

Rosie Plum
and Other Stories

T. F. Powys

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By T. F. Powys

Novels

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Meditations

AN INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS
SOLILOQUIES OF A HERMIT

ROSIE PLUM
AND OTHER STORIES

By
T. F. POWYS

Drawings by John Ward

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IN FROM SPAIN

Protected from the world by a hill on one side and a river on the other, East Purton went its own ways and pursued its own talk and habits without any interference from outside. Purton had its pastimes; it also had its trials. When the wind was in the north, it blew round the hill both ways and met in the village, so that the people shivered. And when the weather was mild and damp, Mrs. Crane blamed the river for the pain her corns gave her.

As well as the orthodox belief that God had set a flag flying upon East Purton church the Sunday after He had finished building it, the people believed in Mr. Crapper. Mr. Crapper had a way of presenting his affairs in conversation so that no one could doubt the truth of them. He had always shown so wise and cautious a way of acting in everyday life that no one dared to doubt the certainty of his knowledge.

He would often stand at Mrs. Crane's door, where he lodged, for hours and look at the river as wise Confucius used to do, though without his tears. The river always inspired Mr. Crapper with some new thought or other.

One day he discovered that the water always ran only one way. He told Mrs. Crane so at breakfast-time.

"Yes," said Mrs. Crane, "I do believe 'ee, for they running rivers be ignorant."

Mr. Crapper had a son named Albert who had gone away into foreign parts to make his fortune.

When his son had been away for some years, Mr. Crapper went to sleep in a field in which he was employed to hoe the turnips. Farmer Barfoot, who came into the field to see how the man was getting on, woke him up and remarked, harmlessly enough, "that it wasn't Sunday".

Mr. Crapper slowly raised himself from the ground as if he still dreamed, and taking up his hoe he made a motion as if to work again. But as soon as the hoe touched the turnips Mr. Crapper threw it down.

"It isn't much that I do want," he said, "here below, but my son Bert could buy up all that be in this little village where river do flow."

Farmer Barfoot listened to Mr. Crapper with astonishment, not knowing the dreams that a field can give to a man.

“ ’Tis most like,” said the farmer, “that Bert have done well for ’isself.”

“Better than well,” was Mr. Crapper’s reply, “for if Bert were to hoe these turnips, they would be golden.”

From that day Mr. Crapper began to be proud.

East Purton pride is not so simple an affair as the vulgar might imagine it to be. You may find it sometimes in a row of runner beans or wrapped round a feather bed or even in the mark that a cheap new rubber heel has made in the Sunday mud. This time it settled in Mr. Crapper because his dream in the turnip-field had made him proud of his son.

Mr. Crapper’s pride would not permit him to work, but sometimes he would walk on to the top of the hill whence the road to the town could be seen, a straight, white street between the water meadows. That was the road that Mr. Crapper expected his son to come by. In what sort of manner of coming he hadn’t yet made up his mind, but he told Mr. Barfoot at the inn that he expected his son to come “riding”. Mr. Barfoot had been reading an old picture-paper as well as drinking his beer, and pointed out to Mr. Crapper a young man riding upon an elephant.

Mrs. Crane’s husband was a meek little man who bound straw round the tops of his boots in snowy weather. He accepted all facts alike: his ten children, Mr. Crapper who paid no money for his lodgings and twelve hours’ work each day. On Sundays he walked to the top of the hill.

Mr. Crane believed that one day Albert Crapper would come and give him a new pair of boots and a white coat that he had once seen on the back of a coachman. Whenever he looked at Mr. Crapper eating, he was reminded of these good things.

Mr. Crane was never tired of hearing of all the wonderful wealth that Bert Crapper was soon to bring home.

“Sacks,” said Mr. Crapper, “sacks and bagfuls.”

“Will he come soon?” asked Mr. Crane, who was eating dry bread for his dinner.

Mr. Crapper set off to the hill to look out for his son’s arrival. He watched the motor-cars go by, and wondered which was his son’s.

“They look rather small,” he said to himself, “though they go by quickly.”

A man was walking along the road whom Mr. Crapper did not care to notice. The man walked with a light step as though he were nearing his home. He stopped by the ash-tree that marked the turning to East Purton, and came up the lane.

A large motor-car passed by below. Mr. Crapper shook his head, and returned to Mrs. Crane's fireside. He sat for a while talking about Bert and about what he would do when he came home.

Mr. Crane came in, and Mr. Crapper and he walked together to the inn, Mr. Crane having first bound some straw round his legs because he thought it was going to snow.

"You won't need to do that," said Mr. Crapper, watching him, "when me son Bert do come home."

The man who had come up the lane was now standing on the top of Purton Hill. He was looking at the lights in the village. There were two lights that shone brightly, and the stranger looked at them with interest. He began to whistle in order to keep down an odd feeling that came like a lump in his throat. One of the bright lights came from the inn, and the other shone in Mrs. Crane's cottage, where Mr. Crapper had lived for many years.

The stranger came down from the hill, walked through the village, and peeped in Mrs. Crane's window, to see who was there. Mrs. Crane was busy ironing. The man left her window without having been seen, and found his way to the churchyard. He went to the corner where the poorest people were buried, and knelt down upon his knees in the grass and faded nettles. Presently he left the churchyard whistling.

Near to the river bridge at East Purton there used to be a tall elm-tree; the stranger went up to the tree and patted the hard bark of its trunk. He looked up at the bare boughs and began to climb; he was evidently pretending to be a boy again. When he came down he pressed his head against the tree as though he were reminding himself of something.

Mr. Crapper was in a fine fettle at the inn that night.

"His son would soon come home," he said, "riding in a chariot of fire," put in Farmer Barfoot, who sometimes read the lessons in church.

There was always a happy rivalry as to who should fill Mr. Crapper's cup, but this time everyone took turns, with the exception of Mr. Crane, who had no money.

In the middle of the evening Farmer Barfoot begged for the song.

Mr. Crapper's song was famous in Purton bar. As near as we can remember, it went like this:

Oh, you shall drink wine,
So sweetly in season; then you shall be mine.
You shall have no more pain; I will you maintain.
My ship she's a-loaded, just come in from Spain.

The song sounded of coming riches, so it was always well clapped and cheered. During the singing of the song the stranger, who had been going the round of the village, came to the inn. He was a man with a rough beard, and was clad in poor clothes, though not in rags.

He waited quietly in the doorway until the song was over, and then made his way to warm himself by the fire. In doing so, he passed Mr. Crapper, and touched his arm in an affectionate manner, and even allowed his hand to rest for a moment upon the old man's.

Feeling the touch, Mr. Crapper shook him off roughly, while Farmer Barfoot rebuked him for his familiar behaviour, and informed him that Mr. Crapper had a son in foreign parts who was soon to return loaded with riches.

"'Tis a happy life that I do lead," said Mr. Crapper, "thinking of the way he will come riding home in a golden engine."

"Yes," said Farmer Barfoot, filling up Mr. Crapper's mug, "'tis a real greatness to East Purton to have a rich man's father to give beer to."

The stranger rose quietly and went to the door, but this time he never touched Mr. Crapper.

When he was leaving the inn, he heard Farmer Barfoot making a speech in honour of Mr. Crapper and advising the company all to drink the health of his son Albert, "who be richer than I be," said the farmer with reverence.

"And may he soon come home!" called out Mr. Crane, as he borrowed someone's mug to drink the toast.

The stranger returned to the hill again, and looked back at the village lights.

He leaned over the stone wall for a moment or two, and then walked down the lane away from East Purton, whistling.

HEAL THYSELF

“There were some who believed”, says Tacitus, “that the one and only God worshipped by the Jews was none other than Bacchus, for their priests made use of fifes and cymbals, crowned themselves with wreaths of ivy and tended a vine wrought in gold in their temples.” But though some may doubt whether Jehovah and Bacchus are one and the same, yet all men were aware that Squire Goater was the god of Penny Norton.

Squire Goater lived above the village as a god should, in a great house, built of red brick; for the riches of the family were no older than the neighbouring brick field. The mansion and a number of its windows gazed fiercely down into a little valley where there was a brook, a small lane, the green and a few tiny thatched cottages. Beside the brook and down the lane, in the dampest and darkest situation that could be found for it, was the village school. The people worshipped and the dead were buried in the next parish.

The Squire farmed the land; his labourers were hired in the village and the women worked there. In the great house all good things were known, but in the village the women were pale and thin and the children caught colds through sitting for many hours in a damp ill-ventilated room with rats under the floor. They had lost the usual merry spirits that children should always have and throve but badly. Had the village been otherwise, Squire Goater could never have been so grand a god. For poverty is always a great help to the charitable and the greater the poverty the less need be given to relieve it.

As a rule Mr. Goater enjoyed the best of health. He had been married three times and his third wife knitted his woollen gloves, kept a look-out from the drawing-room window to see that the village behaved, and ordered the dinner. Mr. Goater’s sons were all in America.

A rich man who possesses a wife, a village and a good appetite is not likely to wish to put up with any pain. Mr. Goater at certain times suffered from the colic. Whenever he felt the slightest twinge in his belly he expected he would die. In order to prevent such a thing from happening, he engaged a doctor, allowing him the best cottage in the village, to minister to himself and to his servants and workpeople when they became ill. This physician was Dr. Puddy. Whenever Squire Goater sent for him, the doctor was expected to fly at once to his bedside and produce a remedy that would ease the complaint. But however fast Dr. Puddy ran, puffing, for he was a heavy

man, he would be sure to find his patient in the greatest terror, groaning and crying out, and believing himself to be at his last gasp. So great used to be the poor Squire's agony of mind that the doctor, knowing well what kind of draught to give, would carry the physic in a large flask, and without waiting to ask any questions of Mrs. Goater would pour the contents down the Squire's throat, and in a very little while he would feel, though with some inconvenience to himself, a little easier. Dr. Puddy, finding this medicine so useful with the Squire, used it upon the poor as well. But on stomachs weaker than Mr. Goater's the effect was so startling that sooner than take Dr. Puddy's remedy, which was the same for all complaints, the common people preferred to bear their illnesses with fortitude until Nature in her own good time either made them better or deprived them of their lives. Dr. Puddy, having only his one drench to give and his one patient to give it to, grew idle. But during his lazy days he contented himself with an amusement he had grown fond of, his interest in names.

"The name is all," he would tell Mr. Goater, "the man, nothing."

"Oh, George," he told his gardener, "if your name had not been Digger, you would never have been able to grow such fine kidney potatoes." And when his housekeeper, Mrs. Tuffin, brought into his bedroom his early cup of tea, he would give his head a little shake to awake himself and then observe sleepily, "If there was no such name in the world as 'Tuffin'^[1] I should die of thirst and starvation."

Another time when Mrs. Tuffin was taking out the tea things Dr. Puddy said, "I should never have come amongst you, Mrs. Tuffin, had it not been for my interest in names, for I was upon the point of buying a practice in London when I received a letter from Mr. Goater, who was none other than our Squire here. This gentleman, as we all know, has an unfortunate tendency to suffer with his inside, and although I was not aware of that when he invited me to live here, yet who would not know that 'Goater' is the name of a respectable patient."

Often the Squire would descend the steps of his Hall and walk through the village in the proper country clothes of a gentleman intending to be looked at. The women curtsied, Mrs. Best, the foreman's wife, dropping the lowest, and the men touched their caps in proper humility. Mr. Goater walked on, slowly, with genteel strides. He believed his house was different from those cottages and his stomach different from Mr. Best's, and so it was.

Upon the 1st of June, his birthday, Mr. Goater took his usual walk. The sunshine was wonderful. The children, shut up in the dingy school, were

singing the hymn “All things bright and beautiful”. They had just risen from their knees after praying for the Squire. The singing of the hymn carried the dust from the floor into their weak lungs and they began to cough. Mr. Goater walked proudly on. He knocked at the doctor’s door and was admitted by Mrs. Tuffin. Mr. Goater was surprised. Instead of studying people’s insides as he should have been doing, in order to assist him to treat the case of his grand patient, Dr. Puddy was examining with extreme care the signatures on a number of letters.

“With your kind leave,” said Dr. Puddy, after bowing low to his patron, “I would like to take a month’s holiday. I have chosen Jerusalem to go to because of its name. Had it not been for that city, there never would have been such a thing as our Christian religion. Mecca has little to be said for it compared with a name like Jerusalem that has been so useful to the poets. A successful religion is always bound to a beautiful name, very much in the same way as the lusty god was to Venus.” Dr. Puddy turned again to the letters. “I shall not, of course, leave my noble patient without a doctor,” he said. “The human belly is a curious thing and needs attention. I have here the names of a number of gentlemen who are willing to take a holiday in the country. Out of these names I am choosing the best doctor.”

“I should have thought,” said Mr. Goater a little severely, “that you should have chosen the doctor from the letters that follow the names.”

“I must venture to disagree with you,” replied Dr. Puddy. “The letters that follow a doctor’s name are merely there by luck or by accident and have nothing whatever to do with a man’s usefulness as a physician. I choose by the name alone.”

“And have you found one to take your place who will run to me as fast as he can when he is called by William?” asked Mr. Goater.

“For some while,” said Dr. Puddy, taking two letters in his hand, “I thought Dr. Poorbunder was the man, but here is Dr. Mangalore; that’s the name I have chosen.”

“I trust his medicine will suit me,” said Mr. Goater.

“He will certainly bring the very best,” replied Dr. Puddy, “but I cannot recommend mine to him, for in the matter of physic no two doctors ever think alike. Dr. Mangalore,” continued Dr. Puddy, “is interested in the herbs of the field. He hunts about, he says, after plants and flowers.”

“I hope you told him about my complaint?” asked Mr. Goater, anxiously.

“Yes,” replied Dr. Puddy, “I said that when William runs down the lane shouting, that he must go at once to the Squire. . . .”

So little happened at Penny Norton that when it became known that Dr. Puddy was going to take a holiday in Jerusalem and that a new doctor was coming for a month who was, Dr. Puddy had said, to bring his own medicine, everyone showed an extreme interest in the event. Perhaps one of the most interested was Tommy Best, a little boy who suffered from a tedious and dangerous sickness that forced him to keep his bed. Though a modern cure had been discovered for his trouble, the relief had not come to Tommy. When he was first ill he had been given the same drench as the Squire; but, as that physic seemed more likely to kill him than the disease, he took no more of it. Tommy, who now never left his bed and was rapidly growing worse and had no one to talk with or read to him, was very excited that a new doctor might be coming to the village who would be sure to pay him a visit. Though he suffered a great deal, his heart still remained merry and he longed to run out again into the meadows and pick the flowers.

In two days' time Dr. Puddy left the village, going out of his gate when a little rain was falling, which he considered, as the Emperor Caligula used to do, a good omen for his travels. He had only proceeded a little way towards the station in his car before he stopped the driver to inquire the name of a tramp beside the road. The wanderer's name was Honeycomb, which promised good fortune to the doctor.

Night had come when Dr. Mangalore arrived at Penny Norton. He drove to the village in a station car with two packages, one a portmanteau in which his clothes were packed together with a few precious drugs that only he knew of, and the other a large case upon which the doctor had written “Medicine with care”.

Dr. Mangalore's first patient was Mrs. Tuffin.

Opening the door for the doctor, she fell backwards in a great fright, thinking she had seen the Devil, for the doctor was black. As soon as Mrs. Tuffin had recovered and had given the gentleman his supper she hurried out to tell the news, and everyone decided that if they, when ill, had been more than half poisoned by Dr. Puddy, the black doctor would complete the process and bury them all. Only little Tommy wished to give a proper welcome to the new arrival, for so few people ever came near him that he was pleasantly excited with the idea of even seeing the Devil.

When Mrs. Tuffin returned from her errand and carried into the surgery the glass of hot water that Dr. Mangalore had asked for, she found her guest

busy. He had carried upstairs his portmanteau, that good Mrs. Tuffin discovered later he never left unlocked, and was now employed in bottling his physic.

“He must think,” considered Mrs. Tuffin, “that we are a sickly lot.”

The doctor had brought no less than two dozen quart bottles of physic in his case, upon which the name of a famous Bristol merchant was written. With great care, and a silver funnel, the doctor had already filled thirty medicine bottles and had affixed labels with the proper dose to be taken written upon them. Perceiving that Mrs. Tuffin still looked a little pale, he filled another bottle for her, recommending that she should drink all of it before she went to sleep.

The next morning, the summer sun being more lovely than ever, Dr. Mangalore started out to view the village and to see those who might some time or other be his patients. He appeared pleased with everything and in a few moments had a bunch of herbs in his hands that he had gathered in the lanes. He soon met the children who were going to school and talked merrily to them, though when they were gone he grew thoughtful, as if the sight of so many pale and ill-grown creatures did not altogether please him. He went to the hedge and examined a nest of caterpillars that were all plump and happy and who never went to school. He also in a little while met Mr. Goater, who looked a fine eater of beef and plum pudding. Mr. Goater stared hard at the doctor and passed by upon the other side of the way, where Mrs. Best stood ready to drop a very low curtsy. Mr. Goater sighed, pressed his body with his hand and returned home.

The news of a good remedy is never hidden for long. After taking her medicine upon the first night of the black doctor’s arrival, Mrs. Tuffin had slept so well and awakened so refreshed that she recommended Mrs. Best to try the same cure for her headaches. Mrs. Best had no sooner drunk her bottle than, liking the taste of the physic, she advised other women to try some. Dr. Mangalore dispensed his medicine with the utmost pleasure. But the men would have none of it. They did not believe their wives, but they believed Mr. Goater. The Squire said that the black doctor was certainly a foreigner or else the Devil, and whichever he was he felt sure that in some way or other he would disgrace the village. The men grumbled and Mr. Goater hoped that his stomach would behave itself while the Devil was in Penny Norton.

But the women were glad enough to better their health in such a simple manner as the doctor recommended and every morning one or two would

call at the surgery for a bottle of physic. Sometimes they would find Dr. Mangalore washing and filling the bottles. They would then sit in the chairs that were provided and watch the process and were soon aware that the very odour of the medicine, that certainly had a rich, vinous scent, was pleasing to their senses.

“If you drink a bottle a day of this medicine,” the doctor used to say to Mrs. Wyatt, “there will be no need for me ever to pay you a visit.”

Half of the bottles in the great case were empty and three weeks of the doctor’s holiday were finished, too. Dr. Mangalore was pleased with the health of the women and saw how much better they looked, but he had decided that no man should drink of his remedy; for the men instead of listening to their wives only listened to Mr. Goater, who said that the doctor gave his patients the same drench, only a little more highly coloured, that Dr. Puddy used always to keep in the house.

Dr. Mangalore certainly did nothing to prevent the men thinking so, for when one of them, a Mr. Thomas, hearing his wife speak so highly of the new remedy, asked for a taste, the doctor slipped a little powder, taken from his waistcoat pocket, into the bottle. Mr. Thomas had taken only one sip of it before he retired in a hurry, giving all doctors both black and white to the Devil in hell.

As the women were so much better in health, the doctor now turned his thoughts to the children. The school stood in the muddy lane where no sunlight came to it; the windows were never opened and the only air that entered came from the door when it was left ajar. Dr. Mangalore knew that sometimes a desperate remedy must be used in serious cases. As the school ruined the health of the children, he decided that it must be destroyed. In the middle of the night he visited the building, taking a can of paraffin and a box of matches. He found the door unlocked. He went in, remained for a little while, then retired home to bed. In the morning there was no school to be seen, only a heap of charred bricks and mortar.

The children, having nowhere else to go to do their lessons, ran out into the fields, where Dr. Mangalore taught them about the herbs and flowers and where, as they picked the roses, their own cheeks grew rosy too. But there was one child who could not play with the others; this was Tommy Best. Dr. Puddy had mentioned his illness and as soon as he was settled the black doctor visited Tommy. Anyone who saw them together would never have guessed that Dr. Mangalore considered the case of the little boy as almost hopeless. For no one seemed more happy than the doctor in the child’s

company. He visited Tommy twice each day, watching over him with the utmost care, and every time he came he mixed a little powder in some warm water that he gave him to drink. There was just this one chance for Tommy, and the doctor knew exactly the number of days that would decide his fate. Upon the day of the crisis he knew he must not leave him for a moment. That day came and the doctor remained constantly by Tommy's bedside. If all went well, the little child might be out within a week playing with the others.

Mr. Goater liked cucumber. More than once he had eaten too much of it and had suffered in consequence. Unfortunately upon this critical day in Tommy's life Mr. Goater fancied a little cucumber and one bite led to another. At half past three he felt heavy and troubled. Then came the colic. Never before had the Squire felt such horrible pangs in his belly. He called for his wife, who ordered William to run for the doctor. Black or brown, white or red, he must have him at once. All the house heard the master's groans and William lost no time in beating with his fist upon the doctor's door.

Mrs. Tuffin, whose nerves were fortified by the new medicine, opened the door very composedly without any excitement and in reply to William's breathless demand, said, "Doctor is out with the children."

"But where are the children?" asked William.

"In the fields," replied Mrs. Tuffin, "picking the flowers."

After running in all directions William returned to the cottage. This time he kicked the door.

"I can't find him," he shouted angrily.

"Then he must be at Tommy's," observed Mrs. Tuffin, calmly shutting the door in his face.

The doctor was happy, his cure was working splendidly. The little boy was able to sit up and play spillikins.

Though Tommy was not out of the wood yet, the hope of his recovery gave Dr. Mangalore such joy he could think of nothing else; but the danger was not yet over, though the doctor showed no sign of anxiety as he drew a spillikin from the little heap without disturbing the others. When he tried to take the next he shook the heap. He had heard steps upon the stairs which might have made his hand unsteady and was watching Tommy's attempt when Mr. Goater's manservant, William, opened the door in a great hurry.

“You must come at once,” cried the messenger, “for the Squire’s belly gives him terrible pain; he groans every moment.”

“I am glad of it,” replied the doctor smilingly, seeing Tommy throw a spillikin from the pile, “for pain always helps a man to know himself to be mortal.”

“He calls out that he will die,” cried William.

“He has learned one truth then,” observed Doctor Mangalore, “that I trust he will not forget when he gets better.”

“There is no other doctor within ten miles,” cried William, “and the Squire will be dead before I can fetch him.”

Dr. Mangalore shrugged his shoulders.

“Tell your master,” he said, taking up the little stick to continue the game, “that I will visit him tomorrow.”

William began to protest but, catching a glance from the doctor, he withdrew hurriedly.

Mr. Goater suffered as he usually did with his belly and made the most of it, but during the evening he was reported to be better, and William, who had kept out of the way while the pain lasted, presented himself to inform the Squire that the black doctor would not come because he was playing spillikins with Tommy Best.

“He must be punished,” cried the Squire. “Why, I might have died a hundred times this afternoon.”

“How shall we do that?” asked William.

“Has anyone drunk his curst medicine?” inquired Mr. Goater.

“Only one man,” answered William, “who after drinking it was so troubled in his guts that he was forced to keep to his bed for three days.”

“We will make this black devil drink his own medicine,” cried Mr. Goater.

The next day Dr. Puddy was due to return from his holiday. Dr. Mangalore rose early and bottled the last of his physic so that, as at the beginning, there were thirty full bottles upon the shelf. Though he had promised to visit the Squire, he wished to see Tommy first and found the child so well recovered as to be able to dress himself. Tommy sadly bid the black doctor farewell and kissed him.

“There,” laughed Tommy, “I have kissed the Devil.”

Dr. Mangalore forgot Mr. Goater.

He had not long returned to his cottage when a crowd of men, all Mr. Goater’s servants and labourers, arrived before the little house and demanded admittance. As soon as the door was opened they crowded into the surgery. They were armed with pitchforks and axes.

“We have come to give you our advice,” cried William. “Heal Thyself!”

“Drink your own damned physic,” cried Mr. Thomas.

“Down with it or we’ll break all the bones in your black body.”

“May I not give one bottle to Mrs. Tuffin?” asked the doctor.

“No,” cried the men; “drink them all, every damned one of them.”

Dr. Mangalore took the bottles from the shelf and placed them upon the table. He asked Mrs. Tuffin to bring a wine-glass.

He pushed the most comfortable chair near to the table and reclined at his ease. Then he drew the first cork. As each bottle was emptied the doctor smacked his lips and his smile broadened.

“He is the Devil,” said Mr. Thomas.

The men stood uneasily. The doctor continued to drink as though he liked the doses. Instead of groaning, hurrying out of the room or holding his belly with his hands as Mr. Goater used to do, Dr. Mangalore appeared the more content the more that he drank. When he had drunk the last bottle he became very merry, invited William to dance and when the men all huddled away from him he ran out upon the green to dance with Winnie, the naughtiest girl in the village. His antics ended when Dr. Puddy drove up and handed him a bottle of Jordan river water.

“I prefer Bristol Cream,” cried Dr. Mangalore, kissing him on both cheeks.

[1] This is a reference to “Tuffins”, a cake shop and restaurant at Sherborne, Dorset, which the boys of the School used to patronise. The original “Tuffins” is no longer in existence.

YELLOWSKIN

Mr. Lanning, the house agent and Mayor of Weyminster, loved cats. Mr. Tooke, the lawyer, who was also a Justice of the Peace as well as an Alderman, said that had Mr. Lanning not married another wife he would have wedded a cat. Mr. Lanning knew the full value of such an animal. When a cat purrs contentedly before the fire, its master will be content, too. When anyone opened his office door, and came to his desk wishing to see a list of houses to let, Mr. Lanning would inquire, rubbing his hands gently together, and smiling, whether the would-be tenant kept a cat. If the visitor replied that he kept only dogs, Mr. Lanning would shake his head a little doubtfully and ask for a quarter's rent in advance.

"These dog-lovers," Mr. Lanning would say to Mr. Tooke when he took his glass of sherry at eleven o'clock at the Black Ox, "are bad payers; they keep dogs out of pride and pride dates money in advance. One who kept a Great Dane gave me a cheque dated 1968."

"A mistake," said Mr. Tooke.

"I think not," said Mr. Lanning. "A cat teaches better habits. She always purrs when the rent is paid. . . ."

Town tradesmen are a peculiar people. They have simple childish minds as well as very crafty ones. They will manage their affairs with the utmost diligence, so that one would think they could do nothing else, then all at once they get an idea into their heads and run off like little devils on a spree.

When Mr. Tooke was seen walking along the esplanade in a fine new suit of sporting clothes everyone knew that some game was in the wind. And so there was. The County families are not the only ones who can let off a gun. Clerks and shopkeepers can imitate them. How shooting had got into Mr. Tooke's head no one knew; no one knows exactly how religion got into the heads of Rowland Hill or Captain Patch, but there it was. Mr. Tooke hired two thousand acres of shooting at Madder and the rest of the fine ones—if you read *The Holy War* you will know their names—ordered shooting outfits, too, and bought themselves guns.

When Mr. Lanning first took up his weapon, he was afraid of it, but to reassure himself he told Dolly, his housemaid, that it could not go off unless it was loaded. The cartridges came, too, and Mr. Lanning in the pride of his heart stood up a dozen of them upon the dining-room table, where they

reminded him of the chimneys of residential villas. He put the cartridges carefully away before he took up the gun. Then he looked round the room for something to aim at. What he saw was a portrait of himself in his Mayor's robes and so he aimed at that.

He was raising the gun for the second time to his shoulder when a loud scream came from the road. Dolly came running in in the greatest fright to say that Lord Bullman's car had run over Tobias. Tobias was Mr. Lanning's cat. Two wheels had gone over the cat and it was dead. Lord Bullman, who was driving, was extremely upset. He said he felt just as if he had shot a fox. He was on his way to the Weyminster club to play a game of cards, but returned home at once to look over his steward's accounts, that always made the saddest reading.

Mr. Lanning buried his cat in his front garden, where he could see the grave from his study window, and for a while he never thought of his gun.

One morning he received a note from Mr. Tooke inviting him to shoot at Madder on the Thursday following. Mr. Lanning agreed to go.

Now all he saw in his mind's eye were live creatures running or flying away from him while he fired at them as rapidly as if he let off a machine-gun.

In order to prepare for the great day he began to practise shooting. He walked to the end of the pier with his gun and a pocket full of cartridges. Then he shot at the seagulls. At his first volley they all flew away. To begin with they had supposed he was going to feed them with breadcrumbs. Mr. Lanning began to fire at a buoy which was anchored a little way from the end of the pier. He believed he hit this target with every shot.

When the great day came his wife, Lady Daisy, made up a little parcel of sandwiches for her husband to eat in the fields. She was sure, she said, that Mr. Tooke would only provide for himself. Mr. Lanning asked for a flask of brandy. But Daisy knew her man, and so without his knowledge, thinking that brandy might make his gun go off unexpectedly, she filled the flask with creamy milk instead.

A day in December, after the first blast of winter has come and gone, can be as quiet and as still as any in the year. The sweet and gentle spirit of a kindly winter walked in the muddy fields and listened to the drip drip from the hedgerows that were near bereft of their leaves. The air was indeed so mild that the very trees wondered whether or no the whole earth had been

translated to heaven, where genial weather would be sure to last all the year round.

The cows lazed in the sunshine and even the restless bull, who had been known to jump a five-barred gate, lay down with his head upon a molehill and fell fast asleep.

Such a silence begets gentle thoughts in a good man and Mr. Hayhoe, who had walked from Dodder to please himself with a glimpse of the sea, for his next Sunday sermon was about Jonah, bethought him that the Church Prayer Book had no fitting utterance in praise of complete silence; only the Holy Bible knew how to praise that. Mr. Hayhoe had gone past the green and had begun to climb the path along the down when a number of great cars roared, like so many dragons, into the village and drove to a meadow where they arranged themselves in a row. Out of them came the oddest set of beings that could be imagined, dressed in what they considered appropriate garments for sport in the fields, with town dogs, too, whose only game had been to chase a rat in the pleasure gardens, and who soon began sniffing at Mr. Tooke's luncheon basket with the greatest eagerness.

What grand talk these sportsmen made as they got out of their cars, though but a while ago they were at the office desk or shop counter. Lord Bullman, too, should have been there to have learnt a little of the fine art of venery, for all the talk was of the birds, the merry hares and the sly rabbits, to say nothing of other fowl such as woodcock and snipe. The rarer the bird the more often had they been destroyed in such high flights of fancy, and indeed had a golden plover escaped to heaven it would have been brought down by a sure shot from Mr. Tooke's gun.

One amongst their number was listened to with more respect than any, when he said that at midnight on the marshes near the town he had all but brought down with a double shot a great wild goose that crossed the heavens like a star, with such a whirring of wings that it sounded for all the world like an aeroplane. Then Mr. Lanning said boldly, and no one dare contradict him, that he had once killed four birds with one explosion. There was an awed silence and at a little distance away Farmer Told's barn cock could be heard to crow.

For all his surprising stories Mr. Lanning handled his weapon a little anxiously, having only one thing clear in his head; that no matter what hedge or fence he climbed through the muzzle of his gun should point somewhere otherwise than at his own person.

Leaving their cars, the gentlemen strode together through a pleasant meadow where each of them would have preferred to stay to keep his boots clean. But their pride drove them on, for was not all the town waiting to hear of their exploits?

Reaching a turnip-field near to Mr. Told's farm-house, they formed into line and, each holding his gun in the most serious manner, they began to tramp over the roots.

Mr. Lanning was not used to walking at the best of times and then only upon pavements or gravel paths, and he wished every turnip in the field had been made into a lantern to frighten the little children in the dark lanes, for wherever he trod there was one of them and he had a sure feeling that if he fell his gun would go off. Besides the awkwardness of such rough walking the pockets of his shooting-jacket were filled with cartridges which weighed him down and caused him the greatest apprehension. Presently he gave a sudden jump; a gun had gone off. Mr. Tooke had shot at a lark. So startled was Mr. Lanning that he more than half believed his own gun had been fired. But on looking into the breech he saw that all was safe. Then another bang and another came, and at each Mr. Lanning jumped the more nervously.

When they were about half-way across the turnip-field Mr. Lanning, who had never willingly hurt a fly, looked round him eagerly for something to kill. Such a desire comes as suddenly as a clap of thunder. A meek harmless man may in a moment become a murderer. Those who are used to killing will then be the most moderate, but when once a man turns from kindness to murder there will be no limit to his wish to destroy. Next in the line to Mr. Lanning walked Alderman Tooke. Only that very morning Mr. Lanning had received a bill of charges from that gentleman. His fees, even to the Mayor, appeared to be excessive. Lawyer Tooke strode along amongst the turnips as though he were born in them. His new leggings shone with the moisture from the leaves.

Mr. Lanning's wish was always to help a town tradesman; he was one himself, so he knew where the shoe pinched. Next to Mr. Tooke upon the further side walked the undertaker, Mr. Bindel. He had whispered to Mr. Lanning when they came into the field how quiet trade was for the time of year. Mr. Lanning slowly raised his weapon . . .

Then something surprising happened. In front of Mr. Lanning a streak of yellow darted through the turnips. For a moment he forgot that a charge of shot, impelled by the explosion of gunpowder, can travel faster than a

human being, so instead of letting off his gun he gave chase. No one heeded what he did. The yellow beast was through the next hedge and Mr. Lanning after it. Now that the chase had begun, Mr. Lanning forgot everything in his excitement to catch the creature. He saw glimpses of it as he ran. He had wished to kill and kill he would. There before him ran the game, scudding here and there, going this way and that, but always ahead of him. Mr. Lanning tore his new clothes, he scratched his face and hands with thorns, but still gave chase until at last utterly worn out and tired he laid himself down to rest upon a green bank. Then, to the great astonishment of Mr. Lanning, the hunted creature, who was tired, too, and only a little in front of Mr. Lanning, came softly out of a gorse bush and approached its would-be destroyer. It was a yellow cat. Now, in all his life, not since he had given a poor man whose name he could not remember nine shillings and tenpence halfpenny in exchange for a ten-shilling note, had Mr. Lanning felt so penitent.

“Ah,” he said, “is it come to this, that I should try to kill the best of God’s creatures? To have shot Mr. Tooke would have made little odds, but to destroy a poor harmless cat!” Mr. Lanning stroked and fondled yellowskin and begged its forgiveness. He took out of his pocket his parcel of sandwiches and the flask. Being thirsty with his chase, he applied himself to the bottle. The liquor was milk, not brandy as he expected. But how happy Mr. Lanning was now! He poured out half the milk into his cup for the cat. The blessed stillness came back to the fields, for the rest of the party were busy with their baskets of food and drink. Never had Mr. Lanning felt more content.

Of all associates a cat is the most forgiving. Yellowskin now regarded Mr. Lanning with the utmost affection. It was a splendid beast, with eyes like pools of still water. Mr. Lanning fed it with the best Wiltshire ham.

“It is indeed strange,” he murmured, “how happy one can be in the wildest place with a gentle cat.” He stroked the soft fur. But a sad thought came to him as he looked into its loving eyes. He must return yellowskin to its owner. Mr. Lanning believed in property, he believed in the right of ownership. Everything that was owned must be of value to the owner, and so someone no doubt enjoyed the ownership of this cat.

“Alas,” cried Mr. Lanning, embracing the cat, “if only I might take yellowskin home how happy I would be, for now that Tobias is dead I have no one to give titbits to after dinner. But all the while I wait here some poor country woman is sorrowing for her pet. Ownership is a state of grace. It may be that yellowskin is all that some poor farmer’s wife has to love. She

is weeping now at the thought of her darling being out in the wild fields. I must return the cat at once. God alone," Mr. Lanning took off his hat and bowed, "has prevented me from becoming a murderer."

Mr. Lanning took yellowskin in his arms and carried it together with his gun in the direction in which he supposed Madder to lie. As he walked along he regretted that he had not fired off his cartridges of which his pockets were full, for they weighed him down sadly. Reaching a lane, Mr. Lanning met a labourer who had come there to mend a hole in the fence made by the shooters. Mr. Lanning inquired of this man who could own such a beautiful cat. The workman, who saw Mr. Lanning as one of the breakers of the hedge, rudely pointed to a farm-house which was near the very field of turnips where the shoot had commenced. Mr. Lanning proceeded thither and arrived at the farm-house door, which he found open. There was no need to inquire where the farmer was, for he could hear him. Mr. Told was cursing and damning Mr. Tooke for not bringing him any present of game. To damn a lawyer before his time appeared to Mr. Lanning to be an unnecessary formality, just as to expect him to give anything away was an insult to his vocation. Mr. Lanning, wishing to deliver up the cat, entered the parlour, but no sooner did Mrs. Told see the animal than all the rage that she was venting upon Mr. Tooke, for she was by no means behind her husband in her language, was poured out upon the head of Mr. Lanning.

"Did not I," she cried, beside herself with anger, "drive that damn cat into the turnips for no other reason than to be killed by they blasted shooters. Didn't she take a kipper from the hearth that was put down to fizzle? Curse 'ee!" she shouted at the cat, "thieving yellow brute. Why baint 'ee dead?"

If the lady had only abused Mr. Lanning, all might have been well. As the Mayor of a famous town Mr. Lanning had always taken any personal insult most mildly, and had never been known to resent even the worst affront, but as soon as Mrs. Told called the cat bad names Mr. Lanning's look changed. He raised his gun and pointed it, first at Mrs. Told and then at her husband.

To look down the muzzle of a gun which is only a few inches off gives one no pleasant feeling and Mr. and Mrs. Told were out of the parlour in a moment. Mr. Lanning's first idea when they were gone was to comfort the poor cat. He set it upon a chair. As soon as the cat began to purr Mr. Lanning rushed to the door in time to see the farmer and his wife hurry out of the garden gate and begin to run across the turnip-field. That best of sportsmen and upholder of liberty, Coke of Norfolk, could not have let off his gun at the little rabbits as fast as Mr. Lanning fired at the retiring foe. He emptied

and loaded his piece with a rapidity which was astonishing for one utterly untrained in the use of firearms. It was fortunate for the farmer and his wife that they made the most of their legs and so were not within easy range. At each shot Mr. Lanning called out, "Murderers! Vile wretches to harm a poor cat. Wicked rascals!" he shouted. Bang! Bang! Bang! The pellets rattled against Mr. Told's hat and made him run the faster until a welcome haystack gave him shelter.

Then Mr. Lanning, his enemies having fled and his pockets empty of ammunition, took yellowskin in his arms, his own property now by the supreme right of conquest, and carried her to his home.

The evening came and over the silent fields of Madder shone the everlasting stars.

THE UNBIDDEN GUEST

A cock pheasant called from the woods. Lord Bullman awoke uneasily with a pain in his back. He wished to complain to Lady Bullman, but she still slept.

His horse had let him down heavily in a ditch the day before; he had not felt much at the time, but now he awoke in pain. Lord Bullman never blamed a horse. When he lost money at the races it was the jockey who was always in fault. Lord Bullman believed that a horse was a sort of divinity who could do no wrong. When his mare stepped into a rabbit hole the rabbits were to blame.

He never told himself that if he had ridden better nothing would have happened. The windows of the bedroom were open and the sound came of the swish of water and the sweeping of a broom. No one had called him up and so no harm had come to his horse. He was glad that the beast was not hurt. When a man awakes in pain, if he has anything unpleasant to do he is sure to remember it. The world to Lord Bullman was divided into two kinds of people: gentlemen and servants. When he mentioned servants, he was always reminded how thankful they all ought to be because they were not slaves. All countrymen, rich farmers, corn merchants and labouring people were all the same to him—servants. They were one class: the gentlemen were the other. But a gentleman had to be a gentle man to be called so by Lord Bullman. At his rent audits he addressed the farmers in the village hall; before an election he addressed the labourers. After each of their meetings he came home as quickly as possible and took a hot bath. But it was neither a political meeting nor a rent audit that made his back worse; it was a wedding.

Though Lord Bullman believed that a horse could never be in fault, he knew well enough that women were often in the wrong. If he ever went where he did not wish to go, it was all the fault of Lady Bullman, and she always had the same reply to his objections: "That his position in the county demanded some sacrifice."

When he thought of the wedding his back hurt the more. A former governess of Lady Bullman's was to be married to Farmer Soddy, one of Lord Bullman's largest tenants. Lady Bullman had promised Miss Neate that her husband would attend the church and the breakfast. Lord Bullman groaned. Miss Neate was a lady who believed in example. It was her boast

that she had never remained in the same room with low-bred people. She always set a fine example to her pupils in haughty behaviour. Farmer Soddy wished to marry her to show his belief in good breeding. He kept pure-bred sows and he thought a wife ought to be of the best kind, too. He knew that Miss Neate would make any man she married a gentleman because she was so proud of thinking herself a lady. From the very first, when Miss Neate lived at home, where she dusted the dresser and polished the floors, she decided that, if she ever married, Lord Bullman should attend the wedding and that none but gentlemen and ladies should be the guests. Lady Bullman she thought little of; she had never been one of those who follow a good example, for she even addressed her own servants as if they were human beings; but Lord Bullman she knew to be a great man and indeed he was the first in the county. His attendance at the wedding would set a seal, by which she and her husband would ever live, upon the grandeur of their house. This they would do by the simple process of considering themselves superior to everyone who had no title, and even superior to the vicar of the parish, Mr. Hayhoe. When she was going to be married Miss Neate applied to her Ladyship, who promised to bring her husband to the wedding and after that to the breakfast.

Lord Bullman rose; his back felt better; he took his bath and dressed himself. As the pain lessened so his thoughts became less unpleasant. He wondered why this was so. Even though his back was well, he would dislike the wedding extremely. He always hated attending any ceremony to do with the upper servants, though when a kitchen-maid had a wedding he enjoyed himself. The ale was always good. The bride's lips were as sweet as honeycomb. He could never bring himself to kiss Miss Neate, but his happier thoughts had something to do with Mullen, where the wedding was to be. He tried to recall what had pleased him there. He had ridden through the village a good many times, but it was some years since he had looked about him and walked in the Mullen lanes. He remembered that other day very well; he had gone there with his agent to mark some timber which had to be cut down so that a gap in his income might be filled up. He remembered the day as a very pleasant one. He had just walked around, leaving Major Darcy to mark the trees. It was November, always a month that pleased him. He liked to see the leaves fall as well as pheasants, and it is rare that November troubles a simple fox hunter by freezing the ground. No one heeded Lord Bullman at Mullen; he could walk as he liked without being stared at, while his thick shooting-boots kept out the damp of the lanes. But what was it that gave him such a pleasant memory of that day? He believed that he had met someone that he talked to, but all he could now

remember was that he was neither a gentleman nor a servant. Simple creatures he liked. He might perhaps have met some oddity who was neither familiar nor servile. He could not say. At breakfast Lady Bullman observed that she was going to present Miss Neate with an Album as a wedding present so that her distinguished visitors might write something in it. Lord Bullman at once thought of something to write, but he did not dare say what it was. Lady Bullman said she would start at a quarter to twelve in order to be on time.

“I will walk,” said Lord Bullman boldly, “by the fields.”

“You will be sure to get there?” observed the lady anxiously. “And if you see a fox you must only admire it, for if you do not attend the breakfast Miss Neate will be very disappointed.”

“Miss Neate,” groaned Lord Bullman, “be . . .”

“Your back,” cried his wife, “I hope it is no worse . . .”

If anyone, even a stray cat or dog, moved this way or that in Mullen, going over the green or down the lanes, there would always be Mr. Wandy to talk to. Whoever was sad, did Mr. Wandy but talk to them a little their mournfulness would be changed to gladness. But those who only judge by the outside of a man would think little or nothing of Mr. Wandy. He was a creature of tales and visions, the kind of thing that one might witness in a dream. His looks were meagre, his gait slow and humble, his clothes in rags. But even so no one would have taken Mr. Wandy to be a tramp or a loafer. Upon a winter’s evening he might have been taken for a gate-post or a knotted thorn bent by the wind, but he was too much a being of the earth to be thought a thief or an outcast.

Mr. Wandy was a man with a vocation. His conversation was always interesting. He liked to talk about pigs. Who does not know that there is always something new to be said about a hog? The hosts of heaven may fade into uncertainty, but pigs are real. Pigs are of the earth earthy and so was Mr. Wandy. His finest stories were always of hog lore. A pig is a romantic animal; he knows more than his trough, and many were the cases of far-sighted wisdom that Mr. Wandy could recite about the porker. He could even tell some bloodthirsty tales, for he remembered one great boar who roamed the woods of Dodder to the terror of the neighbourhood and compelled the Lord of the Manor at that time to climb into an elm-tree to escape its tusks.

As all fine poets do, Mr. Wandy completely disregarded all natural and ordinary doings in his stories, and once he even hinted to Mr. Hayhoe, the

clergyman, that Jehovah himself was nothing but a large and rather sleepy hog, so far did Mr. Wandy allow his wit to go. "Watch a pig," he would say, "for hours and hours as I have done and all the world will become merely an acorn patch with they hogs a-feeding."

Mr. Wandy and his wife lived upon the parish, but were always grateful for small mercies, and when a married daughter sent them a present they had a grand feast. On those joyful occasions a pleasant odour of fried bacon came from their chimney. Mrs. Wandy believed in charms. She had a rusty key tied round her neck that told her everything that was going to happen. But even with the knowledge that the key gave her she listened to other signs as well. If someone knocked three times upon the door, a death would follow. To drop a plate meant an earthquake, and if a cat sneezed there would be blight in the corn. One day Mr. Wandy asked his wife to give his compliments to the key and inquire what would happen next. The key answered "a wedding". And sure enough Miss Neate was going to marry Mr. Soddy.

"I should like to taste the ham," Mr. Wandy said.

"Miss Neate is a lady," replied Mrs. Wandy, "and so it is impossible that you should be invited."

On the morning of the wedding a little black dog ran into the Wandys' cottage, took the leg of a stewed rabbit and ran out again. Mrs. Wandy said the meaning of that was that the chief wedding guest would be stolen away by the devil. . . . When Mr. Soddy was informed by Miss Neate, who was watching the grand piano being safely placed in the drawing-room of their new home, that Lord Bullman was to be a guest at the wedding he opened his mouth and looked at her with awe. It was always after the audit dinner that he had heard Lord Bullman speak and saw him through a cloud of tobacco smoke. At a wedding all would be different. Miss Neate disliked tobacco as much as the grocer's wife in the play. Mr. Soddy hoped that his lordship's gout would keep him at home.

"Who could ever have expected Lord Bullman to come to us?" cried Mr. Soddy.

"He is one of my oldest friends," replied Miss Neate coldly. "As soon as ever he heard of our engagement he promised to come. I have always sat next to him at dinner and I really think he prefers me to his own wife."

Mr. Soddy looked at the piano.

"Help to move it, please," said Miss Neate.

Mr. Soddy did what he was told. When the piano was placed Mr. Soddy said quietly, "Will Lady Bullman come, too?"

"Lady Bullman is an ill-bred little cat. She tries to be kind, but she does not succeed," said Miss Neate.

Miss Neate looked at her watch. She must go home and dress she said. . . .

Lady Bullman liked to enjoy herself. When she was not laughing at the behaviour of her husband she laughed at anything she saw. She expected that Lord Bullman would make a speech at the breakfast. How pompous he would look with Miss Neate, who would then be Mrs. Soddy, beside him. What would he say? Something about the weather or the foxes she supposed. Anyhow, it would be fun to hear him. During the drive Lady Bullman looked at her pretty frock, and smiled.

As soon as she arrived at the home of Miss Neate's parents, an odd little house that appeared to be set down in the middle of a patch of bushes, Lady Bullman was received with all due respect by the bride, who inquired after his Lordship and received the news that he was walking by the field path to Mullen. As soon as Lady Bullman was released by Miss Neate she ran into the arms of three tiny bridesmaids who welcomed her like a sister. At once they began to romp and play until they were informed by Miss Neate that a wedding day was a sort of Sunday and that they must behave themselves. Lady Bullman put out her tongue.

When a woman sees a meaning either for good or ill in every event which happens a little out of the common in the house, her husband, if he be wise, will walk out quietly into the lanes. This time it was two spoons in a saucer, so Mrs. Wandy told her husband that he would go to the wedding.

"Suppose there had been three spoons?" Mr. Wandy inquired.

"You would come home drunk," was the reply.

Mr. Wandy slipped another spoon into the saucer and went out.

The truth was that a grand wedding in the parish was so much lost time to Mr. Wandy. A funeral was a different matter. A poor man bereaved of wife or child was a proper one to listen to him. All life and death was but a family matter to Mr. Wandy. Who but Mr. Wandy could give a new hope to the bereaved? They would stand together upon the green discussing the doings and ways of hogs whatever the weather, after the body, as content as they, had been settled in its cot to remain there indeed as long as pigs were mentioned, that is until the end of the world.

One would have thought that Mr. Wandy had stood for ever upon the Mullen green, while the hogs in the sties ate, dunged and were stuck, throughout the ages. The oaken boarding of the sties would go the way of all good lasting wood to the Christmas fire, and yet Mr. Wandy would still be telling how Farmer Pully once had a fat hog which filled the whole bottom of a great waggon when it was taken to market and of the huge hams which would be smoked in the farmer's chimney. But this day Mr. Wandy was sad; he felt himself a benefactor to his kind, for who indeed told so many good tales? Yet he had been insulted. That had happened only the day before. It had been foreseen by Mrs. Wandy. She had dropped a knife, which meant that her husband would be insulted by a woman. And so he was. He had been waiting for someone to talk to, when Miss Neate came by. He stopped the lady with the utmost politeness and informed her as a piece of valuable knowledge that a good sow is known by its many founts of milk. But instead of wishing to hear more Miss Neate bid him get out of the path in no very gentle language. "Disgusting" was a word she used. So Mr. Wandy leant over a stile which led to Dodder and brooded over his wrong. He was not revengeful and believed he could forgive Miss Neate were he allowed to taste her wedding banquet.

He had not been at the stile long before the figure of a man approached him, striding across the fields. Mr. Wandy believed he remembered the gentleman. No sooner did Lord Bullman see Mr. Wandy than he recognised him as the one whose conversation had given him so much pleasure in the past.

They shook hands most cordially.

"Ah, it was a boar you told me about," said Lord Bullman, who remembered now all that had been said.

"I know of many a hog," said Mr. Wandy, "and I could tell how Bert Pringle stole a pig from Dodder Hall and sold it to the steward the day after, only I do not feel inclined to be merry, for yesterday I was insulted by a woman." Mr. Wandy told his friend what had befallen him.

"Oh," cried my Lord, "it's these modern fancies of independence that make women so rude."

"They best bide in the kitchen," suggested Mr. Wandy.

Lord Bullman nodded.

"A good hog," observed Mr. Wandy, "is the best to love."

"Or a vixen that avoids badger holes," replied his Lordship.

They conversed most happily. Presently Lord Bullman observed sadly. “We have forgotten the wedding!”

“Why, so we have,” exclaimed Mr. Wandy, who was beginning to feel hungry and who remembered the fine smoked ham that Mr. Soddy had given for the feast.

“A dry champagne has been bought on purpose for me,” cried Lord Bullman.

“I prefer ale,” said Mr. Wandy.

“Not unwisely, I dare say,” replied Lord Bullman.

They walked together to the village and were soon in the Neates’ parlour, where the cake had been cut and the breakfast nearly over.

When Lord Bullman entered in company with Mr. Wandy the laughter and conversation ceased.

All looked at the unbidden guest. Only Lady Bullman, who was as merry as a linnet, shook Mr. Wandy by the hand, for she regarded his ragged appearance as merely a wedding jest. But the bride rose disdainfully and, with a look at her husband which nearly sank the poor man through the floor, left the table and together with the other guests withdrew to another room. Lady Bullman out of politeness was forced to follow.

“We were a little late,” observed Lord Bullman to Mr. Soddy, who remained out of respect to his landlord, “but my friend here is such a great story-teller.”

“I am acquainted with this pig,” observed Mr. Wandy, cutting generously into a splendid ham. “I have known him since he was a sucker.”

Lord Bullman accepted a portion.

Mr. Soddy uncorked a bottle of champagne and handed a jug of ale to Mr. Wandy. . . .

“My dear,” said Mrs. Soddy a week later to her particular friend, Hilda Tiddle. “Why, how can you doubt me? Of course Lord Bullman came, together with Lord Wandy. Unfortunately Lord Wandy took a little too much to drink.”

THE KINGFISHER

Mr. William Lanning, the Mayor of Weyminster, was a man of strong character; he was determined to marry again. He believed that a Mayor should have a wife just as a home should have a chimney, which is what he said to his clerk. Mr. Lanning understood property. He was a house agent in a large way of business. The property in question that he wished to acquire as his own was a widow, the Lady Daisy Diller.

Mr. Lanning had suffered one great disappointment in his life which had turned his hair grey. When he was Mayor of Weyminster for the first time he had waited upon the quay one August morning for the King to land on a visit to the town. When the King stepped ashore he would be certain to make Mr. Lanning a knight. He could not do otherwise, for there stood Mr. Lanning ready to read out his address of welcome. What else could the King do?

Half an hour went by. Mr. Lanning still waited and looked seawards. Out of the sea must come the King. He would be wearing a sword, the very weapon with which to knight Mr. Lanning. The Aldermen stood around Mr. Lanning; one gentleman, a greengrocer, lit a cigarette. Mr. Lanning informed him that only cigars were allowed.

“We must consider the honour of the town upon this grand occasion,” he said. “We must think of the King. Had a mere prince been coming, a pipe would have done.”

But the King did not land. Someone said later that His Majesty had seen Mr. Lanning waiting for him through the ship’s telescope and had changed his plans, retiring into his cabin with a novel.

No great man is defeated in one battle. Mr. Lanning’s namesake, William of Orange, fought three hundred engagements and he lost some of them. So Mr. Lanning started a new hare running. He thought that to marry a Lady was the next best thing to being a knight himself.

Sir John liked servant girls; Mr. Lanning liked Ladies. Sir John had created a Lady for Mr. Lanning to like. He gave Daisy a halo and Mr. Lanning would wear it.

Daisy Diller had three times the wealth of Mr. Lanning. He had sold her the house she lived in and so he knew its value to a penny.

When a Mayor goes courting everyone hears of it. It is put in the news as when he visits a church. There was a cartoon in the local paper, the *Daily Reply*, of a large billy-goat dancing on his hind legs before a nanny-goat who sat up on a great basket filled with carrots made of gold.

Daisy was a fine woman of forty years old with a free independent nature. She had ideas of her own, too, and as soon as she was settled in the largest house in Weyminster she began to express a great admiration for nature, for the flowers of the field and for the birds.

When Mr. Lanning first called she asked him about owls; she wished him to show her one of their pellets. What she said about pellets was a great mystery to Mr. Lanning, but he told her that he admired nature as much as she.

“I enjoy nothing better,” he exclaimed, “than going into the fields to hunt for animals and birds. Had I not been William Lanning, I might have been Prince Constantio, who was changed into a pigeon. But a fine fat pheasant well cooked—” Mr. Lanning checked himself suddenly. “Alas,” he cried to hide his confusion, “I have always been forced to move amongst pavements and houses when my heart has longed for green meadows and purling brooks. All my senses cry out to go on to the downs where the happy lambs play with the little foxes.”

Lady Daisy Diller smiled.

Mr. Lanning shuffled a little way across the drawing-room to her on his knees. He invited her to marry him. He rose from his knees and even capered a step or two like the goat in the cartoon, to show his manhood.

Daisy looked coy.

“I wish to see a kingfisher,” she said. “If you show me a kingfisher, I might think about it.”

Never was a man more delighted. Mr. Lanning hurried home and called his clerk to come to him in his office. Together they began to value all that Daisy Diller possessed. That was easy, because in a little town everyone’s business is common property and there was nothing that Mr. Lanning’s confidential clerk did not know; he even knew the exact value of Daisy’s jewels. Lady Diller was richer than Mr. Lanning thought. He kept repeating to his clerk, “A fine woman, a very fine woman.” And then he said, “woman, woman”, with the greatest delight.

When the clerk left him he remembered the kingfisher. His brow clouded; he had said “woman” happily enough, but this kingfisher was

another matter. Mr. Lanning looked out of the office window as if he expected to see a flock of kingfishers fly over the bay. But he only saw a few seagulls.

“Now,” he thought, “if Daisy had only wished to see a gull, how easy it would have been to show her one.”

He supposed she was only joking and the next morning he went to ask her for her decision and to name the wedding day. Lady Daisy Diller greeted him coldly.

“I shall not marry you at all,” she said, “unless you first show me a kingfisher in its natural surroundings.”

She turned away from him and withdrew.

Mr. Lanning retired like a good general.

That cursed bird, he supposed, was going to cheat him, as a defaulting tenant might, out of four thousand pounds a year, and a home worth twenty thousand. Then he remembered that he had once gone out to pick mushrooms at a little village named Mullen. Do kingfishers eat mushrooms? wondered Mr. Lanning. He thought not, but he had a dim recollection that after looking for the mushrooms he had seen a kingfisher near the Mullen brook. With a large fortune at stake Mr. Lanning was quick in his movements. It was Saturday afternoon; Mr. Lanning ordered out his car and drove to Mullen. He left his car at the Black Boar on the main road and walked to the village. When he came to the brook he clapped his hands. He did this expecting to disturb a kingfisher that would fly out from under the bridge.

If there was one thing, more than an unlet villa, that Mr. Lanning hated it was the country. When he had come to Mullen years ago to gather mushrooms he had found none and so had wasted the day. Mr. Lanning believed that the people who lived in the villages were savages. They became like the beasts they tended, bulls, rams and hogs. A dangerous expedition Daisy had sent him out upon to find this cursed kingfisher, when everyone knows that murders and accidents are always happening in villages.

Mr. Lanning watched the brook; it wandered quietly along through a green meadow. At the further end of the meadow Mr. Lanning noticed an animal feeding. He mistrusted its look. To feed so quietly was in itself a bad sign. It was a calm before the storm. In a moment the creature might raise its head and roar or bellow. Or supposing even the bull was quiet, he might

meet the farmer. Farmers were no friends of Mr. Lanning. He had once let a house to a man who had retired from that occupation, who had talked much of the bullocks he had fattened. The man hanged himself and not a penny of rent did Mr. Lanning receive. "A rude cheating savage," Mr. Lanning called him.

"Here is the brook," said Mr. Lanning, "and the kingfisher must be somewhere, too." He would bring Daisy there and show it to her. Then he would be married.

"A fine woman," thought Mr. Lanning, "a fine woman."

Mr. Lanning was short-sighted. Once he met a tramp in St. John's Street and took him for Alderman Dowgate.

"How do you do, Mr. Dowgate," cried Mr. Lanning, "and how are the gas company's affairs this morning?"

The tramp spat in his face.

The most naughty boy in all Mullen was Tommy Toole. He was a well-grown young spark of fourteen, tall for his age and filled from the soles of his feet to the hair of his head with mischief. He was always escaping from school by one excuse or another, but when he was there the lessons were easy for him. No beating or any other sort of punishment made the least difference to Tommy. Only the day before Mr. Lanning's arrival at Mullen, Tommy had found an old drunkard asleep in the hedge. In a sack by his side there were six bottles of strong beer. Tommy drank them all. Then he fell into the river and thus by the custom of the place was named the Mayor of Mullen. This boy, always on the look-out for some kind of roguery, followed Mr. Lanning to the bridge. He had been loitering near the Black Boar when Mr. Lanning's car arrived, and seeing the gentleman alight he thought him to be one of those simple ones who are the proper prey for the sharp wits of the countryside.

Mr. Lanning presently noticed that someone other than himself leaned over the bridge, and wishing to get in touch with the natives he politely requested Tommy to tell him his profession. Had he left school yet? Mr. Lanning condescendingly asked him.

"I am the Mayor of Mullen," replied Tommy solemnly.

Mr. Lanning regarded him with much interest. If the village had a mayor, it must be respectable. Perhaps a country place was not quite so savage as he believed. Of course, he had valued great houses in the country before and also sold and let them. But he had always been a little surprised when he

received a cheque for his services, thinking that very likely a score of fat sheep or a drove of oxen might have been rendered in payment of the account.

“Mr. Mayor,” said the house agent, who always showed a proper respect for dignitaries, “would you be so good as to direct me to the kingfisher. I have heard that such a bird lives hereabouts and no doubt it resides within calling distance. I do not wish to take a long journey through fields and meadows to see it. If you tell me where it is to be found, I shall be your humble servant.”

Now, master Tommy did not lack wit; he had noticed that Mr. Lanning was a man of substance, his clothes were not of common cloth but the best material, his boots shone with polish.

“We cannot afford to show curiosities to strangers for nothing,” replied Tommy coldly, copying the voice of Mr. Boddy, the clergyman, who had often given Tommy a good scolding for his naughtiness.

Now, no one understood business better than Mr. Lanning and he was the last person in the world to deny a proper fee where it was lawfully due.

“Of course, Mr. Mayor,” he said slyly, “no one would expect that you should supply your valuables without recompense. But, I think, with your leave, a commission will meet the case when the goods are delivered, rather than a present payment. If you would give me a moment or two of your valuable time, I will explain the matter.”

Tommy looked round. One or two of his companions in mischief were drawing near. He had no wish to share his booty with another.

“We will remove ourselves to a more quiet spot,” he observed grandly.

“With pleasure,” replied Mr. Lanning.

Tommy led him through a gate into the meadow and they sat together near a willow-tree beside the river. Mr. Lanning then told his story. When he had concluded he exclaimed with rapture. “A fine woman, sir, a very fine woman.”

“A kingfisher is not a common bird,” observed Tommy. “It is easily frightened away and will only appear at certain seasons. One must be a generous giver to see a kingfisher.”

“You don’t suppose that one might rest on Lady Daisy’s gate-post at Weyminster?” asked Mr. Lanning, who wished to save himself the expense of another visit to Mullen.

“No rare bird,” answered Tommy sternly, “ever visits they seaside towns.”

Mr. Lanning sighed.

“They are sacred creatures,” said Tommy. “Lord Bullman was nearly sent to prison for shooting one that he mistook for a snipe.”

“Oh dear,” sighed Mr. Lanning.

“The bird is precious,” remarked Tommy, “and it is an expensive matter even to wish to see one.”

“How Daisy ever got such a notion as this into her head I do not know,” observed Mr. Lanning anxiously.

“Ten pounds when you are married, and two pounds now, would be cheap to show you one,” said Tommy.

“Say seven at the wedding and ten shillings now,” suggested Mr. Lanning.

“Eight and a pound,” said Tommy, “or else I’m off.”

“Very well,” said Mr. Lanning and they shook hands.

“You have a strong grasp, brother Mayor,” observed Mr. Lanning, rubbing his hands together.

Mr. Lanning paid Tommy the pound.

“The cost of my staying here with you will be another ten shillings,” said Tommy.

Mr. Lanning paid that, too.

The Mayor of Weyminster felt his power.

Nature, all birds included, came to the call of money. He made a close bargain with the Mayor of Mullen; he was indeed in a happy case. He looked round with interest at the meadow. He noticed that the animal he had first seen was advancing slowly to the brook.

“I believe that little bush might hold a kingfisher,” he said softly to Tommy, pointing to the willow-tree. “Would you be so good as to bring the bird at three-fifteen p.m. on next Saturday the eighteenth instant. I will bring the lady.”

“The bird will be there,” said Tommy, “and the balance of the debt must be paid in the church vestry after the wedding.”

“It shall be so,” replied Mr. Lanning.

While money was being spoken of he had given no notice to the animal that was coming towards them, but as soon as he rose from the grass to go to the meadow gate he saw his danger. The beast raised its head and bellowed. Tommy was the fastest runner and only his laughter which brought tears to his eyes could have hindered him from leaving Mr. Lanning. As it was, he reached the gate many yards ahead of his companion.

When Mr. Lanning was safely in the road he looked again into the meadow and saw only a harmless cow drinking the river water near to the willow-tree.

“A terrible adventure,” Mr. Lanning muttered to himself on his way to the Black Boar. “I might have been killed.”

The next day when Mr. Lanning paid Lady Daisy a visit she received him graciously. He told her joyfully that the kingfisher was found, he also added that it was the last of its species ever to be seen again in the United Kingdom.

Lady Daisy permitted him to kiss her hand. . . .

Tommy, with thirty shillings in a pocket that had never before held more than a few coppers, grew serious and thoughtful. He set his wits to work. He believed he knew how to turn a lucky penny in this business. On the Monday, instead of going to school he set off to Weyminster. He walked all the way there and inquired in the town for the residence of one Lady Daisy Diller. He knocked respectfully at the back door and sent up to the lady a mysterious message telling her that he had something of importance to report that deeply concerned herself and the Mayor of the town. After a long time of waiting he was admitted to the lady’s drawing-room. Tommy fell on his knees. He would prove Mr. Lanning to be a wicked liar, a deceiver, he said. Tommy used the very same words that Mr. Boddy had used to him. “A vile hypocrite,” he said, “a wolf in sheep’s clothing. I will prove my words now for two pounds,” exclaimed Tommy, “and another five when the wicked man is unmasked!”

Then he told her that Mr. Lanning meant to cheat her by placing a stuffed kingfisher in a little willow bush in the Mullen river.

“To deceive so lovely a lady,” cried Tommy, “what a dreadful crime! For no live kingfisher has ever been seen at Mullen.”

Lady Daisy gave Tommy two pounds and promised him the remainder if he proved his words. But she felt a little sorry for Mr. Lanning, for she

herself had played a trick or two upon Sir John before she was married. As soon as he received the money Tommy bowed low and retired.

He knew the town well. There was one shop window over which three brass balls hung that he had often looked into. He went there again. What he had noticed before, marked at three shillings and elevenpence, was in the window still. Tommy entered the shop and made a purchase. . . .

All the way to Mullen, sitting next to Daisy in the car and feeling her presence there very decidedly, Mr. Lanning could only say to himself “a fine woman, a very fine woman”. And she certainly was; Daisy was plump enough at fourteen, when she called Sir John’s attention to herself by leaving a garter in the morning-room. Daisy at forty was a splendid creature and it was evident that she knew her high station in life, for though he made the attempt, she would not permit him so much as to squeeze one of her gloved hands during the journey.

“Ha, Mr. Mayor,” cried Mr. Lanning when they met Tommy by the bridge, “may I do you the honour to introduce you to Lady Daisy Diller!”

Daisy looked a little surprised when she saw Tommy, but she shook hands in a graceful manner, Tommy giving hers a gentle pressure. He wore a new coat. When they came into the meadow Mr. Lanning walked a little ahead to see if the bull was there and Tommy took the opportunity of winking at Daisy, who smiled coyly. Indeed, she had begun to like Tommy; he reminded her of a page boy at Sir John’s mansion who had climbed a ladder and peeped at her through the bedroom window, making all the fun in the world of her husband, who was still snoring by her side. They now came to the place where the kingfisher was expected to be.

Mr. Lanning was a mayor and he thought it proper before Daisy was shown the bird to make a little speech upon this occasion.

“This,” he said, “is a civic festival. Nature and the most lovely lady in Weyminster are met together.” He believed a kingfisher was near, a very rare bird, but not so rare a creature or as beautiful as Daisy Diller.

Then Mr. Lanning in a bold voice demanded to see the kingfisher. Tommy pointed out the bird, perched upon a low bough of the willow near to the water.

“I will catch the kingfisher,” said Tommy, “and show it to you.”

“You are most kind,” observed Mr. Lanning.

Tommy looked at Daisy.

He stepped into the river, but no sooner did he put his foot in the water than one kingfisher and then another flashed by, a gleam of colour, just where Lady Daisy was watching. She saw them both.

“Why, there are two of them!” she cried delightedly.

Mr. Lanning clapped his hands.

“Mr. Mayor,” he called, “Mr. Mayor, congratulations.”

But Tommy had disappeared.

A PAPERED PARLOUR

Everyone in East Dodder knew that when Miss Mary Perret married she would marry a good man. No one, in a village way of speaking, had been taught better than Mary. There was no housework that she could not do; no one could iron the pleats in a summer frock better than Miss Perret, and nothing in a house—even to the painting and decorating of the inner walls—came amiss to her. She could cook so carefully, having as much regard to the pence that provided the materials as to the bellies that digested them, that it was said of her in East Dodder that, whereas some people could only live on so many pounds a week, Miss Perret could live on so many pence.

Miss Perret had been the only child of her parents, who were a little different from other people because Mrs. Perret had one religion and Mr. Perret another. But they both believed in Mary. They died blessing her.

When they were gone, and no graves were kept neater and tidier than theirs in all Dodder churchyard, Miss Perret had to leave her cottage because it had been but a lifehold vested in the lives of her parents. Miss Perret was thirty when her cottage was taken away from her by the Squire's agent, Major Rutter, who had never seen Miss Perret, for if he had he could hardly have turned her out so rudely.

Miss Perret's hair was so clean—indeed, all of her was as clean as her hair—and she was never idle. She could sew and make her own dresses, and the dresses that she wore always fitted her perfectly. While she lived with her parents there was always a little money to spare, so that Miss Perret could buy some remnants, out of which she made her pretty frocks.

One would have thought that, when Miss Perret was at liberty—having no parents to tend—a number of people would have offered her a home, as she was so good a workwoman. But this was not the case, for it seemed that a young and pretty woman and a good worker into the bargain was not as much sought after as might have been expected.

However, Mrs. Haxey, a widow lady, allowed Miss Perret to live with her, though she promised her nothing in return for her labours except her mere food.

Miss Perret had always been kind and good to her neighbours and, when all the furniture in her old home was sold, and the doctor and the funeral expenses paid for her parents, Miss Perret was left with only a wooden box

where she kept her clothes, and a dozen rolls of wall-paper, all done up in a brown-paper parcel.

This wall-paper Mary had intended for the parlour at home, but what with one thing and another connected with the illness of her parents she had never been able to use it, and so she carried the parcel to Mrs. Haxey's, hoping that one day she might have a parlour of her own to decorate.

Once or twice when Mary Perret had done all the work that she could do for Mrs. Haxey, she thought that she might use the little leisure that she had by papering Mrs. Haxey's front room with her own paper, instead of keeping it for herself, but she might just as well have papered the trees in the Squire's park, for Mrs. Haxey would have been sure to have torn it all down in one of her coughing fits, for when Mrs. Haxey coughed she caught hold of anything that was handy, and after a fit or two she would have had the paper all off the walls. And so the possession of that wall-paper made Mary Perret wish to marry.

It is said that every lady has her own reasons, which few would share with her, for wishing to be wedded. Miss Perret saw her own wedded happiness in the setting up of her wall-paper, and so she had only been at Mrs. Haxeys's a few months before she looked round her for a husband.

A good woman naturally wishes to marry a good man, and a woman who is industrious would not wish to marry idleness. And so Miss Perret cast her eyes about her in order to find, if possible, a hard-working man who would give her a good home.

Miss Perret did not look long, for, so shapely were her legs and so neat her ankles, she was soon noticed. Mr. Mill who noticed her was the least idle of all the men of East Dodder. He had two employments and was always ready for anything else in the way of work that wanted to be done. His neat cottage, which he lived in all alone, was a little way back from the road, and not a stick nor a stone about it was ever out of order.

Who could have supposed that Mr. Mill had a cruel heart? No one in Dodder thought so, and certainly not Miss Perret. But no woman, however careful, can always follow a man into all his doings.

Mr. Mill was a rabbit-catcher, as well as being sometimes a day-labourer, for if any work, such as threshing the cornstacks, required extra men, Mr. Mill would follow the customs and traditions that belonged to that calling, so that no one could say of him that he acted in any way out of the ordinary in his profession.

He was always a man to do what he promised. If Mr. Mill promised to supply a rabbit to Mrs. Duggs, who didn't mind its age so long as the rabbit was a large one, the rabbit was always brought—as Mr. Mill had foretold—in time for a Sunday dinner.

Mr. Mill wore side-whiskers; he was a pale and a quiet-looking man, he walked slowly when abroad, and was never disturbed or put out by any ill-bred word from a man, nor yet by any fierce gust of wind, or hail-storm from the sky. When the rain fell in torrents Mr. Mill would walk as though the sun shone, neither seeming to stoop against the blast nor to be in the least displeased by the splashing waters.

Mr. Mill was a king by nature; he ruled the rabbit-warren, over which he had sole power, in an autocratic manner. He gave his subjects life and he also took their lives from them, and their bodies, too. And, though he killed as many rabbits as he chose, yet he would allow no one else to do his subjects any hurt. All stoats and weasels were banished from his kingdom, and did any poacher try to steal a march upon Mr. Mill and set a snare in his preserves, he lost the snare as well as the time that he had taken to set it.

Mr. Mill had not always lived in his cottage alone; he had been married twice. Each of his brides he had chosen because of her docility, and because of a natural taste in each to harbour her husband's goods, so that when she left the house—a poor, meek corpse—there was not one thing broken or mislaid that had been in Mr. Mill's cottage when she stepped in, wearing her orange-blossom.

Neither lady had given to Mr. Mill any child, and so when Miss Perret's turn came—she looked so charming that day that even the Reverend John Hayhoe shuffled his feet a little when he married her to Mr. Mill—she felt that, though she had just walked by the graves of the other two, she was really the first one to be married to him.

Everyone likes to hear a good man speak kindly, and during the courtship Miss Perret was never tired of hearing Mr. Mill talk. And he was never tired of saying how kind he liked to be to women, and to rabbits. He knew the ways, he said, of the one and of "they t'others. One woman at a time," he was once heard to say, "and many rabbits. . . ."

Mr. Mill wanted a woman for another reason than to work, and that was why he married Miss Perret.

"Please, may I paper the parlour?" asked Mrs. Mill, when the wedding guests were departed and the two sat at supper alone. "May I paper the

parlour? I have kept the paper for a long time, and often at Mrs. Haxey's, when the rains dripped down the windows, and Mrs. Haxey held her sides with coughing, I used to undo the rolls and admire the pattern and wonder when I should have my own parlour to paper."

"No, not tomorrow," said Mr. Mill.

As the evening wore on, Mr. Mill eyed his wife more and more curiously. Once he took up her hand, but soon put it down again, merely observing to himself, "Yes, a woman!" Once when she moved to the door to go out with the supper cloth, Mr. Mill moved silently out, too, as though he thought she was a snared rabbit trying to escape.

At breakfast the next morning Mary said, "May I paper the parlour tomorrow?"

"No," replied her husband, "what be done here, I do do. A woman be too wide awake sometimes, and a rabbit be too sleepy." And Mr. Mill went out to help to thresh Farmer Lord's new wheat.

Mary sat in a chair when he was gone and wondered what she had better do. Mr. Mill's married behaviour had exhausted her; he had behaved like an old red fox who had been long denied a mate. Mary felt both shocked and outraged. She had married only to be able to paper her own parlour.

To bustle about, to do one thing or another in a womanly manner would, she hoped, give her more ease. She felt ill and looked this way and that to see what she could do so that she might forget the usage she had been subjected to. But there was nothing for her to do. All the work of the house had already been done by Mr. Mill. He had been working while she had fallen into an uneasy doze. There was nothing left for her to do.

Before Mr. Mill had gone out he had helped her to clear away the breakfast and to wash the plates and cups. He had done his share so deftly, and indeed, more than his share. All that she did to help was so little that she had seemed to do nothing. He had even laid her dinner, setting upon the table all that she might require, and had departed with his own done up as neatly, and all prepared by himself.

Mary Mill looked at her rolls of wall-paper. She seemed far worse off now than at Mrs. Haxey's. She had work there to occupy her the whole day, and now she had nothing to do. She had changed her state because she wished to paper her own parlour, but she could not do that even now unless Mr. Mill gave her permission. At Mrs. Haxey's she had slept comfortably

each night, but her first married night had utterly disgusted her and made her miserable. What could she do to forget it?

She took up her workbox and looked into it. She had used all her cotton in making her wedding garments. She would go and buy some more at the shop, but she had no money—not so much as one penny. She had spent all her savings in buying what she needed for her wedding.

She sat with her hands folded upon her lap. She had married Mr. Mill because he was so hard-working, and now she had nothing to do. She sat thus all day; she felt too dispirited even to take away the plate she had used for her dinner.

When he came home, she said that she wanted to do something—to work.

“Bed-time be coming,” observed Mr. Mill, while he employed himself in doing all that was needed.

The next day Mary felt more than ever weak and sad. But, for all that, she asked Mr. Mill for some money to buy cotton.

“If there is nothing else for me to do, I must sew,” she said.

“I didn’t marry ’ee to do sewing work,” said Mr. Mill, “and ’tis me pleasure to do all meself.” Mr. Mill unlocked a strong wooden box, in which were all the tools that are required for household mending. He locked the box again, and put the key into his pocket.

“A married womans be best without work,” he said, “for ’tis for she to lie down and to think upon t’other matters.” Mr. Mill moved about the room.

Though ill, Mary lived from day to day. She did nothing, and, when evening came, she doubted whether she could live through another night of his behaviour. But a woman can bear much, and so months went by, and many a time during those months did Mary Mill wish she had never been born. She wished herself, many a time, to be anything in the house that he used rather than to be herself—his woman.

Mr. Mill appeared to spend hours out of doors, and yet he seemed to be nearly always at home. All the proper tasks of a woman he took away from her. He only allowed her one use—the natural, the crude, the merely bestial. He expected that of her, and that alone.

All her life, up till the unlucky day when she thought she had found a good man, Mary had never been idle and had always been happy. There was nothing she would not do, as a child, to help in the home, and at Mrs.

Haxey's she had only the one wish, to go where she could work harder—and that was why she had married Mr. Mill. She had certainly thought that there was room in any house—even in Mr. Mill's—for a woman's labour. She had been married on a Tuesday, and through all that week, though she could find nothing to do, yet she still hoped.

She would wait till the Monday, which was the day in which all right-minded women did their washing. He couldn't possibly deprive her of that labour—a woman's toil and pleasure. She had remained in enforced idleness, but when Monday came she would be free to work.

On Sunday Mr. Mill looked at her curiously. They went to church together, and he seemed to be very devout. It was a feast day, and Mr. Mill told her it was his custom to buy from the inn a gallon of beer, to carry this home and to drink and be merry in company with his friend, Mr. Bone, the sexton. Mary had always been told that Mr. Mill drank nothing.

He made her stand in front of him. He wanted to look at her as he drank, he said. When he had finished the beer, he ordered her to bed. Mr. Bone left the house and Mr. Mill soon followed her to bed. In the middle of the night Mary Mill stirred weakly. She spoke, no one replied, and she closed her eyes.

In the early morning she opened her eyes. She remembered the washing; she had looked forward to that day through long hours of enforced idleness. She raised herself a little. However much his huge lusts had weakened her, she would light the copper and begin.

The morning was delightful. The little May birds were all of them singing and the sun had just risen and poured out his golden love upon all things. A fresh wind, happy that the night was gone, blew briskly.

Mary dressed herself, looked at the bed, and shuddered.

“How wise are some women,” she thought, “to get to know the habits of a man before they marry him.”

Mary Mill opened the bedroom door. She was greeted by a puff of steam from the copper. She tottered downstairs.

The copper had been lit during the night; it was now burnt out, and all the washing was done. Mary Mill opened the back door; she saw all the clothes hung upon the line. Her own breakfast was laid ready, and he had gone out to work.

There is something about the word “rabbit” that makes children laugh. But Mrs. Mill dreaded the word. Whenever her husband spoke of a rabbit, he behaved more cruelly towards her. On the days when he worked as a labourer he acted mildly compared to the days when he went to the warren.

There he could do things that no one could see, and, because they were done to rabbits, no one heard of them. But at night, he would be newly inspired, he would seem as if he would gnaw her eyes out—he did worse, too. She—a poor woman—found herself in the hands of a horrible beast, and she found it hard to creep about the house.

A little way up the road, and near to the sexton’s cottage, there was the churchyard. One day Mrs. Mill asked her husband whether she might walk there. The sexton was Mr. Bone, her husband’s friend, who had often come to drink with him upon a Sunday evening. Both were regarded as very respectable people in the village. But Mary never dared stay in the room with Mr. Bone.

One night, when her husband was very drunk, he had offered his wife to him.

“Ferret her out, and let I see thee do it,” he had cried. But Mary had made that impossible and Mr. Bone had departed.

But now she wanted Mr. Bone. Through all her trouble, Mary had still the heart of a girl who had one wish in the world, and that was to paper her own parlour. She had grown used to the goatish behaviour of her husband, and she did not think that Mr. Bone could treat her worse, amongst the graves, than he did. She met him by the churchyard gate, when her husband was out.

“Will you do it for me,” she asked aloud, after whispering a question into Mr. Bone’s ear.

Mr. Bone looked at her. Though so weak and ill,—indeed, nearly dying of her sorrows—she still appeared to have the body of a woman.

“Come on,” said Mr. Bone, “behind the yew-tree there be a nice soft grave.”

“No, not now,” said Mary, “but you can do what you choose with me when my parlour is papered.”

The sexton nodded. It was worth while, he thought, to do a little work with such an end in view.

The next morning Mr. Bone asked Mr. Mill for a rabbit. A young doe-rabbit, he said, would suit his rotten teeth. Mr. Mill said he would go to the warren the very next day.

He went and Mary did not wait long after he had gone out, but went out, too. She went out joyfully. She had only herself to give to Mr. Bone as payment for what he had done. But, even with that end in sight, Mary went happily to the churchyard. She might have good luck, and that good luck would be to escape Mr. Bone. She could also prevent her husband from taking another wife. He was killing her quickly and was already beginning to talk to Nellie Brine, a village girl, whom he would present now and again with a rabbit.

Mary Mill took two rolls of her wall-paper, and went out. She had never been so happy. No one—not even her husband—could prevent her working that morning. Her husband had gone to the warren; he would not be back for some hours. He was gone to fetch a dinner for Mr. Bone. She also was to be the sexton's dinner, but not before she had papered her parlour.

The grave had been dug on the sly; no one in the village knew of it. And when she had papered it, it was to be covered up again with boards.

Mary prepared herself for the work. The sides of the grave were lined with matchwood boarding; she had made the sexton do that by promising the reward—herself.

The churchyard ladder was in the grave, and Mary unrolled her paper. She had brought some paste with her, and she laid her paper down upon the grass and put on the paste. She measured the grave and cut the rolls into proper lengths. Then she papered her parlour.

She had just finished when the sexton came back from his dinner. He found her looking at her parlour; she was happy.

Mr. Bone looked anxious. "There be folks at work in that field," he said, pointing with his hand. "Get thee into the grave; 'tis a good place for thee."

Mary had worked for so long, and she was happy. Happiness is a danger to some people, to others it is a blessing. Though ill, the work Mary had done had given her a new heart. She had always worked for others, and now she had papered her parlour, not for herself, but for Mr. Bone.

She asked him to go first into the grave: she would follow. Mr. Bone went down and called to her to come.

Mary drew up the ladder. Before Mr. Bone knew what she was doing, she placed the heavy boards over the grave. Upon them she shovelled the earth that had come out of the grave, so that the man in the grave would be secure from draught.

He would also be obliged to stay where he was.

The grave had been dug in a corner of the churchyard to which no one went. Mary was happy; she was now dangerous.

Her husband had carried his ferrets to the warren, and when he went with the ferrets he left his gun at home. The gun was loaded. Mary went out of her back door, carrying a gun.

Over all Dodder a thick mist had fallen. It was impossible to see more than a few yards in any direction. Near to the cottage there was a little lane that led to the warren. That was the lane down which her husband used to come. Mary had papered her parlour for Mr. Bone, and now she would shoot her husband for the devil's tea. She had never been allowed to lay her own tea, so she would lay the devil's. Mary waited. Soon a gun went off. Mary laid his weapon beside him and went home.

The first thing she did when she got there was to put all the dirty clothes she could find into the copper and cover them with water. Mary clapped her hands; she lit the copper fire. While the copper was burning, she ate her dinner. . . .

In the spring a mound of earth is soon covered by nettles and grass. For years the heap of mould in the corner of the churchyard was left untouched and then more rubbish was put upon it. People said that Mr. Bone was gone to stay with his sister, and a new sexton was appointed.

This new sexton's name was Mr. Huddy, and the first grave dug was for Mr. Mill, who had shot himself, accidentally, in the lane.

One never should carry a loaded gun and a sack of rabbits on the same shoulder.

ACROSS THE WAY

The most personal part of Mr. Bachelor Goody's cottage at Thorburn, that is the part that more than anything else resembled himself, was a crafty-looking wooden shed, the door of which was somewhat shaky, though still remaining upon its hinges, and still able to give a modest and moderate safety to bits of sticks and straw that Mr. Goody stored therein.

John Weare's cottage across the way was built in a more modern style than Mr. Goody's, which was but rubble and mud, with a brick or two thrown in here and there just to inform the thoughtful that bricks did exist even in those olden times. As a happy contrast to this aboriginal dwelling of the bachelor, Mr. Weare's home possessed a slate roof and sash windows, though these latter wonders were, we must own, never opened.

John Weare was a widower, but had been beguiled, against his own will, so he always said, into accepting the services of a kindly housekeeper whose name was Mrs. Deacon. After she had cooked for honest John for a twelvemonth or two, Mrs. Deacon one day remembered, and remarked upon the fact, that she owned a little girl, who was put out to keep in the next village. Upon this interesting information being handed to him with a cup of tea, John Weare looked for full five minutes at the grandfather's clock. He made, however, no comment upon the disclosure, and Mrs. Deacon, who knew that John liked to take his burdens upon his back bit by bit, expressed a modest desire to invite her daughter to tea.

When she came, Mr. Weare watched the child intently as she ate her bread and butter and listened, raising his hand to his ear, when he heard her mother call her Nancy.

John Weare worked upon the roads; the calling of his neighbour was not so simple. The Bachelor Goody was a learned man; he understood, so 'twas said, "near everything". Goody was a horse doctor. He could kill a pig, skin a cow, catch or poison the rats, he could sing a hymn, he could sharpen a scythe and likewise accomplish many other country mysteries.

Mr. John Weare was wont to pause while eating his own tea and look at Nancy, who had, bit by bit, become a member of the household. As time went by, Mr. Weare began to imagine that Nancy was a wolf.

It was the custom of Bachelor Goody to pay certain happy visits to the Merry Swineherd, the Thorburn inn.

Mr. Weare would watch his neighbour go off in that pleasant direction and sigh. Sometimes it happened that when Mr. Goody returned from these visits he would not take the trouble to go to bed, but would merely lie down in his shed upon some dry straw. This happy manner of coming home and finding so easy a resting-place, more than all else he did, aroused the envy of John Weare.

Even the established fact that his house was the better of the two did not help poor Weare to bear his cross the more uncomplainingly. He could never keep his eyes off his neighbour. He reasoned thus: Mr. Goody could do as he liked, he could sleep where he liked, there was no wolf in his house, there was no Mrs. Deacon to make him undress.

Mr. John Weare envied his neighbour.

Now, Bachelor Goody had often watched John Weare in an interested way. He would see Mrs. Deacon sometimes call him in to his dinner, waving her hand invitingly. He would follow the matter on, too, and would think of the hot rabbit stew, and smoking potatoes, all these wonders projecting their savour daintily to his nostrils from his neighbour's chimney. Goody would try to relieve his feelings the next morning by saying in a tone that meant so much: "They roads be easy to dig."

Bachelor Goody would often lean over his garden gate and look at his shed. He could not touch it, the whole thing looked so dilapidated. The very idea of touching the shed with a hammer or a nail seemed too horrible. He could only look at it, as though he advised it to mend itself—if it could.

The bachelor would then turn and look across the way.

Inside Mr. Weare's cottage the lamp would burn in a clear, friendly way. In the cheerful light of the lamp the tea-table was set. There would be Mrs. Deacon, comely and good-natured, cutting the bread and butter. Nancy would bend down over her place and her hair always reminded Goody of golden guineas falling on to the white table-cloth.

One morning, at breakfast, Mr. Weare stared at the clock for five long minutes. After staring at the clock he opened his mouth and nodded his head twice and said gravely, as though he gave out a prayer, looking at Nancy. "She do eat, she do."

With this remark as a beginning, he waited for a moment, stared at the clock again, and then shouted out, looking straight at his housekeeper: “You be both greedy wolves, you be.”

Mrs. Deacon cleared the breakfast things away. She behaved exactly as usual until the next day. At half past three by the clock that Mr. Weare would stare at so hard Mrs. Deacon walked across the way and spoke to Bachelor Goody.

Thorburn was interested. The latest news ran about on cats’ legs, rode upon single blown straws, dropped from the black wings of sober rooks, telling everywhere the same tale: that Roadman Weare had parted from his housekeeper and that Bachelor Goody had taken her instead.

In a happy frame of mind was Mr. Roadman Weare; he moved slowly and surely along the lane that led to the inn; he carried five shillings in his pocket.

The roadman remained there happy and smiling until a late hour, when he shuffled home in high glee, climbed his stair with the help of his hands and knees and slept upon the bedroom floor.

Awaking rather early, Mr. Weare was unpleasantly conscious that he felt cramped and cold, colder than he had ever been in his life before. He arose in a sulky fashion and looked out of the window. There was a light burning in the house across the way, and a little girl who seemed to have golden money in her hair was eating her breakfast.

Mr. Weare moved gloomily down to his own front room; he had left a loaf of bread upon the table. The loaf fell to pieces in his hand and two mice scuttled away across the table. The roadman looked for the cheese. He peered into all the corners of the room, but there was no cheese—the mice had eaten it all.

On his way to work Mr. Weare encountered Mr. Bachelor Goody. “They mice be animals,” he remarked as he went by. . . .

For the first few days after the coming of the new housekeeper Mr. Goody did finely. It was very delightful to have someone to do all the work for him. It was so pleasant to hear a little girl laugh and to see how prettily she stroked the cat.

One day Mrs. Deacon asked for money to buy pig's blood so that she might make a black pudding.

“Nancy loves black pudding,” she said, “and so do I.”

The sound of this request for money buzzed unpleasantly in Mr. Goody's ears; besides, black pudding was a favourite dish of his own. . . . And he didn't like the idea of dividing by three.

This unlucky sort of mathematical reckoning kept on troubling him.

At tea-time that evening Goody looked at little Nancy and wondered when he had seen that sort of eating before.

He thought of a creature that had unfortunately escaped from the ark. The beast had four legs and a long, nasty tail.

Mr. Goody chanced to look out of his doorway; he saw in the darkness his neighbour coming home intoxicated from the inn. Mr. Goody longed again for that immense peace that overcomes the drunkard in his cups.

The bachelor moved gloomily into his room again. The little girl and Mrs. Deacon were eating a hearty supper.

The following morning Bachelor Goody remarked to Mr. Weare: “They blessed rats be for ever biting, they be.”

Time passed. Thorburn believes in fate. Thorburn believes that water always finds its level.

The two neighbours who lived so near to one another could not deny the justice of God.

They had not left well alone, they deserved their doom.

Christmas-time had come, the tottering shed was still standing, and its owner, Bachelor Goody, slept snugly within it.

Mrs. Deacon and Nancy had returned to the better cottage, because a woman always knows when God beckons her. . . . But she merely said that the other house was too draughty for her chest.

Mrs. Deacon carried home with her to Mr. Weare's a good poison for mice. “And Nancy,” she said, “has learned to darn stockings.”

The two men would sometimes pass one another as of yore.

“Scythe be sharp now, bain't it?” Bachelor Goody would inquire.

“Yes, and they mice be dying,” Mr. Weare would reply.

THE WRONG NAME

Farmer Pully's horse stopped. The place was a wide open heath crossed by one road and covered with heather and dismal pools of water. The way had been rough going, but even so the horse—a young animal—with only two pigs, the farmer and Mr. Hayhoe in the van, could easily have trotted on.

Mr. Pully let the reins go; he looked troubled. The evening darkened, ugly-shaped clouds hurried over the sky. Mr. Pully had given Mr. Hayhoe, the clergyman, a lift from the market town of Maidenbridge, but now, although not half-way home, he wished him to get out.

Ever since Mr. Hayhoe had mounted the van there had been trouble. First Tony the horse had picked up a stone in his hoof, then he had bolted and now he stopped dead. Such behaviour was curious in a well-behaved animal. Mr. Pully looked suspiciously at his companion. What, he wondered, had made Mr. Hayhoe do nothing but talk about God? He might have known that even the two pigs, let alone the horse, did not like that kind of conversation.

“None of us do,” said Mr. Pully to himself. “It wasn't a proper thing to ask an honest farmer who paid his rent to the day whether he knew God. Surely to hear that said was enough to make any horse bolt.”

“It bain't no use trying to get 'e to go,” said Mr. Pully mournfully, “so thee best get down.”

Mr. Hayhoe climbed out of the van.

When the clergyman was in the road Tony the horse trotted softly on, the pigs grunted and Mr. Pully waved good-bye with his whip. In a few moments the van was out of sight.

Mr. Hayhoe, who was left in the middle of the heath, began to walk. Presently, before he was gone many yards, a large drop of rain hit him like a pellet. Another followed and soon white sheets of rain swept over the heath. Mr. Hayhoe shivered, but there was nothing for it but to walk on and be drenched by the storm. What had he done to be turned out of the farmer's cart? Evidently he had said something to displease the farmer. It must have been the Holy Name that he had uttered.

Mr. Hayhoe walked on in the driving rain. Soon he felt his clothes heavy with water and the wet slushed in his boots. Upon the chalk road the water

ran by him in little rivers. Certainly he had brought trouble upon himself by naming God. At last he reached home, looking like a drowned man.

When he had changed his clothes and come to the tea-table he sighed. Upon the table there was a note from Lady Bullman. Mrs. Hayhoe had laid the note beside his plate. She had not alluded to it and so he supposed it contained something that would not be pleasant to read. He now opened the letter and read.

“It was not convenient,” Lady Bullman wrote “that Mr. Hayhoe should dine at the hall on the morrow.” That was Sunday. Mr. Hayhoe now knew the reason for this dismissal. It was because at dinner he always named God. Lord Bullman had already hinted to him that the mention of that name gave him indigestion, which made his gout worse. But Mr. Hayhoe had not heeded him. The very next time he dined at the Bullmans’ he behaved just as badly. As soon as ever the fish was brought in he began to speak of the Almighty. Mr. Hayhoe always liked fish, so when that dish came to table he spoke of the loving-kindness of God to His children upon earth. Lord Bullman was then heard to say in more than a whisper that no bishop had ever behaved so badly, for if one had ever spoken in such a manner he would never have become a bishop.

The Bullmans were sorry; they liked Mr. Hayhoe, but that sort of talk wasn’t for the servants to hear and so Lady Bullman wrote the letter. Whenever Mr. Hayhoe was neglected or slighted he drooped sadly. Now he appeared to be very miserable indeed and for a good reason. Farmer Pully had put him down in the middle of the heath in a rain-storm and Lady Bullman had refused him her table.

Mrs. Hayhoe tried to comfort him.

“You may speak of Him to me as much as ever you like,” she said. “You can tell me how much you love His Name and how much you long for all the world to be saved; I shall never tire of hearing you.”

But Mr. Hayhoe remained silent. He felt ashamed.

He was a sociable kind of man and liked a good dinner and he always enjoyed driving to market with Mr. Pully. He remained silent all that evening and then he went to bed.

The next morning he awoke more happily. He thought he had done wrong to expect a great nobleman to like to hear God’s name mentioned, and certainly no farmer would, especially if to name Him made the horse pick up stones, bolt and then stand stock-still in the road. Evidently neither

rich men nor their cattle cared for such talk, but perhaps the poor would hear. He would go out that very day and visit Shepherd Poose. If this poor man listened, all would be well again. The storm was over and the sun shone pleasantly when Mr. Hayhoe started to climb the down where the sweetest air met him coming softly from the sea. Mr. Hayhoe breathed joyfully and climbed the upland path. Though the ground was slippery and wet he did not mind; he had the countryman's gear upon his feet, stout boots shod with iron.

Soon a homely scent came to his nostrils: the smell of sheep. He had always loved that smell of earthy sheep dung; loved and known of all ancient pastoral tribes, the very parchment almost upon which the first holy words had been written. A wholesome stench indeed, blessed of God, who is the shepherd's friend. For was it not to the simple shepherds who were watching their silly sheep that the angels came? Indeed, in the huge firmament of being, God could choose no better place to herald the glorious truth than a poor sheepfold.

"Surely," thought Mr. Hayhoe, "whoever names the Master there will be welcome."

Mr. Hayhoe stepped on light-heartedly; he even sang as he walked, a verse from a psalm,

"Thou shepherd that dost Israel keep
Give ear in time of need
Who leadest like a flock of sheep
Thy loved Joseph's seed—"

When he reached the fold he found Mr. Poose taking out some cake from a great bin to feed the lambs. Mr. Hayhoe bid the shepherd good morning and spoke as his custom was about God. But no sooner had he said that Name than Mr. Poose got into the barrel for the purpose perhaps of fetching the cake from the bottom and shut down the lid upon himself. There he remained until the sheepfold was rid of Mr. Hayhoe, for that gentleman, seeing that he was not wanted there, walked sadly away.

A simple nature that is pleased with good things is as soon fallen as raised. Mr. Hayhoe was now plunged into the deepest gloom. It was not that he felt himself injured or insulted, but that the wonderful joy which always came to him from the contemplation of that Divine Glory, which is the knowledge and hearing of the Name, must for ever be denied to those ears that will not hear. When he stood upon the heath the raindrop would have welcomed the Name and in the fold the sheep would have listened, but not

men, for whom the world was made. Mr. Hayhoe moved slowly, his steps faltered. A gull with its wings hardly moving flew silently overhead. Mr. Hayhoe wished that he himself were this seabird who knew God without knowledge and who abode with Him without understanding.

“What happiness,” he thought, “to be any living thing rather than a man and to be any man rather than a minister of the Gospel whose sole and only duty is to proclaim the great and wonderful name of God to deaf ears.”

In the distance upon a further down Mr. Hayhoe saw two tiny specks which seemed like black flies upon the hillside. He knew them at once, Winnie and Tommy Poose, who were returning home from the village.

It was an easy matter for Mr. Hayhoe to overtake the children, who were loitering along as children will do, playing in the cart track and taking up large lumps of chalk from the pit and placing them in the middle of the way to trip up the horses.

When he came near Mr. Hayhoe removed the large stones and then, coming to the children who stood silent, hoping that he had not seen what they did, he began to talk to them about the goodness and love of God. He had hardly named God twice before Winnie and Tommy took to their heels and scuttled away over the grass at such a rate that no one could have caught them.

And now Mr. Hayhoe saw nothing about him but blackness and despair, for even the children forsook him and fled. Indeed, the worst of it was that the everlasting Name which none, not even the innocent babes, wished to hear seemed now dimmed to him, too, and even he for that time felt as though he did not wish to hear it again. So the joy of his life was taken away and he walked home a sorrowing man.

When a man is really stricken a wise woman will not for a while interrupt the sadness of his thoughts, because she knows to do that will only add to his pain. Mrs. Hayhoe bided her time, going about her affairs as kindly and as lovingly as ever, though in a more silent manner than usual, because she wished to show him that she understood his trouble. But even her comforting presence could not for some time raise the heavy cloud which rested upon her husband's spirits. At length, thinking that she might interest him with a simple piece of news, she asked her husband whether he had noticed any sound coming from the kitchen. He replied “No.”

“Well,” she said, “old Mr. Jar the tinker is mending a kettle.”

“Ah,” observed Mr. Hayhoe, who seemed to wake up out of a deep sleep, “I thought I heard a hammer knocking. Tinker Jar is an old friend; bid him come in, Priscilla.”

As soon as ever Mr. Jar was seated at the table a heavy burden fell from Mr. Hayhoe and he began to be happy, though it must be related that he feared the cause of his happiness was not a proper one; for though he had long been acquainted with Mr. Jar, never being able to remember when he did not know him or await his coming with joy, yet he knew that he had never once named God to him. Indeed, God never seemed farther from his thoughts than when this old man was near. And now with Mr. Jar, who wore as open and honest a look as ever man had, sitting near him, he felt no more inclined than he had ever done to name the Lord.

But the conversation turning to living in the country, Mr. Hayhoe narrated what had happened to him in the last two days, telling how he had been dismissed from Lord Bullman’s table and that neither Farmer Pully, his shepherd, nor the children would listen or hearken to him when he mentioned a certain Name.

“And whose was it?” cried Tinker Jar. “Whose name made poor Mr. Poose hide his head in a cake barrel?”

“The name of God,” replied Mr. Hayhoe.

Tinker Jar blushed.

“We cannot all be loved,” he said quietly, “and indeed sometimes one is not in a mood to hear even one’s own name mentioned. There is something dull, too, in speaking of One who is always ready to mend souls as though they were so many pots and pans. Those who truly love us are often unheeded and indeed wished out of the way. But,” laughed Mr. Jar, “who does not like to hear of one who hates and wishes us ill? A happy subject for talk he always is. Have you never—” Mr. Jar laid his hand on Mr. Hayhoe’s arm—“have you never thought of mentioning the Devil in your country walks? You know that in the scriptures”—Mr. Jar blushed again—“he is spoken of and you as a good minister should name him, too.”

As Mr. Jar spoke Mr. Hayhoe remained respectfully silent, for though the tinker seemed a common workingman and a low one at that there was something about him that once seen or even read of was rarely forgotten. When Mr. Hayhoe heard what Tinker Jar said he promised to do as he advised.

“You can hear too much of some people, you know,” Mr. Jar said with a wink when he went out of the back door, having earned sevenpence.

Mr. Hayhoe was a changed man when the tinker left him.

Perhaps he had done wrong to mention God so much, he thought. The Devil is better known to the world.

Mrs. Hayhoe now brought in the work that Mr. Jar had done to show to her husband. He had soldered a lantern, mended a kettle and scraped a saucepan clear of rusted soot.

“And besides that, he cleaned the stove,” said Mrs. Hayhoe, “I don’t call that dear for sevenpence!”

“Certainly,” said Mr. Hayhoe, “his advice to me is worth a great deal; indeed, I don’t believe all the money in the world could purchase such good advice as Mr. Jar can give!”

The first news that reached Mr. Hayhoe the next morning was that Tommy Poose had swallowed a fish bone and that unless the bone could be removed Tommy must go to hospital. This Mrs. Poose refused to allow. Without taking his breakfast Mr. Hayhoe walked at once to the down. There was a thick fog and nothing could be seen. However, as he kept to the track Mr. Hayhoe walked along quickly enough. When he arrived at the cottage he found Mrs. Poose in great trouble. The doctor was to come at any moment and was to take the boy away if he found him no better. Mrs. Poose still said that she would not let him go. The boy lay still, breathing with difficulty and in great pain.

“Tommy,” cried Mr. Hayhoe when he came near, “what would you do if the Devil were under your bed?”

No sooner did master Tommy hear that name than he burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. The bone was loosened and Mr. Hayhoe easily took it out. Tommy was at once eased of his pain and in a very little while was romping about as merry as ever. To show her gratitude Mrs. Poose invited the clergyman to say a prayer which he did readily enough, while Tommy turned head over heels upon the bed, and then she promised that all the family would come to church the next Sunday, an unheard-of thing.

Mr. Hayhoe walked home in a cheerful mood, but forgot to keep to the cart track which showed him the way and soon found himself completely lost in the mist. He walked more and more out of his path until to his dismay he heard, just in front of him, though three hundred feet below, the waves of

the sea. As he did not wish to step over the cliff, he took the opposite direction.

“In such a thick mist,” he thought, “how likely it would be to meet the arch enemy of man going about his evil business upon earth”, and Mr. Hayhoe repeated from the poet,

“But now an aged man in rural weeds
Following as seemed the quest of some stray ewe
Or withered sticks to gather . . .”

Mr. Hayhoe spoke these lines aloud and shivered, for a dank heavy fog which surrounded him became icy cold. He had not gone many steps further before a form appeared before him which seemed huge. Mr. Hayhoe felt compelled to go towards the spectre. The figure stooped. It was only an old man gathering fuel.

Mr. Hayhoe was extremely relieved when in a moment or two the form rose up and showed the well-known face of Shepherd Poose, who had been collecting a few broken hurdle sticks to carry home for the fire.

“Ah,” cried Mr. Hayhoe joyfully to Mr. Poose, “I thought you were the Devil.”

One would have supposed that to be mistaken for the Devil might have troubled a good man, but Poose was mightily entertained by the idea and invited Mr. Hayhoe to sit in his hut until the fog lifted. While Mr. Hayhoe sat contentedly upon a bag of chaff, Shepherd Poose rummaged under a sheep’s skin and after some hunting brought out a tattered book, well thumbed and read.

“ ’Tis best thee read a chapter,” he said to Mr. Hayhoe and handed him the Bible.

Mr. Hayhoe read how the Devil tempted Jesus. As soon as he finished reading and handed the book back to its owner the fog vanished. Outside the hut all became clear and the sun shone. Mr. Hayhoe bid the shepherd good morning and went his way. In a little while he was safely at home and, having an excellent appetite, made a very good breakfast.

He felt so well then that he wished to walk out again instead of writing a sermon, which was his usual employment in the morning.

“Perhaps you will meet Tinker Jar,” said Mrs. Hayhoe, “for he is still in the village”, and she began to clear away the breakfast things.

“Or I may meet the Devil,” said Mr. Hayhoe, again thinking of Milton. “For I discern thee other than thou seems’t . . .”

When Mr. Hayhoe next met Lord Bullman, and remembering what Tinker Jar had advised, he told his Lordship how he had mistaken Shepherd Poose for Satan.

“I wonder you did not mistake me for the Devil, too,” laughed Lord Bullman and invited Mr. Hayhoe to dine at Dodder Hall the next Sunday.

Mr. Hayhoe accepted the invitation.

The news that the curate of Dodder did nothing but talk of the Devil soon got about and Farmer Pully sent to the vicarage to offer to drive Mr. Hayhoe to Maidenbridge on market day.

THE RED PETTICOAT

Mr. Giller of Enmore was always respectful to ladies; indeed, he loved them; and if anyone made fun of him for saying so, he would remark gently, "My mother was one of them."

Mr. Giller was working bailiff to Farmer Kent, who lived at Buckland, and besides attending to his duties in the best possible manner, he was one of those who believe in God as well as in women. The one he honoured, the others he treated with consideration and love.

"But why baint 'ee married?" asked Carter Beer, who was a man who always enjoyed a laugh at his betters. "Why baint 'ee married, Mr. Giller, for thee do say that a woman be as good as a horse and should be treated as kindly?"

Mr. Giller looked at the ground. He saw a string of emmets hurrying to their nest across the road, and moved back a little so that he should not hurt them.

"I have never been proud enough to think," replied Mr. Giller, "that any woman could care for me, and they certainly turn away laughing whenever I speak to them."

"You don't approach them right," said the carter. "Why, if I went near to thik horse, Pinker, without swearing, I'd deserve to be kicked."

"But, surely," replied Mr. Giller, "one ought never to approach a woman with a wicked oath?"

"Neither be 'en right," observed Carter Beer, "to talk as though all would be a church, when 'tis kissing and cuddling that women do want."

Mr. Giller lived alone and did the housework himself. Once every year he whitewashed his cottage, and every Saturday afternoon he scrubbed through his rooms.

During his working hours Mr. Giller had plenty to think about besides the management of the farm, for, upon the upland down or in the low meadows, Mr. Giller perceived the presence of God, and, sometimes, a coloured garment caught his eye, passing in the lane.

Though Carter Beer never knew when Mr. Giller perceived the high manifestation, he now and again noticed when the bailiff looked at the

lesser.

“Ha!” the carter would say. “Ha! ha! Yes, that be one of them and how thee do stare; ’tis most like thee do gaze through her clothes, maybe the petticoat be fastened in a tape.”

Mr. Giller patted Pinker the horse; he had approached him with a kindly word.

“I have never seen a lady’s petticoat,” he said.

“Some be white, and some be red,” said the carter, who was a married man, “and a tape do tie them and I can tell ’ee more if thee’ll listen.”

“No, thank you,” replied Mr. Giller.

Carter Beer coughed. . . .

Mr. Giller often felt his loneliness in a world where a word or two of the most simple kind can so often make the path of life easier for the wayfarer. He was near fifty years old with side-whiskers and a rather bulky frame, though a strong man that no woman would be ashamed to take as her husband.

But no maid or widow liked him and however kindly he treated them they would not listen to his approaches. Some said that he insulted them because, instead of admiring and smirking at them in chapel, as others did, Mr. Giller always thought of someone else whom he believed to be present there, too.

Of all the seasons of the year the autumn is the time when a lonely man grows most lonely. The dead leaves that fall then, leaf after leaf dropping off the trees, in fair weather or in storm, speak to him in a way that a man gladdened by a happy family never hears. The moaning winds, too, at night-time, that tear and rush through the valleys, rending the skirts of summertime, tell the lonely one, if he feels his sins, that it would have been best had he never been born.

One autumn day Mr. Giller felt chilly and as he walked home from the fields he thought he would buy a new flannel shirt. He sent a child to meet the carrier, Mr. Balliboy, at the cross-roads, and to ask him to make the purchase. Mr. Balliboy lived at Norbury.

The day was Saturday, the autumn wheat had been sown, and the horse, Pinker, had run away with the corn-drill and all because—so Carter Beer said—Mr. Giller had not sworn at him.

“’E be only good when he be damned,” said the carter.

Mr. Giller scrubbed his house through and went to meet the carrier.

A strong man thinks little of a walk even after a hard day’s work. Mr. Giller walked under an avenue of oaks. Now and again he trod with his heavy boots upon an acorn that crushed pleasantly. Two children ran past him laughing; they pulled down a few late blackberries and ran off again. A pale woman went by with a perambulator. Mr. Giller spoke to her kindly, but as soon as his back was turned he heard her laughing about him to the children. She was Carter Beer’s wife.

A fresh wind, full of the richness of autumn, blew down the lane and the first drop of rain from a coming storm struck Mr. Giller when Mr. Balliboy’s motor-van, swaying from side to side, descended the hill to the cross-roads.

Mr. Balliboy was late and he hunted in a hurried manner for Mr. Giller’s parcel.

“’Tis thik darkness I be afeared of,” said the carrier. “It be after I, and often when I do turn handle nothing don’t light, for lamps be queer-tempered.”

Mr. Balliboy seized a parcel, thrust it into Mr. Giller’s hand, and continued his way in the gathering darkness.

Mr. Giller walked home; the night grew sadder. He put the parcel under his coat to shelter it from the rain, and the parcel seemed to warm his heart as he walked.

He decided to change his cotton shirt for the warmer one as soon as he reached home. When he entered his cottage he felt unusually happy—perhaps it was the pleasant warmth of the parcel that made him so. He placed it upon the front-room table and lit his lamp.

Mr. Giller opened the parcel and looked with interest at the goods supplied. He had not expected a red flannel shirt and yet the material used in the making of this one was of that colour. The shirt, too, was fastened by a tape.

Mr. Giller held the garment up and discovered that it was not a shirt at all but a woman’s petticoat.

Mr. Giller blushed.

But where was his shirt? He picked up the paper that the petticoat had been wrapped in and looked at the name and address. The parcel was

addressed to Miss Jarret of Norbury.

Mr. Giller wondered what Miss Jarret was like; he had never even heard of her. He supposed her to have gentle manners, fair hair, laughing—though modest—eyes and a fine womanly presence. Perhaps she would marry him. Mr. Giller hoped she would.

Mr. Giller hadn't heard a knock at his door and Carter Beer stepped in, uninvited. The carter's quick eyes looked around the room and soon saw the petticoat that Mr. Giller had laid out upon a chair.

"It's a mistake," said Mr. Giller.

"And a pretty woon," observed the carter, looking from the petticoat to the stairway door.

Mr. Giller, for safety, placed the petticoat that night upon his own bed.

He rose early and visited the horse, Pinker, that Carter Beer had told him, the night before, had gone lame. The carter had tried to cure the hurt by putting bacon fat and gunpowder upon the wounded leg. Mr. Giller removed the bandage and applied a proper remedy. Mr. Beer looked on angrily.

"If thee don't talk Hell to him, thee'll be kicked," he said.

Mr. Giller said no word of that kind and Pinker stood very still.

Mr. Giller attended the chapel and heeded his devotions as usual, even though he had stuffed under his waistcoat a parcel that he intended to take to Norbury that very day.

As soon as the service was over Mr. Giller commenced his walk. The storm that had raged in the night was over and done with and the sun shone graciously, giving again a summer look to the fields.

Mr. Giller walked happily, he walked as a bridegroom does who seeks his fair bride. No doubt Miss Jarret was a small farmer's daughter, but not too proud to marry a farm bailiff who had saved a little money.

Mr. Giller knocked at the carrier's door. The carrier was busy blacking his Sunday boots. Mr. Giller told him of his mistake and inquired where Miss Jarret lived.

Mr. Balliboy pointed across the road to a house with the blinds drawn down. He winked knowingly and rubbed at his boot again.

Mr. Giller knocked at Miss Jarret's door. An old woman, with watery eyes and a soiled apron, opened it.

“A mistake has been made,” said Mr. Giller. “I have brought back Miss Jarret’s petticoat and kindly ask her, if she’s at home, to give me back my shirt.”

“Oh, that is quite impossible,” replied the old woman, “for she is wearing it.”

Mr. Giller looked astonished.

“ ’Twas the best we had to shroud her in,” explained the old woman.

“Well, never mind,” said Mr. Giller. “I am glad you found my shirt useful. It’s sad to think that the young woman is gone.”

“ ’Taint to die young to live to be ninety-six,” replied the village nurse.

Mr. Giller walked home. He decided never to marry. He hid Miss Jarret’s red petticoat away in a drawer.

THE USELESS WOMAN

While Jane waited at Hatton House for the pony cart that was to take her to the station, her brother, Colonel Ellery, told her that she was a useless woman.

Colonel Ellery told Jane so because she had allowed Mr. Davis the lawyer to run off with her money in order to marry a young lady in America.

Jane, who liked to hear words used correctly and with concise meaning, considered “useless” a wrong one in this case, for she fancied, and not untruly, that she had been of some use to the lawyer.

Jane had given up her house at Wotten, having had to sell her furniture to pay her tradesmen’s bills, and was now on her way to Mrs. Bawler, her married sister, who lived in London. Hatton House being near to Wotten, Jane had gone there first to bid good-bye to her brother.

“Why useless?” asked Jane in the interested tone of a grammatical inquirer.

“Because—” said Colonel Ellery sternly, raising his chin and looking at a picture of his grandfather, who wore a sword by his side—“because a woman without money is a beggar and a beggar is useless.”

Jane called up in her mind a few of the beggars that she had given bread and cheese to. They were cold and woebegone, but that condition of being did not prove, she decided, that they were useless.

The wheels of the pony trap now crunched the gravel with the sound that before the arrival of motor-cars used to be so well known in small country houses. Jane kissed her brother and he opened the door for her. The trap was the small one that the Colonel usually sent to the station with luggage. He saw Jane now as worse than luggage, as something useless.

Jane stepped into the trap, that was driven by the Colonel’s boot-boy in a light-hearted manner, and he tucked the rug round his knees as well as her own in a motherly way. When the trap turned the corner of the drive near to the copper beech tree Jane waved to her brother. Colonel Ellery held up his stick.

The pony trotted on down the new road that the Colonel had made and then into more pleasing country. The movement of the trap made Jane think.

She thought of her past twenty years at Wotten. Miss Tarrett, who painted water-colours, lived there, and the Rev. George Temple, who always said that poor people interested him. Wotten was a lean-looking village with a gloomy church at one end that hid itself in green leaves in the summer and an inn at the other with a thatched roof and a pigsty. There was but one wicked man who lived at Wotten and that was Thomas Sellick. Mr. Sellick's abode was a low-roofed cottage near to the inn pigsty. His wickedness lay in the fact that he always swore at his wife and sometimes beat her, and as she never complained and always forgave him Mr. Temple applied to her the same word, useless, as the Colonel had given to Jane. Once when Mr. Temple had gone to Mr. Sellick to ask him why he had said such a loud "Amen" in church when the sermon was over, Mr. Sellick told him to "Ask the devil."

Miss Tarrett, to whom Mr. Temple confessed this shameful reply to his mild question, went at once to Mr. Sellick to tell him that he was damned. Thomas advised her to "Put her b—— hat on straight."

Jane, too, had heard about the wife-beating, and because she did not like to think of anyone being beaten, not even a dog, she went to see Mr. Sellick herself. He opened the door to her.

"Mr. Sellick," Jane said, "you must not beat your wife. Women are made to be loved and not beaten."

Mr. Sellick leaned forward and before Jane could tell what he was going to do he kissed her. Jane took the kiss with perfect composure.

"Mr. Sellick," she said firmly, "if you beat your wife again, God will punish you."

"E've done thik already," replied Thomas. "First Parson Temple did come and then Miss Tarrett and now 'tis you that be a-preaching."

"If you beat your wife again," said Jane more sternly than ever, "God will send me to live with you."

The villa Jane had lived in at Wotten looked into the street. As long as Jane was there a picture of St. Francis feeding the birds could always be seen through the large bow window. The picture had been sold cheap at her sale and Jane did not even know who had bought it or where it had gone to. Jane missed her picture. Miss Tarrett had taken Jane's house and had moved in as soon as the sale was over, so Jane had no home now to go to.

The pony trotted along while Jane was thoughtful. About a mile from the station they overtook an old beggar woman walking in great boots that were

much too big for her. Jane offered her a lift. Fred the boot-boy remarked rudely that his orders were “never to give lifts to tramps”.

“But this is an old woman,” said Jane and stopped the pony.

When they reached the station the London train was steaming out. The beggar woman moved away and Jane carried her bag to the cloak-room, because there were no more trains to London that day. The boy waited with the trap until Jane came back to him, because he expected a sixpence. Jane gave him a shilling.

“And remember,” she said, holding up her finger, “that an old woman isn’t a tramp.”

The boy grinned and drove off.

“Of course,” thought Jane, “though I have missed my train I can walk home. Wotten’s only four miles and you can’t leave your house one day and be unable to go into it the next, even if Miss Tarrett does rent it now.”

Jane walked along. The road was dusty, but she didn’t mind that, because she liked to feel that she was going home. The wind blew and covered Jane with dust. About half-way to Wotten a storm of rain came on, thinking perhaps to wash the dust off Jane, but the rain only made her the more dirty.

“I must look like a beggar,” thought Jane.

Though the rain came on harder than ever and Jane, having no umbrella, was getting wet through, yet she was glad to have missed the train. If she had gone to London, her sister Edith would have found fault with her hat. Edith had already written a letter blaming Jane for having lost her money and saying that no one is ever rich enough to do that. Anyhow, the windy roads were better than her sister’s drawing-room with Edith’s husband coming in and complaining about the income tax as though it were a disease of the liver. She was glad, too, that she hadn’t stayed longer with her brother at Hatton House, although that might have given him a chance to find a more correct word for her than “useless”.

“He might have said ‘idle’,” thought Jane, “or ‘extravagant’. Extravagant in the matter of other people’s weddings.”

Jane laughed and wondered whether her lawyer would send her a piece of wedding cake. Jane liked cake. The evening was growing dark. In Wotten village Jane passed a lady who walked by on the other side of the road.

“I nodded,” said Jane to herself, “but Miss Tarrett never knew me.”

Jane decided to go to the vicarage. There was all the evening for her to walk about in and it would be all the better going home if she were tired. No doubt Miss Tarrett had bought St. Francis and the birds and had hung the picture where Jane used to have it.

Miss Tarrett had not known her in the darkness, but when she rang the bell and went in, of course, she would be welcomed. Jane thought it quite amusing to be walking about in the rain and to be getting so wet and dirty.

She was opening the vicarage gate when an old woman came up to her and pushing her roughly to one side went in first.

“There bain’t bits for two here,” said the old woman, the same to whom Jane had given the lift, as she hurried up Mr. Temple’s drive.

Jane turned from the gate and stood in the road. The rain whipped her cheeks in spiteful gusts.

“I had better go home,” she said.

She began to walk towards her old house just as she had often done in times gone by when she had been to the vicarage to tea. She knew the turn of the road where the great elm-tree stood and the one candle was still burning in Mrs. Patten’s cottage as it was when Jane had last been that way.

The rain beat upon Jane harder than ever when she looked at the bow window. She expected to see St. Francis and the birds, but she saw instead a large portrait of the Rev. George Temple with a prayer book in his hand.

Jane turned into the road again. The rain pleased her even more now and the darkness was not uncomfortable. She started to walk to the other end of the village where the inn was. The home feeling that she had had when she first came to Wotten was gone, but the rain and darkness were different, too. They seemed to love her, so she did not mind. A man came out of the inn walking unsteadily and met Jane. This was Mr. Sellick. Jane knew he had been drinking and feared he was going home to beat his wife. Jane stopped him.

“You must go home,” she said, “and be kind to your wife.”

“Then you must help me there,” said Mr. Sellick, “for my legs be lost.”

Jane took his arm and guided him along.

“I don’t never hit she now,” remarked Mr. Sellick, “because there be something else to look at.”

In the cottage a bright fire was burning. Jane walked in. Mrs. Sellick, who was setting the table for supper, welcomed her as one useless woman welcomes another.

“You best bide with we,” she said, “for there be thee’s picture.”

Jane looked.

The firelight reddened St. Francis and made the birds really appear to be flying.

VALENTINE CUFF

Mr. Valentine Cuff could never understand why he was not treated with more respect by mankind—mankind, in his case, being the inhabitants of Child Madder, where Mr. Cuff, through a remarkable kindness of fortune, came at last to purchase a small house and paddock.

Mr. Cuff was a mild and demure man. He stooped as he walked, his moustache was a melancholy one, and his eyes were often dim and watery, but he always liked, whenever possible, to tell the truth.

“I do not know what you will do now,” Mary Cuff, who was Valentine’s mother, said to him, as she breathed her last in the attic bedroom in Vine Street, Weyminster, where she—a widow—lived with her son. “I do not know what you will do upon earth, Valentine, when I am in heaven. You have, for a number of years, done nothing beyond walking up St. Mark’s Street and down St. Luke’s, while I have gone to work and earned the money by which we have lived.”

Mr. Cuff, who was then about forty years of age, pressed his mother’s hand. He could not answer for crying, because he had always loved her so much.

But at last, seeing that she was troubled as he did not reply, he said, “I will ask Mr. Dibben.”

Mrs. Cuff closed her eyes; she awoke no more.

Mrs. Cuff had left a few debts; she had also left a little furniture and a will. In the will she named everything that she possessed—not forgetting even her flat-iron—and she left all to her son Valentine.

Mr. Cuff carried the will to Lawyer Pratt. Within a few weeks Mr. Pratt presented him with one penny.

“That is your estate,” he said. Mr. Cuff thanked the lawyer and withdrew.

Since his mother had died Mr. Cuff had lived upon the promise of the will. He expected much from it, he told his neighbours, some of whom lent him money. As soon as he received his penny, by force of habit Mr. Cuff walked up St. Luke’s Street. He admired the shop windows and wondered

what he might be able to buy with his penny. A dirty child—but a merry one—smiled at him; he gave her the penny.

Valentine reached the end of St. Luke's Street and, going a little to the left, began to walk down St. Mark's. The world seemed to him then—the same world as when his mother had lived—a world where one walked up one street and down another. Mr. Cuff stopped; he looked into the window of Mr. Smith, the grocer.

Inside the shop a powerful man was slicing bacon. Mr. Cuff admired his dexterity. He sighed, turned down the street again, and met Mr. Dibben.

Mr. Dibben was a distant cousin of the Dowager Lady Bullman—he was also a clergyman. So far he hadn't received a living, but he hoped that one day Lady Bullman would give him Child Madder and the lady had also promised to give him three thousand pounds. When Mr. Dibben talked to a poor man, he felt proud.

He had often spoken to Mr. Cuff, asking him what he thought of the weather, or how it would do to tax bicycles and cats, and other matters, but now Valentine had a question for him and inquired how he could live.

“By working,” replied Mr. Dibben.

Anyone passing at the time could easily have seen how this reply troubled Mr. Cuff. He looked sad.

“I have been taught no trade,” he said, “and I am ashamed to beg.”

“Wait one moment,” said Mr. Dibben, “and please don't move.” Mr. Dibben stepped behind Mr. Cuff and looked at his back. “Yes,” said Mr. Dibben, “your back will do; I will sell you the bath-chair, by instalments, of course. My mother, as well as yours, has passed away and she will require it no more.”

Mr. Cuff hadn't a flighty mind; he had a plodding, thoughtful one, and it took him a whole week to decide whether to purchase Mr. Dibben's bath-chair.

But at last he did so and found that the inconvenience of pulling an easy-going chair behind him was not so great as he had expected.

“Indeed,” he said, addressing himself to King George's statue, “I believe I walk the easier for it.”

It was a cold day in March when Mr. Cuff paid Mr. Dibben the last shilling of his debt for the chair. The two were standing under the shelter of

the town clock and Mr. Dibben's teeth chattered. Three days before, Mr. Dibben had been married to a fine lady named Miss Hopkins.

"And why don't you marry, too?" asked Mr. Dibben. Mr. Cuff shook his head. "You would gain by it," said Mr. Dibben, who seemed in no hurry to go home.

"Why, I believe I might," answered Mr. Cuff.

"Your customers," said Mr. Dibben, "would like to hear you talk about your children."

Mr. Cuff nodded his head knowingly.

"I should like a wife that I made myself," he said.

"God made Mrs. Dibben," said Mr. Dibben with a very deep sigh as he moved away.

Mr. Cuff moved away, too. Outside his house he was spoken to by an unfortunate young woman who asked him for a shilling. Mr. Cuff gave her one, and to reward him she drew him down a side alley where all was dark.

"Child," said Mr. Cuff, "your behaviour is not seemly, but it may be only your ignorance that makes your hands stray. You may not be aware that my back is the only part of my person of which I am proud. Good night to you!"

The very next day Mr. Cuff was honoured by a new benefactor. This lady was none other than the Dowager Lady Bullman. Her new bath-chair had been sent away to be repaired and so she hired Mr. Cuff.

Mr. Cuff was well aware how important it was to make a good impression when he first drew her out. He had been well taught the correct manners by his mother. He never spoke unless he was spoken to, he always did as he was bid, was never in a hurry, and was always completely confident that his back would do the trick.

And it did, for Lady Bullman could do nothing but admire an enormous patch—of another colour to the coat—held there by the aid of large stitches sewn on by Mr. Cuff himself.

"Poor man," thought Lady Bullman.

Lady Bullman at first only meant to hire Mr. Cuff's bath-chair for a day or two, until her own was mended, but one day when she asked Mr. Cuff's advice as to where they should go, he said that he would take her into a certain church that he knew of where he could show her something of interest. The lady agreed and Mr. Cuff pulled her into a wide porch where he

left her to read a small mural tablet that was upon the wall. The lady was deeply distressed by what she read, for the tablet informed the world that the Honourable Maria Topp was thrown out of her chair and into the sea at high tide by her gardener and sank like a stone.

Mr. Cuff uttered no word as he drew her home, and when they reached the house Lady Bullman invited Mr. Cuff to pull her out every day, for after what she had read in the church she could never again trust a gardener.

And now Lady Bullman began to ask Mr. Cuff about his family and he told her, without turning round, all about them. First there was his wife, Annie, and when he mentioned her Mr. Cuff sighed so deeply that Lady Bullman sighed, too.

“She never leaves her bed,” said Mr. Cuff. “She never helps with the children, yet she always smiles.”

“Poor woman,” said Lady Bullman. “And your children?”

“There are six of them,” replied Mr. Cuff sadly, “and the youngest is soon coming.”

“Alas!” said Lady Bullman, “your cares are endless, poor Cuff.”

“Rags!” cried Mr. Cuff. “Poor children, poor Annie—nothing but rags!”

Lady Bullman was so affected by this sad conversation that the next morning she sent for Lawyer Pratt and commanded him to alter her will.

“My cousin Dibben,” she told the lawyer, “is now in possession of the benefice of Child Madder, and will not need the three thousand pounds that I have left him.”

“He will need them the more,” said Mr. Pratt.

The lady did not hear him.

“Instead of leaving that sum to Cousin Dibben,” said Lady Bullman, “I intend that it should go to Mr. Valentine Cuff. Poor man, he is a sad case. His wife only smiles; she is an invalid. His back is patched worse than ever and another baby is expected.”

Mr. Pratt looked out of the great bow window; he saw a man in the street who picked up a piece of sacking.

“That’s poor Cuff, and he always told me that his family wear clothes like that,” said Lady Bullman, who had looked, too. “Please attend to the legacy, Mr. Pratt, and I will sign.”

It was unfortunate, as far as Lady Bullman was concerned, that when Mr. Cuff tried to remember anything he always stood still. He had told Lady Bullman as soon as they had started out that a baby had come, and she asked a simple question as to whether the child was a boy or a girl.

“I must think about that,” said Mr. Cuff.

At the moment when Mr. Cuff began to think he crossed the road with his charge, and as he thought so deeply he stopped in the middle, forgetting that there was anything behind him.

Mr. Cuff had stopped suddenly and a heavy lorry that happened to be coming along crashed into the bath-chair. A lady of ninety is easily killed, and although no wheel went over her, Lady Bullman died from surprise.

After attending the funeral Valentine Cuff walked home slowly. The Coroner exonerated him from all blame, at the inquest, as soon as he saw how honest his back looked. Mr. Cuff was extremely depressed, for his bath-chair had been broken and he did not know where to seek another customer like Lady Bullman. As of old, he walked up St. Luke’s Street to try to compose his mind.

Near to Mr. Smith’s shop he met Lawyer Pratt, who shook him warmly by the hand.

“I wish I had your back, Mr. Cuff,” said the lawyer.

“Alas!” said Mr. Cuff. “In this street the ladies . . .”

The lawyer laughed merrily.

“You may draw upon me for three thousand pounds, left to you by Lady Bullman,” he said.

Mr. Cuff purchased a small house at Child Madder. He moved in by night and the people of the village, having heard tales of Mr. Cuff, said that his family was with him.

The time of year was May; Mr. Cuff stood in his narrow garden path and looked into the paddock. One apple-tree was there and that was in full blossom.

“A pretty park,” said Mr. Cuff.

Valentine Cuff had never lived in the country before; indeed, he had never left the town pavement except to cross the street, and when he did so, after the accident, he used the utmost care. He had an idea that every countryman has the highest opinion of a gentleman from the town who has

enough money to purchase a little house. He believed he would be admired from Child Madder even from in front.

Valentine Cuff wore a new suit of dull grey. He put a notice in the window of the village shop telling all who cared to read that he wished to hire a servant to attend to his wants, to dust and cook for him, but he added at the end "She may sleep at home". He said not a word about his family.

Mr. Cuff knew nothing of the habits of servants except what he had seen of the maids at Lady Bullman's, and they were all so haughty that he was glad to be out of their company. The girl who came to call upon him the next morning to ask for the place startled him exceedingly. She was exactly as he imagined his wife Annie. But she only looked down when he stared at her. He liked her manners.

"Annie," he said, for that really was her name, "I will show you my wife and children."

Mr. Cuff took her to his bedroom. In the bed, smiling as she always did, was a large rag doll, plump and pleasant to look at, while beside her were the seven children.

"I told Lady Bullman that nothing I gave them to eat would ever make them grow," said Mr. Cuff, taking his wife out of bed and beating her into shape.

"Oh!" said Annie. "What a lot of children!"

"Not one too many," said Mr. Cuff. He still held his wife and looked at his servant. Annie said the dolls were so like one another that Mr. Cuff couldn't help blushing. "You had better prepare dinner now," he said. Annie retired. Mr. Cuff put his wife to bed.

Mr. Dibben was not a man who wished for worldly goods, and when he heard that the three thousand pounds his cousin had promised him had gone to another he merely read the fifth chapter of Deuteronomy and walked a hundred times up and down the garden path, so that he might not hear the words his wife spoke to him.

"Annie tells me that your family are but dolls and that your wife is the largest," said Mr. Dibben when he paid his first call upon Mr. Cuff.

"That is true," replied Mr. Cuff, "for I am not one to tell a needless lie; but what have I done to the people here, for no one notices me?"

"I, too, have my troubles," said Mr. Dibben sadly, "for my wife is no rag doll." He walked slowly home.

It is said that a man's life can change in one moment. For a number of years he likes to be looked at from one way and then, all at once, he wishes to be looked at from another.

When Mr. Dibben left him, seeming so pensive and sad, Mr. Cuff felt a new pride rise in his heart. Until his arrival at Child Madder he had only wished to be looked at from behind, but now his wishes were changed. Since Annie, the servant, had been in his employment he had watched her at work. She arrived at eight, opened all the windows, threw out the mats, lit the fire in a moment and cooked the breakfast, so that Mr. Cuff, who had never seen such quick work in his life before, could only watch her with amazement and almost with horror. Although he was a little startled by all this flurry and dust, he could not help noticing that the new Annie, when he met her in the passage, smiled at him, and that not from behind.

“Ah,” said Mr. Cuff, “I am quite a different man.”

He took his wife from his bed, threw her into a corner of the room with her children about her and dug a hole under the apple-tree and buried them all.

“I have altered,” he said.

Though the maid looked at her master in a proper manner, he was by no means content, for he wished all the good people of Child Madder to view him, too, as one who could afford to show his front to the world.

Mr. Cuff addressed himself to Annie.

“Although,” he said, “my late family, who helped me so much to gain the kindness of Lady Bullman, are dead and buried, yet I wish to show myself off here to the best advantage as a man of means and to be thought well of, for I do not mean to turn my back to the ladies again. What am I to do?”

“At Child Madder,” replied Annie, who was taking out the breakfast things in a merry manner, though she stood still when he spoke and looked fully at him, “the gentry do always go to church.”

“Then so will I,” said Mr. Cuff.

All that Mr. Cuff knew of the inside of a church was little enough. He had only once in his life been into a church and that was when he drew Lady Bullman through the porch at St. Luke's, leaving her exactly in front of the Honourable Maria Topp's mural tablet, which he had read about in a guide-

book. He had left the lady there for an hour, retiring to a public house that was near by.

To remain quietly in one's own house, or else in a pretty paddock, is one thing, but to walk out to church in the eyes of all men, and of women, too, is another.

"It is a very important thing," Annie, looking more than ever like the rag doll that had been so prettily buried, told him, "to dress oneself properly when one goes to church, for even if Mr. Dibben reads from a book, they t'others don't."

Mr. Cuff held himself up proudly. "I shall not be alarmed," he said. "I wish to be looked at in another manner now."

Annie looked at Mr. Cuff.

When the Sunday that was to give Valentine the grand title of gentleman came, he dressed himself suitably in black, getting along very well with his task until he came to the tying of his tie. That appeared too difficult a labour for him, as he had not troubled about wearing one before. He was forced then to go to Annie's cottage, that was but a few steps away, in hopes of finding her there. She was, luckily, at home to help her master.

Mr. Cuff had been informed by Annie that it is proper to await the ringing of a church bell before going there, and so as soon as ever he heard it ring he walked, in as grand a manner as possible, into the church. He had come so early that only a few children dressed in white frocks, who formed the choir, had already arrived.

Mr. Cuff looked about him with the interest of a man who has arrived in a building noted for strange rites about which he knows nothing. In order to take part in whatever was happening, he decided that it would be proper to take a seat.

He looked at the pews, but these seats did not suit the changed attitude of his mind, for, with the exception of Mr. Dibben, a man who knew his past, if Mr. Cuff took the front pew he would be viewed by everyone from behind.

Mr. Cuff stood irresolute; he shook his head sadly. Happening to glance beyond where the children were seated, he saw a brass rail that enclosed a small pew that was furnished with a table and a chair. The chair, Mr. Cuff thought, if he turned it a little, would make a fine seat for him. He walked slowly up the aisle, stepping carefully as he used to do when he pulled Lady

Bullman, and entering the enclosed space and moving the chair a little, he sat down upon it.

He sat for a while, contentedly enough, viewing with much displeasure the little girls in the choir, who were beginning to giggle.

These girls at first began by making only small noises, but, soon becoming more bold, seeing that no hand of God was laid upon their little white-ribboned hats, they began to point with their fingers and to laugh aloud.

Their laughter brought the sexton, John Huddy, upon the scene. He viewed Mr. Cuff with the greatest indignation and approached the trespasser with quick and noisy steps.

“Thee baint no Lord Bishop,” Mr. Huddy called out in a thunderous whisper.

“I know well enough,” replied Mr. Cuff calmly, “that I am not a bishop, but I prefer this seat to any other and am willing to pay a double price for it, because I do not like to turn my back to the ladies.”

“Child Madder church bain’t no queen’s court,” shouted Mr. Huddy, “’tis God’s housen.”

“That,” replied Mr. Cuff, frowning at the girls, who still laughed at him, “is the very reason why I wish to be seen here in a proper manner.”

“What be the matter with thee’s back?” inquired the sexton, who was beginning to be interested. “Thee’s trousers bain’t broke behind, be they?”

Mr. Cuff blushed. He did not reply. He walked down the aisle in a stately manner, but sideways, because of the choir girls, and leaving the church, took the nearest way to his home.

That same evening all the village knew that Mr. Valentine Cuff didn’t like to turn his back to a lady because his clothes were all torn behind. When an idea of this kind is bruited abroad, it is easy to imagine, when one is intimate with the sottish and idle minds of country people, who indeed often seek for merriment where it is not usually to be found, that the match strikes fire everywhere and everyone peeps.

When one wishes and is willing to face the world, having for too long turned one’s back upon it, one is not the best pleased that the world should be always getting behind one.

Now, if Mr. Cuff did but walk up the street to post a letter to the worthy lawyer who supplied interest for his moneys, or did he merely take a little stroll for his health's sake, he was sure to be followed by someone, some child or other or even a grown person, who would come very close to him and gaze at his back. The very dogs and geese that roamed upon the village green seemed to wonder if there was anything the matter with Mr. Cuff's clothes. An old gander would hiss and follow with neck outstretched, while a dog called Tinker, whose tail curled, would sniff at his heels most unpleasantly.

Mr. Cuff grew sad; he must be ever, he felt, looked at from behind. He kept at home and rarely left his garden.

However, an occasion soon arose that made him come out: Annie's mother died and Annie begged him to attend the funeral.

"I am the only daughter of a widow," she said, "and when my father died I had my mother to walk with. Now I have no one." Annie looked at Mr. Cuff and sobbed.

"My dear mother is dead, too," said Mr. Cuff, crying in sympathy.

Valentine Cuff walked with bowed head beside Annie, and half the village, when they saw him go, followed after. But Mr. Cuff did not heed them; he had heard his mother say there were two streets in Heaven and he wondered if Annie's mother was walking down one of them while his mother walked up the other.

Time went on and Mr. Cuff grew more and more mournful, for he couldn't put his head out of his own gate without some child or other calling out unpleasant things to him. As he met with such behaviour, Mr. Cuff rarely left his paddock and could only walk up and down the two little garden paths as if they were streets.

"Oh, Annie!" he cried one day to his handmaiden, who watched him coming in from the garden, "you alone are kind to me, you alone look at me properly."

In order to make sure that Annie couldn't, even if she wished, creep behind him, Mr. Cuff took her in his arms and pressed her to him, saying gently, "Oh, Annie! You alone honour me, you alone love me."

No Child Madder wedding had more jests thrown at it, from behind, than Mr. Valentine Cuff's, though when he led Annie to the altar she looked as happy as any bride could. However much she was begged by the vulgar, who dared not mock now at Mr. Cuff, to name what was torn behind, she

heeded them not, and ever after loved and obeyed her husband as God had commanded and as she had promised.

THE BEAUTIFUL SEA

Mr. Day the pastor always believed that if only Mrs. Moggs could be persuaded to leave her little shop, that was also the village post office, upon a Sunday or any holiday, and to go down and look at the sea, her soul's salvation would be sure to follow such a visit.

"Her soul must feel sorrowful," Mr. Day would remark, "amongst all this starch and boot polish; it must long to get away at least for an hour or two from so many balls of string and pen wipers."

Whenever Mr. Day went to the Dodderdown shop, stepping carefully upon the stone path in winter, so as to avoid the puddles that lay here and there where the stones were broken, he would say very earnestly after paying for his stamps.

"You ought to go and look at the beautiful sea, Mrs. Moggs."

"Oh, it's quite enough for me," Mrs. Moggs would reply, "to hear the waves roar, so I have no wish to go and look at them."

Sometimes Mr. Day would describe the sea.

"It's as beautiful as the blue sky," he would say, "and its colours are heavenly and are exactly like"—and Mr. Day would look excitedly around him—"those pretty sweets on your top shelf."

"But is it a long way to the sea?"

"Only half a mile," Mr. Day would reply.

Mrs. Moggs was tidiness itself; nothing was ever out of place in her shop and she always knew exactly where to lay her hands upon anything that was wanted. Her round face was pleasant and friendly and two fine grey curls hung down on each side of her head like pretty bells. Whenever Mrs. Moggs shook her head these bells would shake, too, and Betty Pring used to say when Mrs. Moggs told her that there were no more sweets in the bottle that "She's bells were a-ringing."

One spring day the pastor brought Mrs. Moggs a present of two white mice.

"I thought you might like to play with them," he said, "when you feel lonely, though they're nowhere near as beautiful as the sea."

“Oh, I’m sure the seas’s nothing like so lovely,” said Mrs. Moggs and put the mice into a drawer where they could be happy.

“They’ll do nicely there,” she said, “and they can’t hurt the postal orders, because I never put them into that drawer.”

Everyone in Dodderdown admired the white mice that Mr. Day had given to Mrs. Moggs, who said they were more beautiful than the sea.

Although nearly every day Mrs. Moggs’s round kindly face glowed with content, sometimes a day would come when she looked timid and careworn, and this always happened when the postmaster from the town rudely pushed open the shop door and came in with his questions. His questions were always about the money, and he would look hard at Mrs. Moggs as he questioned her, as though he were sure that she had done something with the stamps or the postal orders that she shouldn’t have done.

“If ever you allow anyone to owe you for a stamp you’ll get yourself into trouble,” Mr. Hunt the postmaster would say crossly. Mrs. Moggs would look fearfully into the face of her inquisitor as if she fully expected him to tell her the very next moment to go to the workhouse; that was in Mrs. Moggs’s idea the very nearest thing in England to a torture chamber.

Sometimes when he had brought Mrs. Moggs almost to tears and the happy ringing of her bells to a sad silence the postmaster would ask in a grand breezy way, copied exactly from Squire Blewberry—as he stretched out his stockinged legs in imitation of the same fine personage—how far off was the sea? Before answering his question Mrs. Moggs would perhaps hand a screw of pepper to Betty Pring, who had stood in the shop doorway asking repeatedly for shoe laces.

“Oh, Mr. Day is always talking about the sea,” Mrs. Moggs would answer nervously, “but I have never been there, you know, so I cannot tell how far off it is. Oh dear, I believe I gave Betty pepper instead of laces—but she’s gone away now.”

Whenever Mrs. Moggs had a bad dream it would always take the form of some loss or other connected with the stamps or the postal orders, and in the winter nights when the winds shook the ivy, or when in summer the great moon peeped in upon her, she would awake in terror, hearing Mr. Hunt telling her in the grand bullying voice that he always used to inferiors that she was a thief and a liar. She didn’t mind the thief so much, for she remembered one mentioned in the Bible who died in God’s company and with a sure promise of Paradise; but she couldn’t bear the thought of being

called a “liar”. Mr. Hunt would always shout that word out so loudly in her dream that Mrs. Moggs would awake trembling, and afterwards she would think of all the fine things Mr. Day had said about the beautiful sea, in order to compose herself to sleep again.

It was now summer and Mr. Day was standing upon the yellow sands and wishing that he could persuade Mrs. Moggs to come and look at the sea. The water looked so beautiful and clear that Mr. Day could see little fish swimming in it and coloured stones that shone down at the bottom.

“If only she would come,” said Mr. Day, “I feel sure that her soul would leap and cry out for eternity.”

The pastor looked further away, to where the sea and sky met one another.

“Her soul would not stay only as far as her eyes can see, but it would rush on until the glory of God is reached,” he said.

In the shop Mrs. Moggs allowed Betty Pring to take the little white mouse called Tony in both her hands and to kiss it.

“’E be pretty and tickly,” said Betty, “but mayn’t I take up little Gertie, too?”

Mrs. Moggs shook her head, making her bells ring merrily, and smiled at Betty and whispered that she believed Gertie was making a nest, so that she mustn’t be disturbed.

“But one day I’ll give you a tiny one just like Tony,” said Mrs. Moggs, handing Betty the stamp she had called for, but without troubling her for the money. “That will do tomorrow,” said Mrs. Moggs and her bells rang again.

Mrs. Moggs awoke the next morning very hopeful and happy. She believed that when she went downstairs and peeped into a certain drawer she would see little baby mice. But this wasn’t the only reason for her happiness; there was another that gave Mrs. Moggs pleasure, which was that the postmaster had apparently forgotten the village.

“Perhaps,” thought Mrs. Moggs, showing in her thought the innocence of her nature, “he will never come again.”

Mrs. Moggs dressed herself slowly and stood before the glass and shook her curls and listened—and she thought she heard bells ringing.

When she looked into the drawer to see how many mice were born she counted seven. She was so glad to see them that she hardly noticed that the

mice had bitten a hole into the other drawer where her stamps and postal orders were kept. But when she wiped her glasses and looked more closely at the nest she saw that it was made up of little bits of coloured paper. Mrs. Moggs started. A large motor-car had drawn up at her door and a man was stepping out of it. Mrs. Moggs turned very pale as Mr. Hunt in his noisiest manner came into the shop and at once demanded of Mrs. Moggs an account of the stamps and postal orders that she had sold. While Mrs. Moggs looked for her books Betty Pring opened the door and holding out some pennies she said, "These are for the stamp we owe for, Mrs. Moggs."

Mr. Hunt looked so fiercely at Betty that she dropped all the pennies.

"Yes, I see," said Mr. Hunt, glancing at the figures, "and now bring me what you have in stock, please."

"But where are the rest of them?" asked the postmaster after he had counted what Mrs. Moggs brought to him.

"The mice . . ." Mrs. Moggs began, trembling and looking extremely guilty.

"You're a liar," shouted Mr. Hunt.

Mrs. Moggs remembered the sea. The shop faded and Mr. Hunt went as a bad dream goes and before her was the sea as Mr. Day the pastor had described it to her.

Mr. Hunt was gone from Dodderdown, but what exactly he had said to her she did not know, though the one shameful word had been plainly spoken and even Betty Pring, who had been looking through the window, had heard it, too.

Mrs. Moggs fetched her bonnet and cloak.

In the lane she met Mr. Day, who was stepping upon the stone path just as carefully as if the winter puddles were still there. The pastor stopped and held up his hands in astonishment and wonder.

"I am going to the beautiful sea," said Mrs. Moggs, nodding her head while her bells rang. . . .

"'E did call she a liar," said Betty Pring boldly when the inquest was held upon Mrs. Moggs, who was found drowned in the sea, "'an' she don't fancy thik word. . . ."

THE TREE OF GOD

Mr. Told was a great man. He farmed his own land, he owned a village. It is true that the village he owned only consisted of ten cottages, but his land reached from South Dodder to East Dodder, so that it was Mr. Told's boast that if he stood upon a little hill he could view nothing that was not his own. Mr. Told had investments in coal, iron and gold. He was Chairman of the Board of Guardians and his wife was a woman of fashion. He had children who inherited all the pride of their father, together with the pretty habits of their mother's of wearing a fur coat in church and spitting at poverty.

All rivers flow into the sea, and all money flowed into Mr. Told's purse, and yet it was not full. Mr. Told believed that the father of a family should buy, but Mr. Told never bought unless he had the ready money in his hand. To sell out his money in order to buy elsewhere was against his doctrine of perpetual gain. There was always some land or house that he wished for, therefore he must save, and suppose the time came when he had no money in his purse he believed a miracle would help him.

Mr. Told saw all nature as his faithful steward. When the rain fell and the grass grew, his sheep were fattened. When the snow came his wheat was covered up from the frost and took no harm. When the sun shone his crops ripened.

The more Mr. Told got, the more jealous he became of the wealth and even the happiness of others. He wished all men and all women to be poor, except himself. He endeavoured in every way to cheat his labourers out of their wages. His plan was to make them drunk once in a while. The men paid ten times over for the beer he gave them, but this they did not understand.

That even such a great man as Mr. Told, the friend of riches and power, should have his disappointments is strange. But with everything that one wants in one's hands, sometimes one little thing may be lacking.

Mr. Told had used all his ready cash for the purchase of Johnson's field, when the vicarage at Little Madder came into the market. The price was one thousand pounds.

In order to save more, Mr. Told decided to deduct from his men's wages not only their cottages and firewood but also two shillings a week for the

privilege of working on land owned by a magistrate who had once dined with a High Sheriff. So that they might not notice the cheat, he decided to make them drunk.

There was no more beautiful place in the world in August than South Dodder. From Madder Hill, one looks out upon a land of fair promise. All the wide undulating fields are then ripe for harvest. There are acres of splendid wheat, oats and barley, a wonder of beauty for the gazing eyes. The wheat-fields are the colour of rich gold, the oats a splendid yellow, and the barley, under the summer sun, a shining white.

In the valleys, if the year has made a proper libation of gentle showers, all is green. And then the colour is spotted with feeding beasts, the red and white kine that move so slowly. But Mr. Told never regarded such godlike wonders. He ordered barrels of bad beer, so that his men might not notice how much he defrauded them.

The next day all was free drink. If any man in the village, which included East Dodder, too, where most of Mr. Told's workmen lived, was sober by four o'clock, then, of course, he was sent packing. Even Mr. Haynay, the vicar, was included in this mandate. He received a bottle of port from Mr. Told and, liking the taste of wine, was soon too drunk to remember his own name.

The only person in the parish who remained sober was Mr. Bundy, who, because he lived in one of Mr. Told's houses, was entitled to his share. But, instead of drinking Mr. Told's health, Mr. Bundy had fallen asleep under the chestnut-tree in the churchyard. He was found there by Mr. Told himself, who had him turned out of his house for his ill-mannered behaviour.

Mr. Bundy had slept under the chestnut because the August day was hot and drowsy and he was glad to rest there. He thought he could sleep until the fall and then he would be happy.

Mr. Haynay, the vicar, was a particular man. He would often say to Mr. Bundy, "Now be sure you don't forget your broom. If the leaves lie about, trouble will come of it. A leaf is proper to a tree, but in a path it always acts indecently. It is untidy." So when the time came for the leaves to fall, Mr. Bundy swept them up.

Mr. Bundy was sexton; he was tender-hearted, which was why he had given up his former employment of mole-catcher. He had caught the moles because his father had done so before him. But his father had been dead for

fifty years. Mr. Bundy's pleasure now was to be in the churchyard and his amusement was to watch Mr. Told, who lived in the great house near by.

Mr. Bundy was a student of nature. He understood moles. He knew their ways and behaviour and he believed that moles were superior to men. Then why should he kill them to please Mr. Told? And so he left that service.

Besides his knowledge of moles, Mr. Bundy understood the chestnut-tree, too. He believed that God made the tree, so that he knew it was good. "But then who made Mr. Told?" Mr. Bundy spoke aloud to himself. "God made him, too," he replied, "but only to be made fun of, for His own sport."

The great chestnut-tree had always had a strange fascination for Mr. Bundy. He liked its peaceful ways. Mr. Bundy was a widower. When his wife died he did no work for a whole year, because he was very sad. Then he stood under the chestnut-tree and watched the leaves fall and so was better able to bear his loss. In the spring, when the leaves grew, he let his beard grow, too, and became more happy.

To move about was again a pleasure to Mr. Bundy and to lie still pleased him, too. He was not as particular as Mr. Haynay, for he was as content in the darkness as in the light. When Mr. Bundy felt a little doubtful of his own happiness he would remember the wealthy Mr. Told and perhaps he would say to Minnie Cuddy, who had a great respect for Mr. Bundy, "Only look at Mr. Told. What will he do next? Perhaps today he will buy a field, or will the poor fool spread treacle upon his bread?"

No one was more sorry than Mr. Bundy when it came, by ill hap, that he must dig a grave. Though he took the fee willingly enough, he could never dig a grave with the same pleasure that other sextons had in their work. He would sigh when he took out the earth and wonder where the soul was that so recently had left his friend of a lifetime—the body.

Everyone is said to be a sinner, but it is not always so. Mr. Haynay envied God, because God was unmarried and lived in heaven. Mr. Haynay wished he were there, too, and would often tell Mrs. Haynay that in heaven they would be as the angels. Mrs. Haynay preferred to be as a woman is.

"With the most humble reverence to Holy Writ," she observed, "to be an angel does not give me that hoped-for pleasure that others have. Do you believe, my dear," she said as they were sitting beside a winter fire of logs, "that angels employ their time in darning stockings?"

"I am sure that they do," replied Mr. Haynay, readily enough, "for God wears them."

“But supposing,” asked Mrs. Haynay, “that they were only Mr. Bundy’s? Would the angels mend his?”

“God would command them to,” answered Mr. Haynay.

Mrs. Haynay felt happier.

Mr. Told, who had all that a heart could wish for, envied Mr. Bundy. This was curious, but who can tell where envy will pinch a rich man? He may even become envious of his own goods and wish himself as clever at counting money as his cash register. Or he may envy his pen that can dispose of so much money upon paper slips.

In the early spring the chestnut-tree in the churchyard had large sticky buds that, opening slowly, discovered the green leaves. Mr. Bundy watched them grow. The tree was said to work miracles and the people called it the “Tree of God”.

Mr. Bundy regarded the tree with reverence and awe. Its roots spread far and wide under the grass. When Mr. Bundy dug a grave he would come upon them. Then he would go home for his axe. Mrs. Minnie Cuddy, when she saw him go by with the axe on his shoulder, would say pityingly, “A sexton’s life is not all pleasure.”

Mr. Bundy would cut through the roots piously. The tree was fed by the silent and blessed dead. What better meat could God’s tree take and eat than that? In the spring the sap rose in glory, the leaves opened and the dead came to life. They breathed the air once again, and drank the cup of pure sunshine.

There is no greater pleasure upon earth than in sweeping up leaves in a churchyard path in November. Mr. Bundy knew that in a dead leaf there is profound understanding. Every leaf is beloved by the soft summer airs, but its real joy comes when the wind detaches it from the tree and the leaf floats to the ground. A leaf knows nothing of fear. The November blasts can do it no harm. Only mortal bodies fear the immortal gods.

Only to look at a dead leaf may fill a man with everlasting content. There the leaf lies; no power can harm it. Its grave is easy to it. There is hope in its entombment. In corruption it becomes sweet leaf-mould, the paradise of worms.

Mr. Told envied Mr. Bundy because he swept up the leaves and was happy. Once or twice he had watched him sweeping. Mr. Bundy did not sweep the leaves as if they were dirt, but as if they were gold. Their colour was golden. But Mr. Bundy did not love the dead leaves for their colour. He

loved them because they told him tales of long summer days, of sweetly falling June showers, of still moonlit nights. Mr. Bundy wished to associate with leaves. He knew their virtue and so he swept them tenderly.

Mr. Told did not know this. He supposed Mr. Bundy worked slowly because he was an idle fellow with his head full of women and drink.

Mr. Bundy was envied by Mr. Told.

Before the end of November there were only a few leaves left on the chestnut-tree and Mr. Bundy grew thoughtful. He feared he had committed a fault that summer, because he had not got drunk as Mr. Told commanded. For this offence Mr. Told had turned him out of his house. He now lived with a married daughter who did nothing but grumble about his lazy ways. Her husband beat her, but as her father was all kindness to his daughter she hated him.

This sort of behaviour troubled Mr. Bundy; he could not understand it. The leaves on the tree of God were all one in love and kindness. They hung happily there without any discord or debate. They never tormented one another with foolish, unmeaning words. They only breathed and made sweet music when the winds blew. Why were women so different from leaves? Mr. Bundy did not know.

If possible Mr. Bundy remained all day in the churchyard near to the chestnut-tree. When night came he went home to sleep in his daughter's wood-shed. Always on Saturdays he visited the inn. He did so now because he was old enough to receive a state pension. "The King is good," thought Mr. Bundy, "to give me money to spend."

When he went to the inn he made the most of his money. He carried it in his hand. When he drank he liked others to drink, too. He believed that God pledged him in a deep cup in heaven and so he drank to God upon earth. After that toast he drank to King George, who had given him the money. Then to Minnie Cuddy. When he went back to the wood-shed, he remembered the chestnut-tree in his prayers and fell fast asleep.

Though Mr. Told had much wealth he always wanted more. He did not carry all that he had in his hand, spend it in one evening, drinking to God and the King and treating his friends as Mr. Bundy did. Sometimes he wanted a certain sum to make a purchase. When he bought, he was not satisfied. If money came in showers like leaves falling, there would not have been enough gold for his wants. While he was a buyer, Mr. Bundy appeared to him to be an eater.

“It is unpleasant,” thought Mr. Told, “to see a man eat when he owns no property.”

Whenever Mr. Told drove by the churchyard he would be sure to see Mr. Bundy putting food into his mouth. His own rich meals were always ready, but he was never as hungry as he liked to be when he came to them. Indigestion troubled him and always he wished that he could eat like Mr. Bundy.

One day in passing the churchyard Mr. Told’s car broke down. He left his man to mend the wheel and walked into the churchyard. He did so not because he loved the holy silence of death but because he hoped to find Mr. Bundy stealing from the poor box. If he caught him he must be sent off, for Mr. Haynay could never allow a thief to say “Amen”. Mr. Told wished that no contented man should be left in Dodder—and by all accounts Mr. Bundy was the last of them.

There was Mr. Bundy; he was neither stealing nor eating, but looking. Mr. Bundy was looking up into the chestnut-tree as though he counted the leaves that were left. Then he examined the sky as if he expected a sudden whirlwind to come to blow the leaves off the tree.

Beside the path there was a neat little pile of leaves, ready to be taken to the rubbish heap. Mr. Bundy took the greatest care of that heap, for he could not bear that the leaves should be thrown out like dung. He would carry them tenderly to the heap as if they were children he was putting to bed.

Mr. Bundy bowed to Mr. Told, as though the farmer was a curious monster. “Ha! Squire,” he cried happily, “how would thee like they pretty leaves to be money-notes and to blow down to thee’s feet?”

Mr. Told looked greedily at the tree. All things that exist, the sweet air of heaven, the mountainous stormcloud, the fair green down, had but one meaning for him. Mr. Told stared at the leaves. Money had always come to him easily and so why should not the leaves change to notes when he looked at them?

Things far more strange than that had happened. He had got money often in the most unlikely ways. To give him gain the leaves might be changed. Mr. Told believed in wonders.

The sound of wind coming was heard. Then the tree shook and the leaves fell. As they floated down Mr. Told saw that they were Treasury notes.

Some fell in the churchyard path and these Mr. Bundy swept up in his usual leisurely fashion, while Mr. Told grabbed at the notes which lay on the grass and thrust them into his coat pocket.

When Mr. Bundy had made a little heap of the paper money which had fallen into the path, with the greatest contentment he sat down under the chestnut-tree to eat his dinner. Mr. Told, expecting that he was grabbing the money, too, watched him with astonishment. Mr. Bundy appeared less concerned with the heap of money than he had been when he swept up the real leaves.

Mr. Told could only suppose that, in his ignorance, the poor sexton did not know the value of paper money. He knew better what food was, for he ate with the greatest deliberation, putting each mouthful into his maw as though it were holy.

When Mr. Told saw him do that he was more than ever envious of Mr. Bundy. Also, had he grabbed the notes, Mr. Told might have discovered him to be a thief, for the money was not his. Whereas Mr. Told, as a churchwarden, had a legal right to it.

Mr. Told now went to the heap and put all that was there into his pockets.

“’Tis nice to have a willing helper,” observed Mr. Bundy, when he saw him do this.

Mr. Told, with his coat stuffed, looked again at Mr. Bundy. The sexton was vastly enjoying a large slice of the best currant cake, that had been given to him by Minnie Cuddy, who was very kind to him.

When Mr. Told was gone, and the money with him, Mr. Bundy smiled down the path. That heap of litter had been taken up by other hands than his own, so that he might have longer time to eat his cake. Money, Mr. Bundy knew, always makes a man hurry. He used, himself, to step quickly to the inn to spend his pension. When it was gone he could rest at his ease and enjoy his life.

Mr. Told carried the notes to the bank; they came to nine hundred and ninety pounds. If he had ten pounds more he could buy the Madder vicarage that was going so cheap and that would be a great bargain.

Mr. Told lived by instinct, as all men do. When he found good in one place he would go there again. If the cupboard were empty, he would try somewhere else. Pavlov would have saved himself the expense of a dog had he employed Mr. Told.

No sooner did Mr. Told discover that he lacked ten pounds of the sum he wanted than he thought again of the chestnut-tree. He now considered the tree as a creditor of that sum.

The next day Mr. Told ordered out his car and drove past the churchyard. There he stopped and, taking out his knife, he punctured a wheel. He wished to act the same scene again. He was now more than ever envious of Mr. Bundy. He had heard that Mr. Bundy could enjoy himself at home as well as abroad.

The evening before Mr. Bundy had invited Minnie Cuddy into his shed when his daughter had gone to bed and all was quiet. The lady had brought some pork pies and a jug of cider, so that they ate and drank very merrily. Mr. Bundy had told her how the money-notes fell from the tree and how eagerly Mr. Told snatched them up. They both laughed silently.

Minnie Cuddy believed in love and in goodness. She thought Mr. Bundy was a good man because he behaved like one. She had never seen him angry or cruel. She had never heard him blame anyone. When he saw an ill deed done he would say, "Ah, Mr. Bundy, if you had not looked that would never have happened."

When Mr. Told entered the churchyard, Mr. Bundy bowed respectfully. He bowed so lowly because he was sure now that the man was a monster. There were ten leaves on the chestnut-tree. If these turned into notes, then Mr. Told could have what his heart desired. He believed that if he had the ten pounds, and bought the vicarage, he would be as happy as Mr. Bundy.

Mr. Told looked up greedily at the tree; and he saw the leaves change and become pound notes. But no wind came and the paper money did not fall.

"Make the wind blow," cried Mr. Told angrily to the sexton. But Mr. Bundy was eating a pork pie that had been left from the last night's feast and paid no heed to him.

Mr. Told looked up at the tree. Could he climb it? He saw his servant still busy with the wheel; he was paying no heed to his master. Then Mr. Told remembered that Mr. Haynay was a thin, spare man and could climb a tree like a cat. If Mr. Haynay chanced to come and saw the notes he would have them in a minute.

Mr. Told then looked at Mr. Bundy and hated him. There he was giving no heed to anything in the world except the pork pie. He ate, as he always did, gratefully, as if he gave thanks to God with every mouthful. In the

distance, too, Mr. Told saw the house that he wanted to buy. He began to climb the tree.

He thought that the notes were easy to reach, but the higher he went the higher went the money, too. When at last he clutched the twig where they grew the bough he held on to gave way and he fell to the ground.

Mr. Bundy felt sorry; for Mr. Told had broken his neck.

A DUMB ANIMAL

The sin of theft was a subject that had always interested Mr. Facey and, whenever he fed his horse upon a sweet patch of clover at Tadnol that belonged to Farmer Denny, he would speak touchingly of this sin. The little lawn had never been railed in and so, whenever the farmer wasn't near, Mr. Facey, who dealt in such modest ware as rabbit skins and ducks' eggs, and who three times a week drove through Tadnol, used to allow his horse to feed there, discoursing to anyone who happened to be near upon the wickedness of thieving.

It happened that Lily Topp, the little daughter of John Topp, was as interested in this sin as ever was Mr. Facey himself, and she would stand before him with her black eyes very serious and thoughtful and would shake her curls whenever Mr. Facey made a good point. As Mr. Facey always fed his horse where he had no right to—by order of Mr. Denny, who had put a notice-board upon the green—the subject of stealing was a most proper one to discuss there. Of course, Mr. Facey liked a listener, and when Lily Topp was there he would address her as if she were all the world gathered to listen to him.

“What do 'ee know,” said Mr. Facey to Lily one day, “about taking other folks' things? Have 'ee ever heard or read of thik kind of wickedness?”

Lily spied a log of wood in the hedge. She sat upon it, placed her chin in her hands and looked at Mr. Facey, because she knew that an interesting conversation was about to begin.

“I have learned the commandments,” she replied, “for Mr. Hayball do teach we they on Fridays.”

“And what do commandments tell 'ee?” asked Mr. Facey, bending his long and lean body in Lily's direction.

“Thou shall not steal,” replied Lily.

Mr. Facey whistled softly to his horse, who ate the faster. “John Topp be gone to market, and Mr. Denny, too,” he observed.

“Yes,” replied Lily, “they both be gone.”

“At home,” said Mr. Facey, in a low impressive tone, “there be a large black book, and in 'en be written they same words, but there be more of

them. ‘Thou shalt not steal’ be written and close along be written, too, ‘ ’Tain’t no stealing to take for a dumb animal.’ ”

“Oh,” said Lily, “and who put that in?”

“God Himself,” replied Mr. Facey, “did write they words, for ink be faded and washed by the flood waters. Second words be always best, too.”

“Not when our Daddy do talk,” said Lily.

“But they be best,” continued Mr. Facey, “when God be the writer, for ’e did mind they dumb things and did put in they new words.”

Lily stood upon the log and gave her hair a little shake.

“What be a dumb animal, Mr. Facey?” she inquired.

“Whatever,” replied Mr. Facey, “do bide about and say nothing.”

Lily pondered over his words. . . .

Mr. Facey was one of those who always supposed that things remained exactly as they used to be when he was a child. In those old days that Mr. Facey still saw about him a rich farmer, such as Mr. Denny, would start home at about five o’clock from market and arrive, after waiting at two or three inns upon the road, at suppertime. But only a few minutes after Lily had left Mr. Facey, being called by her mother to her tea, Farmer Denny dashed up to him, in his large car, and demanded fiercely what his horse was doing there.

“Be thee talking?” asked Mr. Facey, addressing himself to the spare wheel that was fixed behind Mr. Denny’s motor.

“Take that damned horse away,” shouted the farmer. “ ’Tain’t proper for such a lean brute to steal my good grass.”

“I bain’t deaf,” replied Mr. Facey, staring hard at the wheel.

“Take yourself off. To hell with you!” blustered the farmer. . . .

Mr. Facey was the most obedient of men, but he disliked loud noises, and so he waited patiently for the farmer to go before he obeyed his orders, harnessed his horse, and drove away. . . .

When Lily’s mother called out to her that tea was ready, she called only to sound hopeful to her neighbours, so that they might think that there really was something to eat in the house. But Lily, who was hungry, knew better, and when she reached home she found the truth only too true, for her mother was sitting over the empty bread-pan and crying into it.

“There bain’t nor mouse in ’en?” asked Lily.

“No,” replied Mrs. Topp, “there be nothing, and baker did say ’e could not leave we no bread and John be afear’d that Lawyer Patey won’t lend ’e no more money, for John bain’t got nothing to sell.”

“ ’Tis a pity our Daddy bain’t dumb,” observed Lily.

“Why so?” asked her mother.

“If ’e were dumb,” said Lily, “I’d go and fetch something out of Mrs. Moggs’s shop when she weren’t a-looking.”

“ ’Twould be stealing,” said Mrs. Topp.

“ ’Tain’t stealing to take for a dumb animal,” replied Lily, firmly.

Mrs. Topp and Lily looked out of the small cottage window. They saw a very fruitful and pleasant land; the rich upland hills were green with the growing corn, and the large herd of Mr. Denny’s cows were moving one by one from their pasture to the milking-shed, and over all this shone the summer sun. In the meadow exactly in front of them rabbits were playing. These rabbits were so joyful that they leapt sometimes two feet into the air and then ran races in the most frantic manner. One rabbit was in so gay a mood that it ventured into the middle of the field and on its return it suddenly rolled over in a heap and lay still.

“ ’Tis wired,” said Lily.

Mrs. Topp gazed longingly at the rabbit.

“ ’Twould be a nice supper for our John,” she said.

“But ’tain’t our rabbit,” observed Lily gravely, “and would be stealing to take ’en.”

The Topps were proud. They had hidden their poverty as best they might, and even when they were refused food by the tradesmen they still pretended to eat. Mrs. Topp even went so far as to light her fire and to make a great show of cooking upon the Sunday, so that everyone should see the smoke coming from the chimney and wonder what Mrs. Topp was having for her dinner.

Before Lily went to bed she took a last look at the dead rabbit, but, feeling so certain that she at least possessed no dumb animal to take it for, she went upstairs slowly, played for a little while with a spider, naming it Mr. Facey—for she thought the spider looked wise—and, taking off her frock, she climbed into her cot. . . .

Perhaps John Topp felt that Mr. Patey shouldn't have said "No!" so sternly to his request for another small advance. Had Mr. Patey said nothing at all when John remarked that this time he had no security to give, no harm would have come. Had Mr. Patey merely turned aside, saying, with a laugh, that "money bain't stones", as John would have done had anyone asked him for a sixpence that he hadn't got, then John would have sung a song and guided his horse home more safely.

He didn't mind being refused so much, but it was the way of being refused that mattered to him, and besides, there was no need for Mr. Patey to say that John Topp had never once intended to pay back what he borrowed, because John meant to pay all back when his sow farrowed.

John had risen early that morning, and because he didn't sing upon the road, he couldn't keep awake, and once, forgetting where he was, he gave the reins a wrong pull. A motor-car was passing, a crash came, and John Topp was picked up with a broken neck. . . .

Lily Topp awoke the next morning feeling hungry. She also awoke surprised, for her cot had been moved in the night, and she with it, into a small inner room.

Lily was soon in her clothes and, hearing the cottage door open and shut, she peeped from the window and saw her mother walking up the lane with a hurried step and crying as she walked.

"She bain't dumb," said Lily, a little disappointedly.

Lily's room faced the meadow—the snared rabbit still remained there; nothing had touched it.

Lily went into the next room. Her father was in bed, but a sheet was drawn over his face.

Lily pulled the sheet back.

"Bain't 'ee going to get up, our Dad?" she called.

There was no reply and Lily became interested.

"Be thee dumb?" asked Lily. But no reply came.

"If thee be a dumb animal," said Lily, "who do bide about and say nothing, thee may be fed." John Topp remained silent.

Lily went at once into the field in front of the house. . . .

Farmer Denny always rose early, as a rich man should do, in order to guard his wealth from harm, and as Lily was loosing the noose from the dead rabbit's neck the heavy hand of the farmer was laid upon her shoulder.

Lily shook herself free and stood up boldly with the rabbit in her hand.

“ ’Tain't stealing,” she said, “to take for a dumb animal.”

“And what dumb animal are you taking my rabbit for?” asked Mr. Denny.

“Our Daddy do bide about and say nothing,” replied Lily.

Farmer Denny moved out of the child's way. He had heard a sound that pleaded for the dumb animal, too—the tolling of the parish bell.

ROSIE PLUM

The chapel at Dodderdown was the smallest in the world. The caretaker was Rosie Plum. Times change. Dodderdown chapel had once been famous. A minister had used it and people had worshipped there. Rosie had cleaned the chapel since she was a child. She still cleaned the chapel after she had married. That was in the days when the minister came and the chapel flourished.

The use Rosie made of the chapel was to clean it. To worship in it was a secondary matter that went with the cleaning. When the chapel was clean, Rosie considered it proper to sit upon the bench and admire her work. But she looked sometimes at the pulpit. Thus Rosie used the chapel.

She made other uses of her husband. She was a little woman, powerful and lusty. She could lift anything and she had a hearty laugh.

When the chapel was swept and garnished, Rosie would sit upon the long bench in front of the pulpit and listen to the preacher. The most important piece of furniture in the chapel was the bench. It had always held all the worshippers. The congregation was never too large to sit down upon it. Rosie always dusted the bench carefully.

In one village the church flourishes, in another the chapel holds the highest position. In Dodderdown, though the chapel was little, it had once been great, but now it was great no more. The people had left it for the church.

But Rosie still dusted the bench. When the people were all gone the minister gave up coming and Rosie found a new use for her husband. She put him into the pulpit.

She had used him for other things. When the chapel door blew in during a service, her husband had to stand in the aperture and become a door. He had also to stand near to the window in the summer and become a flypaper. When Rosie placed her husband in the pulpit he looked at her and she at him. She fancied he preached.

Just above the pulpit there was a hole in the roof. The rain fell through this hole upon Rosie's husband.

Rosie had determination, she had power, she was going to be outdone by no one. The church people said that they alone worshipped the one true God.

Farmer Lord, the great farmer, was certain of it.

“Him only shalt thou serve,” he said.

Rosie did not agree.

Her husband, who was a carpenter, made a cross, and Rosie made a Christ. She stuffed an old sack with straw, made a white face with a bag pudding, sewed on arms and legs and fixed her God upon the cross. She placed the cross in the chapel.

No one heeded Rosie. When you begin to do something in Dodderdown, you continue to do it. Rosie had always dusted the chapel. Her husband had helped her and the preachers who used to come had spoken of God. In the church they boasted about their God. Rosie hung her God up, too.

Mr. Hayball, the clergyman, would have let Rosie do as she chose.

“According to law,” he said, “one can worship as one chooses here in England. We are all Christians. Every Christ hung upon a cross is our God.”

But Farmer Lord thought differently. He had nothing to say against the crucifix that Mr. Hayball had placed upon the altar in St. Mark’s church. Why should he? It was made to pattern: it was made in Manchester. That was a holy cross. The face was a proper one for Jesus. The limbs were natural. It was nailed on to the cross and not tied on like Rosie’s God.

Farmer Lord was churchwarden. He was a middle-aged man and the hat he wore on Sundays reminded one of King Edward’s. He could remember the time when the little chapel was full and the church was empty. He spoke of those days as if they were before the Flood. In those days there were Radicals in the land, he said. But now there was only one left and that was a woman—Rosie Plum.

Farmer Lord believed that Rosie had set up another God to combat the true God. The true Christ was carved; Rosie’s Jesus was only stuffed. Rosie’s God was unimportant. Her cross was a sham. It was made in Dodderdown and not in Manchester. Farmer Lord reported the matter again to Mr. Hayball at a vestry meeting.

“She has stuffed a stolen manure bag with my straw,” he said, “and she’s made a Guy Fawkes that she calls Jesus. She is a blasphemer.”

“Why no,” said Mr. Hayball mildly. He believed in images. “She worships a symbol.”

Rich Farmer Lord made inquiries. He discovered that the chapel bench that Rosie dusted so carefully was only lent. It had been lent by a gentleman fifty years before, who was then affluent, but was now a resident in the Stonebridge workhouse. Farmer Lord was the Chairman of the Guardians and he called the old man, who had been ruined through his honesty, before the Board.

“You are a thief,” said the farmer. “You are living upon the county, when you possess property. You came here under false pretences. You have enough to live upon for a week. You own a bench. I insist that the bench you lent to the chapel at Dodderdown be at once sold and the money handed to the Board. I am willing to give ten shillings for the bench. It will do, if altered a little, to make a sheep trough. Rosie Plum only uses it to stare at her husband, who stands like a dunce, and to look at a straw guy Jesus that she has stuck up on the wall.”

The old man merely mumbled a reply. He was taken away. . . .

Rosie’s husband had the misfortune to contract rheumatism. Perhaps he caught the illness from standing in the damp pulpit of the chapel; perhaps he caught it from lying drunk in a ditch all one night. The disease made alarming progress. It twisted his limbs and pulled them this way and that. His knees doubled up, his arms were crooked, his back was curved. He became a problem for the undertaker. The doctor told him he was dying. . . .

A farmer, however much he gets on in the world, likes a bargain. The old man at the workhouse had evidently consented to sell his bench. He had said nothing to the Guardians. But, later, when a young nurse who wasn’t very soft-handed rubbed a hard scrubbing-brush over his naked body, he murmured the word “Tobacco!” which meant that he would prefer a pipe rather than a scrubbing. Farmer Lord paid the money; the bench was his.

When a rich man makes a purchase he doesn’t always carry away at once what he buys. Sometimes he waits. He likes to think that he can, at any moment, take away what another person finds a good use for. A well-to-do farmer, although he wears fine gaiters and a convenient Sunday hat, can hover like a hawk. He can pounce suddenly upon the prey, or else he can soar in the air and await his own time.

Rosie’s husband was very ill; he could not move. He was completely twisted. Rosie, who all her married life had made different uses of him, now found him useless.

Rosie felt herself to be a great leader. She was a dissenter; Farmer Lord was the establishment. Rosie wasn't going to be outdone.

Rosie decided to be better than the church. The church was mean and was always begging: Rosie decided to be generous and to give things away. While her husband could work, Rosie could afford to be generous after the fashion of the older generation of the dissenters, who were wont to give away more than a tenth part of their goods to the poor. She had given away the flowers from her garden and the vegetables. Any child who had a grave to tend would go to her for flowers. Rosie never refused, and often, instead of going to their own gardens to pluck the flowers, quite well-to-do people would go to Rosie instead and she would give all she had. When the garden ceased to be cultivated, Rosie began to give away her furniture. She always worshipped in the chapel and so she must be generous, she said. She would talk to her husband in this way:

“T'ain't no use that you be now, but prayer can do much. I do pray in chapel and maybe God wi' straw in 'en will show what use thee be.”

Soon Rosie gave away all that she had except the old mattress upon which they lay at night. When she wished to rest she went into the chapel and sat upon the bench.

Her husband could no longer stand in the pulpit. He could stand nowhere. He could only rest in a bundled-up manner. But Rosie must have a preacher, so she took her straw Jesus and placed him in the pulpit. She fancied she went on better than the church. They had only Mr. Hayball to listen to; she had Jesus. She knew that no image was proper for a chapel, but hers wasn't an image, it was our Lord, who looked fine in the pulpit. . . .

One winter's day Rosie was returning from the wood, where she had been gathering sticks. She carried a heavy bundle and her aged feet were not very light upon the road. She often stumbled. As she passed through Dodderdown she noticed a light in the village hall where the church sometimes held a social gathering.

When Rosie reached home, she said to her husband: “The church people be busy doing wickedness, and as we be holy 'tis proper to listen to chapel sermon.” Rosie's husband's sickness had touched his heart; he was about to die. He said nothing. She laid down the sticks and lifted her husband instead. She carried him into the chapel, where she laid him down and he breathed his last.

Rosie allowed him to remain where he was. The chapel was holy; he had died there. She would listen to the sermon. The small hanging lamp swung slowly to and fro; it gave but an indifferent light.

There was a loud knock on the door, which opened of itself, after it was kicked, for it fell down. Farmer Lord stood in the chapel. He only saw Rosie. He did not notice the dead man.

“I be come for my bench,” said Farmer Lord.

Rosie moved away.

“There be so many church folk at our party that there bain’t places for all to sit.”

The farmer raised the bench. He stood for a moment in front of the pulpit, looking at the straw figure, and went away laughing, carrying the bench with him. Everyone laughed about Rosie’s bench being taken away.

“Let thik Jesus she do worship give her another,” they said.

It was Sunday morning and the people, on their way to church, looked through the chapel window to see what Rosie did. They knew that she had nothing to sit down upon, but all the same Rosie had found something.

That afternoon the policeman came and peeped, too. He went into the chapel. Rosie was sitting upon something that made, when propped up upon its elbow, a very good stool.

“I did pray and God did make ’en so,” said Rosie.

“And what’s that?” asked the policeman, pointing to the figure in the pulpit.

“ ’Tis Jesus,” replied Rosie.

THE WINE-FED TREE

The Reverend George Merley and Mrs. Merley were without children, but they were the closest of companions and having kind hearts they wished to use their own happy state of companionship in order to do good to others less fortunate. When they came to live at West Barrow their eyes not only sought pleasure from the view from their drawing-room window, nor yet from the book that they read together, but they looked about them for some human creatures whose way of living would give an added interest to their own lives. Mrs. Merley noticed the Mondays and, having stamps to buy at Mrs. Clay's tiny shop, she inquired in her usual friendly way about them. Mrs. Clay lost no time in telling all that she knew, but first she peeped out of the door and nodded as if to say "West Barrow has cornfields and meadows, old women who knit and gossip, old men who drink and swear, flowers in the summer and rain storms in the winter, stray cats and the Mondays; also listeners."

The Mondays were said to have a family (there was nothing that Mrs. Clay did not know); but what children they had were away from home. Mr. Monday had inherited from his father some two thousand pounds and gave up his work, which, Mrs. Clay believed, was selling something; she was not quite sure what—old books, she thought. Anyhow, when he had his money, Mr. Monday considered himself rich enough to retire.

"But money do waste away," Mrs. Clay observed, "same as water from a barrel when sun do shine. . . ." Somehow or other before the Mondays had settled down at Barrow they had spent five hundred pounds, a good sum in those days, so that Mr. Monday's income had fallen below two pounds a week.

Mrs. Monday liked sweet cakes and Mr. Monday smoked cigarettes. Mrs. Monday never had enough rich cake, and Mr. Monday was always looking in odd corners of the house for more cigarettes. When anyone has not enough he usually strives to get more. Mr. Monday wondered: "Could he sell some more books; would some of his old customers buy off him again?" He thought not, but he wished to make some money, and as is often the case Mr. Monday chose the most unlikely way. He believed he could make chairs.

An old shed leaned against his house and Mr. Monday set to work in it. He hung the pattern that he had to guide him on the shed wall. It was the

picture of a high-backed chair.

When he had finished the chair Mr. Monday decided he would carve a dragon on the back; then find a nobleman who had a dragon on his crest and sell the chair to him. When he put down a tool to rest himself Mr. Monday would put his hand into an imaginary box which contained a hundred superior cigarettes. Mr. Monday was not a clever carpenter, but he tried his best. After many failures, much labour and waste of wood, he made the high-backed chair. He was beginning to cut out a Chinese dragon on the back when the Merleys arrived on their first visit.

Mr. Merley was a rich man and Mrs. Merley had money, too. When rich people enter a poor man's house, that lousy knave poverty hides his head in an empty cupboard. In the breath of riches that Mrs. Merley breathed Mrs. Monday thought she detected the scent of sweet cake. Whenever Mr. Merley put his hand carelessly into his side pocket Mr. Monday thought he would bring out a handful of fine cigarettes. So far the Mondays had only to do with those who gave nothing; soon they would learn that even rich people were givers. When a new-comer arrives a child will show its best toys. Mr. Monday had a like nature and wished to show his chair. He led the way to the shed past odds and ends in the path, old rags and tins, that Mrs. Monday wished she had swept away. Mr. Monday hurried his visitors into the shed. The Merleys were delighted with the chair; they praised it in every possible way that a chair could be praised, and at once offered five pounds for it. Mr. Monday could carve the dragon at his leisure. Mr. Merley took a note out of his pocket and gave it to Mr. Monday.

When they went away everyone was pleased with what had happened. Without losing a moment, Mrs. Monday sent to the stores at Enmore for rich sweet cake and Mr. Monday ordered some good cigarettes.

Wealth brings content, peace, joy, virtue, goodness, health, happiness; the Merleys showed the proper spark of wealth well used. Hardly a day went by without their visiting at Holly Cottage, the home of the Mondays. They wished to bring happiness there and they succeeded.

Mr. Monday went on gaily with his Chinese dragon. When he was tired he smoked a real cigarette. But a dragon is a curious beast; he has a long tail that is difficult to carve. Wood was a mystery to Mr. Monday as well as a dragon. He failed to notice a large knot in the plank he had chosen for the back. In cutting out the dragon's eye the wood split in half; it had not been properly fixed, so one piece fell one way and one another. Mrs. Monday told the Merleys when they next called that the chair would be a long time in the

making; there were difficulties. Mr. Merley saw at once that the chair carving was a trouble to Mr. Monday and thought he would advise another way for him to earn a little. He began by speaking lightly of the profits that come from gardening.

“Money is easily earned by cultivating your garden,” he said. He suggested a few potatoes as a beginning.

“All the vegetables that you do not want for yourselves we will buy,” said Mrs. Merley cheerfully. Next day Mr. Monday locked up the shed and went out to dig. He worked hard and when he rested he smoked cigarettes. He watched the ground for the first green shoot with the same eagerness that Noah watched from a window in the ark for a green leaf.

As soon as the first potato showed itself Mr. Monday went to tell his wife and then when the Merleys came in the afternoon he showed it to them.

But one day, curiously enough, the Merleys appeared to forget all about the tiny green leaf of a potato that had once been seen. Mr. Monday was saying good-bye to them at the front door. He sniffed a little, for he thought the flavour of good cigarettes hung about Mr. Merley’s clothes and Mrs. Monday supposed as she handed Mrs. Merley her scarf that it smelt of sweet cake. Mr. Merley happened to look over the bare garden in the middle of which was the solitary potato shoot and he said gaily, without giving much thought to his words, as a departing guest sometimes will, “You ought to plant a pear-tree in your garden.”

“Why so I should,” cried Mr. Monday, delighted at the idea.

That afternoon Mr. Merley had given Mrs. Monday a pound for a sack of potatoes that Mr. Monday would dig in the summer. But the potatoes were now neglected, for all Mr. Monday spoke of was the wonderful pear-tree that he was going to plant.

“We will sell our pears to the Merleys,” Mrs. Monday said joyfully, for that afternoon she had eaten exactly what she liked best for tea.

“Good pears are certainly very scarce and dear,” observed Mr. Monday, “and ours will be the very best.”

Mr. Monday consulted a nursery gardener and the tree was purchased. It was planted with the greatest ceremony and care, exactly where the best early potatoes were supposed to come up. The tree’s roots were spread out, the best earth mixed with dung was laid upon them, and the soil patted down tight. As soon as the pear-tree was planted Mr. Monday could think of nothing else.

He began to read the gardening newspapers and any old book that he could lay hands upon which spoke of pear-trees. Then he would stand in the garden and watch the tree, wishing to see it grow quickly.

The day after it was planted the Merleys went off for a long holiday. They bid the Mondays a hurried good-bye and never even noticed the tree. They were away for some weeks and when they returned they found Mr. and Mrs. Monday in bed with severe chills.

Mrs. Merley ministered to their needs and they quickly recovered.

As soon as they were well enough to go out a little Mr. Merley, who had come to see them, observed happily; "You need wine to drink, rich burgundy; you must share a bottle a day until you are better."

The next day there arrived by the carrier a case that contained two dozen bottles of wine. With the wine came a book that Mr. Monday had borrowed from the County Library. The book was a reprint, translated from the French. It was written in the fifteenth century and was all about orchard cultivation.

"A wise gardener", Mr. Monday read, "will be generous with his wines; many men have caused a backward pear-tree to grow well by feeding its roots with a red burgundy. A tree fed thus at the full moon will flourish and bear much fruit and he who takes this meat will taste the wine, too."

Mr. Monday almost shouted with delight. He called to his wife and read her the passage.

For some weeks there had not appeared much life in the tree. Though the spring had passed there was still no sign of any leaf.

"If the tree dies, what shall we do?" Mr. Monday used to say sadly. "There will be no ripe pears to sell to the Merleys." But now he was all gladness. "At the full moon," he cried, "I shall feed the tree with a gallon of red wine. Then it will grow and flourish, its roots will spread far under the soil and every pear will taste like a glass of the best wine."

"But, my dear," said Mrs. Monday, "Mrs. Merley wished you and I to drink the wine; she would not like to hear from Mrs. Clay that we poured it all out on to the ground."

"We will drink the wine in the pears," said Mr. Monday, "and the Merleys will taste their own good wine, too, when they buy our fruit."

"I wonder whether it's the chair or potatoes that Mr. Monday is at work on now?" Mrs. Merley said to her husband when the Mondays were quite

recovered from their illness.

“Lord Bullman will dine with us next week,” observed Mr. Merley, “and if we take him to see Mr. Monday he may buy a chair. He might take ours, and Mr. Monday can make us another.”

“Nothing could be better,” said Mrs. Merley, “for I am sure that the Bullmans have a dragon on their coat of arms.”

“Or else a bear,” observed Mr. Merley.

“Mr. Monday could call it a bear,” said Mr. Merley. “But we ought not to take him away too long from his potato-digging.”

“He could carve the bear in rainy weather,” remarked Mrs. Merley.

Though all the village—and Mrs. Clay had a great deal to say about it—thought it a fine thing that a Lord was to lunch at the Rectory, yet the Mondays had never heard of the event, for so expectant was Mr. Monday and so eager for the night of the full moon when he should give new life to his beloved tree that had he heard of the wonderful visit he would have given no heed to it. He read over and over again the page in his borrowed book which gave directions for feeding the tree, and would delight himself in the thought of its joy at the draught of good wine. Mr. Monday was completely taken by surprise when one day as he was out watching the tree he was called in by his wife, who came excitedly to tell him that there was grand company in the parlour.

Mr. Monday pulled his tie first one way and then the other to try to straighten it, and going into the room he found himself introduced to Lord Bullman, who, Mrs. Merley said, had come to look at the chair he had so cleverly carved and who might prove to be a very profitable customer.

“I would prefer to show you the pear-tree, my Lord,” said Mr. Monday.

“What,” cried Mrs. Merley, “have you carved a pear-tree, too, as well as a dragon?”

“Come, Mr. Monday,” said Mr. Merley in rather a sharper tone than he was wont to use, “be so good as to show his Lordship the dragon.”

Mr. Monday led the way to the shed. He unlocked the door which had been closed for almost a year. Though Mr. Monday had not entered it for so long, the rats had. The chair was fallen like Dagon before the Ark and all that remained of the dragon were a few of its teeth, that needed a Cadmus to make anything of. His lordship admired the view seen through a tiny window overspread with cobwebs.

“Show me the pear-tree,” he said kindly, for he felt sorry for Mr. Monday.

Mr. Monday, who had become very gloomy when he saw what the rats and damp had done to the chair, now grew happy again. He was pleased with Lord Bullman, with whom he felt entirely at his ease, and Lord Bullman, who never failed to please when he wished, thought Mr. Monday a very amiable gentleman. On their way to the garden Mr. Monday whispered to his lordship as a profound secret the fancy he had to feed his tree with red wine.

“By heaven,” cried Lord Bullman, “that tree is in luck; but don’t you think pond water would do as well, so that your good wine may be drunk by a thirsty Christian?”

“The tree is a Christian,” whispered Mr. Monday, looking round cautiously. “I baptized it myself.”

“And a better one than most of us, I expect,” said His Lordship gaily.

When Lord Bullman left West Barrow he expressed himself very pleased with his visit and was especially glad to have met Mr. Monday, whom he called a droll fellow and an excellent companion. But Mr. Merley could not take the same pleasure as his Lordship in what had happened. Both he and his wife had hoped so much from the visit, for they thought that Mr. Monday might really sell some chairs to Lord Bullman at a good price. Besides, when they were in the garden Mr. Merley noticed that nothing whatever had been done to the potato patch, for which he felt sorry, because the Mondays certainly needed more food for themselves.

“It’s only the pear-tree that Mr. Monday thinks of now,” observed Mrs. Merley despairingly.

“I did notice a little tree,” remarked Mr. Merley.

The full moon came at last and flooded the earth with its gentle silver light. Mr. Monday held up his arms to the moon, begging for its blessed influence to cause the pear-tree to flourish when he gave it the wine.

Then he fed the tree with six bottles of Burgundy.

He opened each bottle with proper care and slowly poured it out over the roots of the tree. The moon shone even brighter as the red wine sank into the earth.

As was her wont she delighted in sacrifice, and the wine was the colour of blood. When the last bottle was finished Mr. Monday raised his hands in

prayer to the splendid goddess and went indoors.

Four weeks passed by and again Mr. Monday fed his tree and worshipped the moon. At the fourth moon the wine came to an end. The Mondays were grown poorer, and though in course of time they expected to have wine-fed pears to sell yet many months must pass before these grew and ripened.

The Merleys, too, were disappointed with their friends, for though Mr. Monday was so happy with his tree, he did nothing to help himself in his poverty. He even used the remains of the chair that he had sold to the Merleys for firewood. The potato garden was only weeds.

“It’s all due to that tree,” said Mrs. Merley, “and Mrs. Clay tells me that every drop of the wine we gave him was poured over it. It would be doing Mr. Monday a real kindness to cut it down.”

“With the tree gone he will work again as he used to do and be a happy man,” observed Mr. Merley. “I will sharpen my axe.”

“You will fell the tree tonight?” asked Mrs. Merley anxiously.

“Yes,” assured her husband.

At midnight by the dim light of a pale summer moon, Mr. Merley softly opened the gate of Holly Cottage.

He found the tree. It had grown well and pears were already formed.

Mr. Merley cut down the tree.

He let it lie.

THE DEVIL AND THE GOOD DEED

Mr. Piller stood by his gate. He looked towards the Dodder church, expecting at any moment to hear the bell toll for old John Fardy. Mr. Piller waited. Every quarter of an hour he knocked out his pipe, filled it from a packet of tobacco that he kept in his left hand and lit it again with a match taken from his waistcoat pocket.

Unlike most people, Mr. Piller knew what he waited for. His wife was nursing John Fardy, who was dying. When John died Mrs. Piller would return home, but first she would call at the sexton's and he would toll the bell. The tolling of that bell would mean Mr. Piller's supper. When his wife returned she would lay the table and he would eat. Mr. Piller stood by his gate, smoking his pipe, waiting for Mrs. Piller. Sometimes he looked into the road. The hour was towards evensong.

All nature panted after a sultry, glowing day. Slowly the coolness came. The holy delight of blessed summer was everywhere. The deep green of the leaves gave to the heart of man a strange and wonderful delight and the gentle butterflies, finding no flowers in Mr. Piller's garden, alighted upon his wall to warm their bodies in the sun.

Mr. Piller heard the shuffle of steps, and as no sound came from the church tower, he looked into the road.

A tramp was going by. Mr. Piller saw him, but as he was neither his pipe nor his supper he was of no importance to Mr. Piller.

The tramp wore a broad-brimmed hat of the Spanish type and though the weather was so warm he was wrapped in a black cloak, somewhat ragged. He carried a sack slung across his shoulders. His feet were tied up in old rags.

Near to the village two women were gossiping. Mrs. Gear, the elder, held a baby in her arms; the younger, a merry wench, was holding her sides with laughter. Mrs. Gear called her "Nancy".

"'Tis a wicked man old Fardy have been," said Mrs. Gear happily, "an' me husband do say 'tis to hell 'e be going."

The tramp stopped and looked into the hedge; he wished to hear more.

“Ah,” laughed Nancy, “the Devil will come to take old Fardy away.” She laughed louder than ever. “How long has he been up there?” she asked.

“John Fardy has bided twenty years in thik old shepherd’s hut that be falling to pieces,” replied Mrs. Gear. “John were a shepherd once. He was turned off by Farmer Lord because he did drink, but he wouldn’t be moved. Farmer did want hut moved ten miles away, but John were afraid they little flying birds who did build in hut would never find their nests again if ’twas shifted so far. Farmer did order Carter Tom to start ’is horse, but shepherd did lay ’is own body down before they wheels. Farmer did send horses to move hut by night and when John did hear their tramp ’e did go out ’imself and set Farmer’s house on fire. So Farmer Lord soon called they horses back to drag thrashing-engine away from yard. Then wold hut were forgotten. When he come out of jail John did go to hut again, for no one didn’t live there only they birds and ’tis in thik hut ’e be a-dying.”

“And to hell they fire-lighters be sent,” laughed Nancy, “for bain’t they the sorcerers that Bible do tell of?”

“ ’Tis what they be,” said Mrs. Gear, shaking the baby, who had fallen asleep in her arms.

The tramp moved slowly away, but there was a purpose in his steps; he knew now where he was going.

Beside the village green he stopped again. Upon the green two little girls were playing with a tiny boy. Kitty, the biggest girl, was suggesting a new game.

“Mrs. Piller be gone to shepherd’s hut. Wold John be dying and ’tis most like, Mrs. Piller did say, that Devil will get ’e.”

“Let Tommy be Devil and we will be wold dying John,” cried the two girls and set off running with Tommy after them. Tommy chased Kitty all round the green and when she tripped and fell he caught her.

The tramp rubbed his hands gleefully and took the road to the vicarage. He passed by a load of hay that rumbled contentedly along. From the downs there came the sound of sheep bells and a murmur of flies was everywhere in the air. The tramp smiled. He liked flies. He came to the vicarage and turned into the wide-open gate.

The clergyman, Mr. Hayball, sat with his wife at supper. There was the scent of sweet peas in the room and a rice pudding and gooseberry fool upon the table. A heavy blind was put up outside the window to save the carpet from the evening sun.

The tramp stopped and listened. His shadow was thrown upon the blind.

Mr. Hayball was speaking. "I fear for old John's hereafter," he said in his slow heavy voice. "He never came to church and twenty years ago he went to prison for setting the farmer's house on fire. I fear much that he often spoke unseemly words."

"But he used to amuse the little children when he was drunk," observed Mrs. Hayball softly.

"I fear that will not save him," replied Mr. Hayball. "I don't suppose God likes to be mocked. We none of us like that," he added with conviction, "and I am much afraid that the evil one will take old John tonight."

Mrs. Hayball helped her husband to the gooseberry fool and sighed.

The tramp was going to beg at the back door, but he did not do so. He turned to the gate again.

He passed the church, walking at a quicker pace. Leaving the shade of the heavy elms, he climbed a stile and proceeded along a footpath that led to the downs. Upon one of these downs he could see the little hut which had been for so many years the home of old John Fardy. The tramp had one peculiarity that whereas he was friendly to flies, he hated birds. When he came out from the shadow of the trees a dove cooed. His face darkened as though a thunderstorm had crossed his brow. Now he frowned again, for a nimble swallow flew around his head, darted away into the sky, caught a gnat and flew around him again with a swish of her wings. The tramp was in a rage. He threw his hat at the swallow, but the bird did not leave him. When he supposed her gone, she was about him again, skimming over the short grass and darting so near to the tramp that she almost touched him. He cursed the bird in a deep and dreadful voice and in a strange tongue. He expected to see it fall and die, but no, the swallow gave no heed at all to the terrible words and became more lively than ever. She seemed to mock him as she would a great cat. Evidently Mr. Hayball was right. No one likes to be made fun of; certainly not the tramp, who grew more and more angry. What annoyed him most was that the bird seemed so merry. She flew here and there as though her whole life was nothing but happiness.

Mrs. Piller, who was with John Fardy, was picking up a few sticks outside the hut when the tramp approached. She regarded him in a friendly manner. She had been there since noon and had seen no one. She had watched him take the upland path and climb the hill and supposed him to be the clergyman.

“I have never seen two people more alike,” she said when the tramp drew near. “I took ’ee to be Mr. Hayball.”

“Ah,” observed the tramp, “I am a preacher, too, Mrs. Piller. Is John dead?”

“’e can’t last long,” replied Mrs. Piller, who believed the tramp to be a relation of the dying man. “’is face be changed. The sooner ’e be gone the better, for ’is feet be cold and I am to call at sexton’s for bell to be tolled and ’tis getting late and me husband wants his supper.”

“I am come for John,” said the tramp in a sly tone.

Mrs. Piller was startled.

“’Tis one of they preachers,” she muttered. “Do ’ee go in,” she said, moving away so that a few yards at least might be between herself and the strange visitor.

The tramp went up to the hut.

He threw open the door and entered.

In a moment he was out again, blood streaming from his eyes. He cursed in a strange and terrible voice, then shuffled quickly away over the downs until he came to a deep pit that is called Hell’s Gate and there he disappeared from sight.

Mrs. Piller was surprised.

“Evidently,” she thought, “though John Fardy be a-dying, ’e don’t like to be visited by they relations.”

She went to the hut and peeped in. A bird was nestling upon John’s chest. His dying hand caressed it.

“’Tis thik swallow that do build in hut,” said Mrs. Piller impatiently, “and most like there’ll be bird’s dirt to clear up as well as death sweat.”

John gave a little sigh and died.

The swallow rose. She touched the dead man’s lips, then flew far out into the evening sky.

THE STOLE AND THE HOUR-GLASS

An hour-glass stood in a niche in the vestry wall in Great Dodder church. It had been brought from Rome by Mr. Tucker, the Vicar of Great Dodder, who, whenever he came into the vestry, would turn the glass upside down and let the sands run.

One evening in early autumn, that might well have been summer, for the weather was so warm, the hour-glass, that had been considering a little mournfully the swift passing of time, heard a deep sigh that he thought proceeded from Mr. Tucker's stole, which was hung together with his surplice and cassock upon two large wooden pegs.

Evensong was done and a sense of peculiar peace that follows ever the prayers of the simple, that are indeed like the cooing of doves in a wood, was settled over the church. The last words of Mr. Tucker, as with raised hands he spoke from the altar, were still being murmured by the bees who hived in the roof.

"The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ . . ."

Outside from the churchyard there came the softly speaking voices of those who loitered beside a new grave.

"You are troubled in your conscience, I fear, Master Stole," observed the hour-glass, who had been so often turned over by Mr. Tucker that he had learned the English language, "or perchance this blessed silence that follows the seemly worship of the gods has filled you with an holy melancholy. That is indeed the only true happiness upon earth."

"Alas," cried the stole, "I am in love."

"Then pray to Venus," said the glass.

"Her name is Winnie," continued the stole.

The hour-glass smiled.

"Perhaps you blame me for loving her," said the stole, "but you will understand me better when I tell you that each of the vestments worn by a priest is in love with some young person. For five years I have watched Winnie, who comes to sing in the choir and who is now seventeen."

"Tommy who blows the organ has watched her, too. Perhaps you are jealous, Master Stole," remarked the glass.

“Marriage is a sacrament,” said the stole angrily, “and we who are the garments of the church can love virgin or wife. Tommy would have married Winnie had it not been for Mr. Dice.”

“Who is he?” inquired the glass.

“A rich man,” replied the stole.

“And has given her,” said the glass, “slaves and houses and the milk of a hundred goats for her bath.”

“He has given her nothing,” answered the stole. “He has only taken her away from Tommy, who would have brought her so near to me that in nine months we should have had her here to be churched. Mr. Dice drives here every day in a great car from no one knows where. He comes to court Winnie and stays till nightfall. Tommy can only grieve and hide away in the wood.”

“The idea of Winnie pleases me,” remarked the glass. “She reminds me of a beautiful slave that my master took out of the Tiber by stretching or rather casting his garment into the water and so bringing her to land. She had been thrown in by two young ladies who were jealous of her beauty. But first they had stabbed her breasts with long sharp pins. My master carried her home in his arms. She was drenched in blood and Tiber water.”

“And did she recover?” asked the stole.

“Yes,” replied the glass carelessly, “she was married to one of our slaves and she spent the rest of her life contentedly in washing the household linen.”

“Alas, poor Winnie, she will suffer a far worse fate, I fear,” said the stole. “Mr. Dice has told the men at the inn where he drinks every night that he means to have his horrid way with her upon the altar of this very church.”

“A common custom in past days,” observed the glass. “But is there no one here who can prevent such rude behaviour?”

“There is Mr. Tucker,” said the stole.

“And Tommy,” remarked the glass.

“He can do nothing,” sighed the stole. “He is but a simple boy with no money in his pocket and only love in his heart. His home is next to Winnie’s and as little children they would walk hand in hand to school. Tommy has worked so hard, thinking of Winnie, that he has saved enough money to

furnish a small cottage and in a few days' time their banns would have been given out had not Mr. Dice appeared on the scene."

The sky darkened outside the church and there was a long roll of thunder.

"Ah," said the stole, "Mr. Dice has come. His arrival is generally heralded by a sound like that."

"Perhaps he is a god," whispered the glass.

"Or Satan," said the stole.

"Much the same thing," observed the glass, smiling. "Winnie wishes to be married, I suppose?"

"Most women do," replied the stole simply. "Winnie's hair is the colour of the sun upon ripe corn. Her feet are so dainty that in church when she wears her long white frock they are difficult to see and she has the round ripe lips of a baby."

"And where is she now?" inquired the glass, wishing that Mr. Tucker would come and turn him over, for he felt sleepy.

"She is under the vicarage hedge with her dark follower," replied the stole nervously. "Her love is all a-flame and she is begging him to be kind to her, but he only kisses and fondles her and points to the church, telling her that all her wishes shall be satisfied if she will only allow herself to be led to the altar."

"From your situation you can view all that goes on through the vestry window," observed the glass a little crossly.

"But you," said the stole, "will be able to see what happens at the altar."

"Ah, there is young Tommy," cried the stole. "He has climbed the vicarage orchard railings and is tapping at Mr. Tucker's study window." He began to wave with excitement.

"Mr. Tucker is a cunning one," said the glass. "I remember after he had bought me he inquired of a priest what the poor people would kiss when St. Peter's toe was quite worn off."

"What did he say?" asked the stole.

"Ah," said the hour-glass. "Ah."

"Winnie is smiling," cried the stole suddenly. "Mr. Dice has been promising her gold and jewels. He kisses her hand. He points here. Tommy

is talking to Mr. Tucker.”

“Can you hear what they say?” asked the glass.

“Yes,” answered the stole, “for every part of a priest’s vestments hears all that he says and sees all that he does.”

“Even when he visits a house of pleasure?” asked the glass.

“His pleasure is in heaven,” replied the stole sourly.

“By the way Mr. Tucker can toss off a great cup of wine, his pleasure must be here, too,” laughed the glass.

“Mr. Tucker believes in happiness,” said the stole, “and the happiness here he affirms will be nothing to what the blessed will enjoy hereafter. He would interfere with none unless it were the Devil. He knows a trick to catch him, too; a power from on high that is given to a lowly vestment.”

“I have heard of a way to catch the unicorn and by your account of him Mr. Dice has horns, too,” observed the glass.

“Only think of it,” cried the stole in much excitement, “Mr. Dice has persuaded the girl to enter the churchyard gates. No, they are standing together in the lane and she is begging him not to lead her here.”

The hour-glass grew thoughtful.

“Has any strange animal been seen in these parts at night-time?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied the stole. “Only last night, when a thick fog hung heavy over Madder Hill, Shepherd Poose, Tommy’s father, heard the flock break pasture. He pulled on his trousers and boots and hurried to the fields. There the sheep were all huddled together as if in great fear and amongst them was a great billy-goat, leaping and capering. When the goat saw Shepherd Poose it vanished.”

“Has Mr. Tucker heard that story?” asked the glass.

“Yes,” replied the stole, “Tommy Poose has given him a full account of this strange appearance.”

“What did Mr. Tucker say?” inquired the glass.

“The good man murmured, ‘Alas, from all evil and mischief, from sin, from the crafts and assaults of the devil, Good Lord deliver us’,” replied the stole.

“Ah, he addressed the Thunderer,” observed the glass reverently. “Surely this Mr. Tucker must be a reincarnation of my good Master Caius.”

“I hear Winnie’s voice,” cried the stole. “Mr. Dice has prevailed upon her to enter the churchyard.”

The evening grew dark. A still sultry air moved over the fields that had a sulphurous smell, and a curious light, which was not of the sun, glowed upon the churchyard path.

“Mr. Tucker follows them as silent as a cat; he wears his carpet slippers,” whispered the stole.

The sulphurous smell and the strange light were now in the church and a tall man stood in the aisle, supporting a young girl in his arms.

“Mr. Dice is carrying Winnie to the altar,” observed the glass. “An act of this nature has often been staged in the amphitheatre at Rome. I am anxious to witness it.”

“Mr. Tucker has crept into the church, too,” murmured the stole.

He could say no more, for Mr. Tucker snatched the stole hastily from its peg and walked stealthily up the aisle.

Mr. Dice had cast the Holy Book upon the floor and had laid Winnie in its place.

In a moment Mr. Tucker had thrown the stole that he held like a skipping-rope over the gentleman’s head.

Mr. Dice shivered, turned deadly pale, and in less than a moment became a large black goat.

“Ah,” said Mr. Tucker, leading him away to the vicarage garden, “I shall not have to send to Stonebridge for a billy this autumn.”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Because of copyright considerations, the illustrations by John Stanton Ward (1917-2007) have been omitted from this etext. In addition, the foreword, written by Francis Powys (the author's son) has been excluded from this edition.

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[The end of *Rosie Plum and Other Stories* by Theodore Francis Powys]