they teach him, could he learn, do anything more down there than be charmingly interested and appreciative, while his mind worked its swift way to an enclosing formula?

CHAPTER XV

None of the summer days, no going forth to discover and explore, had brought so deep a pang of love as this sudden finding, within the moist, cool air, of autumn's first breath, hitherto, through all the years, announcing farewell and the return to imprisonment, greeting her, now, as an intimate, and opening, as she met the assaults of its astringent freshness, new depths within her still incredible freedom.

Turning away from the pillar-box in whose keeping lay the record that to-morrow, in her new home—'Of course, Babinka, I realize that the best is Michael's ritual reading, with his silk cap on his head. I hear him. And you know I begin to think that in ways the Jews, held up, marking time, are still the best Christians. Socially, already, they are, amongst themselves, the best the world has ...'—Amabel would be reading, she looked up towards the woods beyond Dimple Hill, every day of whose slow, rich transformation would be securely her own, and found at her side a halted bicycle. Richard, alighting.

'Do you know,' she said, aware of his haggard, friendly, lonely eyes upon her as still she looked away down the vista, scanning, to retain her strength, the beloved features of his recovered rival, 'I've just been realizing that the country comes into its own, looks quite different, somehow relieved, when the summer visitors have cleared away.'

At once, on his response, ask him the time, pleasantly and casually, and make off.

‘Ah, yes,’ he breathed, unsteadily, still with his eyes on her face. Here they were, side by side, with only his bicycle between, alone for the first time since her return, alone with the burden of their mutual knowledge. Was he expecting her to look at him while he spoke, and read? Did he not know he was invisible, infinitely far away?

‘I want to get,’ she said, and her voice rang clear and hard, ‘as far as I can before tea. D’you know the time?’

Why was he here? Why coming home so early?

‘It won’t be much past four yet.’

His voice had steadied, but still he stood motionless, gazing down at her. He would stand thus, and talk, no matter what sacred undertaking awaited him, for half an hour, with her, with any one.

‘Then I’ll go my best-beloved way and watch the bracken beginning to turn. Good-bye.’

‘You see, Amabel, you picture it all? The three of them, for certainly the old lady will have talked to Rachel Mary as well as to R., having it out during my absence. Alfred and the pupil stand outside, unaware and unembarrassed. R. M. will not, I think have talked to R. Her embarrassing embarrassment when we are all together means that she has seen R. draw back, as she has often seen him do before; but this time with more pain to herself. She is saddened, as well as ashamed. The old lady, who lives for R. alone, I never really liked and, not being a wise woman of the world, have never courted. Could not have courted, even if it had occurred to me to attempt an estimate of her power over R. Imagine the impressions she collected during my table-talks with Mayne.... Imagine the use she made of them in bringing R. to his right mind.

‘I hide my agony, living, when in their company, perpetually on a stage. But there are intervals, during our silences, when

everything is as it used to be. You see, Amabel, there is something we all share and that even for me, who am only at the alphabet, is what makes life worth living, the only real culture, the only one that can grow without fading and carry through to the end. But you know this better than I do, and in relation to more people, because you soon run through your personal relationships and want to move on to more people. Me, nothing short of dynamite will shift. And when I think of the life here going on without me, I wince. And they all show me, at every turn, how much, before I go, they want everything to be restored, trying to heal the rupture in advance, even the old lady, having got rid of me, tempering her naïve exhibitions of triumph and delight by singling me out, whenever possible, as the object of her flirtatious girlish flattery. And R. and Rachel Mary by a special kind of niceness, a genuine eagerness to share with me every smallest thing, are actually healing it so perfectly that even while I pine to stay, I pine, in equal measure, to be gone. Perhaps to Oberland. I've written to Mrs Harcourt, who at once tells me of a fearfully reasonable pension kept by an English ex-schoolmarm up above the lake of Geneva. She'll be somewhere in the neighbourhood herself, in January. Vereker sends, at regular intervals, reminders. Found a new place last winter in Austria. Kitzbühel. Says it leaves Switzerland in the shade and is known, so far, only to a few.'

Transcriber's Notes

This text is taken from: Dorothy M. Richardson, *Pilgrimage IV: Dimple Hill*. Virago Press, London, 2002, p. 401-552.

The original spelling was mostly preserved. A few obvious typographical errors were silently corrected. Further careful corrections, some after consulting other editions, are listed here (before/after):

- ... universe. 'I've spent the best part of an hour trying to instil ...
... universe. 'I've spent the best part of an hour trying to [instill](#) ...
- ... light, in a way that is perfectly preventible. In a single, ...
... light, in a way that is perfectly [preventable](#). In a single, ...
- ... Awake, deep down in the heart of tranquillity, drinking its ...
... Awake, deep down in the heart of [tranquility](#), drinking its ...

[The end of *Dimple Hill: Pilgrimage, Volume 12* by Dorothy M. Richardson]