T. F.
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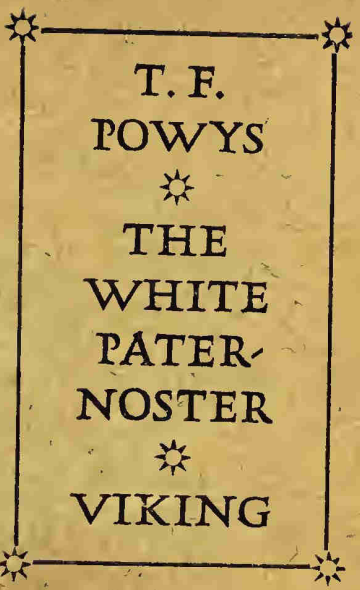

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THE WHITE PATERNOSTER

AND OTHER STORIES

By

T. F. POWYS

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THE WHITE PATERNOSTER

Mr. John Wigg, whose usual employment was that of hay-trusser, had discovered by experience that he was a very fine artist in another kind of work. He would roam in the lanes of Crosscombe with his boon companion, Fred Pratt, never knowing—as the word goes—when the hare might jump, that is, a maid be found in her form or else a-running.

John Wigg was strong and sturdy, with a bold leer and a taste that wasn't too particular, and neither he nor his friend Pratt, who was both long-legged and cunning, was in the least troubled by that inward voice the discovery of which caused the death of Socrates, and since his day has brought a great deal of misery and sorrow to many a sick soul.

It has been often noted that meek women, who are young enough to wish for experiences, like cruelty and the hard brutal manners of men who are not wont to take 'no' for an answer; and so for all the pretty warnings told in many a poet's rhyme and the wise admonishment of our Holy Mother Church, a simple soft one is often laid upon a grassy bank and her natural dowry snatched from her ere she knows what viper's poisoned fang has struck home.

Worthy Wigg and Pratt, we may be sure, knew the colour of mild lace and muslin and all the warm hopes and sweet desires that are garmented by such airy lightness, though the game they sought was not always as plentiful as the hunters wished.

Crosscombe is pleasantly situated amongst little mossy hills, and the houses, most of them thatched, are all around the green. A few steps down a shady lane there is a very small wood in the midst of which is an ash tree, that is—according to its kind—a haunted tree. This tree is very old, and one of its boughs is shaped like a cross, and there were those that said the tree had never been without such a bough, so that the village might have obtained its name from this peculiarity of arboreal growth. But no one had seen anything else more strange there than an old brown owl that lived in a hole in the tree and flew round the church tower at evensong, giving its cry.

Under the ash tree Mr. Wigg and Fred Pratt would make their plans for the undoing of the maids, for from the wood the village could be seen and the manner and behaviour of the girls could be noted. Here the gentlemen discussed the vital matter of improper loves, showing the greatest sagacity

and caution, that might—some will say, perhaps—have been used to a better purpose.

On one thing both the friends were agreed—that there is safety in numbers. Both the one and the other of them, having a generosity of temper, willingly arranged and wished that the young maid they chose to venture with should be betrayed by others first, so that the affair might be the more easy and less dangerous for them when they clinched the matter with her too.

In all country matters, alas! a lean time will sometimes come when the best of sportsmen find the game scarce, and, even if a hen-bird be disturbed and flutter a few yards before 'tis winged, it is sometimes found to have no breast at all and but meagre and thin thighs. It might have been a demand elsewhere for young servants, or else mere time and chance that rule us all, but in all Crosscombe—except for one or two that were not worth the firing of a fusil—there was only pretty Betty Moggs who was a proper subject for the schemes and plans of Master John Wigg and Fred Pratt, and they easily decided that if gay Tom of Shelton—the finest wench-killer in a dozen parishes thereabouts—could be brought to compass her she would fall an easy prey to their ignoble lust.

The fact that Betty's mother had been dead a year and was safely laid in the Crosscombe churchyard did not make the matter easier for the plotters, who had often experienced the truth that there is no one more apt and ready than a kind mother to assist in the betrayal of a pretty daughter.

Betty's father had loved his wife, as a simple-hearted man will sometimes love a woman, with his whole body and soul, and now he couldn't help loving his daughter Betty too, who was just such another kind one as his wife Alice. Honest Moggs would walk out with Betty and would guard her from an early error so tenaciously that both Wigg and Pratt, and Tom of Shelton too—whom they had taken into their confidence—despaired of working their purpose while Mr. Moggs was the watch-dog.

A chance came, however, that the plotters were not likely to neglect, for Moggs was obliged by Farmer Lord to go to a distant part of the county to another farm owned by his master to help with the hay.

Every item of news in the story is vital to a village mind, and the early departure of Mr. Moggs upon the next Monday was known and discussed by all, for there were many who had noted the doings of Mr. Wigg and liked to see gentleness, or what they called 'paltry pride,' brought down into the dust.

The Sunday evening before Mr. Moggs' departure, when Betty had taken away the tea-things in her usual quick and happy manner, Mr. Moggs walked importantly upstairs and returned with his Sunday hat, held respectfully in his hand, which told Betty that he wished to go out with her. As soon as she was ready they walked out together, Mr. Moggs viewing the village in Sunday fashion and Betty feeling her maidenly well-being with a proper pride, until they reached the little wood, where Mr. Moggs sat with his back to the ash tree exactly below the bough shaped like a cross that, though the rest of the tree lived, was itself dead and bare.

'Thee's mother,' said Mr. Moggs, speaking for the first time since the walk was begun, 'did use to walk with I here, and did lie down, same as thee be a-lying—under shady tree—but now she do bide in grave! But I do mind sometimes what she did say.'

The leaves of the ash tree rustled, and a little mouse, disturbed by some movement in the wood, ran out of the thick bushes and looked at Mr. Moggs.

'A mouse be a mouse,' said Mr. Moggs, 'and words be words, and sometimes when words be printed they do have a meaning.'

'Yes,' said Betty, who looked at the bushes as if she heard a movement.

'Where be thik text,' asked Mr. Moggs, 'that thee's mother did tell 'ee to pin up on house door, if thee were left alone in housen? She did say "if maid be left lonely they funny words will keep away naughty ones at night-time." . . . There bain't no woon listening to we?'

'Oh yes, there be,' laughed Betty, 'there be heads a-peeping.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Moggs, 'a wood where folk do peep bain't no place for we. 'Tis best we go and talk to our Alice.'

'But mother be in ground,' said Betty.

'So she be,' replied Mr. Moggs, 'but talk do come from below as well as from above.' . . .

As soon as Betty, with her father, had left the wood, John Wigg and Fred Pratt, who had been eagerly watching the young girl through the bushes, came out from their hiding-place and sat down under the tree.

'We'll make a woman of her,' said Mr. Wigg.

'And none of they nice ones have ever said "no" to Tom of Shelton,' laughed Mr. Pratt, 'for ground that be well harrowed be the best for we

drillers.'

'Tom do say,' remarked Mr. Wigg, 'that 'e 've a-tried the cottage door and that, though Moggs do turn key, lock don't hold, and no one don't never cry out "murder" to Tom, for 'e do soon quiet their pretty mouths.' . . .

Mr. James Moggs liked something to set his back against. In the wood there was the ash tree, and now, in the Crosscombe churchyard, there was his wife's gravemound. Betty stood near to him, looking now at him and now at the grave, as though she saw both her parents there. Mr. Moggs looked contented and happy. He had taken off his hat out of respect to the situation, and looked up at the evening sky with a knowing smile. All at once he put his hand to his ear and listened.

' 'Tis thee's mother who be a-talking,' he said, 'and she be a-saying where writing be to pin up over door.'

'That I do know,' answered Betty, 'for when nail did fall out I did put thick old parchment paper to guard me Sunday frock from they moths.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Moggs, 'and now mother do say 'tis best to nail thick above door each night-time when I be gone. 'Tis a charm, I suppose.'

' 'Tis a prayer,' said Betty.

'No, no,' observed Mr. Moggs, ' 'tain't no prayer, and I bain't no praying man, though I be one who do sometimes talk to his maker same as I do talk sometimes to John Wigg.'

'There bain't nor need to tell I that thee be a talker,' laughed Betty.

Mr. Moggs regarded the skies for a moment or two in thoughtful silence.

'Thee do bide up there, don't 'ee, wold 'un, most Sundays?' he said.

A slight roll of thunder came from the far distance of the eastern sky.

' 'Tis there thee be and here thee be,' said Mr. Moggs, looking first up and then down. 'Thee be everywhere,' said Mr. Moggs, 'and 'tis well for 'ee to know that our Betty be eighteen years old when oat-harvest do begin.'

Betty, who had gathered some flowers, put the bunch upon her mother's grave and sat beside her father.

'Thee may as well listen to I,' said Mr. Moggs, looking up again, 'as start setting a light to they stars.'

'God won't like it,' whispered Betty, 'if thee do name 'e as a star-lighter.'

‘I did only mean that ’e be foreman who do tell t’ others what to do,’ replied Mr. Moggs. ‘Thee bain’t offended?’ said Mr. Moggs.

A distant roll of thunder replied ‘No.’

‘Betty be to bide alone to-morrow,’ said Mr. Moggs, nodding to the eastern skies, ‘and she do tell ’ee to spell out they words, if thee be a scholar, that she mid put on our door and to mind what they do say.’

A louder thunder-clap was heard.

‘ ’E be getting crabbed,’ said Betty.

‘And so will I get crabbed, too,’ remarked Mr. Moggs sternly, ‘if ’e do let anything bad come to thee, Betty.’ . . .

The first thing that Betty Moggs did when her father left her alone the following morning was to open her drawer and place carefully in it her Sunday frock and take out an old piece of soiled and aged paper, upon which were written three lines scarcely legible, but, as far as Betty Moggs could understand them, they read like this—

‘Jesu Christ, and seynt Benediht,
Blesse this hous from every wikked wight
For nightes verye, the white paternoster!’

Betty took a strong nail and fastened the paper under the thatch eave and above the cottage door.

As soon as Betty had satisfied herself that no wind could blow the paper away, she joyfully commenced the work that she had set herself to do—to clean the house while her father was away.

All day long she was happy and joyful, singing at her labour as she shook the parlour carpet or scrubbed the bedrooms. During one of her visits down the lane to the well to fetch water to scrub with she found John Wigg waiting for her. John Wigg was sitting upon a bank that the sun had warmed and the butterflies still hovered over, and he watched, very intimately, the pretty Betty leaning over the well to draw up the water.

Mr. Wigg gloated over her mild maidenhood, that was shown innocently, for her print workaday frock was small and ill-fastened. He looked so ardently that he even became a little jealous of his own plans that were to permit Tom of Shelton to be the first to rifle such a sweet store of happiness.

Betty knew well enough that when she turned the key the lock never held, but that gave her no concern, and, being tired with all that she had

done in the day, she had no sooner put her head upon the pillow than she fell fast asleep.

Mr. Wigg had no mind to rest so innocently, for his imagination was fired by what he had seen of her, and he loitered until the stars shone in the lane, near to the haunted wood, in the hope that the event he wished for might be nearer than he expected. Mr. Wigg was soon joined by Pratt, who told a merry story or two, so that the holy calm of the summer night was soon disturbed by the noise of gross and horrid laughter.

Wigg and Pratt were about to set off for home when the owl, as though suddenly disturbed, flew out from the ash tree and flapped and fluttered towards the church tower. The owl was scarcely gone when two bearded men, one of whom carried a carpenter's rule in his hand—he was a mild-looking man—while the other, the bigger and stronger of the two, held a tall staff with a curious handle as well as a vase.

Seeing strangers there, Mr. Wigg naturally wished to know where they were going, and beheld with some astonishment—for neither of the men had the least resemblance to Tom of Shelton—that the pair went directly to Betty Moggs' cottage, opened the door, and passed in. . . .

It is said by the poet that women's tongues are like aspen leaves, that the smallest and softest breath of wind can always stir. All the women of Crosscombe had hoped and prayed, from the time that Betty Moggs left the village school, that something nasty would happen to her, and now that the murder was out they made the most of it.

No one was more angry than Tom of Shelton when he heard from Wigg that the dish of cream he had felt himself sure of had, beyond a doubt, been licked up by two strange visitors whose names no one knew.

In the daytime nothing was seen of them, but when night came and the summer darkness that is loved by naughty ones, the two strangers would come through the wood—the one noticed to be carrying a staff and a broken vase and the other a carpenter's rule. They both appeared simply dressed, as workmen would be, and the taller of the two a little astonished Mr. Wigg, who stood as near as he could when the men went by, by repeating to his companion three strange words, 'Ora et labora.'

Mr. Wigg interpreted these words as meaning 'come along too,' and so, reasoning wisely that these two strangers had but taken the place of Tom of Shelton and that where two went three others might follow, decided that

very evening that they should walk boldly to the cottage and demand their share of the feast.

The fair summer weather that had been brought in by the thunderstorm was now likely to depart with one too, for the sky had darkened when the sun drooped and now and again an ominous rumble was heard. Mr. Moggs was to return the next day, so the plotters chose that night, which was a Saturday, for their wicked purpose.

They waited in the lane and listened. Presently the sound of footsteps came from the wood, and soon the two men appeared, one of them carrying, instead of the rule, the ash cross in his hand, that had been struck from the tree by the lightning. Mr. Wigg stepped back in a hurry to let him go by.

'What be afraid of?' cried Pratt. ' 'Tis only a broken piece of wood.'

'But a funny woon,' replied Mr. Wigg.

'Let's after them,' shouted Tom, 'for Betty be for all of we now,' and they hurried to the cottage.

A heavy peal of thunder and a fierce rush of wind went with them too, while the owl, that had turned as black as the night, perched for a moment upon the cottage roof, but as soon as the strangers approached the door with the cross, fled away, screaming.

But the gust of wind had torn down the paper and had carried it far away. The strangers, finding the charm gone, did not enter and, leaving the cross behind upon the doorstep, went by Wigg and Pratt and Tom of Shelton, and retired to the wood again.

Wigg pushed open the door. But, instead of seeing Betty alone as he fully expected, there was Mr. Moggs sitting by a summer fire and enjoying a pleasant supper.

'Ah!' said Mr. Moggs to Wigg, as he took up and fed the fire with a piece of the broken cross that he had picked up on his doorstep, 'I bain't long a-moving meself when some one be a-talking.'

A BOX OF SWEETS

When the Maby stores at Conway set up the new bacon-slicer, Henry Simpson supposed that his life would be changed. He had become almost a brother to the steel sharpener of the old order, and to the knife, and could cut slices to a nicety to the exact weight that was required.

But now, with the new method that took all his old cunning away, Henry at least hoped that he would have a moment or two to look out of the window—and to dream.

In this hope Mr. Simpson was disappointed, for Mr. Maby expected him to do other things that his constant attention upon the side, back, and body of a pig had exempted him from. Henry was now expected to hand down from a top shelf the half-crown boxes of chocolate to any customer who desired to possess the pretty ladies upon the cover and the pretty sweets within.

Henry Simpson lodged in the town—in Shepherd Street—where he took his meals sometimes alone and sometimes with Mrs. Henley and family.

He had chosen this street to lodge in because of its name. Henry had the most delightful opinions about the country; for though he had never tasted fresh cream or fresh butter, he knew that such things existed in the meadows where cows eat real grass and clover.

Henry's favourite poet was Tennyson; he would read him every night in bed, and he felt sure that his soul would one day join the choir of country birds and sing their happy songs. . . .

The bacon—regarded symbolically—stood in Mr. Simpson's eyes for all that was vulgar. And although he was no Jew, Mr. Maby's chief assistant felt his soul cringe and weep every day when he weighed the rashers.

But the boxes of sweets were quite another matter; they belonged to the flower-strewed meads, to all gentleness—to Tennyson. Mr. Simpson would wipe his hands when a customer desired pretty sweets rather than lean-striped rashers, and would take down the box in joyful expectation, hoping each time he sold one to a pretty lady that she would whisper into his ear as he handed her the change for her note—

'Sweet soul, do with me as thou wilt. . . .'

One day in the week, the day of early closing—for, being in the choir at St. Mark's, Henry could never call Sunday his own—he would travel to Weyminster by train, going there by the 2.20 and returning by the 5.15, in order to visit his mother, who lived there in a house with a rather ugly name.

During these journeys Mr. Simpson would sit as near as he could to the carriage window to view—for he always sat the right side to see it—a pleasant farmhouse and green fields, that suited, he felt, so well the lines—

'Go not, happy day,
From the shining fields.'

Mr. Simpson would always carry, and hold them in his lap in the train, a bag of queen-cakes and half a pound of tea as a present to his mother.

Once Mrs. Simpson had suggested, during one of his visits to her, that a rasher would be acceptable as a little change from the cakes. But Henry only kissed her and shook his head.

And he shook it again, too, even more sadly, when he went by the farm, that had a white gate, and saw a black cat sitting upon it and a red cow feeding near.

The first time, now three years ago, when the pleasant appearance of this farm caught Henry's attention, he had seen that something important was happening there. A coffin was being carried out from the front door, that was evidently going to be placed in a waggon that waited in the green lane. All the house blinds were drawn down, and a young woman was standing by the door, her pretty face—for of course she was pretty—hidden in her handkerchief. Mr. Simpson nearly wept too.

After that little scene at the farm Henry would watch affairs there with great interest. The black cat would often be sitting contentedly upon the gate, and the gentle cows and the little pigs—there was no vulgar look of streaked bacon about them—showed how the farm prospered in the hands of the young widow. And once Henry saw her: she was opening the white gate to go into the meadow—and she looked at the train. . . .

The fields by the rail-side became yellow-coloured for harvest, and then the autumn rains fell and the cold winds descended and all the people of Maidenbridge seemed at the same instant to wish for fried bacon. Mr. Simpson was kept busy with the slicer, so that Mr. Maby himself was forced to hand a box of chocolate to a child, who told him in strict confidence that she was going to give a party to her dolls and that Rosie had fallen into the fire. Mr. Maby blew his nose.

But mild days soon came again that were penitent and confessed the sins of the world in little raindrops, and Mr. Simpson had time to look at the chocolate-boxes and to hope that one day she might come in and buy one.

One market-day, in the afternoon, Henry turned away from the bacon and repeated softly to himself, so that Mr. Maby, who was scolding the girl who kept the accounts, should not hear him:

> ‘Fair is her cottage in its place,
> Where yon broad water sweetly, slowly glides.’

‘Green waters,’ whispered Henry. Green meadows. And then a lady entered the shop and asked for a chocolate-box.

Mr. Simpson, whose heart was full of love, didn’t notice—for he had known her as soon as ever she opened the door—that she wasn’t very polite in her asking.

‘I want one of they things,’ she said, pointing upwards.

Mr. Simpson had once been able, when the train happened to slow down near the farm, to read her name upon a waggon; and he now said softly, as he opened the shop door to her, ‘Edith, love me.’

Edith looked up surprised. . . .

Henry Simpson had saved £17, and when on his wedding-day he handed this money to Edith his wife in the vestry, she said that it had better be spent upon little pigs that with good attention would soon become ripe bacon.

During the drive to the farm Henry repeated poetry to his wife.

The little pigs that had been bought with his money were in the back of the cart, and when Henry repeated from ‘Maud’ some very charming lines, the little pigs commenced to grunt and to bite each other, while Edith began to lash the horse, so that Henry found it hard to say a dim ‘Thank you’ to himself when he finished the poem.

Safe at the farm, the lady hurried indoors to be out of the rain, leaving Henry and the cart standing in what seemed to Henry to be a very dirty pond, with an island of cow-dung in the middle.

Having at last unharnessed, and persuaded the horse to leave the cart in the puddle, something happened that was as unexpected as it was dreadful. The cart fell over backwards, and unless Mrs. Simpson had run out to save them, all the little pigs would have been drowned.

At supper Edith asked him to slice the rashers. She had used ten pages of the works of Tennyson to get the fire to burn.

'Don't 'ee bring none of they blamed books here,' she had remarked.

At breakfast, Henry, who had driven the cows to their pasture and so felt hungry, expected that now at last he would taste fresh butter and pour as much cream into his tea as he wanted.

He sat down and tasted the butter; it was margarine. The cream was skimmed milk.

After breakfast, Henry was told, just as he was discovering that only two pages of 'Maud' were gone, to go out and to help Squibb the labourer to cart the island of dung into the fields.

A train came by while the men were working, and Henry, laying down his fork for a moment, stood and watched it.

He supposed the farm still looked as pretty from the train as it used to do. . . .

Henry Simpson was now within walking distance of Weyminster, and he would walk there on Saturday afternoons instead of going on Fridays as he did when he went by train. But he now went sadly to the Weyminster workhouse, because he had no gift to bring.

On his way there he passed over a bridge, and sometimes a train went by underneath. If he heard the whistle of a train in the distance Mr. Simpson would even wait until it came.

One Saturday his mother, who every time he came found it harder to hide her disappointment that he had brought her nothing, asked artfully, for she was a knowing old lady, though bed-ridden, whether they ever killed a pig at the farm.

Henry shuddered, and said, 'No, mother.'

Mrs. Simpson sighed.

The next time Henry went, having been telegraphed for, the nurse said to him as he knelt beside the bed that now bore no living burden, 'She has been talking of you all night long, and before her end came she whispered in my ear, "Me boy Henry did use to bring they queen-cakes, maybe 'e'll bring a nice rasher to-morrow." '

When Henry returned to the farm that evening, he arrived just in time to see the last of the green cover of his works of Tennyson, that was burning in

the copper fire and helping to heat the pig-wash.

He told his wife that his mother was dead.

Mrs. Simpson answered sharply that she hoped he knew better than to expect her to pay any of the funeral expenses for such a good riddance.

Henry carried out the wash to the sty.

He noticed how fine and fat the pigs were growing. . . .

The following afternoon Mr. Simpson stood near to the line. The train that he had so often travelled by was due to pass. Perhaps in the train there would be some simple man who would look as he had looked at the pretty farm. Perhaps his wife was standing beside the white gate stroking the cat and looking pretty too.

Henry fancied himself sitting in the train again and loving her.

The train whistled. Mr. Simpson climbed the hedge and lay down upon the line.

OLD MEN

John Mowlem liked to be seen. He liked also to see, and he chose the home that he retired to so that he might be in full view of Mr. Gasser.

Mr. Mowlem was the chief elder of the chapel at Great Dodder, where Mr. Gasser was minister. Mr. Mowlem's cottage was about three hundred yards from the chapel, next to which was the manse that was no larger than Mr. Mowlem's cottage.

The manse was by the roadside, while Mr. Mowlem's habitation was to the westward, under a green and pleasant hill. In order to reach Mr. Mowlem's place of retirement, if one stepped out of Mr. Gasser's open door, one had to walk a little down the lane where the first celandines open to the March sun, cross a bridge of stepping-stones, and go through a gate that opens easily and leads into a meadow path.

Mr. Mowlem's cottage was an old one, over which ivy grew and jessamine. But, though old, it was convenient. The rooms were large, and Mrs. Mowlem, who ruled indoors with a fury that surprised even the stair-carpet when she swept it, was contented enough—as long as Mr. Mowlem remained in the parlour.

When a man ceases to work and is for ever at home, the woman who is married to him soon finds him in her way, wishes him dead, and tries to torment him until he dies. It is not her fault; his foolishness becomes so apparent, and his habits so restful, that no woman with a mind to movement can let him alone.

There was a sheltered porch at Mr. Mowlem's cottage that had a good roof and a good stone step to sit down upon. This porch Mr. Mowlem used on Saturdays, Mrs. Mowlem being away on that day. From there he could see the lane, and, sometimes, see Mr. Gasser and be seen by him; he could also see the cows in the meadow and the church flagstaff.

About the porch Mr. Mowlem always felt in his heart a kind of content, that a good man feels when he knows that his friend has something that he has, because Mr. Gasser had a porch too, and when Mr. Mowlem looked across at Mr. Gasser's house and into his porch—where Mr. Gasser himself often sat with a book in his hand—he felt pleased. But the distance was too great for him to notice exactly how Mr. Gasser sat, whether he had his legs crossed or whether or no he held the book in both hands. And yet Mr.

Gasser's porch was so plainly to be seen that the hand of a caller could be noticed reaching to the knocker, and the knock could be heard by Mr. Mowlem. It sounded loud enough to him, but was not always loud enough to bring Mrs. Gasser or the servant, Susanna, to the door.

John Mowlem had once been a small dealer in corn, chiefly in malting barley, but when his wife received the legacy, that she had always talked so much about, from her uncle the linen-draper, she told her husband that he had better retire, and so he did.

John Mowlem was sixty years old when he came to live at Great Dodder, and Mr. Gasser, his friend and pastor, was sixty-four, but John Mowlem always looked upon and respected Mr. Gasser as if he were his father.

As soon as Mr. Mowlem was settled into the cottage, and each piece of furniture had been placed in the right place, Mrs. Mowlem, after the first breakfast in their new house, spoke to her husband.

'You are now retired, Mr. Mowlem,' she said, 'and as you are earning nothing you must learn to do nothing. Your corn-dealing brought in a little money, but anything now that you do is sure to take money away. You are likely to live about ten years more, under my careful care. Your best suit of clothes, and your weekday ones, will last about that time, and there is no reason that your shoes should wear out either. When you are gone, I mean to give them to your brother James.'

Mr. Mowlem begged for leave to work in the garden.

'I cannot allow it,' replied Mrs. Mowlem. 'I have always heard that it is cheaper to buy potatoes than to grow them, and besides your trousers would be torn and your boots would gather up the dust.'

'I could clean them,' said Mr. Mowlem mildly.

Mrs. Mowlem gave him one look and withdrew.

A man who retires had often better walk into the grave—if the worms will have him there—than into his own house. And Mr. Mowlem, having the grave to look forward to—as he was told nearly every day by his wife—could now only feel any pleasure during the passing of time from his friendship with Mr. Gasser and from his Saturdays.

Every Saturday was freedom to Mr. Mowlem between the hours of nine and six, for Mrs. Mowlem, upon this day, would visit the market-town of Maidenbridge, where she bought provisions for the week.

A confined person, as every schoolboy knows, even if he has a little liberty, can hardly believe in the liberty that he has. But, upon the Saturday, Mr. Mowlem would do a bold thing; he would leave the parlour chair, where he constantly sat—day in and day out—and go out of the front door and, after dusting carefully with his pocket-handkerchief the upper step of the porch, he would sit down and fancy strange things in his mind—things that he would never have allowed his thoughts to wander to with Mrs. Mowlem in the house.

When he felt his cheeks burn a little—which they always used to do if his ideas were too fanciful—he would consider Mr. Gasser and the pleasure that it always gave him to walk with that gentleman upon a Sunday afternoon. This Sunday walk, even though she looked sadly at his shoes when he went out, Mrs. Mowlem did allow him to take, for her husband's friendship with the minister gave the Mowlems an honourable place in the village, and the people, when they saw the pair of them going up the grassy lane towards the little hill, set their clocks and watches, as some used to do in the German town where Kant lived, when he walked out with his umbrella at half-past three.

Upon every fine Sunday—and even a little storm of rain did not prevent them—Mr. Mowlem would walk contentedly beside Mr. Gasser, always remembering, however, to step in the cleanest part of the road, while Mr. Gasser never cared where he trod, for, as he once said, his heavenly master's footsteps were mostly in the mire and once on the water.

Mr. Gasser lived in his religion, but he loved philosophy, and philosophy was his favourite subject of conversation when he walked out with Mr. Mowlem.

Mr. Gasser was a learned man, as well as a kind and friendly one, while Mr. Mowlem was a painstaking and a patient listener, who tried to follow his teacher wherever he led him.

'Be so good,' Mr. Mowlem would say sometimes to Mr. Gasser,' as to explain that idea to me again, as I could not understand it.'

And Mr. Gasser would choose easier words. Mr. Gasser was never tired of beginning again, if he thought Mr. Mowlem wished him to. He would tell him how Truth grows in the earth—a burning torch in the midst of gross darkness—and that even though the men whose minds are lit for a moment by the divine fire sink and perish, yet the Truth grows steadily—the Truth that will one day make the world free.

Mr. Gasser's favourite philosopher was Bishop Berkeley, who, he said, was indeed a wise enough churchman for a poor dissenter to study.

Mr. Mowlem tried his best to understand. Mr. Gasser talked and Mr. Mowlem sighed deeply. He sighed because, out of all the wisdom that Mr. Gasser told him of, he could only bethink him that a live dog was better than a dead lion, and that he had a wish in his heart to hold a young maid near to him, once, only once, before he died.

Mr. Mowlem had always been a man who could love, though he had never been allowed to. His wife, as soon as they were married—and Mr. Mowlem had fancied her to be such a kind woman—showed him a few natural manners, and told him what his behaviour must be as long as he lived with her. And Mr. Mowlem soon found her to be no girl, but a woman. In his secret heart, he believed she was made out of a peppercorn, or else out of a tall ugly pine—the wood for a poor man's coffin. Mr. Mowlem kept his secret for the porch. He hoped that Saturn, the great God—whom Mr. Gasser had once named—might bring him, upon his own day, what he wished for.

No man had more of a dread of gross wickedness than had Mr. Mowlem; he had always known that an evil old man is a horrid sight. Yet how could he, Mr. Mowlem, be wicked when he wished only to be harmlessly happy?

And one Saturday Mr. Mowlem saw Susanna.

The Gassers had never had a servant before, but now there was Susanna —a young thing, so merry and so quick that Mr. Mowlem was forced to take out his pocket-handkerchief and blow his nose very hard when he saw her running.

'I know Bishop Berkeley would have liked her,' Mr. Mowlem said, after seeing Susanna climb the meadow gate—when she might have opened it—pick a bunch of large daisies, and climb back into the lane.

After Mr. Mowlem had seen Susanna in the meadow, he found it more and more hard to listen to Mr. Gasser when they walked out upon the Sunday. He did not say 'Yes, Mr. Gasser,' as he had been used to do, and Mr. Gasser, who was speaking of Lord Bacon and of how he stuffed a hen with snow, was aware that Mr. Mowlem was not listening.

'If there is anything that troubles you, Mr. Mowlem,' said Mr. Gasser kindly, 'I trust that you will unburden your mind to me, that I may ease it.'

'I have,' replied Mr. Mowlem, after a few minutes' thought, 'a friend of long standing. He is a good man, though somewhat melancholy. He walked

yesterday many miles to see me—and did not even turn back when he heard a bull roar. He is in love.'

'With his wife, I hope,' said Mr. Gasser.

'Alas! not so,' replied Mr. Mowlem sadly. 'He is in love with a servant-maid.'

'Bacon observes,' said Mr. Gasser thoughtfully, leaning over a gate and looking into a pretty meadow where two cows were feeding, 'that Nuptial love maketh mankind; friendly love perfecteth it; but wanton love corrupteth and embaseth it. Do you know which of the two later kinds of affection your friend has for the young woman?'

'It must be the friendly kind of love that he has,' replied Mr. Mowlem, 'for my friend has never gone near enough to the young lady to feel otherwise to her.'

'He may then continue to love her,' said Mr. Gasser, 'though I should not recommend him to allow her to come near to him, for, if she did, his friendly love might change into something different.'

'And what would he do then?' asked Mr. Mowlem hurriedly.

'Lord Bacon does not inform us,' replied Mr. Gasser.

Often Mr. Gasser walked as far as Mr. Mowlem's cottage. The friends liked to walk through the pleasant meadow, that reminded them of God's love to all men, for though they stepped upon the soft grass and flowers, as man steps upon God's love, yet the meadow forgave their rudeness and always gave them a welcome. They would wait for a few moments when they reached Mr. Mowlem's porch, and look at the view there—the peaceful village, the hills beyond, perhaps yellow with ripe corn. But Mr. Gasser's looks would dwell mostly upon his own house.

'How well my porch can be seen from here,' he observed the same Sunday that Mr. Mowlem had asked the question about his friend. 'Why, I believe you could see me distinctly if I sat there. And I often do, for there is no better place to read philosophy than in the porch of our house.'

'And I too,' replied Mr. Mowlem, 'sometimes sit in my porch upon a Saturday afternoon.'

Mr. Gasser shook his friend warmly by the hand and walked away. . . .

Mrs. Mowlem was troubled about her husband. When she spoke of him in the village, she shook her head. The people supposed him to be ill, and

hoped that he was, for they were jealous of the grand airs that Mrs. Mowlem used when she walked into the chapel, and only because her husband was the minister's friend.

But it was not an illness that had attacked Mr. Mowlem that so troubled his wife. It was only that he looked happy, and had moved his chair so that he could see out of the window. She wondered if the window had done it, or a view of the meadow. Mrs. Mowlem moved his chair away from the window, but he still looked pleased.

As each Saturday came, Mrs. Mowlem would bid her husband listen to her, and would tell him that he must not by any means leave the house, nor ever invite any one into it.

'Don't let even a cat into the house,' she said fiercely, raising a warning finger. 'And do not think that I shall not know what you do or who comes to you, for Mr. Gasser can see the house plainly, and I have only to ask him and he will tell me who has called—a minister dare not lie.'

'Berkeley says one does not always see correctly,' replied Mr. Mowlem. Mrs. Mowlem took up her coat and went off without replying.

Mr. Mowlem had looked forward to this Saturday because Mr. Gasser had said that his friend might love, and, as he was the friend he meant, he thought he could love. At least he meant to try.

As soon as the carrier's van that carried Mrs. Mowlem was gone safely out of the village, Mr. Mowlem moved out of his chair, opened the front door, and sat down in the porch, hoping that the happy chance would come and that he might see Susanna.

When his wife was at home, Mr. Mowlem could hardly look at all across the meadow and over the lane at Mr. Gasser's cottage. But now he could look as long as he chose, and some time or other he would be sure to see Susanna.

All the morning Mr. Mowlem looked, but not a sign did he see of the young girl for whom he had a friendly love. When three o'clock came and Mr. Mowlem was beginning to be a little sad, for the hour must soon come for Mrs. Mowlem to return, he suddenly began to tremble, for there was Susanna coming directly to him, along the field-path, with a letter in her hand.

Mr. Mowlem watched her, at first friendly, then greedily. Every movement of Susanna's was the movement of a girl. She walked lightly, with a happy grace, as if God were blessing her, and Mr. Mowlem was so

overpowered by his feelings that he could hardly wait for her to come to him, and would have hurried out to meet her, only he remembered that his wife had ordered him not to leave the house.

When Susanna came to the door and gave Mr. Mowlem the letter, he was so troubled that he could hardly speak, but at length he bid her sit beside him, in a voice that he knew was not his own.

Mr. Mowlem opened the letter and read it aloud.

'Be so good as to tell your friend,' wrote Mr. Gasser, 'that some one has said that it is impossible to love and be wise.'

Susanna did as she was bid; she sat down in the porch and seemed, by her looks, to like the place. She hoped that some one would see them.

'My friend is a fool,' exclaimed Mr. Mowlem, 'one of the biggest. Will you be so good as to give that as an answer to Mr. Gasser's letter.'

Susanna rose.

'Stay a little,' said Mr. Mowlem. 'I am a lonely man, and a worse fool than my friend, and I like to look at you.'

Susanna smiled and sat down again; Mr. Mowlem looked at his boots. He took his watch out of his pocket and shook his head.

'I believe it has stopped,' he said.

'What a pity,' murmured Susanna.

'I suppose there is no likelihood,' said Mr. Mowlem, beginning to feel a little braver, 'that Mr. Balliboy's car may have broken down.'

'He drives very carefully,' observed Susanna.

'Oh dear!' said Mr. Mowlem.

He held out his arms and caught Susanna in them. She laughed.

'You must be careful of my boots,' he said. Susanna nestled near to him. 'I am a fool,' said Mr. Mowlem.

'You're very knowing,' remarked Susanna.

After half an hour Susanna begged to be allowed to go, for her mistress, she said, expected her to lay the tea-table at the manse. Mr. Mowlem permitted her to depart, after thanking her for her kindness. Susanna ran merrily away.

Mr. Mowlem was just in time to seat himself in the parlour chair before his wife came in. She arrived in an ill temper.

'There's a green leaf lying in the porch,' she said. 'Who brought it there?'

'The dove,' replied Mr. Mowlem.

Mrs. Mowlem busied herself in laying the table for tea. . . .

For a while Mr. Mowlem was all happiness, but that state of mind was soon changed to fear. In the middle of the night, as he lay wide awake, a dreadful thought came to him. Mr. Gasser could see his porch quite plainly. What had he seen?

'What have I done? What did I do?' enquired Mr. Mowlem of himself. 'Can I say truthfully that I do not know whether Susanna is a boy or a girl? Alas, alas! she is a girl. No one,' he whispered, 'not even Bishop Berkeley, could have had Susanna sitting so near as she was to me without knowing that.'

He opened his eyes very wide. Had he, during the time that Susanna was with him, once looked at the manse? No, he had looked at his boots and at Susanna.

Mr. Mowlem's eyes opened even wider; he stared at the ceiling. A dim light—the new dawn—was come. Everything that had happened that same afternoon appeared to him now as lurid and terrible. Susanna's very goodness to him seemed to be dreadful. How disturbed he had been when she had said, 'Don't be afraid of kissing me, I'm not sugar!'

She couldn't have been kinder, and he couldn't have been more loving. Susanna was so good that all evil must have fled from her. It was all friendly love—friendly love that had been, that afternoon, a little inquisitive.

'Ah!' thought Mr. Mowlem, 'had it but been Lord Bacon in the porch at the manse, instead of Mr. Gasser—or God Himself.' Mr. Mowlem wished that it had been God. He could have explained to Him how it all happened. Why had God made Susanna so kind, so pretty, and so loving? God knew that he, Mr. Mowlem, was an old man, retired, that he had to sit in a parlour chair all day, and could not look out of the window while his wife was in the room. And of course God knew what the laughing body of a young girl was like.

'She only blushed once,' he groaned, as the light slowly filled the room. 'She thought I looked lonely, and would run over again some Saturday and

talk for a little. Oh, but Mr. Gasser must have been in his porch!' Mr. Mowlem trembled so that the bed rocked. He sighed dolefully and fell asleep.

The next morning he awoke very sad. He wished that the Saturday afternoon could be blotted out, that the day had never been. He could not bear that his friend, Mr. Gasser, whom he reverenced so much, should think any evil of him. Mr. Gasser, having seen a great deal, might think that more had happened. Would Mr. Gasser accuse him openly before all men of wantoning with a maid? Mr. Gasser might preach a special sermon concerning him, calling him a son of Belial—or worse. But he, Mr. Mowlem, would answer him. Yes, he wouldn't be afraid. He would speak as well as he knew how. He would name Jesus.

'Is not all true love wanton if real life be in it?' he would say. 'How else, unless led by his wonderful and wanton love, could Jesus have allowed Himself to be hanged upon the Cross?' Susanna had laughed, and he had loved her. What of it? . . .

Mr. Gasser called as usual that Sunday afternoon, and the two friends walked together to the little hill.

At every remark that Mr. Gasser made during the walk, Mr. Mowlem started and trembled, so that his friend feared that he could not be well, and, wishing to put him more at his ease, he enquired of him how he had spent the Saturday, whether he had walked out at all, or merely remained in the garden as the day had been so fine?

'I really cannot remember what I did,' replied Mr. Mowlem, and added hurriedly, 'Do be so kind, Mr. Gasser, as to explain to me a little further Bishop Berkeley's theory of the universe.'

They were resting upon the hill and Mr. Gasser, looking across the valley, saw what might have been one or two persons resting in a pleasant field.

'You see something there,' said Mr. Gasser, pointing with his hand to the spot.

'Yes,' replied Mr. Mowlem, 'I do. Certainly there is something that I do not take to be a log of wood.'

'In Berkeley's *Alciphron*,' said Mr. Gasser, settling himself more comfortably upon the grass, 'he proves clearly and to the satisfaction of every honest man, that a little round tower in the distance is not a tower at all, but a great many other things as well. And so, what we both see across

there under the ash tree in Mr. Topp's meadow—that appears to us to be a young man or a young woman, or even both together—may be really an old hog, or a couple of young swine. It might be a goose even. You may think it a girl, I may consider it to be a creature with four legs. And therefore, what each of us sees is not a real thing at all, because we neither of us see the same thing.'

'But suppose we were a little nearer and could see more clearly?' murmured Mr. Mowlem.

'Even then we would see differently,' replied Mr. Gasser, picking a little thyme and putting it to his nose, 'for even supposing that we could see the object clearly enough to be sure that the thing we see is a woman and not Mr. Topp's white-and-black sow, one of us might take it to be Mrs. Gasser and the other might believe it was Mrs. Mowlem. And if it is not what we think, it must be nothing.'

Mr. Mowlem gave a relieved sigh. He walked home in a happier manner, and invited Mr. Gasser to go as far as his house with him. Mr. Gasser, from his own steps, looking across the field, said decidedly, 'I have not time to go with you now, Mr. Mowlem, and isn't it curious how near your porch looks this afternoon? I believe I could see a kitten if there was one in it.'

'It might be a hedgehog,' said Mr. Mowlem.

Mr. Mowlem hardly said good-bye. He was sure now that Mr. Gasser had seen them, and the evening sermon that the good gentleman preached made Mr. Mowlem the more certain. The sermon was entirely about the wickedness of wanton dalliance that leads to worse. And Mr. Mowlem, hardly knowing in which direction to look, at length decided to close his eyes and pretend to be asleep.

At home all the next week he sat in his chair. He felt a very old man and, he feared, a wicked one. He must have been that, for what right had he to find pleasure in Susanna? Others had that right—the rude louts of the village who had a mind to her, as Mr. Mowlem knew. Susanna was made for them. He never should have looked at her. Why had he looked?

Mr. Gasser would feel, and most properly too, thought Mr. Mowlem, that it was his duty—as a warning to others—to tell every one what he had seen happen in the porch. Mrs. Mowlem would hear of it, and draw the heavy parlour curtains for ever upon him and order him to keep from the porch, so that Susanna would be entirely blotted out from him for ever.

Never before had Mr. Mowlem been so despairing. The hours passed slowly, and every moment he expected that Mr. Gasser would come and upbraid him with his fault. The harmless pleasure of the porch would become a horrible sin upon the house-top. He would be pointed at, derided; if he so much as appeared at his own doorway there would be shouts of laughter, and the boys would wait and pounce upon Susanna, considering her now as their fair prey.

But what had he done? There was no resisting Susanna. Had not she brought to him the first green leaf, that showed that the waters of age had not altogether drowned him? . . .

When his wife had gone to town—for another Saturday had come—Mr. Mowlem sat in the porch, fearing and yet loving, repenting and yet wanting, hoping that Susanna would not come to him, and yet wishing that she might.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Mowlem remembered that his wife had told him that Mrs. Gasser was going to accompany her to Maidenbridge that same day, so that the two together might the better select a new hat for the minister's lady. Mr. Mowlem, remembering this, began to wonder what Mr. Gasser was doing, and on looking across at his home, he saw his friend sitting in his porch. He watched him, for he thought he might as well look at Mr. Gasser as at a green field.

Mr. Mowlem suddenly jumped up, and as suddenly sat down again.

Mr. Gasser was not alone: near to him a woman was seated, to whom Mr. Gasser was behaving very kindly.

'Who could she be?' wondered Mr. Mowlem, But he did not wonder for long. He knew her kind ways, he saw her move nearer to Mr. Gasser; it must be Susanna!

Mr. Mowlem fixed his eyes upon the pair. They were very loving towards each other. Mr. Gasser wore his usual black clothes, Susanna was in white. The colours made a nice match of it. Sometimes one colour, sometimes the other showed the most.

Mr. Mowlem remembered Bishop Berkeley.

Mr. Mowlem sighed deeply, A heavy load departed from him. Evidently God must have told Mr. Gasser to ease his friend's mind. And what other way could be better, than to behave as Mr. Mowlem had behaved, and with the same girl?

‘Mr. Gasser is a good man,’ thought Mr. Mowlem. ‘He is being kind to Susanna; they love each other, I love them, and what have I to fear.’

A great happiness visited Mr. Mowlem’s heart. He walked in the garden, he even went into the meadow. He did not care whether his boots were made yellow by the buttercups, he did not care what his wife would say when she came home. . . .

When, upon the Sunday, Mr. Gasser and Mr. Mowlem were together upon the hill, they forgot philosophy and remained seated happily in the sunshine. And, as they sat there contentedly, Mr. Gasser began to speak about the joys and comforts of married life.

‘My wife never went to Maidenbridge yesterday,’ he said, ‘she preferred to stay with me, and we sat together in the porch.’

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Mr. Mowlem.

‘And you,’ said Mr. Gasser, ‘were just as happy in your porch only a week ago.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Mowlem.

ARCHDEACON TRUGGIN

The Reverend Silas Dottery, the Rector of Tadnol and late Fellow of Benet College, Cambridge—a College that a poet commends as containing no backsliders—was a worthy minister as well as an historian of merit. During his fellowship and before he retired to the College benefice at Tadnol, Mr. Dottery had learnt two very important things that he lived up to very properly—one being to dine at eight exactly, the other to have a proper contempt for all women, whether they were in health or in sickness.

'It is Nature's folly,' Mr. Dottery would say, 'and a man's misfortune, that he has to have a mother, but there let the matter end. But not so our dinner, for that very proper duty to our body must recur diurnally.'

Mr. Dottery was as good as his word. He dined religiously, and woe be to any of his parishioners who disturbed him at his wine! If by any chance an unlucky petitioner called for charity or advice when the walnuts were upon the table and the bottle near to them, Mr. Dottery's housekeeper, Mrs. Taste, would stand at the back door and hold up her hands in horror and deny admittance. When the caller was impenitent and demanded attention, Mrs. Taste would reply—as her master had directed—that he was at prayers and could not be disturbed.

But in a village, as well as in a town, there is one visitor who will come, however much men and women try to prevent his arrival, who is just as ready to shatter the peace and contentment of a ripe university scholar as of a sow-gelder. This intruder, who must have known that Mr. Dottery, though indolent, wished to perform the rites of the Church—of course, at proper and convenient times—would sometimes rudely lay an unhappy man or woman by the heels so that their limbs shook and their teeth chattered and the dull glassy appearance of their eyes showed unmistakably that they were dying.

'Death is very inconsiderate,' Mr. Dottery used to say, 'for as soon as ever I crack a walnut and fill my glass, there is a soft knock at the door and Mrs. Taste calls me out to go to some foolish fellow who must needs, for his last hour, choose my dinner-time.'

Whenever this happened, and it was a man who was dying, Mr. Dottery would hasten—for he was a man too—with a sigh, and attend to the sick one's needs; but, if it happened to be a woman who was snared by the ill-mannered angel, Mr. Dottery would observe a little warmly to Mrs. Taste:

‘It’s most indecent how they trouble me, and, besides, they always think themselves dying, when every one knows that a woman has more lives than a mousing cat!’

In order to prevent such an unpleasant event at such a pleasant time from occurring too often—or, at least, to prevent himself from being sent for—Mr. Dottery wrote a sermon instead of borrowing, as he used often to do, one of Dr. Donne’s, and read it out very slowly—so that all might understand—to the somewhat meagre congregation at Tadnol Church upon a Sunday afternoon.

‘Dying,’ he observed, holding up one of his hands in a sunbeam, as if it held a glass of wine in it, ‘is only a vulgar experience, and one has to put up with it. To be destroyed by death is as necessary and as foolish an act as being born of a woman. I have once or twice had the misfortune to peep into a cottage door when a baby is screaming, or a woman is in labour. Death is as nothing to such horrors. And, besides this consolation, will you be so kind as to remember that kings die as well as mole-catchers. Repent of your sins and sin no more, so that when you come to die you need trouble no one.’

For a long while after this sermon Mr. Dottery was left in peace to dine, and he always remembered to show his gratitude by sending a bottle of wine to the cottage where death was—as a reward to the mourners.

But the best care in the world, and even a wise sermon, cannot always prevent a good man from being interrupted at his chief meal. A frosty day happened to come in December, so that Mr. Dottery was beguiled by the crisp hardness of the roads to take a longer walk than usual. He was not a man to go much abroad, and never stirred from his study in the morning, when his books and letters needed him, but, if he did go out, it was after his tea, that he took early.

This frosty day brought back to Mr. Dottery’s mind that he had once been a boy, and so he walked out upon the heath and even threw a stone upon a pond that was covered with ice, to see if the pond bore. As he returned home, noticing, as though they were newly created, the rooks in the darkening skies, Mr. Dottery went by a lonely cottage upon the border of the heath, from the upper window of which he heard the mournful groans of a dying woman. Mr. Dottery looked at his watch and began to hurry, never turning his head, for he did not know whether he might not be called if he looked back.

The Norbury carrier, Mr. Balliboy, overtook Mr. Dottery before he reached the village and informed him that he had a case of wine to deliver at

the Rectory.

‘I trust you haven’t tapped it,’ said Mr. Dottery, forgetting, for a moment, that the case was not a barrel—for he had read only that morning how a cask of wine sent to Erasmus at Cambridge had been half drunk and then filled with water from a duckpond, by the sottish carriers. The van passed on, Mr. Balliboy merely observing to a companion that ‘there wouldn’t be much wine left for a poor man if they clergy were all in Heaven,’ and Mr. Dottery followed as fast as he could walk.

Though he knew the wine—College port—must have been a little shaken by the journey, yet Mr. Dottery had a mind to sample it that evening, and, as soon as he reached the Rectory, he bid Mrs. Taste have the case unpacked and set a bottle upon the table for dinner.

As every one knows, a good brisk walk in an eager and nipping air will give an honest man—even though he be a scholar as well—a very good appetite, that is likely to agree pretty well with rich hare soup, a large carp cooked in as much claret wine as will cover him, together with five whole onions, twenty pickled oysters, and three anchovies, a plump pheasant, an apple-tart, well spiced, to be followed by large Spanish olives and crisp walnuts. The dinner was taken with all formality and decorum, and was at length over. Mr. Dottery, leaning back in his chair, poured out for himself a glass of the new wine and sipped it. He held up the glass to the lamp—the wine must have travelled easily, for it tasted as smooth and fruity as though it had been brought up direct from the Benet cellars and poured out by the College butler. Mr. Dottery took another sip—his best hour of the day had come—when, alas! there came a knock at the door.

‘If you please, sir, Sexton Truggin wishes to speak to you.’

‘Inform him,’ said Mr. Dottery, ‘that I am busy meditating upon original or birth sin, and that I cannot be disturbed.’

‘ ’Tis a message of death,’ observed Mrs. Taste.

Mr. Dottery frowned.

‘Invite Truggin to enter,’ he said.

Mr. John Truggin, the Tadnol sexton, entered the Rectory dining-room with his usual slow step, carrying his hat in his hand.

‘It’s a stranger,’ observed Mr. Truggin affably, ‘a woman, whose name be Thomas, who be come to heath cottage to die.’

Mr. Dottery muttered a word into his beard, that the sexton caught the sound of.

‘ ’Tis just that Damnation that Mrs. Thomas do want ’ee to save she from,’ said Mr. Truggin.

‘Won’t she wait till to-morrow?’ enquired the minister.

‘No, she do mean to die now,’ replied the sexton.

‘Impossible woman!’ said Mr. Dottery.

‘She ’ave a bag of money under bedclothes,’ whispered Mr. Truggin, ‘and she be afeared they t’other women will take ’en. She do say that she won’t entrust thik money to none but a pastor.’

‘She’s a papist,’ cried Mr. Dottery gleefully. ‘She must be a papist!’

‘No, she bain’t,’ said Mr. Truggin, ‘for she do call out for the Protestant Church minister.’

Mr. Dottery stared hard at the sexton.

‘This silly woman who has come to Tadnol to die has never seen me,’ he said meditatively.

‘No, nor me neither,’ observed Mr. Truggin.

‘I believe,’ remarked Mr. Dottery, looking, not at the sexton but at the wine bottle, ‘that you and I, Truggin, have the same length of beard, and I should take it kindly if you would drink a glass of this port wine.’

Mr. Truggin raised the glass to his lips and drank it off. Mr. Dottery watched him in horror.

‘Oh, it’s not beer, you know,’ he murmured.

‘ ’Tis drink,’ responded the sexton.

Mr. Dottery poured out another.

‘You are a church officer,’ said Mr. Dottery, ‘and no harm could be done to the Church, or to the king, if you visited this poor woman and consoled her in her last hour. Take another glass, sexton.’

Mr. Dottery looked at the bottle a little sadly.

‘My coat and hat are in the hall,’ he said. ‘You had better wear them, and here is a prayer book with the markers in the right place. Now go, Truggin, and be sure you absolve her from all her sins, and be so good as to ask Mrs. Taste to bring me another bottle.’

Mr. Truggin proudly clad himself in his master's great-coat, and fixing the Rector's hat safe upon his head, he went out into the lane. The wine that he had drunk filled him with happy thoughts, though his errand was a sad one. His feet pattered merrily upon the hard road, and he wondered what honourable Church title to call himself by.

He debated this important matter until he reached the heath cottage and satisfied himself, by peeping in at the window, that the women who were looking after the dying one, and were just then employed in eating their own supper, were strangers to him.

Mr. Truggin knocked softly at the door.

The two women—relations of Mrs. Thomas who had followed her from the town in the hopes of getting for themselves the ten pounds in gold that the sick woman was known to possess—rose from the table, and one of them opened the door.

'I be Archdeacon Truggin,' said the sexton.

'Her breath do rattle,' said the woman excitedly, 'and thee best be quick, for she do still hold thik money firm.'

'It isn't proper to hurry an archdeacon,' answered the sexton, frowning, 'nor to name money before a great religious man.'

The women moved back humbly. Mr. Truggin climbed the stairs and entered the death chamber.

'Who be you?' asked Mrs. Thomas faintly.

'I bain't nothing ugly,' replied the sexton. 'I be only an archdeacon.'

'And I be a sinner,' muttered Mrs. Thomas.

'Then Heaven be the place for 'ee,' said Mr. Truggin cheerfully.

Mrs. Thomas gasped. When she was a little easier she said mournfully, 'I fear I can't take me money there.'

'No,' said Mr. Truggin, drawing near, ' 'tis to Hell thee 'd carry thik.'

'Oh, I don't want to go there,' sighed Mrs. Thomas, 'but they women do want to steal it from I.'

'Thee won't need no money in Heaven,' whispered Mr. Truggin, 'for they streets be all littered in golden sovereigns.'

The woman grew weaker.

‘Give thik money to a poor man and thee ’ll have treasure in Heaven,’ he said.

‘Do thee know of one,’ asked Mrs. Thomas, ‘for I don’t care who do have ’en so long as they women don’t rob I.’

‘The sexton here be poor and despised,’ murmured Mr. Truggin.

‘Let ’e have ’en, so I may be saved,’ said Mrs. Thomas. ‘An’ here be the bag.’

Mr. Truggin rose gladly and buttoned the money away into his coat.

‘They devils will lose ’ee now,’ he said gaily, ‘and if heavenly folk do ask who sent ’ee there, say ’twas Archdeacon Truggin.’

THE BAKED MOLE

If any one at Dodderdown took a special interest in Mr. Meek, other than the necessary interest that the moles took in him, that person was Mr. Meek's son, Jimmy.

Others, of course, saw Mr. Meek, but not in the same way as his son saw him, who, though but seven years old, had a very inquisitive mind.

Every Sunday Mr. Meek was properly noticed by the congregation in church and by Mr. Hayball, the clergyman. The good people had long ago decided that Mr. Meek was a very religious man, who was taken every Sunday to church by his own walking-stick.

Along the lane to the church, Mr. Meek's walking-stick, a finely varnished one with a good crooked handle, would conduct Mr. Meek when the first bell rang, and would warily touch the mud in the lane, but tap the church carpet possessively. That Mr. Meek was a good man and a kind one every one believed, for he could be nothing else with such a stick and with such a beard—a beard that exactly resembled St. Peter's that was always so much admired in the east window.

Whenever Mr. Hayball referred to the way that God chastens the faithful, he would think of Mr. Meek, whose wife lay stricken with a cancer and who was utterly unable to leave her bed.

Perhaps it may have been Sarah Meek's fault that she wasn't so much interested in her husband as her son Jimmy, for, instead of being grateful to him for his care of her, she would sometimes remark to a neighbour that she wanted to die.

Perhaps this want came because kind Mr. Meek was always reminding her that she was no use to him. The neighbour, who knew what a good church-goer Mr. Meek was, advised Sarah to be patient, for, no doubt, Mr. Meek went to church to pray for her recovery.

' 'E do want I to get well,' Mrs. Meek replied, 'only to skin they moles.'

One can well imagine that illness at home, though it had its inconveniences, could never be allowed, by so good a man as Mr. Meek, to interrupt his daily toil; for Mr. Meek was known far and wide as the best mole-catcher in the county.

He had his customers, and many a fine lady in the county wore a coat made from the skins of his moles that Mrs. Meek, who was more clever than he was at this task, used to skin for him before she was taken ill.

Mr. Meek was always in the fields, unless the day was Sunday, either setting his traps or taking them up again. The traps he used were of various kinds, and included the old-fashioned rude snare that consisted of a bent stick with wire fastened to the end, that sometimes, though not always, caught the mole alive.

Mr. Meek allowed no vice, such as beer-drinking or tobacco-smoking, to interrupt or to interfere with his labours. He never drank anything but tea, and he used to tell the ladies he sold his moles to, that he never burnt money in his mouth.

Farmer Told was as glad when he saw Mr. Meek in his meadows as when he saw a black rook settle upon the back of one of his sheep to peck out the maggots. Mr. Told wasn't one of those who believe that anything that moves up the soil and makes heaps of it, such as the moles or the worms, could in any way be of use to the land; and so, when he saw Mr. Meek, he would always point him out as a good man who was so clever at destroying the many creatures that hurt the poor farmer. Mr. Told would even go so far as to praise Mr. Meek to the drinkers who visited the inn.

'A mole,' Mr. Told would say, 'be an animal that Meek do know about.'

'Some folk,' Mr. Told would continue, 'do fancy that a mole be as foolish as a maiden, and do walk into a trap to please 'isself.'

Mr. Told would finish his glass, and, after looking round at the company as an important person does who wants to draw all attention to himself, he said impressively: 'Meek do love they creatures and do watch them.'

In order to show a little more exactly how Mr. Meek loved them, Mr. Told moved his empty glass along the bar table.

'Glass be a mole,' said Mr. Told. Every one looked at the glass that had been so unexpectedly transformed.

'A mole do move so,' and Mr. Told moved his glass and pointed to it with the heavy pipe that he held in his other hand.

'Thik be a travelling mole,' said Mr. Told, moving the glass slowly, 'and any woon of thee who don't know nothing would set the trap there.' Mr. Told pointed with his pipe to a part of the table to which he was moving his glass.

Suddenly he turned the glass to one side and brought his pipe down upon it with a crash. ‘But ’tis there Meek do ’ave ’im,’ he shouted.

It sometimes happened that Mr. Hayball, clothed in his long black cassock, would walk up the church path with Mr. Meek, who always arrived early on Sundays. Upon one of these occasions when Mr. Meek, together with the walking-stick, accompanied the clergyman, Mr. Hayball chanced to notice that Mr. Meek was looking very intently at the grass by the path side. Mr. Hayball looked too and noticed that the grass moved. At the same moment, Mr. Meek made an odd sound in his throat like an old dog who means to spring.

Mr. Hayball noticed the sound and said amiably: ‘You know you have my permission, Mr. Meek, to trap the moles here.’

Mr. Meek looked aside, his walking-stick tapped the church path, he hadn’t meant to do anything so wicked as to look at a mole on the Sabbath day.

Mr. Meek lived so good a life, so devout and so well ordered, that had it not been for his son Jimmy, no short-story reader, if we except the angels, would ever have heard of him.

But, with Jimmy always watching his father, things can be told.

Curiously enough, Mr. Meek wasn’t the sort of gentleman who liked to be watched, and, whenever Jimmy followed him into the meadows to see how many moles he caught, Mr. Meek was obliged to remind his son by a pretty sharp box upon the ear, that had more than once laid Jimmy flat, that the proper place for a little boy to play was in the village lane.

The fact that his father didn’t wish to be watched, except in church where both he and his walking-stick behaved exceptionally well, made Jimmy all the more eager to see what he did, and so he would follow him discreetly, though behind some thick hedge, whenever he could.

One afternoon Jimmy followed his father in this cautious manner, and saw him take six moles from the older kind of snares that didn’t always kill them. There were three dead ones, and these Mr. Meek put into a bag that he carried, while three that Jimmy saw were still living, his father put carefully in the inner pocket of his coat.

Jimmy hadn’t watched his father for nothing. He was glad he had come, and now, of course, he wished to learn what Mr. Meek was going to do with the live moles that he had hidden so carefully.

That evening the full moon made all Dodder as bright as day. Mr. Meek ate his tea without speaking, and, when he had finished, he nodded to his walking-stick and rose from the table. Mr. Meek went out into the lane and Jimmy followed his father at a very safe distance. Jimmy crept along in the shadow of the hedge.

Mr. Meek took the way to the church. But, instead of going in at the gate, he passed round by the churchyard until he came to where he knew no one could see him from the lane, and then he climbed over the wall. Jimmy followed too, and, coming to a tree that hid him, he peeped at his father and saw what he did.

Mr. Meek, who evidently believed himself to be entirely alone, for a churchyard at night isn't often visited, began to speak aloud in a jocose manner, as he sometimes used to do at home when he heard his wife groaning.

'A woman,' said Mr. Meek, 'who don't skin no moles bain't no good to I, and so 'tis best for we all that she be made well; a churchyard mole that be baked alive be the cure—an' a baked mole be good meat.

' 'Twas a pity,' continued Mr. Meek, 'that thik mole Parson did see did burrow so deep in ground that I lost 'en.'

Jimmy watched. His father now sat down upon a flat tombstone in the same cautious manner as he used to sit in his church pew. He took three live moles out of his pocket and allowed them to run about the stone.

'Poor animals,' said kind Mr. Meek with a chuckle, 'they don't know where they be to, but I bain't going to bake none of 'ee now, for thee bain't fat enough for table.' Mr. Meek let the moles burrow into the soft grass.

'Clergyman do say,' remarked Mr. Meek pleasantly, looking at the mounds around him, 'that most of these that do bide here will be baked alive too, as a cure for their wicked ways, but Meek be different.' Mr. Meek smiled. ' 'Tis true,' he said, 'that worms be plentiful, an' as they do live so well 'tis most like they be slow crawlers, an' a churchyard mole be the woon to grow fat; in a month's time I will have 'en.' Mr. Meek rose from the stone as if he were about to sing a hymn. Jimmy ran home. . . .

During the next four weeks Jimmy played in the lanes, but sometimes, when no one was in the kitchen, he would open the oven door and peep in.

Mrs. Meek grew worse than ever.

Every Sunday, according to his custom, Mr. Meek would go to church, and as he walked up the path carrying his walking-stick, he would look at the green grass on either side of the path.

The Sunday before the moon was full Mr. Hayball took his text from the third chapter of Daniel and described how awful the burning fiery furnace must have been into which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown. When Mr. Hayball mentioned the furnace, Jimmy, who blew the organ, happened to look at his father and saw that he was smiling.

On the Monday Jimmy noticed that, though the evening was mild for November, his father had heaped coals upon the fire, so that the oven would certainly be hot enough to cure any Shadrach of his faith had he been thrown into it. After he had put on the coals, Mr. Meek went out into the lane and Jimmy followed.

In the churchyard and near to the flat stone, Mr. Meek found a fat mole caught alive in one of his snares. Jimmy ran home, and his father, when he came, saw his son looking into the fire.

Mr. Meek placed the mole upon the table and admired it.

‘ ’Tis a pity,’ he said, ‘to spoil ’is coat, but what be the use of a woman who do only stay and groan, and don’t skin no moles.’

As if in answer to Mr. Meek, a groan that sounded like her last came from Mrs. Meek, who lay upstairs.

Mr. Meek told Jimmy to look to the mole and went to his wife. That groan had been her last. Mr. Meek returned to the kitchen and watched the fat mole that Jimmy was playing with.

‘Mole do fancy,’ said Mr. Meek, smiling,’ that now Sarah be dead, I be going to be kind and let the cat ’ave ’im.’

Jimmy pointed to the oven.

Mr. Meek smiled.

ANOTHER GODIVA

Mr. Dibben, the curate in charge of Little Madder, had one wish in his heart, and that wish was to give the village a new playground. All things he knew were possible to God, and some things, he fancied, were possible to a rather long, lean, and freckled curate.

Mr. Dibben possessed red hair, his face was sallow, and those loose members of his body—his legs and arms—were as unwieldy as though they had belonged to Dr. Johnson himself.

Mr. Dibben had one great idea, which was that outdoor games do both exercise the body and purge and purify the inward mind. Dances, too, upon the green sward, and such like happy merriment, Mr. Dibben would affirm can do no harm.

'Satan,' he said, 'had always disliked a concertina, and, if only old John Goddy had a field to play in, the Devil would never have followed Minnie Masters into Byepath meadow.'

Mr. Dibben believed that if he could but persuade old Lord Bullman—whose head was near as thick as one of his own prize steers—to give the field, John would play, the nimble ball be bowled and batted, children would skip and leap, and, towards evening, the dancers would come. Mr. Dibben believed that he had only to ask—and receive.

Mr. Dibben went to the squire and asked for the field. He was ashamed, he said, to speak to so great a nobleman upon so little a matter. Mr. Dibben blushed meekly and awaited the answer.

'No,' replied Lord Bullman, 'we must not demoralise the poor, for you may be sure, Dibben, that if I give them the field, and charge a shilling a year for it as you suggest—they'll play football upon a Sunday.'

'But even that game, my lord,' replied Mr. Dibben modestly, 'played upon the Sabbath, would be more nice and proper than what they do now down Love Lane.'

'Will you kindly remember, sir,' said Lord Bullman, sternly, 'that our forefathers lost America, and that we lack soldiers.'

Mr. Dibben turned away, ashamed. He walked sadly to the Rectory. On his way there he passed old John Goddy, who was leaning over Farmer

Lord's sty, playing his concertina to the pigs.

At the Rectory Mr. Dibben remembered that Milton had used a swing with which to amuse and exercise himself in his back garden. Though the squire possessed the earth, Mr. Dibben believed that the air was the people's. Upon the village green there was a fine oak; Mr. Dibben hung a swing upon one of its branches.

The swing was a great success, and the only gloomy voice on the subject was Lord Bullman's, who addressed Mr. Dibben after the Sunday service, and told him that one day he 'd be sorry he hung it there.

The swing did a little to prevent certain wanderers from visiting Love Lane; the people enjoyed it; but of course Mr. Dibben knew that, the excitement over, this new toy would soon go, and he still hoped for the field.

A little while after Mr. Dibben hung up the swing, Lord Bullman married his young bride, whose name was Godiva. He had already buried three of them, and so she was his fourth. Godiva was only twenty; she looked such a young, meek thing at the altar that Mr. Dibben couldn't help sighing three times very sadly when the service was ended.

But he had another reason for his sighs than that Lord Bullman had married such a fair and lovely young girl, for the people of Little Madder were growing tired of the swing. The young men and maids, instead of spending the Sunday evening harmlessly in swinging, deserted this pastime and wandered down the wanton lane again. Mr. Dibben wished for the playing-field more than ever. . . .

One Sunday in July, after the evening service, the curate happened to notice on his way from the church to the Rectory that the swing was being used again. Evidently some village girl was swinging upon it. Mr. Dibben was glad—the summer was glad too, and all the little gnats, for the evening was very still, were dancing with delight.

Mr. Dibben looked anxiously; no one seemed to be swinging this young girl. But there she certainly was, in a white frock, pulling the ropes and kicking out her legs so that she kicked them into the leaves above her. Mr. Dibben strode down to the oak, his cassock flapping against his legs. He came to the swing and saw the Lady Godiva. . . .

The next day a small boy was playing in the lane, because there was nowhere else for him to play, and a motor-car, passing swiftly by, knocked him into the hedge and broke his leg. A little later a bull, that had got loose, tossed a tiny girl who was innocently spinning her top in the road. These

accidents determined Mr. Dibben to make another attempt to get the field from the squire.

Hoping to find the Lady and Lord Bullman at home, Mr. Dibben took out a clean collar from his drawer, dressed himself in his sleekest coat, and walked with a long stride from the Rectory to the Hall.

The walk was pleasant, but it was a little spoilt for Mr. Dibben, because everywhere the children played in the lane, and, having no daisies to throw at one another, they threw stones instead. For the Madder children had grown tired of the swing.

Mr. Dibben found the Lord and Lady at tea upon a fair lawn that resembled the softest green carpet. Mr. Dibben respectfully took a chair that the manservant—an old and wise retainer—had placed next to Godiva's.

Mr. Dibben was eloquent, he had his subject not only upon his tongue, but in his heart too. He said how happy are all those who play games in a green meadow. He enlarged the subject. He spoke in praise of dancing and cricket, of ring-a-ring o' roses, and ninepins.

While Mr. Dibben talked, the Lady Godiva watched him silently. His animated look, his raised head showed her that his cause was just, and that she ought to espouse it. The lady looked at her husband, who was glum and gloomy, while Mr. Dibben, his colour heightened, his heart on fire, appeared to her to be a saviour of the people.

As soon as Mr. Dibben finished his pleading, he threw himself upon his knees before the squire and, with his hands clasped, he begged for the gift to the village of the playground. He had hardly knelt a moment when he was aware that the Lady Godiva was kneeling beside him and mingling her entreaties with his own words.

They remained in this posture when the servant came to remove the tray, but he, having lived all his life in the oldest families, had learnt, while performing his own duties, to notice nothing.

Lord Bullman looked sternly at his wife.

'If,' he said, 'on next Sunday at one o'clock you ride naked in the oak tree swing, I will give the field to the village.'

Mr. Dibben flushed in righteous anger and stood up. The Lady Godiva laughed.

'Oh, I shan't mind that,' she said, 'for, of course, Mr. Dibben will tell all the people to remain at home.'

‘Remember Coventry,’ said Lord Bullman, rising and strolling to the house.

Lady Godiva turned to Mr. Dibben.

‘Where am I to undress?’ she asked.

‘You have only, madam,’ Mr. Dibben replied, ‘to climb into the oak tree and the leaves will protect you.’

‘My new maid, Mrs. Flew, can’t climb trees,’ observed the lady, ‘and some one must be there to see if my curls are tidy.’

‘I will attend you myself, blindfold,’ said Mr. Dibben, ‘for I know I can climb.’

‘Then you won’t see my curls,’ laughed the lady.

‘I can feel them,’ replied Mr. Dibben.

In order to fancy how she would look nakedly swinging, Lady Godiva stood at the large dining-room window, where it was agreed Lord Bullman should stand to see the meadow lost or won.

‘One could only just see from here that a person was naked, and that ’s all,’ said Godiva.

Lord Bullman shrugged his shoulders.

‘Quite enough for me,’ he said grimly.

Before the Sunday came Mr. Dibben called together the people and explained to them the hard conditions by which the field might be won.

‘I feel sure,’ he said, ‘that every one will be loyal to the lady and keep indoors, and that those who live near to the oak will pull down their blinds, while I alone will assist the lady to climb the tree and then blindfold my eyes. It is proper that I should be there,’ said Mr. Dibben with dignity, ‘for the little red squirrel who lives in the oak is very naughty and inquisitive.’ And then Mr. Dibben told the story of Coventry.

‘How many peeping Toms were there?’ asked a voice when he had done.

‘Only one,’ replied Mr. Dibben. . . .

The day in which the nice behaviour of the village was to be so dangerously tested soon came, and Lady Godiva, looking extremely pretty in a white frock with a black ribbon round her neck, walked boldly to the

green, where she was joined by Mr. Dibben, who held a large red handkerchief in his hand. Both climbed into the tree together.

The whole of Madder was entirely empty when the two climbed into the tree, but, as soon as they were safely within the hidden shelter of the lofty boughs, all the population came out of their doors as if for a festival and surrounded the oak.

Up amid the boughs, Godiva, with a swiftness and grace that are easy to imagine—and immensely admired by the naughty little squirrel—slipped out of her garments, while Mr. Dibben, with his eyes tightly bandaged, listened for danger.

'Oh!' cried Godiva, swinging airily upon a high bough. 'Oh, do look, Mr. Dibben, for I believe all the village is here.'

Mr. Dibben, hearing her sudden call and forgetting, in the excitement of the moment, why he had bandaged his eyes, pulled off his handkerchief and looked at Godiva.

'Ah!' sighed Mr. Dibben,' what loveliness!'

Godiva pouted.

'To look at me isn't going to be any help to get the playground, Mr. Dibben,' she said. 'And to be sure I'm not going down the tree to swing before all that horrid crowd in this condition.'

Mr. Dibben looked at her angrily.

'With the playing-field so nearly won,' he called, 'and with me looking at you, what have you to be ashamed of? You know you're only a woman.'

'A pretty one, please, Mr. Dibben,' murmured the lady.

'I don't mean that the young people should lose their pleasure because of your prudish nonsense,' he said.

The Lady Godiva climbed lightly a little nearer to Mr. Dibben; she whispered something into his ear.

'He will never know the difference all this way off,' she said.

Mr. Dibben groaned.

'It will be deceiving my lord,' he said.

'That won't matter,' she observed.

'Immodest woman!' cried Mr. Dibben despairingly. . . .

The good people below were, as we may well expect, all impatient for the show. They peered up at the hidden arbour of leaves, expecting every moment a pair of the whitest and prettiest legs in the world to descend cautiously.

But, as time went on, they began to be a little impatient and, although John Goddy played many a merry tune to them to keep them happy, yet there were those who said that a lady needn't take quite so long to undress, even though she was in a tree.

One boy, whose name happened to be Tom, was bold enough to climb upon the lowest branch of the oak, in order, so he said, 'to help the lady into her seat when she came.'

When one has looked for a long time for something unexpected, that something generally arrives with unexpected suddenness. Just as naughty Tom happened to look, for one moment, towards the ground, a nude figure stepped, or rather fell out of the oak, and in one instant sprang upon the swing with so much fury that it swung high, and, in the descent, Tom received a kick that not only injured his eyesight, but broke his head too.

The spectators turned away. The fury of the swinger passed all proper bounds. The swing appeared to be driven by a whirlwind.

John Goddy closed his eyes, tucked his concertina under his arm, and whistled.

PARSON SPARROW

The Reverend William Sparrow was very much disappointed. He had always believed that a good example worked miracles. He was sure that this would be so when he followed Mr. Loop in the cure.

Mr. Loop was dead, and for the credit of the church he died not a moment too soon. Mr. Loop had been untruthful, he was fond of the drink, he administered the Holy Communion in carpet slippers, and he often walked with Mrs. Betty Wing in Byepath meadow.

Mrs. Wing was a woman, and what more need be said—only that she was too buxom, too young, and too merry to be good, and she liked the meadow stile.

Mr. Loop's garden was so overgrown with great shrubs and brambles that it was hard—and even Mr. Loop had found it so—to discover the path to or from the gate. To remedy this, Mr. Loop had dropped bottles, empty ones, that guided him through the shrubbery when he wished to go to the church to preach a sermon, or to meet Mrs. Wing in Byepath meadow.

Mr. Sparrow soon altered all this. He worked harder than any labourer ever does, he cut the bushes, trimmed the hedges, and picked up everyone of the bottles with his own hands and buried them. He wished to remove every trace of Mr. Loop.

Mr. Sparrow had a soft, gentle look, he read Keble and Saint Augustine, and hired aged Mrs. Gale as his housekeeper because she was very ugly. Only to look at Mr. Sparrow once, and to notice what he did, was enough for any one, and every word said about him was the same. He was humble, he was kind, there was nothing more to be told.

Mr. Sparrow gave no one any trouble. The baker's account was cast and paid every fortnight, and everything was done so properly at the Rectory that nothing seemed to be done at all.

How different from Mr. Loop, who would be always causing some sensation or another! For when May Green was married to Tom Baker, Mr. Loop went down to the lych-gate to meet them and commenced the burial service, and it was said that he once tried to baptize Betty Wing in Byepath meadow, taking her into his arms as if she were a baby.

Now that everything was so well and christianly managed in the cure, who would have expected so sad a change to come over Honeyfield, that had been a decent enough village to live in before good Mr. Sparrow was settled there? Mr. Sparrow was all virtue, but the village soon became all sin.

As far as could be remembered in the past only Mr. Loop and Mrs. Wing had walked in Byepath meadow to behave naughtily. Only Mr. Loop had been the one to drop a baby at a christening, only Mr. Loop had told a lie in the pulpit, saying that he owed no man anything. The young girls used to be modest, they were now immodest. They would wait, by the gate into the Byepath meadow, and call to the young men, using unseemly gestures, to follow them to the stile. The old men were as bad as the young. They went to the Inn and met women there who hoped to be treated with port wine. Mr. Tidd, a gentleman who always watched to see what was happening, was heard to say that he wished Mr. Loop was back again, but that if he came he would certainly be extremely shocked by what he saw.

No one took all this new wickedness more to heart than Mr. Sparrow, who feared that he hadn't done his best, and redoubled his efforts for good. He had ever been frugal, but he now hardly ate anything at all. He begged and implored, but to no avail—all the people in Honeyfield were rushing helter-skelter and tumbling over one another to perdition.

Mr. Sparrow visited, all the money he saved he spent upon tracts, he hardly ever went to bed, he prayed night and day that the people should be saved from their sins, but nothing would do.

Children were born that never should have been born at all, and were not brought to the font, and not one candidate appeared for confirmation when Mr. Sparrow gave out from the pulpit that the Bishop was coming to lay on his hands at the next village. Mr. Sparrow found this neglect hard to bear because when Mr. Loop was Rector a large number entered their names, for they hoped that Mr. Loop would instruct them in the catechism with a bottle in one hand and a pipe in the other—and they were not disappointed.

One cannot help feeling sorry for Mr. Sparrow, but whatever he did, or tried to do, to stem the tide of wickedness that Mr. Tidd, the watcher, was so horrified to see, nothing was of any avail, and matters only went from bad to worse.

At last the naughtiness grew to such a pass that Mr. Sparrow received a letter from the Bishop informing him that he had heard sad accounts of the behaviour of the people whose souls were under his care, because since Mr.

Loop had died the people had given themselves up to the Devil and copied him in everything.

Mr. Sparrow cried over this letter.

‘Mrs. Gale,’ he said to his ugly housekeeper that same evening, ‘what can I do?’

‘You had better ask Mr. Tidd,’ replied Mrs. Gale.

Though Mr. Tidd wasn’t a holy one, he was always a watcher. He had once been in trade as a carpenter, but as the scraping of his jack-plane worried him he gave that up and became a bankrupt and a looker-on. No one was better suited as a watcher than Mr. Tidd, and no one was more religiously inquisitive to see what was happening. He would stand in the lanes, and if any one came up from behind him he would look over his left shoulder to see who it was.

Since he had given up his carpentry and taken to watching, Mr. Tidd had grown very wise, and if any one asked him a question Mr. Tidd would always give a reply that was much to his credit.

The May sun was shining and the little lambs were leaping innocently, which made Mr. Sparrow sigh the more because the young Honeyfield maidens were so unlike the lambs, when he walked down the lane to find Mr. Tidd. He approached him from behind, but Mr. Tidd looked over his shoulder and saw who was coming.

Mr. Sparrow came to the point at once, as a good man always should.

‘Why,’ he asked, ‘have the people grown so wicked since I have come amongst them, whereas with Mr. Loop as their Rector they had always been so good? Why, Mr. Tidd, do they never come to church to be christened, confirmed, or married?’

Mr. Tidd nodded at the lambs.

‘ ’Tis like this,’ said Mr. Tidd, ‘there bain’t no wickedness in high places for they to watch or talk of, so, in order to have something to say, they must be bad themselves.

‘Never a day did pass,’ continued Mr. Tidd, ‘when Mr. Loop was here, without there being a fine story to tell. If it wasn’t the slippers, ’twas a bottle, and if it wasn’t a bottle, ’twas Betty Wing. If a young man and maid did wander too far in they wide fields, they had so much to tell one another about the dreadful doings of Mr. Loop that they had neither time nor wish to

do nothing themselves, but now, alas!' sighed Mr. Tidd, 'I fear Hell will have them all.'

'Oh, what can I do to save them?' groaned Mr. Sparrow, holding up his hands in horror.

'Why,' replied Mr. Tidd coolly, 'thee must be a great fool if 'ee don't know how to be wicked.'

Mr. Sparrow stepped back a pace or two.

'You can never mean, Mr. Tidd, that I ought to sin so that the people should have something to talk about and so become good again.'

'There bain't no other way,' said Mr. Tidd, solemnly.

'And should I,' asked Mr. Sparrow, 'by sending my soul to perdition, peradventure save all the poor people who now sin so dreadfully?'

' 'Tis most likely thee would,' replied Mr. Tidd.

'But how can I?' exclaimed Mr. Sparrow.

'Oh, thee needn't do much,' said Mr. Tidd, smiling, 'for a little wickedness do make a lot of talk.'

'But a little wickedness is as damnable in God's eyes as a great deal.'

'Ah,' observed Mr. Tidd, nodding at a little leaping lamb, 'most like it be.'

'But I don't know how to begin,' observed Mr. Sparrow, tearfully.

Mr. Tidd regarded the good pastor for a while in silence.

'Thee don't look like a thief,' he said.

'I am very sorry,' replied Mr. Sparrow.

'Nor a liar, nor yet a drunkard.'

'I am most unfortunate,' sighed Mr. Sparrow.

'Now don't 'ee be worried,' remarked Mr. Tidd, 'for, thank the Lord, there be one sin that be easy.'

Mr. Sparrow blushed.

'Ah, ha!' said Mr. Tidd, 'I believe thee could talk to Betty Wing——'

Never did the manners of a village change so suddenly, and the very next day after Mr. Tidd had given his advice the people of Honeyfield, instead of

behaving improperly in divers ways, were all agog to hear what their minister had been doing, who had been noticed by Mr. Tidd to walk in Byepath meadow with Betty Wing, going towards the stile. It is true, as every one said, that they were but talking, but every great matter, Mr. Tidd observed, must have a small beginning.

The following Sunday the Honeyfield Church was well attended, all the village being there, in order to ask one another what the latest news was. Mrs. Wing was in the front pew, and every one listened to Mr. Sparrow's homily against wantonness with the gravest attention.

But that was not all, for when Mr. Sparrow gave out a notice that a confirmation would be held, twenty young persons presented themselves and, during the afternoon service, six children were brought to be baptized.

In a small time Mr. Sparrow was a Rural Dean.

CHRIST IN THE CUPBOARD

Mr. John Pie, a sober and a worthy man, was now in a good way of business. Mr. Pie possessed a large face, heavy hands, and a keen look—and he had once been poor.

When Mr. Pie was poor and worked as a day-labourer for Farmer Told, he, with the help of Betty, his wife, spent generously what they earned. When any one begged of them—and old Mrs. Crapper was always begging—they would bid her, or any others, share their meat, and Mrs. Crapper would say, after hoping first that she wasn't taking away the bread from the children, that 'John Pie didn't put Christ into the cupboard like some folk, but always had Him to sit at table.'

'And thee daren't refuse no beggar a crust with 'e here,' old Mrs. Crapper would shout out with her usual boisterous laugh that made the plates upon the dresser rattle and shake.

It is well understood that wealth is not increased by large acts of charity, and, though a man may believe that whoso giveth lendeth unto the Lord, it is easy for him also to wonder how soon the Lord will repay.

Mr. Pie began to change his manners as soon as his master gave him a young sow as a gift, because John had worked so industriously. This sow, as is the habit with lowly creatures, increased and multiplied, and within a year Mr. Pie held twenty pounds in his hand through selling his young pigs, with which money he purchased a horse and trap and commenced trade as a dealer.

One gain leads to another when a man is industrious and busy, and it wasn't long before Mr. Pie became a dairyman and then again a farmer.

At Grange Farm Mrs. Betty Pie churned the butter, and in the evening she would darn the socks for her children, Tommy and Winnie, who were six and eight years old.

As one might expect, while the riches were being acquired the beggars were forgotten, for Mrs. Crapper couldn't walk into a large farmhouse as she used to do into a little cottage, because now that the family had got on so well she felt that it wouldn't be proper to eat bread at their table, but would only go to the back door and ask for it. Mrs. Crapper didn't have a kind welcome when she came, for Mr. Pie would be bringing in the milk with a

great clatter and banging of cans, and the old woman's whispered request for a bite of food would pass unheeded. . . .

Although Mr. Pie never gave anything away now that he was rich, he still liked to think that he was a religious man, who would give a very warm welcome to Christ if He ever came to visit him.

Upon the first Sunday in Advent after the evening service held in Norbury Church, Mr. and Mrs. Pie were sitting in the farmhouse parlour, where a large fire burned. Mrs. Pie had laid the supper, and had, by chance, set out an extra plate. When she noticed her mistake she said, as is usual in the country when such an error occurs, 'That's for the Devil.'

In the parlour at Grange Farm there was a large, empty cupboard that had no use except for Tommy and Winnie to be frightened about, for they would take turns to lift the latch and peep in, and then run away to hide behind their parents' chairs.

It chanced that this evening the winds of heaven were very boisterous and gusts of rain lashed the windows so that the old house shook. No one would wish to be out upon such a night, and certainly no knock was expected at the rich farmer's door.

But as soon as the blue cheese and the old ale were ready, there came a soft knocking at the door, that made the children run and hide, for they remembered what their mother had said about the Devil being expected because an extra plate had been laid.

Mr. John Pie opened the door.

The Man who presented himself, and who came in as soon as He was invited, was easy to recognise, for His face all the family had seen either in a church window or else in a picture. He wore a crown of thorns, the usual robe, and His feet were bare.

He sat down at once in the vacant place, and, looking at the table, He blessed the food. While He ate He gazed lovingly upon the children and even stroked the cat that had jumped upon His knee. But the Visitor hadn't been sitting there for more than a few minutes before another knock came, but this time it was at the back door.

This knocker was Mrs. Crapper, who had come to beg a little food, for she had nothing to eat in her cottage that was away in a wide and distant field.

‘Oh, she’s always begging!’ said Betty Pie. ‘She’s always asking for things, and we should be certainly ruined if we gave to every one.’

Mr. Pie looked nervously at the Visitor, who, in a quiet tone, commanded Mrs. Pie to give the best she had to the beggar.

As soon as Mrs. Pie returned from doing so, she looked ruefully at her husband, who remarked angrily that, however pleasant it was to have Christ amongst them, yet if He always commanded them to give to every old woman who came, they might as well go back to the cottage again and work for Farmer Told, as they used to do before he gave them the pig.

‘But we want to keep Christ in the house,’ replied Betty Pie, ‘for if either Winnie or Tommy happen to die of measles He would bring them to life again as He did the daughter of the Roman centurion.’

‘Yes, that ’s very true,’ answered John Pie, ‘but if He sits with us at table He will be soon telling us not only to give away our food, but also to sell all we have and give the proceeds to the poor.’

‘Then we will put Christ into the cupboard,’ said Betty Pie.

The Visitor didn’t wait to be asked twice to go there, for, as soon as ever Betty Pie had made her request, He rose of His own accord and, stepping to the cupboard, He went in.

One can easily imagine that, with Christ in the cupboard, all things would go well with Mr. Pie’s worldly affairs. His cows yielded quantities of milk, and his large flock of sheep that, at this season of Advent, were lambing, had all of them twins.

But such a place of prosperity was no suitable begging-ground for Mrs. Crapper. She, indeed, had been very much surprised when Mrs. Pie carried to her, the first evening of Christ’s visit, all the best of the food. As one may well suppose, she came the very next evening, hoping that the old times were come again when John Pie never refused any poor woman a place at his table.

Mrs. Pie was skimming the cream when Mrs. Crapper called, but she never looked round when the old woman begged, and Mr. Pie, who was bringing in two great cans of milk, told her rudely to go. . . .

As Christmas drew near, the family that thrived so well could talk merrily, and even the children joined in, about their guest whom they were so glad to have safe in the cupboard.

Every evening they would pile the fire high, and Mr. Pie, after tending the cows in the yards and giving them large quantities of sweet meadow hay, would sit amongst his family and, heating the poker red-hot, would plunge it into the large jug of ale to warm it, and Mrs. Pie would even give the children a little sip out of her own glass.

Of course they would often speak of the pleasure of having so grand a guest in the house, though He was but in the cupboard, and Tommy, warmed by the ale, thought one evening that he might take a peep to see if He was there still.

Mrs. Crapper had just been to the back door, but the dog roaming in the yard had torn her clothes that were but rags, and she had gone away. Mr. Pie was smiling into the fire and telling of all the fine lambs that were born in the turnip field, when little Tommy crept to the cupboard and peeped in.

As soon as he returned to the fire his father asked him whether Christ was still there.

'Oh yes, He 's there,' said Tommy, taking another sip of ale from his mother's glass. 'His face is as kind and loving as ever and the marks of the nails are in His hands, but His feet look a little different.'

Mr. Pie laughed. He was so well off now that he could afford a bottle of brandy, which he mixed with the old ale.

'Ah!' he said, emptying his glass and smacking his lips, 'it's pleasant to know that He's there, for, if any of us were to fall ill, it's a comfort to think that we have only to open the cupboard door to have Him by our bedside.'

About Christmas-time it is usual for those who are poor to expect gifts from those whom God has blessed with greater plenty, and more than one poor person besides Mrs. Crapper, as the holy day drew nigh, came to Grange Farm to ask for a little. But each of them was driven from the door.

The cold came with severe frost, and snow covered the fields, and Mrs. Crapper, trying to find her way to the farm to ask for a little skim milk, found herself too ill to reach the gate and lay down in a snowdrift to die.

When the cold froze her and she breathed her last, yielding up her soul to the still comfort of the frozen air, Winnie Pie, in the warm farmhouse parlour, after taking a sip at her mother's glass, thought that she, too, would like to have a little peep at the Christ who, she remembered very well, had looked so lovingly at her when He sat at their table.

Winnie opened the cupboard and looked, but she quickly shut it again, and retired to the fire and told her mother that she had seen no marks of the nails, and that His face, though He still had those mild eyes, looked rather queer.

Tommy peeped the next, but he came back quick enough and said that Christ had a tail and that His feet were like a cow's.

Mr. Pie laughed heartily.

'That 's from standing so long in the cupboard,' he said. 'He hasn't been wanted yet, but the day may come when we shall be glad of Him!'

Mrs. Pie laughed too. It seemed so pleasant to her to have Christ in the cupboard, while they could drink warm ale and brandy and count the gains that had come to them while Christ was there.

On Christmas Eve, when the path to Mr. Pie's front gate was so slippery that one might easily fall, a knock came at the back door that was so like Mrs. Crapper's that Mrs. Pie was startled and upset her glass.

'Oh, I'm not one to be afraid of a ghost, with Christ in the cupboard,' said Mr. Pie, and with an oath, he rushed out to drive the spectre away.

A figure moved along the path in the moonlight, and Mr. Pie followed, but he had not gone far before he slipped and fell heavily upon the frozen ground. He was carried in and laid upon the bed, where it was soon evident that a fractured rib had pierced his lung and that he must die.

The family gathered round, and Mr. Pie whispered faintly that the time had come to let the Divine Guest out of the cupboard to save His host's life.

Tommy ran down to open the cupboard door. The dying man grew weaker, while the family waited in hopeful expectation for Christ to save.

Although the dead of winter had come there was a sudden flash of lightning outside and the thunder rolled. The children cowered and Betty Pie screamed.

A hot breath of sulphurous air filled the room. Presently an ugly thing appeared in the doorway, with flashing, fiery eyes, horrid horns, a tail, and a beast's feet.

'You hid Christ in the cupboard,' exclaimed the Devil, 'but your mean deeds have changed Him.'

THE GOLDEN GATES

George Macdonald once said that ‘it is easy to see what God Almighty thinks of riches if we take the trouble to notice those people that He gives wealth to.’

Amongst those who could accept this remark as a very fine compliment was Squire Duffy, who lived in his castle at Tinclebury, a castle with gates of gold.

Tinclebury is a village, and a small one, and Squire Duffy was the rich man there.

Outside his castle Mr. Duffy was aware that there were human beings who employed all their spare time in longing to be, and praying to be, as rich as their betters.

Mr. Duffy was always glad of an opportunity to contrast the low state of their being with his own exalted one, and he was glad to discover any idea that would help him to do this.

In London he happened to see a play in which a wood moved. Mr. Duffy went home and moved his wood. But even that accomplishment did not content Mr. Duffy, and so he did as every honest man does when he needs inspiration—he watched his wife.

Mrs. Duffy liked music. Mr. Duffy watched her one Sunday and followed her into the drawing-room and saw her sit down before the grand piano.

‘A new hymn, my dear,’ said Squire Duffy, ‘you have learned to play a new hymn?’

‘Yes, dear,’ replied Mrs. Duffy, ‘I wished to find a hymn that would please you, and I am trying to learn a new one.’

‘I hope you have succeeded,’ said Mr. Duffy.

‘Alas!’ murmured Mrs. Duffy, ‘I find the tune more difficult than I expected.’

‘Then read the words, dear,’ said Mr. Duffy, stooping down and kissing her hair that was as white as any other grandmother’s.

I will, if you wish, read a verse—

"The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them, high or lowly,
And order'd their estate."

Oh, I do wish I could play it,' said Mrs. Duffy.

Mr. Duffy kissed her again. He puffed out his chest with pride.

'I know that Mr. Bottom lives at my gate,' he said.

'Hymns are always true,' whispered Mrs. Duffy, 'though they have such hard tunes.'

The next morning Squire Duffy walked to his gates. He admired them tremendously. He had drawn the plan himself, meaning that they should exceed in grandeur all the other grand gates in the neighbourhood.

The gates were certainly magnificent. Mr. Duffy had got the idea from Heaven, and had had the gates gilded. At the top of the gates there were spikes like spearheads, that were as golden as gold paint could make them, and they shone finely in the sun.

Mr. Duffy went out into the road to look at the golden gates from that direction. A few yards away upon the other side of the road there was Mr. Bottom's cottage.

Mr. Bottom had once been an honest workman, but since the golden gates had arrived he did nothing but look at them. He was now the happiest man in Tinclebury, though his wife lay a-bed, ill with dropsy—for he always had the gates to look at and village gossip to listen to from passers-by.

Squire Duffy stood in the road for a moment, but seeing that Mr. Bottom was there, he walked stiffly into the park again and shut the golden gates with a bang.

Squire Duffy walked back to the castle: his looks were careworn. The poor man, Mr. Bottom, still stood in the road.

Mr. Bottom's wife was growing worse, but he always remained in the road, smiling at the gates. Some one would come by who would tell him all the latest village news, and then he would go and repeat it to his wife, and he knew she wouldn't die any the quicker for being amused by scandal.

After visiting the golden gates Mr. Duffy entered his home, for he, like Mr. Bottom, never went far from his doors.

He knew, alas! that Mrs. Duffy was not as well as she ought to be. He had taken her to the best doctors in the land, and each great man had shaken Mr. Duffy very kindly by the hand, but had shaken his own head too.

'Ah, Mr. Duffy!' one of them had said, 'we never know how these things begin. The pestilence that flyeth in the night.'

Mr. Duffy's spectacles were a little clouded when he stepped into the castle drawing-room.

His wife was still sitting before the piano, but she was not playing.

'I am not well,' she said.

Mr. Duffy led her to the sofa.

'I couldn't learn that hymn, and now I fear I shall never play it; and I did so wish to please you, dear.'

Mr. Duffy wished to say something to make her happier.

'I have been to see the golden gates and they shine beautifully,' he said. Mrs. Duffy smiled.

'The castle and its fine gates will always please you, I hope, dear, when I am gone.' . . .

If Mr. Duffy had ever found joy in his grandeur, he certainly couldn't find it now that his wife was dying. He held her hand and shook his head slowly, as the great doctor had done.

'You haven't hated my proud nonsense,' he said, 'you haven't laughed at me, and you shall not leave me.'

'Oh, one of us must stay to admire those golden gates,' said Mrs. Duffy, and held his hand to her lips. . . .

Mr. Bottom, the poor man, was standing beside the castle gates in an attitude of profound meditation. He hadn't seen any one to talk to that day, and his wife, when he went to her, had remarked:

' 'Tis best thee stay out there till thee do hear something.'

Presently Mrs. Pring came along the road, and stopped beside the castle gates and spoke to Mr. Bottom. The gates evidently interested Mrs. Pring, for she peeped through them. In the park drive there was Squire Duffy walking up and down, looking as if he had entirely forgotten the fact that he was a very rich man and lived in a castle.

Mr. Bottom and Mrs. Pring watched the rich man attentively.

‘ ’E do walk crabbed-like,’ remarked Mrs. Pring.

‘They say ’is lady be dying,’ said Mr. Bottom, carelessly.

‘ ’Tis strange,’ said Mr. Bottom, ‘that now she be gone to bed, that ’e don’t come out into street to talk to no woon. They rich folks do take things funny.’

‘How gates do shine!’ said Mrs. Pring. ‘But how be Emma?’

‘Oh! wold ’oman, thee do mean. Doctor did tell she to-day that this week would bury her, and now she don’t do nothing, only ask for coffin handles as bright as they gates.’

‘She were always a wanting woman,’ said Mrs. Pring.

‘So she be still,’ observed Mr. Bottom, ruefully. ‘But she do say that if I ’d tell woon more bit of news, of some one murdered or hanged, that she’d die happy, and she always fancied she ’d look well in a coffin.’

Mrs. Pring stepped a little nearer to the gates and a little nearer to Mr. Bottom.

‘They do say that Alice Newton be in trouble again—’tis they boys.’

The poor man shook his head.

‘Thik common news bain’t enough for she. A rape wi’ murder mid do, or a wicked suicide perhaps?’

‘She do expect too much of a little village,’ replied Mrs. Pring. ‘They kind of merry ways be for towns.’

‘If I don’t have nothing to tell,’ remarked Mr. Bottom, gloomily, ‘she’ll make I promise for they brass handles, and then where shall beer come from for the poor mourners, I do ask ’ee?’

‘Her may ’ave gone now,’ said Mrs. Pring.

‘ ’Tis best I go in and see,’ remarked the poor man, cheerfully. . . .

The rich man knelt beside his wife’s bed. Her last sigh was heaved, and her heart had ceased to beat. Squire Duffy’s faithful companion, who knew all his weakness and all his foolish pride, was gone from him for ever.

‘God must forgive me for what I am going to do, but something has broken within me, and I can’t be left behind alone,’ said Mr. Duffy. He leaned over her and kissed the white forehead.

‘We will be buried in one grave,’ he said.

The hour was midnight. Outside a full moon shone.

The rich man went to the castle stables and took a stout rope from the harness-room. He walked down the drive and reached the castle gates.

He only saw her; he only wished to join her, wherever she was.

He fastened the rope to one of the golden spikes and knotted a noose.

‘God must forgive me,’ said Squire Duffy. And climbing the gates he placed the noose around his neck and let himself fall. . . .

The poor man slept soundly all that night, and in the morning he stepped out into the road to see the fine gates. He saw the rich man hanging from them. Another helper came, and Squire Duffy was laid upon the grass.

Mr. Bottom hurried indoors. . . .

‘Emma did die happy,’ he said an hour later to Mrs. Pring, ’an’ forgot they brass handles.’

MR. DOTTERY'S TROUSERS

Robert Lovelace, in the story, had only one wish in life—to get girls. Mr. Truggin, the sexton of Tadnol, had more wishes than that, but when he set his heart upon getting anything, he had as many schemes in his head as ever Squire Lovelace had when he was after Clarissa. In one way Mr. Truggin was wiser than Lovelace; he would wait his chance; he did not push his plots too far. He waited, and what he wanted would be sure to come to him.

It happened one day that a misfortune overtook Mr. Truggin's best Sunday trousers. They had required a button, and Mrs. Truggin had carried them downstairs. But by a sad mischance, or a slight absent-mindedness, she had put them into the rag-bag instead of into her work-basket. Mr. Fancy, who collected the rags, had called that morning, and had driven off with the bag, for which he had given Mrs. Truggin two pennies.

When she discovered her mistake, she told her husband, who left the grave he was digging, dropped his spade at the bottom, and hurried after Mr. Fancy. He caught him up in the lane and begged him to give him back the trousers. Mr. Fancy shook his head.

'There bain't none here,' he said, and shook out the bag. Only rags rolled out. Mr. Truggin looked at Mr. Fancy's legs.

'Thee be wearing them,' he shouted.

'No,' said Mr. Fancy, smiling, 'these be my funeral ones, for when I visit a sexton's cottage I must look mournful. I put on these trousers at half-past six this morning, and I be proud of them.'

Mr. Fancy smiled. Truggin turned away.

'When a man do buy anything, 'tis his own,' called Mr. Fancy, before Mr. Truggin was out of hearing.

Mr. Truggin walked home. What was taken from him he meant to replace. When he met in the village any man wearing a good pair of trousers, he looked upon them as his own, and waited.

Mr. Truggin had borne his loss for nearly a month when, one night, Mr. Toole, the landlord of 'The Setting Sun,' locked the inn door. Mr. Toole locked the door more thoughtfully than usual, because his wife, Emma, was outside.

The revellers of the evening shouted and quarrelled in the lane, Mr. Spenke took off his coat and shook his fist at the moon. The sound of noisy voices moved at a slow pace down the lane. Mr. Toole shook his head and smiled.

Presently a lightly hurrying footfall was heard in the innyard, coming to the door. This was followed by heavier steps that moved out into the lane. The heavy footsteps belonged to John Card; he was come from the cartshed behind the innyard. The lighter footsteps belonged to a young woman, Mr. Toole's wife.

Mr. Toole unlocked the door, his wife pushed him aside happily, as a woman pushes a man that she is fond of, and went into the kitchen. Mr. Toole sat down by the table; when his wife displeased him, he would tell her so at once.

'John Card did bide wi' 'ee in cartshed and never came in to drink nothing, and that bain't business,' he said.

Mrs. Toole smiled. She brushed some dust from her clothes, raising them a little, and fastened a hook in her blouse. She looked both pretty and merry, and her husband was pleased with her.

' 'Tis thee's saucy ways that do draw in they men,' Mr. Toole said. 'But trade be trade,' he added more sternly, 'and if thee do bide about out-of-doors wi' John Card, when 'e should be drinking within, 'tis a sorrowful sin.'

Emma Toole poked the fire, a bright flame started up that coloured her face with a red glow.

'I do know,' said Mr. Toole, looking at her with admiration, 'that God's laws be different for landlord than for other folk, but this bain't no beerhouse where drink mid be drunk out-of-doors. 'Tain't right for John to take thee into shed, when parlour bar be open.'

Mrs. Toole gave him no answer, but she softly went to the till and dropped in five single shillings, one after another.

' 'Tis for five quarts that John do owe 'ee for,' she said.

Mr. Toole kissed his wife very lovingly.

' 'Tis a young woman to be proud of,' he said. 'Thee do know trade from naughtiness. When a man do pay 'is debt, 'tis proper to be kind, and there bain't never no harm in a good customer, for what be all trade in this great and learned country,' exclaimed Mr. Toole, striking the table with his large

fist, 'but a giving and a taking, and what woman be the worse for being a free-trader?'

Upon the kitchen floor there were two strips of carpet. Mrs. Toole looked at them sadly. Mr. Toole scratched his leg. ' 'Tis there where the fleas do come from,' he said.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Toole,' and 'tis Farmer Spenke who do bring them.'

'Hang they carpets on line,' said Mr. Toole.

Mrs. Toole nodded.

It must have been Mr. Truggin, who always got what he wished for, that made Mrs. Toole look at the carpet, and also caused the flea to bite Mr. Toole, for nothing goes by chance in the world.

The next morning Mrs. Toole fastened the strips of carpet upon the line, and raised them to their highest limit. She gave the carpets a shake and, passing the cartshed before she went indoors, she peeped in. There was a bundle of straw in the corner that Emma smiled at. . . .

Sometimes a person, used to contemplative enquiry, will walk through a village and notice two or three men talking together, and will naturally wonder what is the subject of their conversation.

John Card, Farmer Spenke, and Sexton Truggin were standing during the evening of the day after Mrs. Toole had hung the two strips of carpet upon the line, at the edge of the green, each one having a foot in the gutter. They had stood there for an hour by the Shelton Church clock, and it is pleasant for us, who like to hear of such things, to know what they were talking of.

'I bain't no good observer of devils,' said Mr. Truggin, 'but this I do know, that they sometimes turn themselves into hares and crows, and 'tis often said that they do fancy a woman.'

'Maybe a very old devil do wear trousers,' said Farmer Spenke, suggestively.

'Certainly 'twere no man's wear that I did see hanging from Emma Toole's clothes-line, from hillside, when I was at work,' said John Card.

' 'Tis a sad thing, John,' said Mr. Truggin, 'that this sight 'ave so troubled 'ee, but didn't 'ee go no nearer to see what sort of trousers they were?'

John Card looked up at a bough of a tree, as if he wished he had hanged himself upon it.

‘Yes, yes, I did go nearer,’ he said, ‘for when I did come down from hill, where shepherd do feed ’is flock, I did stand and loiter beside Inn gate.’

‘For to get a sight of thee’s young married woman,’ laughed Farmer Spenke.

‘No, to see they great trousers,’ replied John Card, with a deep sigh.

‘And what did ’ee see?’ asked Mr. Truggin.

‘The weather was dirty,’ said Mr. Card. ‘Clouds of mist, like old Croot’s beard, curled around hill, and I did plainly see upon the clothes-line a pair of enormous trousers.’

‘The Devil’s,’ said Mr. Truggin.

‘I fear so,’ murmured John Card, ‘but what be they trousers there for?’

‘ ’Tis most likely,’ observed Mr. Truggin, reflectively, ‘that the Devil have only one pair, and when ’e do stay at Inn, and his courting habits be well known, he do force Emma to wash what he do wear.’

‘Who would have thought,’ moaned Card, ‘that so nice a maiden—and she be only that, though she be married—would have taken up with such an ugly monster.’

‘ ’Tis what they all do,’ remarked Mr. Truggin, carelessly, ‘for the younger and the prettier that a maid be, the more her fancy do always run after some nasty thing, some dirty tramp who don’t pay no rates—and what else be the Devil but a wanderer?’

John Card turned and walked off in a hurry.

‘Where be going to?’ asked Truggin.

‘To river,’ cried Mr. Card, ‘to drown meself.’

‘The Reverend Silas Dottery be the man to save thee from drowning,’ called out Truggin, holding John Card by the coat, ‘and ’e be the one to get rid of the Devil, too.’

‘How so?’ enquired Card.

‘ ’Tis like this,’ said Mr. Truggin. ‘Every devil—and especially the old one who do tousle Mrs. Emma in cartshed’—John Card winced—‘do like to wear,’ continued Mr. Truggin, ‘what do belong to a good religious man—a man who do drink wine and read Greek.’

‘ ’Twould be hard to find such a one,’ said John.

‘Not in our village,’ observed Mr. Truggin, ‘for Mr. Dottery do drink and read, turn ’imself round, and do read and drink.’

‘But if I do get they holy trousers,’ said John Card, mournfully, ‘and the old Devil do fancy they instead of ’is own, ’tisn’t likely ’e ’ll leave Emma, who be always so kind.’

‘Devils be proud,’ said Mr. Truggin.

‘How do you know that?’ asked Mr. Card.

‘I did come upon one,’ replied Mr. Truggin, innocently, ‘spying about churchyard, when poor Mother Spenke were buried, and waiting for her soul. ’E were a little dizzied, for ’twas a merry funeral, and lost ’is way in graveyard.

‘ “’Tain’t much to carry to Hell, an old woman’s soul bain’t,” I did say.

‘ “’Tis a poor wear for a fine devil same as thee be, and they young naughty witches wouldn’t fancy thee wi’ she, but go with another.”

‘ “I must steal something,” the Devil said.

‘ “There be a fine black gown hung up in vestry—’twas one that Mr. Dottery told I to burn. Wear thik to Hell.” ’

‘And did he?’ asked Mr. Card.

‘Certainly,’ replied Mr. Truggin, ‘and ’e hadn’t gone above five minutes when an angel came by and carried Mother Spenke’s soul to Heaven. And thee may be sure that if wold Devil, who do sleep at Inn lying wi’ ’is horned head in Emma’s lap’ (‘Oh!’ cried John, in torment), ‘if ’e do once get they blessed trousers upon him, he’ll go to Hell and be seen no more.’

‘I will go and beg for they sacred trousers,’ said John Card.

‘And when thee do get them, thee must do this,’ said Mr. Truggin. ‘Spread out they trousers in churchyard grass, and the Devil will see them. And the next morning they ’ll be gone.’ . . .

There is something about the air of a quiet country parsonage that causes many a good man to wish for the hour of eating to come. Under the shadow of a church, and in the near neighbourhood of the bones of the dead, a worthy man may get as good a stomach as on the high seas, or upon the open downs, and with a better prospect of filling it.

The Reverend Silas Dottery, the Rector of Tadnol, was a learned man, but, like a good many more who know neither Greek nor Latin, he would

grow hungry when dinner-time came. Mrs. Taste, the Rectory housekeeper, served her master's dinner in almost royal abundance. There was a noble salmon—poached that very morning from the Tadnol river and sold to Mrs. Taste for a pretty penny—a rich soup, to give a proper beginning to the dinner, a small leg of Portland lamb, a rice-pudding, sardines on toast, a great Stilton cheese, a fine pineapple and crisp juicy nuts.

During the time of the Rector's dining, Mr. Card sat in the Rectory kitchen, growing more and more impatient as the hands of the clock moved. A lover is indeed in constant torment, for his thoughts never let him alone.

There was, John believed, a horrid devil, whom Emma was kind to, allowing herself to be kissed by him. John Card looked at the rice-pudding that had just been taken out. He wished that he had gone straight to the Inn and boldly told Mr. Toole that he harboured an ugly thing. But the Devil no doubt drank his spirits neat. And what landlord objects to a stern drinker, whatever his doings are?

'Bain't this supper, tea, breakfast, and dinner never going to end?' said Mr. Card, 'for I have a question to ask his Reverence, that be very important.'

'A gentleman must dine,' said Mrs. Taste.

'But do this happen every day?' asked Mr. Card.

'Yes,' replied Mrs. Taste, neatly placing sprigs of parsley round the cheese. 'And I trust, if God be willing, it always will. But what is it, Mr. Card, that you wish to see my master about?'

'Only a pair of trousers,' said John Card, with a sigh.

'I fear he has none to give away,' observed Mrs. Taste, prudently.

Mr. Card sighed again, yet more dolefully. 'But I must see him,' he said. 'Bain't 'e finished wi' they large nuts?'

A bell rang, and Mr. Dottery was heard moving in a careful and correct manner to his study, carrying with him, in order to save Mrs. Taste the trouble, a decanter and glass. Mrs. Taste went softly and knocked at his door. She was invited to come in.

'John Card wishes to see you, sir,' said Mrs. Taste, viewing her master with a loving respect. 'He wants you to give him a pair of trousers.'

'Let him have them,' answered Mr. Dottery, taking up a copy of Thucydides, 'and give him a glass of wine too.' Mrs. Taste retired but soon

returned.

‘He says if you don’t see him, he’ll drown himself,’ she said.

‘Not in wine, I hope,’ said Mr. Dottery, starting up and looking alarmed. ‘Ask him in, Mrs. Taste. Set a chair ready.’

Mr. Dottery stood up to receive his visitor, who might have been an archbishop.

‘Pray take a chair, Mr. Card,’ said the clergyman. ‘I hope you have dined.’

‘Yes,’ replied John Card, a little sadly, remembering that the heel of cheese that his wife had given him at one o’clock had been both rat-bitten and mouldy.

‘Tell me what it is I can do for you,’ asked Mr. Dottery kindly.

‘I do want a woman,’ said Mr. Card.

‘Poor man,’ said Mr. Dottery, ‘but I must thank God that amongst all my own sinful wants that is not one of them.’

‘Ah, but you don’t know Emma,’ sighed John Card. ‘Her skin be as white as a new Dorset cheese.’

At that moment Mr. Dottery’s mind wandered. He wished to buy a modern translation of Lucretius to compare with his own rendering.

‘Buy her,’ exclaimed Mr. Dottery.

‘She be bought already,’ replied Mr. Card, ‘for ’tis the Devil’s trousers that do hang up on line, and the Devil do pay for ’is drink and so do take Emma too.’

Mr. Dottery frowned. That the Evil One should have come to Tadnol seemed to him to be a sad accident.

‘We must get rid of him,’ cried Mr. Dottery.

‘Why, so we must,’ said John Card. ‘And ’tis said,’ continued John, a little wearily, ‘that if a clergyman’s trousers be laid on churchyard grass, that the Devil will snap them up and be gone to Hell before a man do say “Damnation!” ’

‘You shall have them,’ said Mr. Dottery.

‘And Emma, too, that very night-time,’ said John.

Mr. Dottery sipped his wine, and the port reminded him that, though to get rid of the Devil was right and proper, yet Mr. Card's behaviour in making love to Mrs. Toole seemed a little reprehensible.

'Are you a married man?' enquired Mr. Dottery, taking for the first time that evening a little notice of his visitor.

'I have a wife,' said Mr. Card, 'who makes good parsnip wine.'

'Then drink out of your own bottle,' said Mr. Dottery sternly.

'The Devil won't let me,' replied Mr. Card, 'for since 'is trousers do hang there, I have a mind more than ever to do what should never be done.'

'So far then,' observed Mr. Dottery, with a pleased glance at Mr. Card, 'God's seventh commandment has not been broken.'

'Alas, no,' said Mr. Card, with a deep groan, 'but she did promise I next Sunday.'

'Ha!' exclaimed Mr. Dottery, 'then all 's well in Heaven, for when a woman makes a promise she is sure to break it.' Mr. Dottery rang the bell. 'Mrs. Taste,' he said, when that lady answered his ring, 'this gentleman wishes for a pair of my trousers to use for a specific purpose. Give them to him with my blessing.' Mr. Card went out.

While John Card was at the Rectory, Mr. Truggin had visited the Inn. Truggin was a man who thought not only of his own welfare, but of that of the village. He had a mind to get, but he had a mind to get lawfully; and though he had nothing to say against a little harmless merriment, that might often save a good man from a sad fate, he would prevent, if possible, anything worse than that from happening.

Mr. Truggin asked for a pint of beer and was served by Emma Toole, who looked very pretty and coy.

Mr. Truggin talked to her for a while in a low tone. Mrs. Toole replied to him in a like manner, and when Mr. Truggin gave her a kiss—just to show her her danger—Emma Toole said that she would do what he advised. And Mr. Truggin himself visited the kitchen to see that the strips of carpet were safely laid out there.

That same evening, too, Mr. Dottery's second best trousers were laid on the churchyard grass.

By the morning they were gone!

A Sunday soon comes, and Mr. Truggin performed his duties, saying Amen louder than ever, and looking down now and again with pride at his own legs.

In the evening, Mr. John Card, dressed in his best, visited the Inn. That was the night when Emma had promised to yield herself to his wishes. Mr. Card walked warily. He believed in the Devil's pride and had little doubt but that he was even now showing off his fine trousers to the little imps of Hell. Though, as he walked up the lane to the Inn, he wished he had taken the advice of the angel who appeared to Tobias, and carried in a small frying-pan the heart, the liver, and the gall of a fish, so that he might make a smoke with it and drive the Devil away, in case he still lingered.

Mr. Card wondered, as he came near the cartshed, what luck he should have. Should he find Emma looking for a nest of eggs in the shed? No, she was not there, but she was not far away, for she was drawing a bucket of water from the well. John Card helped her. Never had he seen her look so tempting! He viewed her with pained delight, as she leant down to fetch up the bucket.

Mr. Toole was nowhere to be seen. John Card rattled some shillings in his pocket, and whispered to Emma that he had a small debt to pay her, and would settle it in the cartshed.

As soon as they were there John Card noticed that Emma's face wore a more serious look than it was wont to do when happy dalliance was likely to be the order of the day.

'You know,' said Emma, and John Card thought her tone a great deal too solemn for the occasion, 'you know, Mr. Card, that I have had a visitor.'

'But 'e be gone,' laughed John Card.

'Yes, to Heaven,' said Emma.

Mr. Card stared at her.

' 'Tweren't t' other?' he said in a low whisper.

'Yes, it were,' said Emma, in a lighter tone. 'It was God 'Imself.'

Mr. Card shuddered.

'And what did He come for?' he asked.

'To taste our beer,' replied Emma.

'And nothing else?' asked John.

‘Yes, he brought a message for thee.’

‘And what were it?’ asked John.

‘Thou shalt not commit adultery,’ replied Emma.

‘But He never said nothing against the beer, did He?’ enquired John.

‘He drank it,’ said Emma.

‘And the trousers?’

‘He gave they to Sexton Truggin.’

THE RIVAL PASTORS

It is always a dangerous thing to allow churches to be built too near to each other, for, like old Devon bulls in the same field, they do not often agree. Whenever two churches are but a mile apart their bells are sure to clang angrily and their pastors are as prone to fight, and to be as jealous of one another, as two Dartmoor stags.

Every one knows that, in political matters, those who hold nearly the same opinions quarrel over them the most, and though High and Low Church ministers are both Catholic Christians, yet either would address themselves more politely to an atheist or papist than to each other.

It is certainly fortunate for the quiet and peace of the modest layman that each church, however near, is set in its own parish, for if two churches—so near as Shelton and Maids Madder—had no legal boundary there would be sure to be murder.

The towers of these two churches were in full view of one another and looked resentful, and their respective ministers were certainly not behindhand in the battle of tongues.

Mr. Hayhoe of Maids Madder belonged to the evangelical persuasion—a persuasion that was, alas! scarce enough in those moving times, when faith hid in the hollow trees and when so many had gone over to the scarlet lady of Rome. Mr. Hayhoe was all the more bitter in heart for being left so lonely.

Mr. Dirdoe of Shelton, though wearing the same kind of cloth—the deepest black that could be purchased for money—held views that Mr. Hayhoe abhorred. Mr. Dirdoe believed in ritualism, and held that any pastor who was too lazy to turn to the East when the creed was being said must be little less than a man of Belial.

Mr. Hayhoe was at heart and in conversation a Calvinist, Mr. Dirdoe a disciple of Dr. Keble. Mr. Hayhoe was married, Mr. Dirdoe was a single man. Each gentleman kept to his own parish, and so terrified his people with threats of everlasting damnation if they entered the church of his rival that no one either in Shelton or Maids Madder ever thought of doing so—except Lily Topp.

Whether it was the Devil's doing or no, it is not possible to tell, but unfortunately the parish boundary that divided Maids Madder from Shelton

went through the middle of Daisy Cottage which was owned by John Topp, though this cottage was but a hundred yards from Maids Madder Church.

When John Topp sat down at his table for tea he took up the knife and cut the loaf of bread in Shelton, and Mrs. Topp, when she filled his cup, was in Maids Madder, while Lily Topp more often than not had a foot in both the parishes.

'Maiden,' Mr. Topp would observe with a great laugh, 'be in two places at once.'

When Mr. Hayhoe came home from the evening service, Mrs. Hayhoe would anxiously watch her husband, who was in the habit, because his own beard was so rough, of calling her a poor weak woman. If Mr. Hayhoe looked sadly at the cold pork that his wife had provided for supper, Mrs. Hayhoe knew that Lily Topp had not been in her pew beside her mother, and so must have committed the crime of visiting Shelton Church, where even incense was used for evensong.

Mr. Hayhoe preached in a black gown—the year was 1880—he was short and thick-set, but with the mildest eyes that any troubled sinner could wish to see. Though he used rough words in his sermons, his acts were the kindest; 'but with damnation knocking at one's door,' he would say, ' 'tis best to speak plain.'

Mr. Dirdoe, on the other hand, was thin and saintly and extremely nice in all that he did or said. His eyes were kind, too, though melancholy, his fingers were long, and his hands as white as a maid's. He, too, as well as Mr. Hayhoe, would be sure to notice whether Lily Topp visited Shelton Church, where the child would sit in a pew in front of the boys, who would throw nuts at her.

As is often the case with men whose thoughts ever dwell in the imagination and seek both their delight and sorrow in religion, neither of the rival pastors ever paid much heed to the earthly or carnal affairs of their people. These pastors were only concerned with the souls of their flocks, and each believed that the soul of Lily Topp was in jeopardy.

No doctor is more courteous in matters of etiquette than a country minister, for to trespass upon another's preserves—even to hunt a soul—is considered a very dreadful crime. Mr. Dirdoe dared not call at Daisy Cottage, neither dared Mr. Hayhoe, for neither knew in which village they would find the occupants. But, alas for Mr. Dirdoe! the manners and warmth of the church at Maids Madder and the fierce pulpit cries of Mr. Hayhoe had

captured John Topp and his wife, Alice, who remained safe in the evangelical fold. Only Lily was the sometime wanderer.

In both the reverend gentlemen's minds there was the awful thought —'What if Lily should be damned?'

Just as Daisy Cottage was in the two parishes so also were John Topp's fields, for though they were both very little fields, one was in Maids Madder and one in Shelton. The fields were high up upon the down, and when John was at plough he could be easily seen from the Rectory windows at Maids Madder or from the Shelton Vicarage garden.

Though so separate in ideas that each believed the other's doctrine to be most damnable and capable of leading any who listened to it to perdition, yet, besides possessing the same loving-kindness in his eyes, each of the ministers had the same favourite hymn. And they never sang it without thinking of Lily Topp, for the hymn was—'There were Ninety and nine.' No pastors of religion could be more humble either than these two good men, though they never met one another for fear they might say too much. But neither, for one moment, would allow himself to think that the simple peasants under his charge were not quite as interested in matters of religion as he.

When two good men seek so lovingly to save a sinner, one can easily conceive that the same idea might come to both at the same moment.

Mr. Dirdoe was an early riser, and so was Mr. Hayhoe, and after breakfast each would walk in his parish, visit the sick, talk to any old hedger he might meet, and then return to write his sermon. One summer morning, when all the fowls of the air were singing their matins, Mr. Dirdoe took a turn in his garden. No one, unless it were Mr. Hayhoe, had more honourable ideas than he. He would have thrust his right hand into the fire and burnt it to a stump sooner than have harmed any by word, thought, or deed. He believed as strongly as his rival in the soundness of family life, and would never think of addressing Lily Topp upon the subject of religion without asking her father's leave.

Mr. Dirdoe, as it happened that morning, looked up at the hills and saw John Topp at plough. Mr. Dirdoe knew every field in his parish, and John Topp was ploughing in Shelton.

Mr. Dirdoe returned to his house. A tramp was resting upon the doorstep, and the pastor asked him politely if he would mind moving for one moment. The tramp moved sullenly, and Mr. Dirdoe fetched his hat and

began to climb the downs. As he climbed Mr. Dirdoe sang his favourite hymn. . . .

Although John Topp's horses were old, they were happy with their master, for John never hurried them, and when they had a mind to rest he permitted them. John liked the horses to stop when he was alone, but he never wished any one to notice that he was resting them, for he always affirmed at home that his horses worked as fast as the best and, if they rested at all, it was because they broke the traces with their vigorous motion.

John heard the hymn. He saw Mr. Dirdoe approach him, and his horses stopped. John called out to them, but they remained still. He gave the reins a shake, but that did no good.

'Maybe 'e won't notice that they bain't moving,' said John, eyeing the approaching minister with much concern, 'but, all-same, 'tis best for I to give they horses their bait.' John had provided a nosebag for each horse, though for himself he had taken nothing. He now permitted them to eat.

Mr. Dirdoe was not a man, as some are, who is afraid to name the master in whose employment he lived.

'I ask,' he said, 'in the name of God, to have a word with you, John.'

But John shook his head.

'Thik bain't a name to speak in these fields,' he said.

'And why?' asked Mr. Dirdoe.

'Because they horses bain't churchgoers,' replied John.

'I wish to ask you,' said Mr. Dirdoe, without heeding John's reply, 'if I may speak of the Eucharist, auricular confession, and the penitentiary to your daughter, Lily.'

John Topp laughed loudly.

'Oh!' he said, 'thee won't catch our Lil wi' they sprats!'

'You give me permission to try?' enquired Mr. Dirdoe eagerly.

'Thee may try what thee like,' replied John, 'but our Lil bain't born yesterday, and that I do know.'

Mr. Dirdoe strode down the hill. In his mind's eye he saw Lily Topp. A young creature, with round legs, running like a fawn, whose black eyes were merry, and whose cheeks might have been jealous of her lips that were like cherries, had not they themselves resembled rosy apples. That was but the

carnal child of the flesh. Mr. Dirdoe saw her soul, too—a white virgin pearl hidden in her heart. . . .

Mr. John Topp had been ploughing the last furrow in his Shelton field when Mr. Dirdoe visited him, and upon the very next day he commenced to plough his other field, that was situated in Maids Madder. He had not been there but half an hour—and had already rested his horses four times, and was driving away his own troubles with a whiff of tobacco, at one end of the field—when he saw Mr. Hayhoe approaching from the direction of Maids Madder Rectory.

Mr. Hayhoe, who regarded the field a little contemptuously because it was not a page of the Scriptures, at once began to speak of salvation by faith, how few were predestined to be saved and how many were to be damned. 'And if,' said Mr. Hayhoe, raising his voice so that even one of John's horses raised its head, 'Lily continues to go to Shelton Church she will be damned too.'

'No one bain't damned,' said Mr. Topp, 'for doing what they be minded, and she who do bide most times in two parishes do like to visit two churches.'

'But there is only one God,' replied Mr. Hayhoe.

'So folk do say,' replied Mr. Topp calmly.

'And Him only shalt thou serve,' said Mr. Hayhoe.

' 'Twould insult our Lil to tell she so,' answered Mr. Topp, 'for she do say she 'll marry a squire, and do go to Shelton Church to see what folk do wear at weddings.'

'You must permit me to reason with her,' pleaded Mr. Hayhoe. 'Would you allow your daughter to call at the Rectory every Saturday afternoon at four o'clock?'

'Which door be she to knock at?' enquired Mr. Topp.

'The front door,' replied Mr. Hayhoe, 'and I will open it myself.'

John Topp looked at the minister a little suspiciously.

'Our Lil bain't one who do fancy any nonsense,' he said.

'Then she cannot like sacerdotalism,' observed Mr. Hayhoe gladly.

'No, she don't,' said Mr. Topp. 'She don't like none of they matters, for she be a good maid.' . . .

If the poor weak woman, who had married Mr. Hayhoe because he came as a missionary to her father's village, had one idea left of her own, it was about her sofa-covers. These she liked to keep clean. But when she heard that her husband had invited Lily Topp to have a talk with him on Saturday afternoons she was sure that he would invite Lily to sit upon the study sofa.

'And her clothes are so dirty,' Mrs. Hayhoe said with a sigh.

'If she goes to Hell they will be dirtier,' remarked Mr. Hayhoe.

Mrs. Hayhoe had only just time to take away the cushion that she feared Lily might lean her head upon, when a quick knock came at the front door, and a young child with a skipping-rope in her hand and a merry look in her eyes was invited to enter by Mr. Hayhoe and conducted to his study.

Had Lily regarded anything else but the furniture she might have been a little alarmed at the extreme deference shown to her by the pastor, who, indeed, treated every man, woman, and child with the same polite consideration, for he saw them all—sinners though all of them were—as children of God. Mr. Hayhoe handed Lily, with a bow, to the sofa.

'You must pardon me,' he said, 'for taking you from your pastimes, but my excuse and warrant is that you have a soul to be saved.'

'Oh, I wasn't doing nothing important,' replied Lily. 'I was only skipping alone. I weren't playing wi' Tommy.'

'Lily,' said Mr. Hayhoe, 'I long to call you a child of grace and to keep you in our fold.'

' 'Tain't nor child of grace that our Daddy do call I, nor Tommy neither,' replied Lily, 'for 'tis little Devil wi' both one and t'other.'

'Lily,' said Mr. Hayhoe, 'do not listen to vain talkers who set snares for your feet.'

'Why,' exclaimed Lily, jumping up with a laugh and skipping across the room, 'that 's just what Mr. Dirdoe do say!'

'I hope you do not listen to him,' said Mr. Hayhoe, turning a little pale.

'Oh no,' replied Lily. 'I don't take no notice of they men.'

'But you will listen to me, Lily?'

'If thee do talk nice,' answered Lily.

'Mr. Dirdoe promised you Heaven, I suppose,' enquired Mr. Hayhoe sadly, 'if you curtseyed to the Altar?'

‘He promised I a packet of bull’s-eyes,’ laughed Lily.

‘I will give you two packets if you stay with us,’ said Mr. Hayhoe.

Lily laughed, kicked up her heels in the air and brought them down upon the sofa-cover. The poor weak woman opened the study door. . . .

Though Mr. Dirdoe hadn’t succeeded in catching Lily Topp when he spoke to her in the lane before she visited Mr. Hayhoe, yet he did not despair of her. Every Saturday afternoon, as soon as she had eaten her dinner, Lily would skip along the Shelton road to meet him, and he would first explain and then condemn the evangelical dogma, while Lily waited patiently and watched the birds in the sky. Presently Mr. Dirdoe would give her, as a reward for her patient listening, a packet of sweets.

Never in his life before had Mr. Dirdoe been so happy, and he secretly began to dread the day when Lily would no more divide her favours between Maids Madder Church and Shelton but come entirely to Shelton, for then he would only think it proper to preach to her from the pulpit. But all means now appeared to be right in his eyes for so good an end, and soon it became a common thing to see Mr. Dirdoe on Saturday afternoons skipping himself—his heels up, his coat-tails flying—or else holding one end of a rope while Tommy held the other as Lily skipped.

Sometimes Lily met Mr. Dirdoe alone, for Tommy would often prefer to go with the other boys to stone the seagulls upon the cliffs, and then Mr. Dirdoe would sit beside Lily upon a log of wood in the Shelton Lane, hold her hand in his and tell her a number of exciting stories all about what happened to him when he was a child. Now and again Lily, as well as Tommy, had occupations at Madder that amused her more than listening to Mr. Dirdoe’s stories, and then Mr. Dirdoe would sit upon the log and wait for her in vain, looking so sad and melancholy that every one who saw him there laughed loudly.

One Saturday Lily, who had taken a little longer than usual over her dinner—for she had the bones of a fresh herring to pick at with her fingers—found Mr. Dirdoe with his face hidden in his hands, looking so disconsolate that she felt pity for him.

‘Our Dad do say,’ remarked Lily, ‘that thee ’d be happier if ’ee had a young girl to mind out to, an’ ’tis a pity I bain’t a little older to be thee’s bride.’

‘I am seeking you, Lily, as a bride for God,’ replied Mr. Dirdoe.

‘Be God very old?’ asked Lily.

‘He is immortal,’ answered Mr. Dirdoe.

‘Our Dad do say,’ continued Lily, ‘that thee mid kiss me if thee’s mouth do itch, for ’tain’t worth while to destroy theeself for want of a kiss.’

Mr. Dirdoe sat Lily beside him and stroked her hand.

‘I am seeking your soul,’ he said, ‘so that I may give it, blameless, to the angels.’

‘Why, that ’s just what Mr. Hayhoe do say,’ laughed Lily.

After Lily Topp had been for an hour or two with Mr. Dirdoe she would, as a rule, visit Mr. Hayhoe at Madder Rectory, where he had been wont to condemn strongly all ceremonial. While he talked he permitted Lily to pull out the drawers of a cabinet that was in the study and lay their contents upon the sofa-cover. This Lily was pleased enough to do, for in each drawer there were a number of curious things—shells and coins, beads and amber charms —that had all been collected by Mr. Hayhoe’s great-grandmother.

Seeing her so happy with these toys, Mr. Hayhoe would leave his talk and tell her the same tales that his grandmother had told him about all her travels. They would both be as happy as possible, until the poor weak woman would knock at the door and say that it was high time that Lily went home.

‘ ’Tis a pity old women be so interfering,’ Lily would observe, as she helped Mr. Hayhoe to put back the drawers, ‘for when ’tain’t their sofa-covers, ’tis their chairs they do think of—and ’tain’t we two who be crabbed.’ . . .

Since Ben Jonson wrote these pretty lines—

> ‘Weep with me, all you that read
> This little story;
> And know, for whom a tear you shed
> Death’s self is sorry.’

some of those whose years have numbered scarce thirteen finish all too early their happy play in the daytime sun, and so a day arrived when Mr. Dirdoe sat waiting sadly and no Lily came. A carriage, that he knew to be the doctor’s, went by him towards Madder, though Mr. Dirdoe did not heed it.

Mr. Dirdoe had decided to make one final effort that afternoon to save Lily Topp from the error of her Madder ways. He would not meet her again, for the people of Shelton were already beginning to talk about him and to say untrue things.

Mr. Dirdoe, upon one of his short holidays, had seen in a jeweller's window at Weyminster a golden chain with a crucifix attached. This he had purchased as a gift for Lily, hoping that with this little cross upon her bosom she would always wish to worship before the more splendid one upon the Shelton Altar.

Mr. Dirdoe waited. The same carriage that had passed him, going to Madder, returned again. The doctor's bald head was inside.

Mr. Dirdoe wondered what could have happened to Lily. 'Perhaps,' he thought, 'Mr. Hayhoe has beguiled her earlier than usual to Madder Rectory, in order to read Spurgeon's Sermons.'

Mr. Dirdoe jumped up excitedly; a sudden idea came to him. He would go and take the lamb out of the very jaws of the lion.

Madder was unusually silent, as if a cloud of gloom was fallen upon it, when Mr. Dirdoe walked boldly through the village on his way to the Rectory. As he walked he overtook the Madder sexton, Mr. Endor, whom he knew by sight. He walked with him, though neither of the two spoke one word, as far as the churchyard gates.

For all the righteous zeal that burned in Mr. Dirdoe's heart, his hand trembled when he knocked at the Rectory door. The door was opened by the poor weak woman, who looked extremely surprised to see the visitor. Mrs. Hayhoe held in her hand a new sofa-cover. She conducted Mr. Dirdoe at once to the study.

During his walk Mr. Dirdoe had prepared a torrent of words that he felt must totally destroy all that Martin Luther or Jack Calvin had ever put into Mr. Hayhoe's head, and after refuting his rival he would offer his gift to Lily and lead her away to the right fold.

But all Mr. Dirdoe's wonderful arguments were forgotten when he saw his rival, for Mr. Hayhoe, with his arms thrown out before him and his head resting upon the great Bible, was weeping bitterly.

He recovered himself as Mr. Dirdoe entered and, grasping the rival pastor's hand, nodded to a picture upon the wall that showed the lost lamb being carried to its fold in the loving arms of the Good Shepherd.

The church bell tolled.

The rival pastors, weeping together, embraced one another.

MR. GUPPY'S GARDEN

It was unfortunate for Mr. Guppy that John Piller, the retired builder, should also have been a dissenter, for, had Mr. Piller been a churchman, he must certainly have heard the tenth commandment read at least once upon a Sunday. But as things were, and as Mr. Guppy's garden was exactly in front of John Piller's new house that had no garden at all but only a back-yard, it was perfectly natural that Mr. Piller—or, more strictly speaking, Mrs. Piller—should covet what was Guppy's. Mr. Piller did more than covet, he bought the garden.

There are some fortunate people born into this world who have a natural bent towards digging and hoeing and towards planting cabbages and earthing potatoes, but Mr. Guppy did not happen to be one of these, and, though he had been able to obtain a somewhat sorry living by doing these things, he had never enjoyed it.

But, however little Mr. Guppy liked to labour with his hands, he liked still less the idea of starvation, and so he had fought a continual battle with nature and so far had dug out of her enough to live by, 'though each potato,' he used to say, 'be pulled out of they wormy clods by woon's teeth.'

A pretty cottage went with Mr. Guppy's garden that he was forced to leave too when John Piller bought the property over his head. By the law of the land Mr. Guppy needn't have left until Mr. Piller provided him with another dwelling, yet Mr. Guppy possessed the kind of pride that refused such a compromise, and he would indeed have slept in the lane rather than stay, though he was glad enough when Farmer King offered him a disused stable as a home.

Under this new roof, Mr. Guppy bemoaned, with many expressions of sorrow, his condition to his wife Kate, but she was far too busy making all as comfortable as she could to pay any heed to him.

For more years than he could remember, Mr. Guppy had been aroused by his wife, who was an honest, hard-working woman, at five o'clock in the summer and at six in the winter, to go to work in his garden, but never in all that time did Mr. Guppy rise without a sad groaning and never did he sleepily descend the stairs without lamenting the sad fate that made him a gardener. During all that time a vast struggle had been waged between the

clods and Mr. Guppy, and never, since Don Quixote fought the well-armed barber, had there been so unequal a combat.

Each corner of the garden was covered by couch-grass, and each year the weeds increased their territory. Mr. Guppy was a poor workman, but he did the best he could; he held the gooseberry bushes for five years against all weeds, but at last the couch won. Mr. Guppy laboured against odds and, slowly but surely, the enemy was upon him. But still he battled bravely, and was in possession of the larger part of the garden when John Piller swooped down, like a hawk, and took it all.

Though despair overtook Mr. Guppy, his wife Kate didn't lose heart. She sold the chiffonier and the sofa and the best chairs, and with the money she received began her new housekeeping. She whitewashed the stable, she scrubbed cheerfully and put in the furniture she had not sold, and the honest farmer, because he disliked Mr. Piller, lent her a stove.

As soon as they had moved in Kate Guppy said, 'I be to have work at farmer's, so thee needn't worry.'

'Oh, but I 've lost my garden,' groaned Mr. Guppy. 'Mr. Piller has taken away my garden and I be very miserable.'

Kate Guppy looked at her husband a little incredulously.

'Why,' she said, 'thee were only saying t' other day that thee had better have been digging thee's woon grave than dig thik dirty garden.' . . .

Although the stable was pleasant and warm Mr. Guppy, during the first evening there, wouldn't raise his head to look about him to see how nicely his wife had arranged things, and would only sit dejectedly beside the table until it was time for him to go to bed.

Strange to say Mr. Guppy awoke of himself at five o'clock the next morning and listened to the rain that was pouring down in torrents. He forgot for the moment where he was.

' 'Tis time to dig in my garden,' he said mournfully, waking his wife.

'Thee bain't got no garden,' said Kate.

'And I bain't sorry,' replied Mr. Guppy, and was soon asleep again. Kate rose and left him. . . .

Mr. Guppy had always had so hard a struggle to live, and his back was bent from morning till night over his work, that he hardly ever had one moment to raise his eyes away from the ground, and so, as one who plays

cards all night sees everywhere clubs and hearts, so Mr. Guppy had always seen docks and couch-grass at breakfast. But now, with the loss of his garden, he could see other things.

After breakfast his wife went again to the farm to work, and Mr. Guppy, instead of hurrying off to his garden, as he had been forced to do until that day, to attack the heavy clods with a rusty mattock, filled his pipe with the care of a lawyer, lit it slowly and sauntered out—for the rain was now over—to the village green.

Mr. Guppy's eyes, instead of being glued to the ground, now wandered at will and viewed with much interest Mother Potten going to the well and Minnie King, a merry damsel, chasing a little pig in her father's field. The pig ran and so did Minnie, who showed a pretty leg, that Mr. Guppy considered was a pleasanter thing to see than a horse-radish root.

But lovely Minnie was not the only sight that pleased Mr. Guppy that morning. He looked up at the high downs that were beautifully green now that the sun shone after the rain, and decided that it would be pleasant to walk that way.

At a little distance up the lane he met Mr. Hall, who was lame and so lived like a gentleman. Mr. Hall was smiling at the blue sky.

'I believe it will rain again,' remarked Mr. Hall, 'before the night comes.'

'I hope it does,' said Mr. Guppy, and taking his pipe from his mouth he nodded to it in a friendly way because it wasn't a spade.

'People don't work as we used to do,' said Mr. Guppy. 'They don't get the weeds out of the land.'

'No, no,' said Mr. Hall, 'there 's nothing but idleness in these days.'

Mr. Guppy wandered on. He could never remember in all his life taking so pleasant a walk; he even stopped to admire a yellow weed that grew by the lane side. He reached the down and, leaning against a gate, surveyed a wide green world of beauty. The trees were still in leaf, giving a rich feeling of loveliness to the valley. Mr. Guppy looked gladly at it all. . . .

Mr. Guppy smoked contentedly. Never in all his life had he been so happy. He watched a hawk in the sky and saw it mobbed by the rooks. Mr. Guppy watched the battle with interest; he wasn't fighting himself that morning, and so he could watch others at war with pleasure.

Mr. Guppy left the hill and returned to the village again. He went down a lane that was well known to him—a lane along which he had often carried his heavy spade.

Mr. Guppy walked idly looking about him, and presently he came to the wooden railings that separated the lane from his old garden.

In Mr. Guppy's garden there was a man working. This was Mr. Piller, who, being proud of his new purchase, had commenced to dig it.

Mr. Piller had grown stout and heavy, and he panted uneasily. From the front window of Mr. Piller's new house Mrs. Piller was watching. She was a lady with a red face and an angry look, and it was she who had wished her husband to purchase Mr. Guppy's garden.

'And you shall dig it,' she had said.

Mr. Piller was indeed digging it, and had commenced in one of the grassy corners that had defeated Mr. Guppy.

Mr. Guppy leaned against the railings and watched.

'You haven't done much,' Mrs. Piller called out crossly from the window, 'and if you don't work harder than that we shall get no profit from Guppy's garden.'

Mr. Piller plunged his spade into the ground.

'It was you that wanted the garden,' he shouted to his wife, 'but I wish with all my heart that Guppy was still digging it.'

Mr. Guppy walked slowly away.

FOUND WANTING

No one in the world could have had a higher opinion of his profession than had Mr. Tiffin. He believed that to occupy and to farm land was the highest vocation that any man born of woman could have. He felt that nothing else that could be done by the hand or the brain of man was so great or noble as the cultivation of land. All mysteries, save his mystery alone, he regarded as commonplace, lacking in dignity as well as in virtue, and as good as nothing.

Mr. Tiffin was a strong man formed of the soil. He rose early and walked sturdily out into the damp heaviness of a November morning, as joyfully as into the sunshine of a fine day.

Mr. Tiffin loved his fields as though each of them was a kind matron by whom he had had a large number of happy children. His looks were those of a hard man, both inside and out, but withal an honest and a trustworthy one. He had as great a hatred of anything that approached or made a lie as God Himself. The slightest kind of deception from any one with whom he came in contact he would resent in the most angry manner, and once, when Mr. Potter, the horse-dealer, brought him a different horse from the one he had purchased—fancying that he would not know the difference because he had bought the horse by candle-light in a stable—Mr. Tiffin said quietly, 'I shall not leave the law to punish you,' and took hold of the dishonest dealer by the collar and thrashed him with his walking-stick.

In the village of West Dodder where he lived, only the very bravest man, or one who did not know him, would have told Mr. Tiffin a lie, although a lie told direct, like a blow from the shoulder, Mr. Tiffin would be more ready to forgive than the least kind of deception practised more cunningly.

Knowing his fields as so many matronly brides, each one of them renewing her wantonness and ardour every spring-time, Mr. Tiffin bestowed his whole care and thought upon them. In the spring the whole farm appeared to awake for his delight, to burgeon and to blossom, to grow green with a lovely body that longed to be fertile, and yet remained a chaste and virtuous woman. There was no corner of his fields, no green bank or stile that Mr. Tiffin did not know and love. Name any little tree or even gorse or briar bush and Mr. Tiffin would at once know the spot that was meant.

At the time when we choose to break in upon Mr. Tiffin's life he was a widower without children. He had married when he was about thirty a worthy and careful woman—because she was a good milker and a distinguished butter-maker—but unfortunately one day she received a blow from the great churn that injured her fatally. She had never deceived Mr. Tiffin, and so he had loved her.

Mr. Tiffin mourned her loss, as indeed he should have done, being a good farmer, because now he was forced to sell his milk in the town. And all things that were connected with towns Mr. Tiffin hated consistently. His land was his Holy Bible, and the townspeople were utterly ignorant of its blessed pages.

Mr. Tiffin would have no friend and would hold no conversation at all with so ignorant a person that could not tell the difference between mustard and charlock, or swedes and turnips. A Bishop once called—for Mr. Tiffin was a noted man of the Church—and happening to look over the churchyard wall into a field of Mr. Tiffin's said—wishing to take a kindly and proper interest in country affairs—'How well your peas are looking, Mr. Tiffin!'

Mr. Tiffin gave his shoulders a shrug, and, calling a dirty little boy of about six years old, who was peeping out from behind a gravestone to see what the grand clergyman was up to, he said to him, 'Tommy, what is that growing? My lord says it 's a field of peas.'

'Vetches,' shouted Tommy, and fled in terror.

Mr. Tiffin would himself have allowed that he talked more of bullocks, of sheep, of horses, and of corn than he did of art or poetry. But he would have reasoned that the highest art has ever come from the land, and that to study the falling rain in its season, the ever-changing aspect of the weather, the worms and their doings, the magic influence of the spring sun, the kindness of snow, and the manners and ways of half-tamed beasts can give a truer happiness to the soul than any thought out of a book.

Mr. Tiffin missed his wife. At each meal they used to discuss what might be then doing on the land, and Mrs. Tiffin would often, of an evening, tell how her grandfather—a simple and worthy man of the old stock of farmers—had made his hay, first allowing the new-cut grass to dry in the sun, then making haycocks of it, to be spread out again, until the true hay was made.

On Sunday afternoons, too, Mr. Tiffin would lead his wife, she taking his arm, around the fields, and together they would view the improvements that were already made and talk of others that were only thought of.

And though now the farmer's meals were laid and his bed made by an elderly servant who had been his own nurse when a child, yet he wished for some one more intelligent than she was to talk to.

Mr. Tiffin lived alone for five years and then, thinking that it would be nice to have an educated woman in the house, he advertised for a farmer's widow as housekeeper—one who had a full knowledge of agriculture and housewifery.

From a number of applicants Mr. Tiffin picked out one who, he thought, would suit him exactly. But there was one objection to her that Mr. Tiffin feared could not be got over, which was that the farmer's widow—Mrs. Wood out of Somersetshire—had a daughter. At first Mr. Tiffin thought that the existence of the girl might prevent him from obtaining the services of her mother. They had considerable correspondence upon the subject, during which Mr. Tiffin learned that the daughter of Mrs. Wood was just eighteen years old, that she had only recently left a boarding-school, and that above all things in the world she loved little pigs and chickens.

For a while Mr. Tiffin was doubtful what to do, until one night an event occurred that made him decide to take the widow and her daughter too. Since his wife had died Mr. Tiffin had taken charge of the fowls that were kept in a paddock close behind the farmhouse, for the old servant had said grumblingly that there was enough for her to do without looking after dirty chickens, and so he tended them himself. One night, however, when he watched over a sick horse while the carter took an hour or two's sleep, he forgot to let down the little doors that kept the fowls safe, and so a fox crept in and destroyed more than half of them.

This accident decided Mr. Tiffin; he would have both the mother and the daughter. One question only remained for him to ask—he wished to know why Mrs. Wood gave up the farm in Somerset when her husband died. He knew of women who farmed their land with considerable success. Mrs. Wood had always told him in her letters how much she knew of the trade. Why did she give it up?

Her answer satisfied him. Before her husband died he had unfortunately given way to drink, and had spent more than he should, so that his debts prevented her from keeping on the business.

But even then Mr. Tiffin was in no hurry. He made certain other enquiries, both about her character and her daughter's, before he finally decided to have them. From every quarter to which his enquiries had gone

he heard what pleased him, and so at last, being entirely satisfied, he wrote to ask them to come.

Even a man who has once been married, a man whose whole heart is set in the labours of the fields, may be pardoned for wondering for a moment what a young girl, who has only just left a convent school, and who is about to enter his home, may look like.

He had interviewed the elder lady one market-day at Maidenbridge, and had asked her whether her daughter was a proper young person to take the important position of henwife in his household. Mrs. Wood was a kindly and harmless-looking matron, whom Mr. Tiffin at once thought to be a little like a nine-acre field of his, with two sober green mounds in it, that he had laid down for pasture. She replied that her daughter was a shy creature, very modest and utterly unlearned in the ways of the world, but when at work she was lively enough and very willing. And, before she left the subject, Mrs. Wood again spoke of her daughter's love of all young animals.

Mr. Tiffin, though he could well afford one, had never demeaned himself by the purchase of an automobile. Indeed, he heartily despised all the pack of them, and would always take the narrowest lanes when he drove to market, so as to avoid seeing any. On his way to the station to meet his new housekeeper and her daughter, Mr. Tiffin drove his high-stepping mare in his smart gig.

Upon the road, however, he came upon a cattle-dealer whose shabby car had broken down, and Mr. Tiffin could not help pausing to bandy a word or two, in which he compared his sound equipage to the worthy dealer's broken one. This and another accident—where two cars had fallen foul of one another—prevented Mr. Tiffin from reaching the station in time to meet the train.

And so, in turning a corner, he came upon the two ladies who were walking to meet him. The elder of them he at once recognised by her steady quiet walk and sober garments, but he did not look long at her. There was the young girl, and when he saw her Mr. Tiffin thought he beheld a field of lovely flax flower in that moment.

Never in his experience of agriculture had he seen magic life, so wonderfully made, rise from the ground. This being seemed more than woman; she was a flower newly blossomed, that grew out of the green pasture with the fresh shining of the morning sun still upon her. Her looks were lively and intelligent, and her dark eyes roguish and merry. She carried

her womanly body with a light step, and her thin summer clothes showed exactly all that she was.

In the country, it is unusual to love a maid the moment she is seen, for the country mind is slow and earthy; dull watchers live there, who bid a man look a long time before he leap. But, strange to say, Mr. Tiffin was that moment entirely overcome. Such a wonder, indeed, he had never seen before. He had a mind to marry her—provided, of course, that she loved and understood farming as much as she was supposed to do.

There had been times before in his life when Mr. Tiffin had made as sudden a decision. He had once met a dealer who was driving, amongst a herd of young creatures, a very beautiful heifer. Mr. Tiffin picked her out at once—she appeared to be perfect—and he ordered the dealer to drive her to his home, without even asking the price.

At another time, too, he had seen a very pretty mare feeding in the field of a neighbour, and nothing would content Mr. Tiffin until he had purchased this mare, cost what she might.

Mrs. Wood, as though she read his thoughts—as soon as she had introduced her daughter, calling her Lily—suggested that Lily had better ride in front with her employer, while she herself would sit in the back of the gig.

'This would be a convenient arrangement,' Mrs. Wood said, 'for then Lily would be able to see better what was by the roadside'—as though the child knew everything that grew in the country, having, as a farmer's daughter, been bred and born there; yet, being only lately returned from school, she would like to hear Mr. Tiffin's opinion on what they passed. For farming, Mrs. Wood explained, when they were settled in their seats, was the one subject in the world that interested them both, and perhaps the customs of the country held to be good in Somersetshire might, in Mr. Tiffin's neighbourhood, be a little different. But she was sure Lily would soon get used to them.

Having looked over her left shoulder to say this to Mr. Tiffin as they drove along, Mrs. Wood, receiving a proper reply, turned away and gazed at the road, as if she cared not at all what Mr. Tiffin and Lily might choose to talk about.

Mr. Tiffin was pleased with Mrs. Wood's remarks, for he knew that no one should pretend that farming was the same everywhere, and he went further and informed Lily, who sat very demure and silent, breathing very

prettily, that even two villages that were next to one another might sow their corn in a different manner, and even employ different methods in making hay.

As the trap went along the pleasant by-lanes, Mr. Tiffin would point out to his companion, with his whip, the contours of the land, and explain the virtues of the fields, for he knew all the country as though it were his own, telling her how this crop might thrive better than that, and the various faults made in the cultivation of their land by ignorant or lazy farmers.

Mr. Tiffin sat forward in his seat, his demeanour showed his extreme interest in the subject, and he talked in country terms, as though to a companion well versed in all the arts and fancies of modern agriculture. Lily listened as though she understood all that he was saying, and when she thought a reply was necessary she answered ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to his remarks, without venturing to give an opinion of her own, except that once when she saw a bed of unusually fine rushes growing in a corner of a field, she observed, though Mr. Tiffin did not notice where she looked, that the grass was well grown. To which Mr. Tiffin replied that certainly, for such poor land, the grass looked uncommonly thriving.

It is possible that Lily, newly come from school, might have forgotten her early training in the fields, but whether this was the case or no, she seemed to understand very well the first glance that the farmer gave her—it was full of admiration, as if he had cast his eye all of a sudden upon a young filly that suited him exactly.

Lily knew that she breathed nicely, and, as she listened to what he said, she looked at him coyly, with eyes a little moist and thoughtful. His neck, burnt by the sun, was a rich colour—a little thick perhaps, but yet the neck of a strong man that might easily bear the yoke of matrimony a second time and be a kind father to the little babies that Lily had so often seen dancing in her own eyes when she looked into the glass.

In a little while they reached the large and comfortable farmhouse, with its wide gateway and cool, open door, and Mrs. Wood’s luggage arrived, having been brought up from the station by the milkman.

Some time elapsed before the ladies came down to the tea-table, which they spent in unpacking. When at last they arrived Mrs. Wood poured out the tea in a very family manner, handing to the farmer the large cup that was always brought in for his use, and, as Mr. Tiffin hoped and expected, the conversation during tea was all about the land.

Mrs. Wood and Lily talked as though they spoke directly out of a book. Mrs. Wood even went so far as to speak of the influence of colour in soils, saying that when the sun shone upon it, black sand had a temperature of 123½ per cent. and white sand only 110 per cent.

'Which shows,' said Lily, speaking for the first time, 'that black sand is the better soil of the two.'

Mr. Tiffin felt that in such knowledge his housekeeper exceeded his own, for he had never been anything other than a practical farmer, and his learning in chemistry was but small. He was glad she knew so much, and only remarked that most of his fields were a fine gravelly loam, but that he had never gone so far as to take their exact temperatures.

During the evening, while Mrs. Wood was being shown the house and its surroundings by the old servant, the master himself undertook to show the younger lady the poultry and ducks.

Mr. Tiffin could hardly take his eyes off her as they walked. Her frock—that a child of twelve might have put on and yet have blushed a little—pleased him so well, that when they came to the granary steps he told her that he would not trouble her to fetch the corn herself to feed the fowls, but that he would order the stable-boy to bring what was needful into the back kitchen at the farm.

After he had escorted Lily back to the house, Mr. Tiffin went a little turn himself, and then took supper with the ladies. When that was over Mrs. Wood and her daughter sat quietly sewing in the drawing-room, where the farmer soon joined them. Lily rested demurely, like a harmless kitten, knitting a garment that Mrs. Wood explained—for Mr. Tiffin had regarded it a little suspiciously—was but a tiny vest that Lily was making for the baby of a schoolfellow, who had happened to be married a little early in life.

Mr. Tiffin had met his own wife when she was no longer young; she had always had a rather tight and cramped manner, that suited the old-fashioned furniture. And now here was a difference! Not that there was anything in the least immodest about Lily. Her pretty knees, that were often to be seen, were always near to one another when she sat upon a chair, and her movements were all charming and maidenly.

In a very few days Lily was entirely at home in the old house, and appeared to be here, there, and everywhere, while her mother, when not actually employed, spent most of her time in her own little room.

Every day now Mr. Tiffin managed his own affairs in a happier manner than of yore. He went out to the fields betimes and directed his servants with his usual consideration and care, but looking forward, all the time, to the evening when the conversation would always turn to his favourite subject.

As the summer grew older, the conversation seemed to grow too, almost as if the pages of a book were being turned over, but, curiously enough, the field operations and the weather in winter seemed to be the subjects that Mrs. Wood and her daughter liked best to discuss.

In the middle of July, Lily, who could chatter away now as well as another, informed Mr. Tiffin, one particularly sultry evening, that ice evaporates moisture as largely as water, and that any wind that blows for a considerable length of time—such as two or three days—lowers the temperature of the air considerably.

Mr. Tiffin had not learnt his farming from books, but he possessed, in two volumes, a very good example of the best of them—Johnson's *Book of the Farm*. One Sunday, the very day after his housekeeper had arrived, Mr. Tiffin had wished to consult this book upon a little matter, but found that the first volume was missing. He remembered having seen it in its place the very morning when Mrs. Wood came, though that same evening Jane, the servant, informed him that the book was not there.

Mr. Tiffin remembered distinctly that it was the first volume that he missed, but, happening to go to the shelf one morning during a sharp thunderstorm in early autumn, he saw that the first volume was returned but that the second was gone.

Mr. Tiffin was the least suspicious of men, and the strange wanderings of his books made him wish only the more eagerly to have a wife to look after his things.

Though sometimes the evening talk was a little difficult to the good farmer, he found the matter of courting the young girl extremely pleasant and easy. Not that she was in the least forward or ever put herself in his way on purpose—on the contrary, more than once, when he asked her to walk with him she refused, pleading as an excuse that she was tired.

But often she would be willing enough, and they would walk about the fields together, and Mr. Tiffin would speak happily of the work that went on, and sometimes he would ask her advice as to what should be done, though, when he asked her, she would prefer, instead of answering him, to sit down

under a pleasant bush, and he, nothing loth, would rest beside her, forgetting what he had asked.

Such loving manners, that went on so nicely, could only have one end in view, and that must be marriage.

The winter came, and while Mrs. Wood was beginning to talk at the tea-table of the system of haymaking in Ireland, all the village knew that Mr. Tiffin had found a second lady, a very young one, but one very much to his liking, whom he was likely to marry when the feast of Christmas was over.

Though Mr. Tiffin hadn't actually asked Lily to be his wife, he had certainly been very attentive and kind to her, and she could not believe that, unless anything very unforeseen happened, he could turn from her now.

When the first fall of snow came in December, Mrs. Wood began to talk of harvesting, remarking as she passed the bread and butter to Mr. Tiffin, that 'the direction to which the end of stooks point is a very important one, to which, in many cases, too little attention is often paid.'

After making this wise observation, Mrs. Wood asked the farmer whether she might go with her daughter to do a little shopping in the town the next market-day. When the day came Mr. Tiffin himself remained at home because the important work of threshing was in progress that he wished to superintend.

He returned from the fields to dinner, and the old servant met him with an anxious face and told him that a large tom-cat had climbed up the chimney in the housekeeper's room. Mr. Tiffin went himself and dislodged the cat, but, as he left the room, he noticed open upon a side-table the second volume of Johnson's *Book of the Farm*. His curiosity was awakened, and he peeped into it and read, in every page, some sentence that he had heard as exactly from Mrs. Wood's lips or her daughter's.

Mr. Tiffin went downstairs; he took the first volume out of the bookcase. There, too, were all the observations of Mrs. Wood, who had, with the assistance of Lily, talked through the book, page by page.

Mr. Tiffin looked very stern, though soon his wiser nature told him that he must not judge any one prematurely. For why should not his housekeeper wish to increase her knowledge, and, if she liked her subject, it was perfectly natural that she should wish to talk about it. Why should he doubt Mrs. Wood's words?—but he decided to give Lily a short examination before he married her.

The time was near for her return, and Mr. Tiffin went out to the gate to see if the trap was in sight. The postman passed by and handed him three letters for Mrs. Wood—each letter bore a London postmark.

The threshing had been completed, to Mr. Tiffin's satisfaction, and the great bins in his granary were filled with choice corn.

A day or two after Lily had gone shopping, Mr. Tiffin invited her—she was dressed in a pretty blue frock—to go to the granary with him to see the corn. Lily blushingly accepted the invitation, hoping that in the loneliness of the granary Mr. Tiffin might become kinder than ever. But when they climbed the steps and entered the dusty door, Lily was annoyed to find that three of Mr. Tiffin's farmhands were already in possession, weighing the corn. She wished he had taken her into the empty barn.

Glancing at Mr. Tiffin she wondered at his looks, that seemed all of a sudden to have become very stern. He looked like a man who has decided to risk all he had upon one cast of the dice—to win or to lose.

Leading her to one of the great bins, heaped with barley, Mr. Tiffin took up a handful and asked Lily what corn it was.

Lily blushed and said nothing. The workmen stopped weighing the corn and stared at her.

'What is it?' asked Mr. Tiffin.

'Oats,' said Lily.

Mr. Tiffin took her to a bin of wheat.

'What is this?' he asked. Lily began to cry.

'Is this barley?' he asked again.

'Yes,' said Lily, smiling, believing that he was helping her out of her trouble. 'Yes, it 's barley.'

Mr. Tiffin turned his back to her.

The men laughed.

THE BRIDE

Mrs. Cains stood at her cottage window watching. Exactly opposite the window was a large farmhouse, square and prosperous, with its drive gates set open.

Mrs. Cains watched more expectantly and more greedily.

A large furniture van entered the gates of the farmhouse and was soon beginning to unload. Out of the van were being taken heavy, costly things such as a wealthy farmer with a mind as heavy as his purse would be likely to buy. Mrs. Cains watched what was being taken out of the van with an interested greed, but her daughter Laura, who was standing near to her, frowned, because she knew what her mother was thinking of.

‘ ’Tis a fine full house of furniture that ’e ’ve a-got together, that should move any young girl to go to ’e.’

Mrs. Cains shuffled her feet and turned meaningly to her daughter.

Laura stood pensive. She rarely smiled or spoke. She was a girl of strange ways, a splendid carnal creature, and eighteen years old that day.

Her magnificent body, that grew, so her mother fancied, always at night-time, had gathered new beauties to it every dark hour since she was a tiny child, and now waited only for the wedding bells to ring.

‘I ’d give all the world,’ said Mrs. Cains, ’to see into farmer’s house, an’ thee be big enough to go over to ’e, who be always asking for ’ee to come.’

Laura watched the unloading of the furniture, with her lips a little parted, and with eyes that were as full of the dark rage of love as the deepest seas.

‘Though ’e be a hoarding miser farmer do buy,’ said Mrs. Cains, wishing to get a word from Laura as to whether or no she would receive the attentions of the farmer and go and be kind to him.

‘ ’Tis the third load of fine things that ’e ’ve a-had in to tempt ’ee, an’ thee bain’t no little chick now to be afeared of a man.’

Laura frowned. Her frown was the first sign that she had been thinking at all about Farmer Score, the rich widower, who had filled his house with costly furniture for her sake alone.

Mrs. Cains shuffled her feet, she looked at the girl suggestively, as though she were weighing her exact worth for love—she wanted, as a mother will want sometimes, to push her out to the man. . . .

Laura Cains had grown up in Little Dodder a flower amongst weeds. Her mother had never understood her silent ways. She had taken her to dances and fairs as soon as she was fourteen, but she never could get her to talk to a young man. Laura would only stand entirely silent and watch the people about her, as she watched Farmer Score, who stood now in the open gateway; for the van had unloaded its goods and was gone.

‘ ’E did buy all for thee to notice,’ exclaimed Mrs. Cains, looking invitingly at the farmer. ‘ ’E did ask I if me maid were as well grown as a heifer cow that be waiting ready for breeding. And I did tell ’e that me Laura were just such a breeder for a strong man to have over to ’s home. Do ’ee see how ’e do stand in road and do beckon, ’e be asking for ’ee to go over to farm.’

Mrs. Cains touched Laura; she wished to raise her desire for a man, so that she might at least want to be married.

‘Oh, thee ’d be nice to kiss an’ cuddle,’ she said, ‘thee ’d be nice for a strong man to hold in ’s arms, thee ’d be something for ’e to ’ave hold on.’

Mr. Score was holding out a hand like a crooked claw and beckoning. His grey head and pale, greedy face and heavy figure leaning forward, formed exactly the kind of man that Mrs. Cains could admire. While behind him there was the large house and the furniture.

Laura watched him without any interest, exactly as she had watched two lovers embracing one harvest-time when the moon was full, and her mother and she were returning from a fair.

‘ ’E be a strong man to content a nice maid,’ remarked Mrs. Cains.

Laura’s firm, full bosom responded to her breathing without any flutter or hurry, as a child’s who sleeps well; she frowned.

Mr. Score walked over to the cottage, entered the room, and talked in a chatty manner about the furniture.

Laura turned a little and looked at him.

Mrs. Cains fancied that her daughter’s colour heightened.

‘Thee bain’t always been a farmer,’ she said to Mr. Score. ‘Thee were a Stonebridge butcher in past days?’

‘Yes, yes,’ replied the farmer, looking hungrily at the girl, ‘there weren’t no one that could strike down a cow same as I, an’ I don’t never mind having to strike twice.’

Mrs. Cains smiled approvingly, her daughter was grown deathly pale.

Laura went over to the farmer.

‘Strike me down too if you want to,’ she said. . . .

Upon her wedding-day a great many envious eyes looked at Laura, and many a man wished himself in the place of Farmer Score, who was to take her to his home that day.

The wedding was upon a Saturday afternoon, for the avaricious farmer couldn’t bear to think of his men idling away their time in the fields while he was being married in church.

The only man in the church who dared not look at Laura was Mr. Crocket, the clergyman, who, fearing the awful presence near to him of so much loveliness, looked down at his square-toed boots in mute agony.

‘I don’t wish to get into any trouble with God about a woman,’ thought Mr. Crocket, whose own eyes now compelled him to steal a glance at Laura as she kneeled, ‘but I would give all that I have . . .’

Mr. Score was churchwarden, and always carried the bag round during the last hymn. He liked to finger money, as well, or even better, than to fill his house with furniture for the sake of obtaining the full possession of the body of a lovely girl.

Mrs. Cains saw him go to church as usual the day after the wedding, and as soon as he was out of the way she hoped Laura would beckon to her to come over and view the wealth of her home. But instead of beckoning her to come, Laura walked over herself, came into the cottage room, and gazed out of the window just as she had done when the furniture was being unloaded.

Her mother looked at her curiously.

‘ ’Tis nice to be married,’ she said.

Laura’s right hand held her own left hand idly in her lap, she stood entirely still and watched in utter detachment her new home.

‘ ’Tis nice to be married,’ said her mother again.

Laura breathed quietly, and looked across the way.

‘Let we go and see all they fine things,’ whispered Mrs. Cains, feeling with her hand the warmth of Laura’s bare arm.

Presently Mrs. Cains began to sniff; something, she thought, must be on fire. She hurried about her cottage but could find nothing burning.

She came to the window again where Laura was standing.

Laura smiled. She held up her left hand and looked at the wedding ring upon it, she folded her hands again and stood as before.

Mrs. Cains sniffed uneasily.

‘Let we go,’ she said, ‘for I do want to see all they things.’

A white puff of smoke broke out from one of the upper windows at the farm that happened to be left open—this was the wedding bedroom.

‘Oh,’ cried Mrs. Cains, ‘house be on fire, an’ all they wonders will be burnt.’

Laura smiled again. In a few moments the whole house opposite was ablaze. . . .

When Mr. Score came from the church carrying the collection money, he found his house a mass of flames. He threw himself into the midst of them hoping to save something.

‘I thought he would want to do that,’ said Laura, speaking to her mother for the first time that morning. . . .

Mr. Crocket was sorry when he heard that Farmer Score was burnt to death, because he feared that if he looked at Mrs. Score, who would be sure to attend the funeral, it might be the worse for him. But he found this temptation easier to resist at the burial than at the wedding, because there was the grave to look into.

FEED MY SWINE

Mr. Truggin could never forgive the people of Tadnol for not dying quicker. His reason was that his first wife, who was called the ‘Old Crow,’ took from him all the money that he earned as gardener to the Reverend Silas Dottery, and only permitted poor John Truggin to spend upon drink the money that he obtained at his occupation as grave-digger.

‘ ’Tain’t for I to spend what be wormy,’ Mrs. Truggin would say. ‘So what thee do get from digging they long holes in ground be thee’s own.’

‘But,’ said Mr. Truggin, ‘folk bain’t always a-dying, and if thee would let I have what I do take at weddings I’d let they live for ever.’

‘No,’ replied Mrs. Truggin, ‘ ’tis only mouldy money that be thine own.’

Now and again the Reverend Silas Dottery would say to Mr. Truggin: ‘If anything goes wrong in the village—if the people behave foolishly and I am required to give them a proper reproof—then tell me, Truggin, and I will give you a present for your information.’

Mr. Truggin always hoped for the best, but so far he had been unfortunate and had received no gift. The folly, he knew, must be something out of the common in order to obtain a present by it.

Mr. Truggin’s own experience had taught him that it was no good carrying every tale that the Old Crow told him at tea-time to the Rectory. He brought upon himself a reproof by so doing. He had once explained the behaviour of certain young Tadnol women in the sunny fields to Mr. Dottery, but the minister had merely called Mr. Truggin’s notice to the ways of the happy sparrows in a bush near by, and bid him remember that one of the Church fathers affirmed that young women have no souls.

‘The Church must be propagated,’ said Mr. Dottery sternly.

Mr. Truggin withdrew from the presence and went to the Rectory pigsties and fed the swine.

For some while nothing occurred in Tadnol that could give to Mr. Truggin the desired fee for information of ill-behaviour, but one Saturday, when the sexton was finding the proper lesson for the Sunday morning in the great church Bible and putting the grandly fringed ribbons into the

proper places, his eye happened to catch the exciting words, ‘What shall we drink?’

These words Mr. Truggin had often repeated in his own heart, and the reply to them that he used to say a great many times over, was—‘Beer!’

The lesson was the sixth chapter of the Holy Gospel of St. Matthew, beginning at the twenty-fourth verse. Mr. Truggin carefully read the passage. After reading the verses three times, the sexton addressed himself to his wife, who was peeping under the pews in the hope that some child had dropped a penny.

‘Who be ’en who do talk in this book?’ asked Mr. Truggin.

‘God,’ replied the Old Crow, ‘and if it bain’t ’e, ’tis ’is family—for they be all one and the same.’

‘What God do tell folk to do they should do,’ remarked Mr. Truggin. ‘But if they don’t——?’

‘Why, then,’ said Mrs. Truggin, ‘they ’ll be tossed into Hell.’

‘What do happen,’ enquired Mr. Truggin again, ‘to folk who take no thought to their lives?’

‘They die, I suppose,’ said Mrs. Truggin gladly, as she picked up a halfpenny.

Mr. Truggin stared hard at the Bible. A plan was forming in his head. He was lucky, too, for that very afternoon a young preacher—Luke Bird by name—happening to pass through the village from Dodder, where he then lived, began kindly enough to tell the people of Tadnol what would happen to them if they didn’t obey the words of the Bible.

Mr. Bird preached on the green near to Mr. Croot’s blacksmith’s forge and only a little distance from Farmer Spenke’s small-holding.

Mr. Spenke, who was leading an unwilling calf with a white face across the road, stopped to listen, and Mr. Croot likewise laid down his hammer and stepped upon the green. Mr. Bird caught at once the imagination of his hearers by calling out:

‘Fear, and the pit, and the snare are upon thee, O inhabitants of Tadnol!’

Neither the churchwarden, Mr. Spenke, nor Mr. Croot liked to hear such a prophecy, and having an unpleasant belief that Mr. Truggin would benefit by one or other of these happenings—for in his spare time the sexton was a rabbit-catcher—they waited to hear what could be done to avoid them.

The reply was simple. They must obey the commandments of the Son of God.

As is usual at Tadnol, anything of interest that happens in the day is discussed at the inn at night, and no inn in all the countryside is so friendly to polite conversation as that of Tadnol, then called ‘The Setting Sun.’ The sign of this happy inn represents a sun of fine gold, half sunk behind a purple cloud, and the round red face of Landlord Toole, like the risen sun, in the parlour is ever ready to welcome the visitor. . . .

The summer clouds hung low, for it was late in May, and a small dripping and silent rain was falling when Farmer Spenke and Mr. Croot entered ‘The Setting Sun,’ anxious to discuss, away from their wives, whose only talk was of the sins of others, the meaning of Mr. Bird’s sermon. But it was impossible, of course, to discuss such a matter properly without Mr. Truggin, who, as grave-digger, had the first right to understand religion.

Sometimes even Tadnol Inn could be dull, and with the pit and fear weighing upon them this evening, and a damp summer, too, that had crept into Mr. Spenke’s trousers and had given him rheumatism, there was a heaviness in the parlour that even the sight of Mr. Toole’s round and rosy face could not lift.

When Mr. Truggin arrived he presented himself with the sad look that he used for weddings, because the money he earned upon these occasions he was not permitted to spend, so that he always wished that the bride’s frock could be changed to a shroud.

‘Maybe thee did listen to preacher,’ asked Blacksmith Croot of Mr. Truggin, ‘and thee be afraid of the pit, too?’

‘And so I be,’ replied Mr. Truggin, ‘for I do know more than most folk about they places.’

‘ ’Tis nice to live,’ observed Mr. Croot, ‘and if I did but know what the Almighty do command, I ’d obey His laws.’

Mr. Truggin looked very wise.

‘There be words in the Bible,’ said Mr. Truggin, imitating, as well as he knew how, the tone and voice of his master, the Reverend Silas Dottery, ‘that if we do obey to the uttermost, we shall be saved from fear.’

‘Thee be thirsty,’ said Mr. Spenke, looking happier and pushing his mug to Mr. Truggin. ‘Drink.’

‘And I,’ said Mr. Croot, ‘will treat ’ee to a pint if thee will but read out what they words be, for ’tain’t no snare that I do want to catch me foot in.’

Mr. Truggin didn’t reply, but regarded Landlord Toole with a sad look.

‘Thee could fill a pit as well as another, landlord,’ the sexton said.

‘I ’ll treat ’ee too,’ murmured Mr. Toole, ‘if thee will but read to we what we can do to be saved.’

‘ ’Tis all in the Bible,’ answered Mr. Truggin.

‘Then do thee fetch the holy book, landlord,’ said Farmer Spenke.

Mr. Toole was absent for some moments, and when he returned he explained that there was nothing of the family Bible left but the cover.

‘It ’s all been used for they taps,’ he said, ‘for who don’t know that paper must be put round a tap before ’tis hammered into barrels?’

Mr. Croot and Farmer Spenke looked at one another.

‘There be a Bible in church,’ remarked Mr. Truggin.

‘Do ’ee fetch ’en, sexton,’ said Landlord Toole, ‘and thee may drink free to-night.’

While the sexton was gone the company discussed the matter of salvation in a very solemn and serious manner.

‘I hope,’ said Mr. Croot, ‘that they words that sexton be going to read bain’t too hard for we to understand.’

‘No, no,’ replied Farmer Spenke, reassuringly. ‘We ’ll know what they do mean, and if they be a little hard, why, Truggin will explain, for ’e don’t feed they large Rectory swine for nothing.’

Mr. Croot was growing happier.

‘We ’ll treat Truggin,’ he shouted, ‘for when we do know they blessed words, we ’ll tell all the folk of Tadnol, and no one won’t be snared or frightened.’

‘A wedding be better to we than a funeral,’ remarked Mr. Spenke significantly, for he had five unwedded daughters.

‘So ’tis,’ replied Mr. Croot, thinking of his own happy one, ‘for a woman when she be good iron be easy to bend.’

‘There be some one outside,’ said Mr. Toole.

‘ ’Tis Truggin,’ observed the farmer.

Mr. Truggin staggered in. He carried the weighty church Bible in his arms, like a babe, and placed it carefully upon the parlour table.

‘Now do ’ee, sexton,’ said Mr. Croot, ‘read out to we what we must do.’

Mr. Truggin sat down before the great book. He found his glasses, blew upon them, wiped them on his coat, and put them on. Mr. Truggin began to read.

In the middle of the twenty-first verse of the chapter that had caught his attention Mr. Truggin stopped to rest, but, after a moment or two, he said, looking at the company, in the tone of one who likes the words he reads and picks out the best of them for practice—‘What shall we drink?’

A filled mug was placed before Mr. Truggin.

The chapter was soon finished, and the company, with the exception of Mr. Truggin, looked a little doubtful as to its meaning. ‘Tell us, sexton, what we have to do,’ asked Mr. Croot.

‘Consider the lilies,’ replied Mr. Truggin softly, ‘and take no thought for the morrow.’

‘But to-morrow be Sunday,’ observed Mr. Spenke, ‘and no woon do think of thik day—only they bad maidens.’

‘ ’Tis Monday that be meant,’ replied Mr. Truggin decidedly, ‘Monday, the twenty-ninth of May.’ . . .

Every one in Tadnol, and even the Reverend Silas Dottery, had heard what the preacher had said was going to happen to the village, and on the Sunday all heard, too, of the new manners that, if they chose to live them, might save from the pit and from the snare. Even the younger Tadnol maids, whose behaviour down the lanes resembled the happy sparrows, listened with attention because they were always sad when their mothers told them to take thought for the morrow and to help with the washing. Mr. Dottery preached on the Sunday to an empty church, while the people, old and young, stood about in groups and considered how happy their lives were going to be—for no little girl even need any more think of darning her stockings, because they would all now live like the lilies and the birds.

‘Though I know there bain’t much of a lily about I,’ Blacksmith Croot said, ‘yet I mid learn—in time—to live like a cauliflower.’ . . .

The Reverend Silas Dottery, the Rector of Tadnol, was a worthy minister—a little choleric, perhaps, when his teeth ached—and friendly, as all old bachelor scholars should ever be, to good port. He had been known to take a bottle to church instead of a sermon, and had placed it in a corner, where later the bottle was found by Mr. Truggin, who was discovered that same evening leaning against a gravestone, happy and silent.

Mr. Dottery was interested in history as well as in port wine, and, as every one is aware, spent most of his spare time in writing the history of the kings of England, that he intended should correspond with Miss Strickland's *Lives of the Queens*.

As soon as ever the winds began to blow, Mr. Dottery apprehended the likelihood of a breath of damp air blowing from the river and attacking his teeth—toothache being the one and only evil that he suffered from—and so he would shut himself up in his study, pile up his folios upon the table to screen him from the draught, and say to Mr. Truggin who brought in the coals—for Mr. Dottery had a fire all the year round—that he hoped he hadn't forgotten that morning to feed the swine.

'And remember, it's your place to tell me what goes wrong in Tadnol, and I will pay you for your trouble——'

Mr. Dottery breakfasted late on Mondays, for that was his happiest day. During the week he became more sad, because of his Sunday's sermon, for he used to tell his older friends that the King of Kings was the most difficult monarch in the world to describe in suitable words.

'If only He had behaved like one of the Edwards, I might keep Farmer Spenke awake for at least ten minutes.'

Mr. Dottery left his breakfast-table at a quarter past twelve and went into his study. His favourite books were about him, piled high. He looked out of the window. The common people worked somewhere out there, and the sparrows and the girls played. From the direction of the Rectory pigsties there came loud grunts and squeals—a sure sign that Truggin had forgotten to feed the swine. Mr. Dottery turned to his table, with a sigh.

But Mr. Dottery's eyes, as an author's will often do who has no need to hurry, looked out of the window again before he concluded a chapter he was writing about the Restoration of Charles II. He remembered happily that that was the very day on which the king landed in England, when he noticed Mr. Truggin, the gardener, who was wearing an old clerical coat of his master's,

moving in a strange manner along the Rectory hedge, as if he did not wish to be seen.

Mr. Truggin peeped cautiously over the hedge into the lane to see if he were being followed, but, seeing no one, he suddenly began to run—a new way of progress for the sexton—and vanished in the direction of the Rectory back door.

Though his breakfast had been a good one, Mr. Dottery had noticed that his cup of tea did not taste as tea should to one who likes the addition of good creamy milk, and when a knock came at the door, he supposed that Mrs. Taste, his housekeeper, had come to make her apology. Mr. Dottery bid her come in.

Mrs. Taste entered and, expressing by her looks both astonishment and anxiety—as though she had been listening to a strange tale—admitted Mr. Truggin, and withdrew.

Mr. Truggin stood before his master with his hat in his hand.

‘ ’Tain’t no Lily Spenke behaving like a goldfinch this time,’ he said slowly. ‘And ’tain’t no “what shall we drink?” neither with the folk upon the green.’

‘Tell me,’ said Mr. Dottery, looking sternly over the wall of books, ‘has Farmer Spenke drowned his daughters in the Tadnol river?’

‘No,’ said Mr. Truggin, ‘but worse be happened. They foolish folk ’ave been reading God’s Word.’

‘You astonish me, Truggin,’ observed Mr. Dottery, smiling. ‘Be so good as to explain yourself.’

‘They have searched the Scriptures and be obeying them,’ replied the sexton. ‘They don’t take no thought for nothing.’

‘What are they doing, then?’ enquired Mr. Dottery.

‘Seeking the Kingdom of Heaven and drinking landlord’s beer,’ answered Mr. Truggin.

‘I conclude from what you tell me, Truggin,’ observed Mr. Dottery, after a moment’s silence, ‘that, instead of attending church yesterday, these doltish clowns have been misreading the Holy Gospels.’

‘That’s just what they have been a-doing,’ said the sexton eagerly, ‘and Landlord Toole ’ave brought ’is last barrel down to the green and the maids be dancing.’

Mr. Dottery turned the matter over in his mind. He stood up excitedly.

'The fools have made an historic mistake,' he said. 'They have read and obeyed the words of a king whose kingdom is not of this world. . . . But they can rejoice to-day,' said Mr. Dottery, seeing the matter in this new light, 'in the Restoration of King Charles II.—an easier monarch and less dangerous to obey.'

'Bain't this news worth a reward?' asked Mr. Truggin gleefully.

'It certainly is,' replied Mr. Dottery, and handed a crisp Treasury note to Mr. Truggin. 'You may go now, sexton,' he said, 'and I will consider what had better be done and how to explain the mistake.'

As soon as Mr. Truggin was gone, the Reverend Silas Dottery put on his overcoat, wrapped a shawl around him, and went out too. As became a good Christian, he went first to the church, knelt at the altar, and prayed that God might make soft and tender the stony hearts of all those who exalt themselves and seek to trouble the quiet of this realm of England. After his prayer was over, Mr. Dottery visited the green.

There he saw the men of the village, resting happily beside Mr. Toole's barrel that had already been emptied. Farmer Spenke and Blacksmith Croot were smiling contentedly at one another, and Mr. Toole was gazing up into the blue heavens. The young people were dancing, and the old women were telling one another that, since Mabel had been found drowned in the farmer's pond, nothing so exciting as this obedience to God had happened at Tadnol. The cows at Mr. Spenke's farm were lowing because no one had thought of milking them, and the Rectory pigs were letting all the world know, by their squeals, that they hadn't been fed.

Mr. Dottery stepped upon the green.

'Foolish people,' said Mr. Dottery, 'what you have read in the Gospel of St. Matthew was not meant for you, but only for the happy subjects of the King of Heaven. If you obey the Gospels without the Holy Spirit's guidance —and your pastor's advice—you will certainly become rebels against God and His anointed king of England. Those words, as you have interpreted them, are the very pit and snare that Mr. Bird spoke of, and if they are hearkened to unwisely, they will bring Tadnol to certain destruction.'

Mr. Dottery paused for breath.

'I noticed,' he continued, 'that Mrs. Taste only gave me skimmed milk for breakfast. Be so good, Lily Spenke, as to leave off dancing with Tommy Toole and go to milking. Do not trouble to change your raiment.'

Mr. Dottery turned to the men.

‘I will rejoice with you,’ he said, ‘for this day—two hundred and sixty-six years ago—a great and good king was restored to his own. We will have evensong at seven and use the proper form of prayer, thanking Almighty God for the restoration of the Royal Family. And now, Truggin, I will add a new word to those that, in their ignorance, the people have understood so foolishly—Feed my swine!’

Mr. Truggin turned to the Rectory sty.

A PRETTY BABE

In all the southern countryside no farmer took more care of his beautiful flock than did Mr. Oliver. The flock consisted of pure-bred Dorset ewes, and Mr. Oliver gave these his greatest thought and attention and always took care to employ a shepherd who was a master at his trade.

At Dodderdown Mr. Oliver was considered to be a hard man, though he was by no means one who expected to reap where he had not sown, but any shepherd who was found neglecting the flock he at once dismissed from his employment.

Though Mr. Oliver was called hard, he was just and honourable, and if a servant obeyed his directions and was true to his trust, the farmer would be sure to remember him at the end of the year, for no one was more generous towards the deserving, and no man who did his best for this master ever regretted his labour. Mr. Oliver owned Norman Grange at Dodderdown. He lived sternly himself, his life was exemplary, his honesty and the taking heed to his ways had brought him good fortune.

Mr. Oliver was no pryer into other people's affairs, and so long as his men, and especially the shepherd, performed their duties in the workaday hours, he cared not if the cups at 'The Soldier's Return' were filled quick or slow.

But, though that was the case, the Dodderdown Inn had deprived him of more than one good shepherd, for it had often tempted an otherwise trustworthy man to desert the flock in the daytime, and being discovered there by his master, he had been forthwith sent about his business. Thus, now and again, because of the Inn, the farmer had changed his shepherd.

When Mr. Oliver hired Shepherd Poose in place of John Sparkes, whom he had discovered asleep at the Inn and neglecting the sheep, he was pleased with his choice. George Poose was no dullard. He was an expert shepherd, and his knowledge of his craft, though a little old-fashioned, perhaps, was more sound and steady than Mr. Oliver had hoped or expected from any uneducated country man. Shepherd Poose had left his last place because his master had left off trading and sold out of business.

Mr. Oliver soon found that Shepherd Poose was just the man for his flock. He was gentle with the sheep—he called them not his master's but his own—and his dog, Jim, was as gifted and as clever as he.

The shepherd's cottage was in the same lane as the Inn. The cottage was old and very pleasant to view, and did a poet, with the true pastoral love in his heart, pass by, he could not but recall to mind, when he saw at evensong the shepherd's crook upon the wall—

> 'So minutes, hours, days, months and years,
> Pass'd over to the end they were created,
> Would bring white hairs into a quiet grave.'

Wherever the man was—and Mr. Oliver was well aware of this—with such a shepherd as Poose, his crook could never lie. When in the field, the crook would be in the shepherd's hand, or if he were making a new fold or taking his homely curds in the hut, the crook would be hanging upon the hut door, as a sign that the shepherd was there.

Inside the field-hut, as if to show how many hours bring about the day, Mr. Poose had drawn a clock to which he had fastened cardboard hands, and as he noted each passing hour by his own trusty timepiece, he would move the hands to that hour and so would see before him how the day sped.

The last serious accident that had happened to the sheep occurred when John Sparkes slept all one spring afternoon, forgetting his charge in his cups. It was then that the flock broke pasture and found their way into a field of rich, succulent clover, so that ten of them were gorged and died.

Mr. Oliver was by no means the kind of man to dismiss a shepherd without any warning. He informed Poose, when he hired him, that if he allowed the flock unthinkingly to fall into trouble, or deserted them during lambing, that day would end their covenant, there would be no forgiveness.

Mr. Oliver's famous sheep were a horned breed and lambed in December, so that about Christmas Day lambing was in full swing, and that day was usually the most busy in all the year to Mr. Oliver's shepherd. It often happens that December is a very wet month, and it certainly proved itself to be so during Mr. Poose's first year at Dodderdown.

' 'Is clothes bain't never dry,' good Mrs. Poose was heard to say sadly, 'for all they waters that do come down from sky do fall upon 'e's back.'

Hardly a day passed when a fierce storm of rain was not falling, and had such a time of wet come when John Sparkes was shepherd, Mr. Oliver's losses would indeed have been heavy. But with Poose it was another matter, for he hardly left the sheep for one moment. He sheltered the fold with woven straw hurdles, and saw to it that the ewes were well fed, for Mr. Oliver was no niggard in that matter, but allowed the shepherd, without stint,

all the cake and hay that was needed. Never before had the flock commenced to lamb so healthily!

John Sparkes, when he left Mr. Oliver, obtained employment as a stableman for Mr. Matterface, the landlord at the Dodderdown Inn, and it's easy to guess that John, having been dismissed himself, would try his best to get the new shepherd sent off too. He had often endeavoured to beguile Mr. Poose into entering the Inn during the daytime with the promise of a cheerful glass, but so far without success.

One night, about the middle of December, when the rains fell and the winds blew more violently than ever, Mr. Poose, who was with the sheep in the fold, noticed a curious behaviour in his dog, Jim, who appeared to wish to lead his master away to the down where the flock that had not so far lambed had spent the day.

Mr. Poose trusted his dog, and, leaving the shelter of the fold, with his lantern in his hand, faced the driving rains. Following his dog's lead he came to a bush of furze where, to his astonishment, Mr. Poose found a man crouching.

' 'Tis a damp bed thee 've a-found,' said the shepherd, holding his lantern to the face of the man, who looked both poor and sad. 'And I do fancy that me hut be better.'

'You are a kind shepherd,' replied the man, whose ragged overcoat was already soaked by the rain, 'and I will be glad to accept of your shelter for this one night, that I know you will the more readily give me when I tell you that I, too, am a shepherd.'

'Who have lost 'is flock,' said Mr. Poose slyly.

Mr. Poose was busy all the night with the sheep, and the stranger slept contentedly upon the sheepskin bed, but when the dawn came and Mr. Poose opened the hut door, he found him gone.

'To look for 'is sheep, maybe,' said Mr. Poose.

On Christmas Eve the weather changed. A hailstorm drove the wind to the north; the stars shone clear, and the frost fairies were abroad. Mr. Poose was glad of the change, for the cold, though it had come so suddenly, was not as harmful to the lambs as the heavy rains.

Mr. Poose was in happy spirits that night. He would not now need to be so vigilant, and might take one or two hours' sleep in the hut. Before retiring there, however, he went, lantern in hand, through the sheep, and discovered

some that he had not expected to lamb so soon, were upon the point of labour.

Mr. Poose spent the night tending them. Now and again he would look at the shining stars.

‘ ’Tis they sheep t’ other shepherd ’ave a-lost,’ he said, winking up at them.

In the morning, seeing that all was well with the flock, Shepherd Poose had a mind to visit his cottage in the village and to wish his good wife, Joan, a happy Christmas. He carried an armful of sticks that he knew would be a welcome gift.

The church bells rang a merry tune as Mr. Poose walked in the lane, cracking, in a happy manner, the new ice in the puddles.

Outside the Inn, from which a merry buzz of conversation came, Mr. Poose met John Sparkes, who called out in a jolly tone:

‘Drink a glass to thik Holy Babe, Shepherd, that be born to-day, for thee bain’t no heathen to pass a tavern upon a Christmas morning.’

Poose replied that he must return to the flock.

‘But ’tis only woon moment that thee mid spend wi’ we,’ laughed John Sparkes, ‘and ’twill bring good luck to they sheep to drink to thik Babe.’

‘I be tired,’ said Poose, ‘and I don’t suppose that woon cup of beer will hurt master; there bain’t no sheep a-groaning in ’s pains, so just to step in and take a drink can do no harm.’

All was merriment in the parlour when Shepherd Poose entered, after hanging up his crook upon the wall on a nail beside the window, that had been used for the same purpose by every shepherd who had entered the tavern.

A weary man likes company that bids him forget his toil, and the merry jest and cheerful glass drunk to the happy morning, together with the fact that outside soft, feathery flakes of snow were falling that soon covered the ground with a white carpet, made time appear to stand still, so that Mr. Poose wotted not how the moments went.

From the Inn window Farmer Oliver’s residence, Norman Grange, could be clearly seen, and John Sparkes noted with satisfaction that Mr. Oliver, clad in a heavy coat and gaiters, was walking out of his drive gates, and

taking the way that went by the Inn and then on to the field where the flock was folded.

John Sparkes turned to Poose:

'Another of the same, shepherd?' he said. 'An' this time I 'll treat 'ee to a drop of brandy in thee's beer.'

Shepherd Poose sat near to the fire and gazed into it. The warm room, the talk, and the drink had dulled his senses; he forgot the sheep and, leaning forward still more, he closed his eyes.

John Sparkes stood by the window.

Mr. Oliver had stopped in the lane to bid a happy Christmas to Mr. Hayball, the clergyman, who was going by.

The farmer was now walking again; he would soon come by the Inn, notice the crook, go off to the field, and Shepherd Poose would certainly be dismissed that very day.

But John Sparkes gave a sudden start of surprise, for a naked Babe appeared walking in the snow. Sparkes rubbed his eyes and looked again. The Babe smiled at him, and taking down the shepherd's crook from the wall, ran lightly in the direction of the sheepfold. . . .

Mr. Oliver was in good spirits when he reached the flock, for the snow was seasonable, and he wished the shepherd a hearty Christmas greeting. The shepherd did not reply, neither did his master expect him to, for he was anxiously tending a ewe that was bringing a new lamb into the world.

Mr. Oliver noted with pleasure the gentle attention that the shepherd was giving, and, leaving him for that moment, went round to inspect the fold. Each of the penned sheep had been carefully tended, some that had been sick were now well, and only one lamb lay beside its mother apparently dead. Mr. Oliver raised it. It fell back again, as though dead.

He called to the shepherd, who came and touched the lamb, that breathed again, struggled to its feet, found the ewe's udder, and drank thirstily.

'You are wonderful,' said Mr. Oliver, 'for I thought the lamb was dead.'

Mr. Oliver left the fold; he walked by the Inn and entered his own gates again. . . .

When Shepherd Poose awoke, he hurried to the flock. The shepherd whom he had sheltered was there, who handed him his crook.

‘Thee’s sheep bain’t found yet?’ Poose asked him.

‘No, but I am still seeking them,’ replied the shepherd, and left the fold.

MRS. HOCKEY'S CROSS

Mr. Hayball was a comfortable clergyman, who liked a feather bed.

'God,' he said in one of his sermons, 'resembles nothing so much as a bed of the best feathers, very soft and downy, and all the troubles in the world can sink into and be lost in Him.'

Besides his fondness for a feather bed, Mr. Hayball was interested in fossils, and, in thinking so much about the stones, he often entirely forgot his parishioners, and even the day of the week. But Mrs. Hayball never failed to remind him of his duties, and sometimes she would have to go into his study in a hurry to tell him that the church bell was ringing.

'Oh, it's Sunday, is it?' Mr. Hayball would exclaim, dropping a stone that he was examining on to his foot; 'why, that day comes so quickly that one is never prepared for it.'

'It's the first day of the week,' Mrs. Hayball would reply, 'and so we must expect it to come rather often.'

As a rule, in the middle of the week, Mrs. Hayball would say to her husband:

'You had better go and visit Mrs. Hockey, my dear. You know how dreadful her leg looks, and her asthma makes her breathing to be heard in the street.'

'I will go at once,' said Mr. Hayball, shutting the heavy book he was reading in such a hurry that he shut one of his fingers into it. 'Oh!' he cried, 'had we been all fossils and petrified bones, we should be squeezed for our good.'

Mr. Hayball stood meekly in the hall and allowed his wife to help him on with his overcoat.

'Will you, please,' he asked her, when he found the proper place for his arm to go into, 'tell Sarah to shake the feathers a little better in our bed, for two hard knobs hurt my back last night.'

'Sarah found two great stones in the bed, that she believes you must have put there yourself.'

Mr. Hayball blushed. He walked through the village.

Mrs. Carter stood at her doorway, surrounded by a crowd of children who had been sent home from school because their heads and faces were covered with disgusting sores. Mr. Hayball paused and regarded the family with interest, as if they had just been dug out of the earth and he had never set eyes upon them before.

Mr. Hayball addressed himself to the youngest child—a baby of two—whose face was painful to behold.

'God will be kind to you if you will lean upon Him,' he said, 'for in a million years He will change your face into a rocky bone.'

Mr. Hayball hadn't gone very far down the lane before something struck his leg. He felt the blow sharply, but, hoping the stone that was cast might be a fossil, he picked it up and examined it. It was a common flint.

A little farther on Mr. Hayball met Winnie. Winnie was so thin a child that it needed no doctor to see that she was in a decline and that, unless she had plenty of fresh air and milk, she would soon be dead.

'The county hospital is a flourishing institution,' said Mr. Hayball, looking at the child kindly, 'they have a balance in the bank of two thousand pounds, and Lord Bullman says it is impossible to cure you, for the cost would ruin them. But God is kinder than Lord Bullman, for He likes little girls best as stones.'

Mr. Hayball walked on.

When he reached the village green he forgot what he had come out to do; however, as he had happened to stop exactly in front of Mrs. Hockey's cottage, he was reminded of her by her groans and heavy breathing that could be easily heard outside.

Mr. Hayball knocked at Mrs. Hockey's door, and was soon beside her bed.

'God,' said Mr. Hayball, 'has singled you out from amongst us all, Mrs. Hockey. He has chosen you to bear a cross that He sends with His love. The bitter things He has written against you are sweetened by His holy name. I am sure you are very happy, for God said, "I love Mrs. Hockey, and I will give her a monstrous leg." '

Mrs. Hockey smiled and moved her right leg that was swollen enormously.

'That leg is your cross,' said Mr. Hayball.

‘Bain’t there nothing else,’ asked Mrs. Hockey, still smiling, ‘that God mid think of?’

‘There is death,’ said Mr. Hayball.

‘An’ ’twill be a coffin!’ remarked Mrs. Hockey merrily.

‘Let us pray,’ said Mr. Hayball.

Mrs. Hockey looked at her cross. . . .

When Mr. Hayball reached his own door he found all was ready for his departure, for he and his wife were going away, that very day, upon their holiday, while Mr. Dibbin, a curate from the town, was to take charge of the village for six weeks.

Mr. Dibbin had no cross to bear; he had very thin legs and a face like deadly nightshade.

As soon as he came to the village he went into the church and commanded the sexton to sweep down the cobwebs that hung in a homely manner from the roof.

‘Mr. Hayball,’ observed the sexton, looking at the newcomer, respectfully, ‘be a kind woon to spiders.’

‘Sweep them down,’ said Mr. Dibbin.

Mr. Dibbin went out the day after his arrival, well brushed and swept himself, and saw outside their door Mrs. Carter with her family about her. Mr. Dibbin held up his hands in horror.

‘It ’s dirt,’ he cried, ‘that brings those sores.’

‘Mr. Hayball do say ’tis God,’ replied Mrs. Carter.

Mr. Dibbin swung his lean arms in a passion. He hurried down the lane.

He met Winnie. Her face was so pale and thin that her cheek bones were almost visible. Mr. Dibbin told her she should be ashamed of herself.

‘It ’s air you want,’ he said, ‘and sunshine. You must sleep out of doors at night and lie naked in the sun all day.’

Winnie blushed.

‘That would be wickedness,’ she said.

‘If you don’t, you ’ll die,’ said Mr. Dibbin.

‘Oh, I don’t mind if I do die,’ replied Winnie, ‘for Mr. Hayball says there ’s a beautiful valley where fossils lie about and are happy, and I want to be one of them.’

‘A pack of lies,’ cried Mr. Dibbin. ‘It’s your duty to grow up and be a parlour-maid.’

‘I ’d prefer to be a nice stone,’ replied Winnie, smiling, ‘and to lie amongst the daisies.’

Mr. Dibbin enquired of Winnie whether any one was bed-ridden in the parish.

‘Oh yes,’ answered Winnie, ‘poor Mrs. Hockey be, who do carry a cross.’

‘And what is that?’ asked Mr. Dibbin.

‘Only she’s fat leg,’ replied Winnie.

Mrs. Hockey expected her visitor, and she praised God that her breathing was worse and her cross more swollen. She raised it on purpose for the new clergyman to see.

Mr. Dibbin came to her bedside and listened to her breathing. He looked at her cross angrily.

Mr. Hayball had been wont to pray for the sufferer, but Mr. Dibbin did nothing of the kind.

Mrs. Hockey held up her leg.

‘I be proud of me cross,’ she said, ‘for ’tis a wonder to all, and God do love I as much as this leg be swollen.’

Mr. Dibbin’s face became yellow. He behaved in a queer manner. He broke open the window that had been nailed up, and pushed Mrs. Hockey’s bed, cross and all, near to it. A sweet and pleasant air entered the stuffy room, and Mrs. Hockey breathed easily. The motion affected her cross, for that too was reduced in size.

‘You ’ve been killing yourself, woman,’ shouted Mr. Dibbin.

Mr. Dibbin preached his first sermon in the newly swept church in a great rage. He told the people that illness should be a punishable crime, and that whoever grew sick by his own ignorant and dirty ways died as miserably as he deserved in this world, and was damned in the next.

But no six weeks, however much one tries to do in them to reform other people's manners, can last for ever, and upon the morning of the day when Mr. Dibbin left the village the sexton rang the church bells, and in the evening, when Mr. Hayball returned, he tolled them, to show his gladness.

When Mr. Hayball went out he hardly recognised Mrs. Carter and her family, for all the sores were gone.

'They won't be stones yet awhile,' sighed Mr. Hayball, regretfully, 'and God must have forgotten them.'

No flint was cast at him when his back was turned.

Winnie lay in the sunshine upon the green with her legs bare.

'I do wish meself dead, but I be getting fatter,' she slid mournfully.

Mr. Hayball tried to cheer her.

'You are sure to be buried one day,' he said, 'and when your bones are found they will never mistake you for the Rhinoceros tichorhinus.'

Mr. Hayball knocked at Mrs. Hockey's door. He was admitted, and he went upstairs.

Mrs. Hockey looked woefully at her leg that had come down, by proper treatment, to an ordinary size.

'God 'ave forsook I,' she said mournfully. ' 'E don't love I no more.'

Mr. Hayball closed the window. He pulled the bed away. Mrs. Hockey's breathing became louder.

'Let us pray,' said Mr. Hayball.

WHAT LACK I YET?

James Pinnock looked out from the low doorway of the holding upon Tadnol Heath, that was now all his own. Before him was a little hill, covered with heather, but also showing patches of white sand. Under the hill a lame cow was lying down, and a little to the right hand there was a three-acre field, which, during all the working hours—from the time James was fourteen till this day when he was thirty—he had tilled with his own hands.

James turned from the door and entered the cottage. Upon the shaky table in the one downstairs room there was an empty bottle of spirits and six wine glasses. The number of glasses was significant. His mother, whom he had buried the day before, was a heavy woman, and James had been forced to hire six bearers. James sat beside the table. He looked at the glasses and thought about his mother. A certain smell told him that she hadn't been long gone.

James had rather liked the journey to the churchyard, for, as long as he could remember, his mother had never grown tired of scolding him. She scolded him even when his father fell from a hay-waggon and broke his neck.

'You want so much,' she would say. 'You are always wanting to improve the farm and to do better in life than your poor mother.'

Whenever James tried to lay aside any money to buy a cow in milk or a few little pigs, his mother had been sure to discover the hoard and take it to the town and buy what was of no use to any one. But on the way there she would always tell Mrs. Barber, the rich widow of Applecoombe Farm, what a kind son she had and how hard he worked, 'and he takes no interest in the maidens—no interest at all.' Jane Barber would listen attentively to all she said.

When Mrs. Pinnock didn't go to the town she would spend all the morning in talking to the people in the village, and then come home very cross indeed to scold James.

After the funeral James said to Mr. Dottery, the minister:

'It's nice to know where Mother is, because often I have had to hunt in half the houses in Tadnol to find her, but now that I know where she is I feel more contented.'

The funeral was upon a Sunday and took place before the afternoon service. After watching the sexton fill in the grave, and observing to himself that though his mother had always been a gadder she had come to a place of rest at last, James had happened to pass the church door when Mr. Dottery read the verse that was to be his text: 'The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: What lack I yet?'

When James had ever mentioned a young woman to his mother she used to say:

'If thee do bring one of they little cats home I 'll spoil she's face.' And James would go into the field to work and forget the girls.

Though his mother's corpse still seemed to linger in an unpleasant manner about the cottage, James knew, as he had told the clergyman, where she was now. He also knew that he was free, and he supposed he could answer the question put by the text he had overheard. He knew what he lacked.

James Pinnock left the cottage. He climbed the little hill under which the lame cow was lying and looked at Applecoombe Farm. This farm, where Mrs. Barber lived, was a short way removed from the barren heath. Applecoombe Farm was approached from the main road by an avenue of large trees—the leaves upon them in late autumn shone like golden guineas. All was good ground here—fair cornfields, green downs, and rich pasture. Near to the farm there was a large orchard of apple trees.

James knew that he lacked this fair orchard, from whence near a hundred bushels of good apples could be gathered yearly. He also knew that he lacked the corn, the cattle, the sheep, that were Jane Barber's.

From where he stood the contrast between his own holding and Mrs. Barber's appeared strikingly enough. James was strong as a lion. He was handsome, too, in a rough way. He felt a power in him that would overcome any woman. He knew animals and he believed he knew women. He had seen his own lame cow—a poor sad beast, hardly fit to bear—become young and sprightly when the bull roared. He intended to act the bull to Jane Barber, who was withered and elderly, too, though she was not lame like the cow.

James Pinnock went to the cow and kicked its flank.

'Though thee bain't wanting, 'tis best I drive 'ee to Jane Barber's bull,' he said.

James went on kicking the cow till it rose up. He picked up a piece of furze and began to drive the cow along the heath road that led to Applecoombe Farm. The cow plodded wearily, and whenever it stopped to rest its bad leg, James beat it on.

When he drove the cow into Mrs. Barber's great yard, the cowman told him that the bull was in a distant field and that he had better leave the cow there, 'Though 'tain't nor bull she do want,' the cowman added knowingly.

James Pinnock went to find Mrs. Barber, to tell her that he had brought his cow.

Jane Barber was in the orchard, watching the trees being whitewashed and pruned so that they might bear the better crop the next season. The winter sun shone and the grass under the trees was a rich carpet of green. Jane Barber was standing under one of the trees and looked, herself, like the gnarled trunk of one. She turned in a friendly manner to James Pinnock, who eyed her as a strong man will who means to have his own way with a woman. . . .

Within a month after his mother's death, James Pinnock was married to Mrs. Barber. At the vestry door, when he shook hands with Mr. Dottery, James said, 'I don't mind leaving my mother now, for I know where she is.' Mr. Dottery wished him joy.

The wedding over, James Pinnock looked into his wife's affairs. He found that the farm was not hers as he had supposed, and that even the stock was mortgaged. James Pinnock knew what he lacked—he set himself to free the farm from debt.

He commenced a stern battle, both with nature and with his labourers, and was called a harsh and mean master by the men. Slowly, though with years needed for the working out of his plans, every venture that James Pinnock tried bore good fruit. He cleared the land of weeds, employing his own hands as well as his labourers for this purpose. He improved and increased the flock of sheep, reared the best of his calves, so that after ten years at Applecoombe Farm he possessed the finest herd of dairy cows in the county.

James Pinnock fought for the farm and won. His wife, Jane, had never been anything to him but a gnarled tree, but he didn't mind what she looked like so long as she kept the maids busy and saw to the house and the dairy.

Of all the crops that James Pinnock tended so carefully the apple harvest received the most of his attention. It was in the orchard that Jane Barber had

accepted him, and so he had come to believe that the orchard was the place to make or mar him. He would often go there upon a Sunday afternoon in the summer-time, lie down under the cool shade of his favourite tree—a Beauty of Bath—and mature his plans for the betterment of the farm.

James Pinnock had been at Applecoombe Farm for fifteen years before his ambition was satisfied and he was able to ask himself the question again: 'What lack I yet?'

The farm now belonged to his wife, and over and above the purchase price there were two thousand pounds upon deposit at the bank. But James Pinnock became more than ever hard and close in his dealings with other men, and though he had begun to ask that question again he lived according to the habits he had formed. His workmen both hated and feared him, and those who could always left him to take another place.

The great hiring fare was held at Maidenbridge upon the 14th of February, and James Pinnock decided to attend it. He had business to do there, stock to sell, the deeds of Applecoombe Farm to lodge at the bank, and a new cowman to hire.

After attending to the more important of his affairs, James went into the market-place to hire the man he needed. There was the usual crowd of workmen, some of one trade and some of another, and James Pinnock picked out John Petch from a score of applicants. John Petch was the most shabby of them all, but he did not look the kind of man to turn against his master.

'Can 'ee work?' asked James.

Mr. Petch, to show what he could do, ran round the market-place calling as if he were fetching up the cows.

'That will do,' said James Pinnock. 'And I suppose your family is well behaved, but if I catch one of your boys in my orchard I will beat him to death.'

Mr. Petch smiled.

'I be only a father to maidens, and me wife be dead,' he said.

Mr. Petch smiled again. . . .

During the early spring and summer James Pinnock spent his time in improving, as a last task, the environment of the farmhouse. He planted a grove of evergreen trees, and purchased some iron railings to put round the home meadow where his bull and rams used to feed. He built a new brick

wall around the kitchen garden. He drew gravel from the gravel-pits upon the heath and made the drive as smooth as a garden-path.

There was nothing ragged at Applecoombe now except Mr. Petch, and it was a wonder that Mr. Petch's clothes held together at all, for even a gust of wind or an unlucky nail would tear them.

The time of haymaking passed and the time of harvest, but, as it often happens, the early days in October were hotter than any of the summer hours.

Upon the first Sunday in October, James Pinnock, though he didn't know why, had a wish to look at his old home that he had left to the mercy of thistle and couch-grass when he moved to Applecoombe. He walked down the drive between the trees that were beginning to turn a golden colour, crunching the new gravel. He crossed the main road and took the same path that he had driven his cow along. James climbed the little hill upon the heath, from where he could view not only the grandeur of Applecoombe but the poor barren holding that he had forsaken when his mother died. Although he had never cared what became of it, the cottage was still his, but the roof was so rotten and worn that the rain came through the thatch and ran down the walls. The field, too, was now only rank grass. The fence was fallen.

James Pinnock turned and looked at Applecoombe Farm. He had lacked that once, but now it was his, and as fine a property as any man need wish to own.

A snake moved in the heather.

'What lack I yet?' said James Pinnock aloud.

He began to descend the hill and met Mr. Petch, who was climbing up to him.

'What 's the matter at home? What did you follow me here for?' James asked fiercely.

'They children,' said Mr. Petch, 'they bad maids 'ave broke into thee's orchard.'

James Pinnock strode past Mr. Petch, waving his stick.

' 'Tis Eva, the big maid,' called out Mr. Petch. ' 'Tis she—a grown maid —that thee should hit.'

Mr. Pinnock wished to catch the thieves suddenly. He remembered that his wife had told him that Petch had insisted on keeping his eldest daughter, Eva, who was seventeen years old, at home with him instead of allowing her to work at the farm or go elsewhere to service. And once or twice Eva, a pretty, well-grown girl with red cheeks and redder lips, had opened the drive gate for James Pinnock, but he had not regarded her.

Only the day before the farmer had decided that the apple-picking should begin as soon as the aftermath of the clover field was gathered in. The clover would be carried, if the weather remained fine, on the Monday, and on the next day after that he hoped to gather the apples. But now Petch's girls were in his orchard, stealing.

James Pinnock crept along under a bank that hid him from view. He wished to reach, unseen, a place in the orchard hedge that he had more than once thought had been broken down by some one. As he slunk along under the bank in the hot still sunshine, grasping his stick tightly, he knew that he had nothing now to look forward to. He was sullen and wrathful, but he couldn't name what he lacked.

But whatever it was that he lacked appeared to fill him with a dull rage, coming out of the bottom of his being as a dark force that rent and tore him. Those thieves, those robbers of his beautiful apples, for James knew well enough that it was from his favourite tree that Eva Petch was stealing the fruit, he would catch them now. His strength, his whole body, as he crept along, was crying out for something that he lacked. His passion grew as he neared the orchard. There the apples that he had guarded so jealously were being taken from him! No matter if there were an hundred bushels left, those few taken were worth to him now more than them all.

'Ha!' he thought savagely, 'my wife, that gnarled tree of a woman, sees to it that nothing is stolen in the house, but now at this very moment my choicest fruit is being bitten by a girl's sharp teeth.'

He remembered having seen Mr. Petch's two little girls, Bessy and Mary, picking cowslips in his home meadow and trampling down the grass. The next day he had ordered Mr. Petch to drive the bull into that field, and Mr. Petch had done so, smiling.

James Pinnock crept along the orchard hedge to find the gap. The last summer heats burned under the hedge, the orchard bank simmered. Peacock butterflies rested on the warmed flowers, and the scent of ground ivy filled the hot air.

James Pinnock reached the gap and cautiously peeped through. He heard the laughter of children and saw Eva Petch, who had climbed to a high bough of his favourite tree, handing down the largest apples she could reach to her sisters.

James Pinnock held his stick tight. He jumped through the hedge and came to the tree. The two small girls ran away, screaming. Mr. Pinnock looked up at Eva. He had caught one of them. Eva's hair was ruffled—she wore no hat—her thin summer frock showed rather than hid her body, while her breast panted, as her heart did, with fear.

Mr. Pinnock had never had his orchard robbed so shamelessly. He bid Eva come down. She obeyed, expecting that he would let her run off like the others.

As soon as her feet touched the soft grass, James threw her brutally down and began to beat her. Eva tossed about, trying to shield with her hands her body from his strokes. Her frock was soon torn, her breast laid bare, but James Pinnock still beat her.

Suddenly he threw away his stick. Eva stopped crying and even smiled at him. James Pinnock gazed at her. He knew now what he lacked. He seized her ferociously and pulled her to him. Eva was too pleased that the beating was over to resist his will, and as soon as he released her again, she smiled. She smiled because Mr. Pinnock hadn't taken away an apple that she still held in her hand. James Pinnock lifted Eva from the grass; he held her close to him. Some one was standing near and watching them. This was Mr. Petch. . . .

James Pinnock didn't return to the farm. He led Eva, who carried a little bundle of clothes, to his old home upon the heath. When she was there Eva hurried here and about, moving the furniture that had never been sold and setting things to rights. James Pinnock gazed at her. He believed he would never more have reason to say, 'What lack I yet?' He couldn't take his eyes off her, and when she put the apple she had stolen upon her own plate to eat at supper, he took her into his arms and kissed her madly. He carried her to bed in his arms, and when she laughed at him his passion was so fierce that he tore off her clothes.

The next day the weather changed. There had been thunder in the night, and all the morning a steady gloomy rain fell. Eva went to visit her father in order to bring back the news from Applecoombe Farm. She left James Pinnock alone in the cottage. As soon as she returned she began to talk quickly as a child will when it has much to say.

‘What do you think have happened?’ she said. ‘Why, the bull that we all do call ‘Dragon’ be broken out—’e be run into orchard—and only Mrs. Barber were able to drive ’en out. But that bain’t all the news, for Mrs. Barber do say that thee bain’t to go home no more.’

James Pinnock drew Eva to him.

‘Your clothes are wet through,’ he said.

‘Then we best bide in bed,’ she replied, and laughed.

The next day Eva went to the shop and got wet again. A cold north wind was blowing, and she was chilled as well as soaked. James Pinnock endeavoured to warm her body with his embraces, but she tossed about all that night and talked wildly in her sleep. By the morning she was in a high fever. In three days Eva was dead.

James Pinnock was stupefied. He was dumb with anguish. He took a last kiss before her face was hidden by the coffin lid, and looked up to see Mr. Petch smiling. In the churchyard, after the funeral was over, Mrs. Barber—as she was always called—waited for her husband.

‘None of them can manage the bull,’ she said pleadingly, ‘an’ I believe that Petch creeps into the granary at night and steals the maize for his hens. One always wants a strong man upon the place to keep things in order.’

James Pinnock did not answer his wife. He turned again to the grave and watched the sexton shovelling the earth. An old crazed woman, whose teeth chattered with the cold, muttered that she had forgotten to buy any rice at the shop to fling at the bride.

James Pinnock looked into the grave. A large lump of chalk clattered into the hole. A gust of wind brought down a few yellow leaves from a tree that stood next to the churchyard wall. The leaves sank gently into the grave.

James Pinnock remembered Mr. Dottery’s text. Looking into Eva’s grave he asked the question, ‘What lack I yet?’

Mrs. Barber took him by the arm and led him to Applecoombe Farm. On the way she told him that she was sure if he went out in the middle of the night he would catch Petch stealing the maize. James Pinnock did not heed what she said, but Mrs. Barber went on talking all the same. She said that one of the plough horses was lame and needed some attention from the master, and also that some new hurdles were wanted before the sheep could be penned upon the early turnips. But it wasn’t new hurdles that James Pinnock lacked.

He lay beside Mrs. Barber that night and stared at the ceiling. One thing alone pleased him in his thoughts. He knew where Eva was. James Pinnock sat up in bed and looked at his wife. She was lying straight out. Her thin, spare body looked gaunt and stiff. Her face, even with her eyes shut, was harsh and mean.

James Pinnock left the bed and dressed himself silently. He went out of the house. There under a full moon all his new improvements met his eye. The autumn night was very still. There was a frost. A slight sound came—the shutting of the granary door. Upon the granary steps James Pinnock saw Mr. Petch, who was descending them with a bag of maize-corn in his hand. Meeting his master in the yard, Mr. Petch forgot to smile.

James Pinnock went into the stable and found a rope. The lame horse was standing upon three legs and resting the other.

James Pinnock walked to the orchard. He found the gap that hadn't been repaired. The moon shone upon his favourite tree that was now bare of fruit. James knelt upon the grass where he had beaten and outraged Eva. He raised up his hands, but no one pitied him. He begged Eva's forgiveness for what he had done. When he arose he knew that it wasn't Eva that he lacked, but something else.

James Pinnock fastened the rope upon the bough that Eva had climbed. He knotted a noose that he slipped over his head, and let himself drop.

SQUIRE POOLEY

No gentleman had ever felt prouder than did Squire Pooley when he received into his own hands the family property and small manor-house at Blazeby in Somerset.

Mr. Pooley inherited the estate from his cousin John—a gentleman who had done nothing else all his life but lay drain-pipes, for John Pooley used always to say that if you only drain a field properly wonders will happen. What really happened was no wonder at all. Honest John died of a cold caught through standing in an open drain in the home farm, called so because no tenant could be found for it.

John had spent so much upon the drains, even selling the Manor plate and furniture to buy pipes, that when George Pooley, the new squire, came into possession there was hardly anything left for him except the family portraits in the dining-room.

As was most natural, George couldn't bear the sight of a drain-pipe, but he immensely admired the family portraits. He remembered them when he was a child and had stayed in the house at Christmas and had done hardly anything else but look at them, while his cousin John was playing at digging with a silver fork, under the table.

George was now in a position to make the most of the past and of his family, and he intended that the world should know him—though willing enough that the world should be only Blazeby—and know what he was and whom he came from.

Sir William Pooley wore the fine velvet of the reign of Elizabeth, with the curled hair and pointed beard of the same period, and it was said of him that once he had gone out a-birding with Sir Philip Sidney. The next portrait was of Squire James, a strong supporter of Cromwell and Parliament, and a member of that august body. He, however, altered his opinions when the king came to his own again. Squire James had a long and doleful face and very large calves, and his sober clothes and wide hat made him look, even by lamplight, a very stern and crafty gentleman; and so he was.

Next there came Nicholas Pooley—a beau of the Regency—who had played away all the family property in Hampshire in one night, leaving only the little manor of Blazeby that he had quite forgotten.

The fine ladies were Julia and Ann. These were the wives of William and Nicholas. They were both of them buxom and rosy, and their clothes were exactly in the finest fashion of their times.

Mr. George Pooley was a bachelor, and a proud one. He wished to be noticed more than his cousin John, who had only worked with his labourers in the clayey fields, so that even Mr. Puddy, the gardener, said of him when he was buried, 'There bain't no more worms where master do bide now than did crawl wi' 'en in they deep drains.'

It was unfortunate for Squire Pooley, considering how proud he was, that Mr. Daniels, the grocer and draper in the next village, should have been so like him, and, as Mr. Daniels was not a rich man—though it was said that he, too, possessed a fine picture—Mr. Pooley felt sure that every one in Blazeby must soon know the difference between the grocer and the true gentleman.

Although Mr. Pooley was so proud, there was nothing about him that could command any more respect than was shown to Mr. Daniels, and that was not much.

Mr. Pooley had not lived in Blazeby for more than a month before he discovered that his state and consequence were not what he had hoped when he used to brood over the grandeur of the family portraits, then so far away, in his bed-sitting-room in Bloomsbury.

Something, he felt, ought to be done so that the common people might know what he was. Even Mrs. Mummery at the village shop used to let him stand for five minutes in her doorway while she served Mrs. Toller with a pound of rice or Betty with a penny packet of sweets.

'It must be those drain-pipes,' Mr. Pooley would say sadly, 'that have lowered the family, though the fields are as wet as ever. If only I could dig them all up again, I might sell enough of them to buy better clothes to make a show of myself to impress the villagers and compel them to see me as a gentleman.'

Mr. Pooley ate his dinner sadly; he only drank beer because the wine-cellar had been empty ever since Nicholas discovered Blazeby Manor. But all at once an idea came to Squire George.

'Mrs. Curl,' he said suddenly to his housekeeper, who was removing the plates, 'has any one here seen my dead relations?'

Mrs. Curl was so startled at his remark that she dropped a plate.

‘I mean the portraits of my illustrious ancestors,’ explained Mr. Pooley, ‘the family portraits. I will throw open my dining-room to-morrow,’ shouted the Squire, rising in a hurry from his chair and gazing at Sir William. ‘No one can show such a picture as that in Blazeby, Mrs. Curl.’

Mrs. Curl blushed.

‘I am told,’ she said, ‘that Mr. Daniels has a picture of a lady in his parlour with nothing on her, that every one tells about——’

‘Hush!’ said Squire Pooley, ‘such a comparison, Mrs. Curl, is by no means proper.’

It was not long before Mrs. Curl told the news in Blazeby that Mr. Pooley invited any who wished to come and look at the pictures, and she added too, upon her own account, that as there was no naked lady to be seen as at Mr. Daniels’, a jug of beer would be provided to prevent disappointment.

On the Sunday, Mr. Pooley prepared himself for his company. He had dressed with care, but with all his care he couldn’t deny when he looked into the glass that he bore a strong resemblance to Mr. Daniels, even in his best clothes, that, alas! were old ones. However, he felt sure that the glory of his ancestors would so clothe him with majesty that no one could possibly mistake him again for a common tradesman.

Mr. Puddy was the first to arrive, and though Mr. Pooley pointed out Nicholas to him as the grandest of them all, Puddy only looked at the beer. Peach and Toller now came with their wives and partook of the refreshment until the jug was empty, and only then were the visitors willing to look at the portraits.

Mr. Pooley spoke most ably; he told fine tales of them all, praising the member of the Rump Parliament the most of all. He told of the great estates of the gentlemen, speaking their names a great many times, and informed his hearers of the extreme virtue and lofty manners of the ladies, whose beauty, he said, had been the envy of queens.

‘Look at the noble Ann,’ he cried; ‘what lovely lips, what delicate hands! And Julia! Isn’t she a beauty?’

Every one was deeply impressed. Toller touched his hat, that he had forgotten to take off, to Sir John. Puddy bowed to Mistress Ann. Peach stared at the member of Parliament as if he meant never to forget him.

When the visitors were gone Mr. Pooley felt pleased though tired. All had gone well, and no one had even mentioned that vulgar picture possessed by Mr. Daniels. His feelings were, however, a little cooled when Mrs. Curl informed him that all the beer had been drunk and there was none left for his luncheon.

The next day Mr. Pooley wished to see the effect of all the fine tales that he had told of his grand relations, whose names, he felt, must be in every one's mouth.

But he was a little disappointed perhaps when he rang the bell in Mrs. Mummery's shop, and she told him she 'thought it was the grocer.' But as he knew she hadn't visited the Manor with the others he forgave her mistake and walked into his fields. The first thing he saw there was a heap of old drain-pipes—the very ones that John had intended to lay with his own hands when he caught his cold. Mr. Pooley beat them to pieces with a great stone. As soon as he had finished them he went into another field, discovered some more, and repeated the destruction.

It was now afternoon, and he watched Peach, the cowman, fetch up the cows. Mr. Peach stood beside the gate, and as the cows came by one by one he named them.

'Come up, Nicholas,' he called, 'do 'e card-play into cow-stall. Walk on, Master William, thee bain't a-flying nor hawk wi' wold Sidney to-day. Shoo! shoo! Member of Parliament, stir up theeself, or else King Charles will rump 'ee.' The two last cows came through the gate together. 'Julia,' called out Mr. Peach, 'Lady Ann! Thee be two lazy Pooleys. 'Tis to court thee be going where milking-stool be queen.'

One other cow came by that had no grand name, and Mr. Pooley turned away disappointedly.

'I was not mentioned,' he said sadly.

He went by Mrs. Puddy's cottage. Mrs. Puddy was calling her hens. Each of the hens was called by a noble name.

Mr. Pooley passed the stables where Toller was feeding the horses. The horses had been named, too, in the same fine way, but Squire Pooley was never mentioned.

Mr. Pooley addressed himself that evening to Mrs. Curl—'All the stock are named after my ancestors,' he said gloomily, 'but I am not even spoken of.'

‘Perhaps, sir,’ Mrs. Curl replied reflectively, ‘they still mistake you for Mr. Daniels.’

Bacon describes the act of Envy as having something in it of Witchcraft. He affirms that deformed persons and eunuchs, old men and bastards are envious, and it was no doubt because Mr. Pooley was an old man that this horrid vice seized upon him. He grew envious of the family portraits. He was still unnoticed; no one bowed to him, and when Mrs. Mummery asked Mr. Daniels to wait a little longer for his money, she called him Sir John, and even Mr. Puddy’s new baby was called Ann and not Georgina, as Mr. Pooley had expected. No one thought of him: he might just as well have been Mr. Daniels. Even the children called out:

‘ ’E bain’t nothing, ’e bain’t no Member of Parliament, ’e bain’t Nicholas.’ . . .

When the fifth of November came the little boys gathered bundles of faggots and set a light to them upon the village green. As they were dancing about the fire and letting off crackers Mrs. Curl arrived with a message from the Squire that he had some guys that he wished them to burn. The boys went willingly to the Manor, and each one of them returned to the fire with a large picture.

‘Ha!’ they shouted, when Mr. Pooley’s ancestors were well alight. ‘ ’Tain’t no use calling boar-pig William no more, so ’tis best we call ’e George Pooley.’

Mr. Pooley, who had watched the burning, returned proudly to the Manor.

THE HUNTED BEAST

Mr. Walter Gidden, the vicar of East Dodder, climbed the stile slowly. He rested upon it as if he had a long hour in which to do nothing before he went home. Then he looked back. Something had happened, something horrible. Something that he could not bring his mind to think of. . . .

Nature sometimes looks with a curious pity at a man upon whom has fallen, from who knows where, an awful event. But the pity of nature is dumb: it is also unthinking. It pities the victim and the torturer. It pities the dead by the look it gives them—and the living it pities by their fears.

Mr. Gidden climbed softly over the stile, he leant against it and tried to think.

He was in the lane that led to the village and to his house. Upon either side of the lane the hedges were covered with honeysuckle. The sweet and odorous scent of new-mown hay filled the air. Everywhere there were flowers, and a little way down the lane a tiny rabbit sat and busily scratched itself. Suddenly, coming from nowhere, rich colour went by—a peacock butterfly. . . .

Unthinking nature can deceive as well as pity. All seemed the same as it ever had been in this quiet country lane. Evidently nature wished to blot out, for a moment at least, in Mr. Gidden's mind, what had happened, but only that the horrid wave should gather force to break.

A great many times had Mr. Gidden, happy with the contentment that belongs to a good man, strayed to that very spot to loiter.

An evil dream might have overtaken him. Perhaps he had lain down beside the stile—he might never have gone into the field. Then nothing had happened—the lane was the same. He knew the blackbird that sang from the ash tree—he knew him by one white feather. Mr. Gidden looked down at his boots. . . .

Mr. Gidden had lived at East Dodder for twenty-five years. He had been married for thirty years. During all that time he had loved his wife and she had loved him. The two living children—there had been a girl, Mary, who had died—were both dutiful and good. The family were united lovingly and their thoughts were for one another. . . .

There was no one in sight. Away towards the village a herd of cows was feeding peacefully. No one interrupted them: they might have been feeding there for ever. No crash came, the heavens did not fall, no earthquake happened, the sky was just the same.

But Mr. Gidden trembled. Had he the ague? His teeth chattered. Suddenly he seized his own throat: he held tight for a moment, gasped, and let go. Why did not the green summer fields gape and pour out hell-fire? How could all the sweetness of summer be there still—with him standing there?

He now walked along the lane uneasily. He thought he staggered, but he was wrong, for he walked with his usual stride as if nothing had happened.

Before he knew where he was he opened his own gate, and he was careful to close it after him. His wife was sitting upon a garden-seat, sewing. Mr. Gidden wondered what she was sewing.

He had returned a little earlier than usual from his afternoon walk; there was nothing untoward in that. It was kind of him, that was all, for he was often late. Mrs. Gidden spoke to him and went on with her sewing—she was darning a table-cloth. He might have felt the sun in the lane a little too warm. Or the downs a little fatiguing? She had seen him there, and a little before he reached the summit, she had also noticed the children.

When she saw the children she found a new rent in the table-cloth. Village washerwomen are very careless!

Mrs. Gidden had watched before she began to repair the rent she had found. She wished well to those children, employing her kindest thoughts about them. She even knew them at that distance away—the two Budden boys and Nellie Webber. Her husband was upon the down and those children in the fields below.

As she had watched him there, there rose in her heart a wonderful feeling of gratitude to God for giving her such a happy life. She hoped to do more good yet, to help others more. She ought to say something to Nellie Webber, who was a trifle too merry with her young limbs, but young girls soon grow. . . .

Mr. Gidden had gone quietly into the house. She heard the study door shut; he would be still there when tea was ready. . . .

Mr. Gidden sat at his study table, the round inkpot was in front of him and his favourite pen. He took up the sermon that he had been writing before

he went out. He had begun and ended his sermon with the word ‘God’—that was curious.

He rose from his chair and took the clock—a heavy one—from the mantelpiece, and placed it upon the table in front of him.

He carefully calculated the movement of time.

Those two Budden boys, when they ran off and left Nellie alone, could not have run far. They must have watched what he had done to Nellie, from some hiding-place near.

As soon as he was out of sight they would have gone to her again. He had probably reached home when they had found her all bloody in the ditch.

Mr. Gidden knew a little about boys. Boys like to look at anything strange: they stand and stare for five minutes and then they run away. They would wait and see if she moved. Then they would run home to tell Mrs. Webber—ten minutes!

Mrs. Webber, a stout talkative woman, who bore an ill character in the village, wouldn’t hurry to the policeman’s cottage; she would talk to people on her way. No one ever hurried in Dodder. It would be fully half an hour, from the time Mrs. Webber set off to tell the policeman, to the moment when Constable Burr would call at the Rectory.

Mr. Gidden looked at the clock. What had he done? He must try to think; he must remember what it was.

But his thoughts wandered. It was hard to hold them to the point. Something seemed to be pulling at his coat-tails. That was his past life. His past life pleaded with him and tried to pull him back.

There had been many joys in it—harmless, peaceful joys. ‘That may be continued,’ said the past, ‘for many more years.’

But what had he decided to do?—to die. And for what? He must remember what it was that he had to die for.

He had been walking along the top of the downs when the rabbit screamed. He knew the sound at once and he knew what it was—a rabbit caught in a snare but not killed. He had come upon a rabbit before, caught in a gin, and had killed the poor beast at once with a blow of his stick. He would put this one out of its pain in the same manner. Perhaps if it were only wired he would release it and let it go.

But, this time, Mr. Gidden wasn't the first to find the rabbit. No, nor yet the first to hear its scream, for the children had heard it. Mr. Gidden watched the children going to the rabbit, and he followed them.

For some reason or other he felt nervous. It occurred to him that the children might think if they saw him that he had come not to save the rabbit but to steal it.

Mr. Gidden was not ignorant of the behaviour of village minds. A country child thinks that the wrong he does is only the wrong that another would do if he had the same chance. When once, by mistake, Mr. Gidden had surprised two persons lying together in a lane, whom he supposed to be fighting, he had heard a voice say over the hedge, ' 'E do wish old Peter were 'e.'

The children, in their eagerness to get to the rabbit, had not seen the clergyman coming after them, and Mr. Gidden was able to conceal himself behind a bush only a little way from the snared rabbit. He watched what went on.

The boys had taken the rabbit out of the snare and had given it to Nellie to hold. Nellie was fourteen years old, a plump, coarse, sturdy girl.

She held the rabbit firmly while the boys examined every part of it. They all laughed to see how the fleas from the rabbit hopped about.

Presently Jack Budden took out from his pocket a blunt knife, and Nellie said jokingly, ' 'Tis they eyes stoats do first bite at.' To the horror of Mr. Gidden, Jack, in imitation of the stoats' behaviour, gouged out the rabbit's eyes with the blunt knife.

For a moment while he watched, Mr. Gidden could not move. The children placed the rabbit upon the grass to see what it did.

Then a terrible rage overcame Mr. Gidden. He rushed out of his hiding-place and beat the blind rabbit to death with his stick. He turned upon the children, meaning to beat them too.

The boys escaped his hands and ran off. But the girl wasn't so fortunate; she did not run so quickly as the boys; perhaps she wanted to know what the clergyman would do to her.

Mr. Gidden threw himself upon her. He tore at her clothes. She struggled and fell into the ditch. He struck her, lay upon her in his fury, and held to her throat. His stick was broken; he took up a great bone that lay near and struck her with that. There was blood upon the bone, and Nellie now lay very still.

During the struggle Mr. Gidden had wished to do the very worst a man could do. He had wished to violate her—to give her cruelty for cruelty, pain for pain. But her clothes conquered him. He did not know what to do, he did not understand young girls. He looked down at her—she did not move. He was satisfied, he had avenged the rabbit. Though the world delivered no justice, he had delivered it. He had toppled over the world. . . .

The Reverend Walter Gidden looked at the clock, he calculated the minutes that must elapse before the policeman would come for him.

Mr. Gidden hadn't lived in the country for twenty-five years for nothing, he knew the people a little, he had read the local paper, he had listened to the village news. He might not have quite killed Nellie, but he knew what they would say he had done to her. He also remembered that his wife had said sadly—though a moment after she had remarked more gaily that young girls soon grow—that a cripple had been a little too kind to Nellie a few days before. . . .

Mr. Gidden rose hurriedly. Some one had opened and shut the front gate, cautiously, sedately, gently.

Mr. Gidden looked out of the side window. It was, as he expected, the constable—Mr. William Burr. Mr. Gidden crossed the room to the larger window that led into the back garden. He leaped out of it.

He climbed some railings, he was in a little field beyond the garden. Two calves were in the field; these galloped away. Mr. Gidden lay down in a small pit.

They would not search for him at once. Mr. Burr would only enquire after him. Mr. Burr would not wish to shock the lady, he would ask about him as if he were merely enquiring about his health. If Mr. Gidden was out, Burr would go to the inspector at Stonebridge to ask what he ought to do.

Mr. Burr would say, 'Is Mr. Gidden at home?' and Mrs. Gidden would reply, 'He was sitting in the study a moment ago, but perhaps he has gone out for another little walk.'

But Mr. Gidden couldn't stay where he was; even though the hounds were not actually after him he knew himself to be a hunted beast. He left the pit and crept on with his back bent, hiding and running. He came to a hedge that he could not remember ever having noticed before. Everything looked different. The earth and sky were not the same now; the green grass mocked at him.

He clambered through the hedge and found himself in a field of corn. He crept into the corn, treading carefully. He began to crawl, he crawled on and on, and then he lay down.

He had now time to think. He lay upon his back and looked up at the corn. A little mouse, moving amongst the corn, came to have a look at him. How high the corn was! It touched the sky. Every reed of corn appeared to have a distinct life. Each stalk was wonderful. They grew up high to heaven and to God. Could he but become a stalk of corn or a little mouse!

Mr. Gidden endeavoured to calm his mind and to look philosophically at the event that had befallen him and at what must come of it. That morning he had received a letter from his son John, who was a curate in Bloomsbury. His daughter, too, had written from Bedford College. He had read their letters happily, in his study before breakfast. He had felt comfortable and contented; the warm weather, the letters, had pleased him.

He remembered his age—fifty-four. He was in good health except for a little chest weakness, and that always made him take the greater care of himself. He might have lived, in all comfort and happiness, until he was very old. But the bolt had fallen, and he was not going to be taken alive.

That thought twisted and bent him, and yet he held firmly to it. It struggled in him, changing into different forms, trying to escape. He held it firm; he would not let it go. He would never live to make sport for the mob. Let the evil ones toss him to and fro—when he was dead—what would he care?

When his name was cried round the streets of Weyminster by the newsboys he wouldn't know of it. It was his wish now—to die.

Shouts came from the village. He was being called for. Every one, he was sure, must know by this time what he had done. He must go farther, he must fly. He said the last words aloud, and so they reminded him of the prayer for the sick—'We fly to Thee for succour in behalf of this Thy servant.'

Mr. Gidden crept on all fours out of the corn. He came to another hedge; a gap in it was guarded by a broken hurdle, round which nettles grew. Mr. Gidden crawled through the nettles. He ran, taking an uncertain course, running by this hedge and by that, crushing the pretty flowers with his feet, breaking through the tall weeds. Sometimes he would creep so that he might more conveniently hide himself.

Once he stopped, peeped through some bushes, and looked at the village. The village appeared to be quiet, he even thought he saw Nellie walking over the green with something white round her head—a bandage. But he couldn't believe his own eyes when he remembered what he had done to her. He did not know how hardy children are.

At last, after crossing the road that led to Shelton, he crept into a little spinney where there were pools of water and thick tufts and tussocks of grass. Mr. Gidden threw himself down amongst them. His hands and his face burned and tingled; he had both stung and scratched himself. His clothes, that had that morning been so sleek and black, were now all spotted and torn. He leaned over a pool of clear water and saw his face reflected. He was become horrible; the face he saw was distorted with anguish; he looked pale and ghastly. He had never seen even a dying man look as he did. The dying, for the most part, were carefully tended in Dodder. And though they might gasp and their breath rattle—yet they lay upon soft pillows. He was far more awful to look at than the worst of them.

From the place in which Mr. Gidden had concealed himself, he could see the downs and the field, too, where the children had been. He saw two men there, and now and again one of them would kneel down as though to examine the ground.

'Of course,' thought Mr. Gidden, 'they must have carried her away,' but they were still looking for anything that he might have left to prove his guilt. Perhaps he had left his hat. He fancied now that it had fallen into the ditch. He couldn't remember having his hat upon his head when he reached home. Was he wearing it now?—no—then he must have left it behind him somewhere.

As he lay in the marsh his past life crept up to him, as a little dog might come who feared a whipping.

Mr. Gidden had entered the world upon a Christmas Day—the longed-for and prayed-for child of gentle and pious parents. He was born in a comfortable parsonage home in Wiltshire. There was a brook in front of the house, where there used to be kingfishers. Upon the south wall of the house there grew a wonderful magnolia. He had adored, with a vast adoration, the great white flowers. His mother had told him that they were beautiful because they had committed no sin. His mother used to lift him up to touch them. He remembered his own little hands, his clean shirt cuffs, and the stainless flowers. Nothing harmed him then.

There was the great Bible—and the first words that he learned to read —'And the Lord called Samuel again the third time.'

He read easily.

He had been delicate, and he could never bear to witness the least cruelty. Once he found another little boy cutting off the whiskers of a cat—a common practice in the country. Walter had rushed upon him, brandishing a wooden sword in his hand. The boy fled.

After those magic days of childhood were over, Mr. Gidden's life had passed on evenly, nothing surprising ever happened. There was, he had ever believed, a loving God who, when it was for their eternal good, healed the sick and gave to those He healed a new chance to do better and to ask for pardon for their sins.

Those gentle thoughts were now all gone—a brutal thief had stolen them away; they were with him no more. Why was he a man? Had he been but one of those tussocks of grass, all might have been well. Strange hummocks they were, whose roots, after many years of growth, had built up a pedestal for the living grass above—a yard or two above the ground some of them were! Here was Nature's mournful plan, the living built up upon the dead. Only the summit of all the bones was green.

Mr. Gidden shut his eyes. Perhaps when he opened them he would be in his study. Or else, was it a dream? Had he laid him down to sleep near to a bunch of thyme upon the down? Then he had dreamed a rather strange dream. Did he use to walk about in his dreams—perhaps to kill? A girl had been found dead upon the heath a year before. Some one must have killed her too. Perhaps it was he—Walter Gidden. Thus moves the devil's cruelty in the earth. The worlds shudder, the skies weep. The deed is done.

Mr. Gidden raised his head: he heard voices. Two men were walking towards him from the direction of the Shelton road. They were two rabbit-catchers, the very two who had been under the hill, setting their snares. They were accompanied by a little black dog. Mr. Gidden did not recognise them.

Mr. Gidden crept to the farther side of the copse. His hands were torn by thorns, his knees sank into the mud, but he was going away from the men.

He crept into a ditch and under a low railing. He was in the meadow. He raised himself and ran, hoping to reach the hedge across the meadow before he was seen. But he had not run far before he knew that he could not escape. The men must see him before he reached safety. What was he to do?

The field he was crossing was a water meadow, in which there were ditches. He cast himself into a ditch in which was half a foot of water. The water ran into a tunnel that burrowed under a grassy roadway where the haycarts rumbled in summer and the cows plodded in winter.

Mr. Gidden peeped out of the ditch through the meadow-sweet and mint. The two men were coming directly to the place where he lay. He crept into the tunnel to hide. He could not crawl in, the place was too low for that. He moved along like a snake or a worm.

He lay still in the middle of the tunnel. The water trickled over his clothes and soaked him through. He heard voices: the men had evidently come to that very place and were resting beside the little ditch, talking and laughing. They were speaking of some one who had disgraced himself. Mr. Gidden supposed they were speaking about him. Presently something dashed into the opening, and a dog barked.

Mr. Gidden was filled with horror. They would have him yet, he thought.

The dog spluttered and splashed. Mr. Gidden was wary. The little dog came on inquisitively, barking with short, sharp barks. It came near; Mr. Gidden clutched at it and held it by the throat. He strangled the dog slowly. When one hand grew tired, he used the other. At length he moved so that he could clasp the dog's throat with both his hands.

After he had strangled the dog, he held its head under the water.

The men did not seem to be aware that the dog had crept into the tunnel; they had moved away and were now calling their dog out of the spinney. They supposed it had run in there. Mr. Gidden let the dead dog go.

He buried his own face in the water. He gasped and spluttered like the dog. But he could not drown there, he must take stronger means than that.

He had avenged the cruelty done to the rabbit, and now he had killed this dog. Who could prevent the cruelty of the world? No one. But he could end himself, and that would be something done.

For some hours he lay there, and then crept out of the tunnel.

The evening was very still. A few dim stars were in the sky, looking faint, weary, and sad.

Mr. Gidden lay on the grass, his limbs were cramped, he could hardly stir. Below him in the ditch was the dead body of the little dog.

Mr. Gidden tried to get up; he succeeded at the third attempt. His limbs were heavy, as though Death had already touched him with his clammy hands. He limped out of the field, and cautiously crossed the road, taking nearly the same way that he had come. He went along in the same cornfield that he had hid himself in.

He was near his home, and he heard the supper-bell ring. The sound called him. He listened. He thought he heard his wife calling him by name. His legs, without his command, moved towards his home. In a few moments he would be there.

He stopped suddenly. Some one in the village laughed—a horrible laugh. It was the hunchback. The cripple didn't trouble about Nellie now. He could laugh as he chose.

Mr. Gidden turned to go to the sea. He was very careful of himself. He did not wish to faint by the way.

Mr. Gidden had always been careful not to take cold. But he had done queer things that day. He had lain in a swamp—in a ditch. He had always been careful about other things too. He was very cleanly, he shaved every morning. If he had the smallest pimple upon his face he would look at it askance and shave the more carefully. The remainder of his body was always as smooth and white as a child's. How would he look after a few days in the sea?—God's Judgment.

Mr. Gidden climbed down the cliff slowly: he did not wish to fall. He looked to his steps.

At the bottom of the cliff he picked up a child's boat. He walked, with the boat in his hand, into the sea.

He knew he could not swim far. His clothes hung heavy, but still he swam out and the tide helped him. He let himself sink, but rose in a moment gasping, and hitting the water with his hands, letting the little boat go.

The little boat floated away. Mr. Gidden began to fight horribly for his life.

He heard the hunchback laugh. The water closed over his head. He thought he was on the top of it, in the child's boat, but he sank deeper.

MR. HANDY'S WIFE

Mr. John Handy had one real holiday a week. He always walked out on Saturday afternoons to visit his sister who lived at Maids Madder. Mr. Handy's sister was Mrs. Jane Pelly, and she was a widow. All the week Mr. Handy worked for Farmer Lord in the Shelton fields, but on Saturdays, at one o'clock, Mr. Handy used to carry his fork, or his hook, home with him and hang up whichever he had used that morning upon its proper nail in his woodshed. Mr. Handy would then carefully clean his heavy workday boots with a chip of wood, and once or twice in the winter he threw the little heap of mud, scraped from his boots, into the garden with his spade.

As soon as he had hung up his tools and scraped his boots if they were muddy, Mr. Handy would address himself to the cobwebs in the corner of his woodshed, and remark aloud as if it were the first time he had ever spoken to them—'I be going Madder way to visit sister.'

After telling this to the cobwebs, Mr. Handy—a peaceful man of forty, with a look of trustfulness that matched his moustache—would give himself a shake, as though to shake off the serf and put on the freeman, step into his cottage parlour, and await his dinner. The distance from Mr. Handy's woodshed to his parlour was but two yards, but Mr. Handy would step these two yards in a slow and easy manner that showed the free-born Englishman, and inform his wife, as he had the cobwebs, that he was going to visit his sister.

During his dinner, Mr. Handy would look most admiringly at his wife, Winnie, and chew gratefully as though she were become a part of the cheese that he ate. Mrs. Handy knew, as every woman does, that she was being watched lovingly, and her lips would look the redder, and the contour of her bosom, as his eyes followed her movements, became more and more rounded and womanly.

Winnie Handy used to lean over the table to take away the loaf of bread when he had cut what he wanted, so that he might have a nearer view of her comeliness, and Mr. Handy would take advantage of her nearness to look the more kindly at her. . . .

It was the first Saturday in May. Mr. Handy's wife looked more blooming than ever, and had just leant over the table very near to Mr. Handy to take the bread away.

‘I do most days,’ said Mr. Handy, leaning back in his chair and watching his wife, ‘see Thomas Pickup and Polly Dent when I walk to sister’s.’ Mr. Handy gazed at his wife’s apron and she blushed. ‘Thee’s mother,’ said Mr. Handy, addressing his three children—all little girls, under ten, who had run into the room from the lane with their hands full of cowslips—‘thee’s mother be a woman. An’ a woman that I do mind when I be out. Now look at she.’

Winnie Handy was putting away the plates. Every movement that she made was a sure and evident indication that she knew how to enjoy and be enjoyed by a man.

‘I do talk to Mr. Pickup about ’ee, Winnie,’ said Mr. Handy, ‘for, even when I be stepping on they little loose stones in road, I do mind ’ee.’

‘Thee don’t tell too much about me, I do hope,’ said Winnie, laughing. ‘Thee don’t tell none of they folk about . . .’

‘No, no,’ replied Mr. Handy, ‘they be secrets that a walking man don’t never tell.’

‘And when thee be gone to sister’s,’ said Mr. Handy’s wife, turning to look out of the window, ‘I do put the children to bed and clean the room we do sleep in.’

‘But we bain’t asleep,’ said Bessy, the youngest of the children, ‘when our Daddy do come in.’

‘Oh yes, ’ee be,’ said Mrs. Handy, bidding the children eat up their dinner.

Mr. Handy now busied himself in preparing for his departure. First, he took off his coat and shaved himself before a tiny glass, placed upon the window-sill. After that was over and he had carefully wiped and put away his razor, he walked up the seven shaky steps to the bedroom and dressed himself in his Sunday clothes that his wife had laid ready for him.

Feeling himself so much the grander by the change, he stepped gently down the stairs, put on his Sunday boots, and took up his black, holiday walking-stick—a wedding-present from his wife—and regarded it for a moment in silent pride. Having done all according to his Saturday custom, Mr. Handy said quietly, ‘I be going to sister’s,’ and went by his wife who was washing the plates, and so out of the cottage door.

In the lane, beside the garden gate, Mr. Handy stopped. He had no need to hurry, and he listened. The distant sound of a military band from the camp

that was about six miles away, came to him.

This sound gave no kind of information to Mr. Handy, other than that the wind was in the north, and so the afternoon was likely to be fine. It was only a habit of Mr. Handy's to wait for a moment beside his own gate before he ventured out into the lane. Perhaps he wished the little birds in the cottage hedge to admire the wonderful shine he had given to the boots that he always cleaned before he set out to work on Monday mornings.

While Mr. Handy yet looked back, Bessy ran out of the house and fled, as fast as she could go, round the little garden with her mother after her.

' 'Tain't time to go to bed yet,' Bessy called. 'All t' other children be out to play, and 'tain't time to push we into bedroom.'

Mr. Handy's wife now caught Bessy and stopped her from saying any more with a good shaking.

Mr. Handy smiled. He walked down the lane in his Saturday manner, continuing his way through Shelton village until he reached the cottage where Mr. Pickup lived. Had Mr. Handy not seen Mr. Pickup in his garden he would have only passed by, remarking to himself that 'some folk bain't always where they be expected'—but this time Mr. Handy had no need to say so, for Mr. Pickup was where he expected him to be—beside his garden wall.

Though Mr. Pickup was there there was something unusual about him. Mr. Pickup had his right arm in a sling. Mr. Handy hit a poppy bud that grew under the wall with his walking-stick.

'What 'ave 'ee been a-doing to thee's arm?' he enquired, regarding Mr. Pickup with a grave, though a holiday, interest.

' 'Twere done,' replied Mr. Pickup, looking with extreme concern at his arm, 'at Madder Inn when they soldiers were talking—and thee be going they Madder ways, too, by the look of 'ee.'

Mr. Handy gazed up the road. Even with a bad arm, he supposed Mr. Pickup would speak as expected. Mr. Pickup softly drew nearer to the wall. Presently he spoke.

'Thee 've left something at home that be the best part of 'ee,' said Mr. Pickup. 'An' when thee two be together something do happen.'

Mr. Handy opened his mouth widely, but he did not laugh.

‘Winnie,’ he said, ‘be made different to I, and ’tis thik difference that do interest.’

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Pickup. ‘Thee can be merry when church clock do strike.’

Mr. Handy expected that to come and looked pleased.

‘Thee do pass here most Saturdays,’ observed Mr. Pickup after a silence of five minutes, during which Mr. Handy employed his eyes in gazing at his friend’s wounded arm. Mr. Pickup looked at his arm, too, as if that member, through its injury, had become an alien part of him that he was obliged to nurse through necessity.

‘They soldiers don’t fancy being called liars,’ Mr. Pickup said, nodding at his arm apologetically. ‘But who be ’ee a-going to see at Madder? There be Polly Dent who do live by the pond. Don’t Winnie mind thee a-going they ways?’

‘She do know,’ replied Mr. Handy, ‘that Polly don’t earn no shilling from I in Grange meadow, for ’tis to sister’s I do walk on Saturdays.’

Mr. Pickup raised his bandaged arm and groaned.

‘Soldiers be fighters, as well as liars,’ he said mournfully.

Mr. Handy moved his feet; he changed his walking-stick from one hand to the other and began to walk. Mr. Pickup entered his cottage. He was going to tell his wife all that Mr. Handy had said.

The afternoon sun shone kindly. Even the air was visible—hot and shimmering—over the meadows. The delicious odour of clover blossoms scented the wind. But Mr. Handy cared for none of these things; he had only thoughts for his wife, Winnie. He had never spoken in a loving manner to any but she. When he was but a boy he had planted a willow twig in his father’s garden upon the evening when, after an exciting chase, he had first kissed Winnie. He had watched the twig grow, and Winnie grew, too—and never in any Sunday walk with her had John Handy behaved unbecomingly.

‘They naughty ways bain’t for we,’ he used to say, ‘for there be thee’s wedding-frock and the ring to talk of.’

During the afternoon walk upon the wedding-day Mr. Handy began to be a little freer in his manners, but Winnie resisted him.

‘Oh, I bain’t Polly Dent,’ she said, ‘and thee had best wait till bed-time do come.’

‘I did only mistake the hour,’ replied Mr. Handy.

When the wedding-night came, and afterwards, too, Mr. Handy could never admire his wife enough, and would bless himself that so many wonders that go to make a pretty woman were all his, and his alone, to do as he chose with.

‘Ah!’ he said, when he saw his first child nursed at the breast, ‘thee’s mother ’ave all that be proper to feed ’ee.’ . . .

Mr. Handy walked along in the dust of the road. The sun shone upon him and a cuckoo flew lazily over him, perched in a tree, and began to call.

‘ ’Tis a bird,’ said Mr. Handy.

Mr. Handy always liked to mark the difference between this holiday walk and those other journeys that, in the way of his profession, he made to the fields. He would show himself this difference by stopping sometimes.

He stopped now beside a deep roadside pond where a willow tree grew. A moor-hen fed under the willow with its family of chicks.

‘Birds!’ said Mr. Handy.

But these birds were not all that Mr. Handy saw in the pond, for the surface of the water was clear in the May sunshine, and John Handy saw himself reflected in it. After gazing at himself for a few moments, Mr. Handy remarked:

‘They waters do know I for a married man.’

To show the waters, perhaps, that he was careless and idle, as well as married, Mr. Handy dipped his stick into the pond in order to see if he could feel the bottom. He felt nothing, but in reaching down he nearly overbalanced and fell into the pond. He recovered himself instantly, but at the same moment looked round to see if any one had noticed his foolishness. Polly Dent was just behind him. She had slipped out of her cottage without being heard.

‘He! he! he!’ sniggered Polly, ‘thee’s Winnie bain’t done what she shouldn’t to make ’ee try drown theeself? If that be what ’ave happened, ’tis best thee do come a little way wi’ I into meadow.’

Mr. Handy regarded Polly critically.

‘I bain’t used to no scarecrows,’ he said. ‘What I do keep at home be a woman.’

Polly would have replied angrily, only the north wind brought again the sound of the band from the camp.

‘Ah!’ she said, ‘ ’tis time I do go and clean meself, for no soldiers be rude to a happy maid.’ . . .

The people of Madder had grown used to seeing Mr. Handy walk that way upon a Saturday to his sister’s cottage, that was near to the church. And so Mrs. Squibb merely remarked to her cat:

‘John Handy be a little late to-day. ’Tis most likely ’e did meet some one down road.’

Mr. Handy’s sister had two gods upon earth—her best chair and her strawberry bed. She had set times to do her housework and a set time to weed her strawberries, and when she had done she would regard both her gods—after dusting the one and weeding the other—with an angry eye, and watch their behaviour. Mrs. Pelly was now in her garden, looking at the strawberries. She had found a snail in the bed and crushed it under her foot.

‘They strawberries do grow,’ said Mr. Handy, ‘an’ ’tis nice ’ee have ’em, sister, but all-same I do know where a strawberry do bide that be always a ripe one.’

‘I suppose thee be come to Madder for a cup of tea,’ remarked Mrs. Pelly.

She wished her brother to stand there a little to be noticed in his Sunday clothes by any passerby. She bent down and searched amongst the white flowers, and at last discovered another snail. Mr. Handy watched her with approval when she crushed the snail, and then followed her into the cottage, looking down at his boots.

Mr. Handy sat beside the table.

‘Thee bain’t Winnie,’ he said.

‘How be they children?’ enquired Mrs. Pelly.

‘Winnie were just a-catching one,’ replied Mr. Handy innocently, ’as I did step into lane.’

‘She don’t never put they toads to bed in the afternoon, do she?’ asked Mrs. Pelly snappishly.

‘Oh! yes, she do,’ replied Mr. Handy. ‘She do put they into the little bedroom and then she do clean the big one.’

Mrs. Pelly looked at her brother in surprise.

‘No woman ever cleans a bedroom on Saturday,’ she said decidedly. ‘ ’Twas on Friday that God created great whales, and ’tis on a Friday that all good people do scrub bedrooms.’

‘God’s ways bain’t Winnie’s,’ replied Mr. Handy, with a knowing look.

Mr. Handy fumbled in his pocket, searching for something that had got into the lining of his trousers. At last he found what he sought, and drew out a new shilling and showed it to his sister.

‘ ’Tain’t often that I do go home merry,’ he said, ‘and so I be going to spend thik at public house.’

Mrs. Pelly looked surprised.

‘Did Winnie give ’ee the shilling?’ she asked.

‘ ’Tis to send I back to she happy,’ said Mr. Handy.

Mrs. Pelly looked, with sudden horror, at her best chair. Every Saturday she used to carry this plush-covered chair upstairs, for fear her brother might sit upon it—for even his Sunday clothes were sometimes a little dusty. She now noticed that she had forgotten to move the chair.

Mr. Handy had finished his tea. His sister had given him a wooden chair to sit upon, but he now rose and looked at the grander one.

‘Oh!’ said Mrs. Pelly excitedly, ‘look out of window at they soldiers going by.’

Mr. Handy took no notice and prepared to seat himself.

‘The shilling,’ exclaimed Mrs. Pelly, ‘bain’t thee going to spend thik?’ She took her brother’s arm and drew him to the door.

‘ ’Tis most likely they soldiers will treat ’ee too. They be going to public,’ she said.

Mr. Handy paused for a moment beside the strawberries.

‘ ’Tis a fruit,’ he said slowly, ‘that I do much admire.’

As soon as he was safe out of her gate, Mrs. Pelly hurried into her cottage and knelt thankfully down beside her best chair.

Madder Hill now cast a shadow that covered a part of the road to the Inn. In this shadow Mr. Squibb was standing, who informed Mr. Handy that he believed the weather would change.

‘A cloud be come already,’ he said.

Mr. Handy entered the Inn and asked for some drink. He sat near to the bar window, tasted his drink, and looked out into the lane. Mr. Squibb was still standing there, in the shadow of the hill, telling any who happened to pass him that the rain was coming.

Mr. Handy emptied his mug, asked to have it filled again, smiled, and said softly to himself:

'Sister didn't fancy I sitting on she's easy-chair. 'Tis well Winnie bain't so particular.'

There were three soldiers drinking in the bar, but Mr. Handy did not heed them. Outside were the birds, foolish Mr. Squibb, and the pleasant fields of Madder. Mr. Handy felt the happiness of one who enjoys all that he needs. God who had made the great whales, as his sister had told him, on Friday, had also a little later made Winnie, whom Mr. Handy called in his heart not his wife alone but his home.

The beer warmed Mr. Handy. He already fancied himself going home to her. He would purposely be a little later than usual in getting home, but, once there, he would take off his boots, open the stairway door, and call out:

'There bain't no woman in bed, be there? for some one be a-coming.'

Mr. Handy finished his beer, and now, for the first time since he had been at the Inn, he looked at the soldiers and listened to what they were saying. There were three of them, and they were talking about a woman.

One of the soldiers was a thick, sturdy man, with a broad back, who, being sat down, seemed to cover half a form. The other two were well-shaped men, strong and lusty, and they all had the same kind of boastful look and insolent manner. They were beginning to talk loudly, in the manner of soldiers, who like to shout and quarrel when they are drinking. The short one was the most angry because the others didn't believe what he said, when he told them that he knew the woman that they were speaking of as well as they.

'I 've been with her a hundred times,' he shouted with an oath, 'and I know well enough what she wants when she unties her apron strings.'

'Damn you, no! You 've never been to her,' said one of the others angrily. 'It's a hard place to find, and we two have always kept the knowledge of her to ourselves.'

Mr. Handy turned from the window. He listened attentively to what the soldiers were saying. He believed their quarrel would make a nice story to

tell to Winnie when he reached home, for, though she was so well behaved, she liked to hear a story now and again.

‘We ’ll all go together,’ growled the angry soldier, ‘on next Saturday, for that’s the only day she can have us. I ’ve come from her now.’

‘Another b—— woman, but not her!’ shouted the others.

‘I tell you it ’s the same,’ the short one growled fiercely. ‘She has a birth-mark—a ripe strawberry—upon her body.’

Mr. Handy sprang up, he staggered, he uttered a great cry—‘My wife! my wife!’—and fell in a heap upon the floor.

AUNT JULIA

Every one in the world, with the exception perhaps of the King of England, likes to be named as a legatee in a will, and so we can well imagine the interest of all those who lived in Chilcot when Aunt Julia—who changed her cap every day, for she still wore that old-fashioned kind of headgear—took to her bed, to consider whom to leave her fortune to.

Aunt Julia's fortune, besides the cottage she lived in, consisted of five hundred pounds. Her fortune had come from a distant relation in Yorkshire who died, in a way admired by all—that of hanging himself upon a tree with a scroll pinned upon his breast saying that he had died for love—and left all his money to Aunt Julia.

Aunt Julia's distant cousin was the only relation left to her, and so she had long ago decided to die when she was eighty, and her eightieth birthday drew near. The time was come, she thought, as she never meant to rise from her bed again, to fix upon a proper legatee.

Aunt Julia was a lady quite healthy for her years. She could, if she wished, have still bustled about the house, as well as any other old woman, but when she made up her mind to do anything there was no stopping her, and she meant to die on her birthday—and die she would.

When Aunt Julia informed the people that she would leave her money to whoever in the village could read her a passage, or chapter, or poem in a book that entertained and pleased her the most, there were some that listened to the proposal, though the majority held aloof from the contest, assuming that their powers of elocution were inadequate for the occasion.

Another reason, besides their own modesty and doubt as regards their reading, deterred many from making the attempt. For, beside Aunt Julia's cottage door, there was a scraper as sharp as the old woman's tongue had been in past days, that was artfully made out of a portion of a broken scythe.

When a visitor looked at this piece of iron-mongery it would often occur to him that his boots were safer with the mud still upon them than subjected to the sharp irony of such a scraper, and so he would retire, vanquished, at the first throw, knowing that to leave a speck of mud in Aunt Julia's bedroom would prevent her from hearing one word he read.

‘Who be a-going to scrape out a good pair of boots only on the chance of getting she’s few pounds?’ was Farmer Budkins’s comment at the Inn when the matter was being talked over. . . .

Susy Titt, Aunt Julia’s maid, who addressed her as ‘Mistress’ in company, but as plain ‘Aunt’ when she was alone with her, had wished ever since she could remember for a Prayer Book with a silver clasp and a gold cross upon the cover.

Harry Cuff, her lover, had long known of this wish, and hoped to content Susy one day by giving this gift to her. Until she had the Prayer Book, she said, she wouldn’t be content, and her only other interest, when they walked out at night, was the stars, and she would lie upon any grassy bank, only for the pleasure of looking up at them.

One Sunday evening when Susy looked in this manner at the stars, Harry said to her: ‘ ’Tis best we be walking, for we bain’t married, you know.’

At that moment a shooting star caught Susy’s attention. She smiled at it, sighed, but allowed him to help her up and to lead her on. In a moment or two she wished to lie down again.

‘You mustn’t, Susy,’ said Harry sternly.

‘But I might see my Prayer Book amongst the stars,’ Susy said regretfully.

The Reverend William Lovegrove, the Rector of Chilcot, was perfectly sure that five hundred pounds was just the sum he wanted, to restore Chilcot Church, to buy a volume of Paley’s sermons that would last his lifetime, and to fill his cellar to the roof with wine bottles.

Knowing his own wants so well, he had not the same fear as Farmer Budkins as regards his boots, that were square-toed, and he believed that a clergyman and a scholar should have an advantage, in both matter and pronunciation, over his more illiterate neighbours.

Mr. Lovegrove had, of course, heard that Aunt Julia intended to die upon her birthday, but as he always believed that all women, and especially all old women, were liars, he supposed her to be lying too—meaning, no doubt, as most people do, to live as long as she could.

But, whether a liar or no, her money would be money, and Mr. Lovegrove hoped for the best.

One afternoon he went to Aunt Julia’s cottage to try his luck. He carried with him the celebrated Cornaro’s book upon longevity, that advises a spare

diet as a recipe for a person who never wishes to die.

Mr. Lovegrove scraped off half the sole of his left boot at the door and the heel of his right, after which he was admitted by Susy to Aunt Julia's presence. She had put on her newest cap with blue ribbons to receive him.

Mr. Lovegrove chose a suitable passage out of Cornaro and read aloud for two hours. At the close of the reading he was not a little taken aback when Aunt Julia said to him, sitting up in bed, in a fine rage: 'I suppose you think me mad as well as dying to read me such useless dull rubbish.'

Mr. Lovegrove went dejectedly down the stairs, and Susy curtseyed respectfully. . . .

Another suitor, who had hopes of Aunt Julia's money, was Shepherd Poose. The shepherd considered that, as he could read the time of night by the moon when it shone, he should also be able to read the words in a book. Shepherd Poose had the highest hopes of success, for he had discovered a book of poems under a hawthorn hedge, left there by a young poet who had gone away and forgotten them.

Mr. Poose called a child to him one evening and said, holding out the book to him: 'When I do know woon of they verses by heart I 'll give 'ee a penny.'

The little boy placed his foot upon the lowest step of the shepherd's hut and, with great care and patience, tied up his boot-laces that had come undone when the shepherd had called him.

'I should like to see thik money,' said the boy, whose name was Jim.

Mr. Poose showed him the penny. Jim took the book in his hand.

'Stand where thee be,' he said to Mr. Poose, 'and I will learn 'ee to read.'

Notwithstanding his fears of the scraper, Shepherd Poose put on his Sunday boots when he went to visit Aunt Julia, but, when he scraped off the mud of the lane, he was a great deal more careful than Mr. Lovegrove had been, and only slightly injured the bottom of one of them. He went to Aunt Julia's bedroom, led by Susy, who, noting the shepherd's determined air, looked a little grave.

Aunt Julia smiled at Mr. Poose. She wore a cap this time with purple ribbons and looked very pale and proper in the great bed.

Mr. Poose stood in the middle of the room, like a child at school. He opened his book at a page where a pad of sheep's wool had been put as a marker, and, gazing intently at a verse of poetry, beside which a black mark had been scratched with charcoal, he recited as follows:

'All ye that lovely lovers be,
Pray you for me.
Lo, here we come a-sowing, a-sowing,
And sow sweet fruits of love;
In your sweet hearts well may it prove!'

There was the sound of smothered laughter outside the room when Mr. Poose finished, and Aunt Julia waved him away.

'That 's worse than Mr. Lovegrove's selection,' she said, 'it 's positively indecent and horrid.'

Susy hurried the shepherd into the lane.

That same evening, as the night was fine, Susy went out to meet Harry Cuff. After she had been with him for a little and they had kissed one another, Susy said she wished to look at the stars.

'But they be falling stars,' said Harry, 'and here, Susy, be a present for 'ee.' Harry handed her a parcel.

'Oh,' said Susy, 'it 's my Prayer Book.'

'And there be reading in 'en,' remarked Harry, leading her modestly away from the grassy bank, 'that mid win for we all Aunt Julia's money.'

'And so it shall,' cried Susy, 'for she do wear black ribbons on her cap to-night. But mayn't I lie here, Harry, for stars be shining?' . . .

The next day was Aunt Julia's birthday and the church bell tolled for her.

In a month's time the same bells rang for Susy's wedding. Mr. Lovegrove read the service in an angry voice. He was forced to invent an address, and the pulpit was so out of repair that it shook when he held it.

When he gave the blessing he remembered he had no bottles in his cellar. Aunt Julia had left all her money to Susy Titt.

'And what did 'ee read?' asked Harry on the wedding-night.

'The order for the burial of the dead,' replied Susy.

THE BAROMETER

The weather was warm. Mr. Bondy stood in his garden. He stood heavily, like a man who has eaten well; his shirt open in front exposed his hairy chest.

Mr. Bondy liked his garden, he liked his flowers. He looked at his flowers and wondered whether they ought to be watered. To water them now, early in June, would mean that he would have to continue doing so. Mr. Bondy considered the matter; he looked up at the sky. He preferred that God should work rather than he, but then if God meant to idle in the sunshine and forget to call the rain-clouds, then Mr. Bondy supposed that he would have to water the garden himself.

Mr. Bondy raised one foot, and put it down again; he raised the other and went indoors to consult his barometer.

Mr. Bondy's barometer was unusual, one could not merely tap it and walk away. It had to be studied. Mr. Bondy remained in his house for some time, consulting his barometer.

He came out slowly, he went by the flowers and nodded at them. He knew that the weather-glass was never untrue. He left his garden, closing the little gate carefully behind him, and stepped into the road.

Mr. Bondy had once dealt in corn, but, as he had always offered less than the market-price, his trade had been small. When his father died and his mother came to live with him he gave up business. His mother had once been a tall and beautiful woman, who couldn't bear anything dirty or out of place. Once she said to her son, 'Even if you spend the money and come to poverty, I beg you do not let me die in a pigsty. I could not bear to.' Her son said nothing.

Mr. Bondy's mother had a little money, her will was in the hands of Mr. Bondy, to whom the money was left. Mr. Bondy and his wife lived in comfort. . . .

Mr. Bondy walked out of his garden gate; he was still in his shirt-sleeves. The time called evening was come, that is nearly as long in the summer as a whole winter's day.

Mr. Bondy stood beside a little bridge that crossed a stream. The bridge had large rails painted white, so that Tom, the drunkard, with twelve pints of

beer in his belly, could walk across in safety. Mr. Bondy moved one foot and then the other: he leant up against the white rails. He stood like a man who has some news of importance to tell to any one who wishes to hear.

Presently Mr. Grabben, the farmer of West Dodder, came by. Mr. Grabben paused, as one does who has a question to ask. He also leant an arm upon the white rail.

'And how is the glass to-night, Mr. Bondy?' asked Grabben.

' 'Tis falling,' replied Mr. Bondy,' and, depend upon it, before the morning comes we shall have rain.'

'Going out to drink a pint?' enquired Mr. Grabben.

Mr. Bondy shook his head, and Grabben walked on.

Mr. Bondy left the bridge and sauntered to the village green; he placed one foot upon the green and allowed the other to remain in the road. A young girl, named Minnie, came towards him. She swayed her hips and moved mincingly, meaning to catch Mr. Bondy's attention. Her eyes were watery and unpleasant, her smile invited lewdness, her body was plump, and, even at a distance, it was easy to tell what she wished for.

'The fête is to-morrow, and I am going,' she said, keeping a little way from Mr. Bondy so that she could see where he looked. 'But Mother thought I had better come to ask you what the weather is going to be.'

'The glass is sinking,' said Mr. Bondy. 'It never remains still for one moment; it continues to fall. You had better not go.'

Minnie sniggered and drew nearer to Mr. Bondy. Mr. Bondy made a gesture with his fingers that made her burst out a-laughing. 'You had better not go,' he said.

A woman came by with a child. The child kept on saying, 'Why not, Mother? Why not, Mother?' in a peevish voice.

Minnie turned away from Mr. Bondy, laughing, and Mr. Bondy took his foot off the grass and went into his house for supper.

Mrs. Bondy had prepared supper with care; she liked her husband because he was a large fat man, and she intended to keep him fat. For this reason she used to fry for him bacon and onions and eggs. Mr. Bondy would always eat as many eggs as she cared to put into the pan. After the bacon and eggs, she had shrimps and old cheese ready for him.

Mr. Bondy sat down. Though he stood heavily, he sat lightly. He was a man who could do a great deal without making the least noise about it. He wiped his face with a large red handkerchief, and ate.

When Mrs. Bondy saw him eat, she began to think of bed-time. She had always thought like that since she had married. She now began to question Mr. Bondy as to whom he had seen in the road. She knew her husband had seen Minnie, and she wished him to talk about her. She wished him to see her—Mrs. Bondy—as Minnie too. Mrs. Bondy encouraged him to talk about Minnie; she even added other stories about this girl to his stories. She wished to fill him with desire for Minnie, which desire she intended to steal. She had practised this theft a number of times, and as long as Mr. Bondy ate plenty of shrimps and drank plenty of stout, there had been no difficulty in her robbing Minnie. Mr. Bondy's heavy nature was easy to rob; he would not walk out into the lanes when his belly was full; he preferred to go to bed. Then Mrs. Bondy was sure of her prey.

As soon as Mrs. Bondy saw him enjoying his supper, she knew she could steal what she wished for. Even with Minnie waiting outside, beside Farmer Grabben's wall, she knew he would not go to her.

Mr. Bondy, being a weighty man, liked his bed. He could never have been happy with Minnie in the street or lanes. The marriage-bed must have been instituted at the request of Mr. Bondy. Nothing less than that would do for him. Mr. Bondy didn't like to be impeded.

All the time that Mr. Bondy was eating his supper, noises were being made in the room above. These sounds did not discompose Mr. Bondy, they made him eat with the greater pleasure. They were creaks and groans that might have meant anything, but Mr. Bondy understood their meaning. These sounds came from the bed in the room above. The bed moved and groaned. There was some one lying on the bed who could not find comfort, and her discomfort became the bed's too. The bed groaned with her groans and moved with her movements.

The bed abovestairs, in the great room, was used by Mr. Bondy's mother, who, suffering from an incurable complaint, was bed-ridden.

Mr. Bondy leaned across the table; he gathered in his great hands fragments of the food. Crusts of bread, crumbs of cheese, heads and tails of shrimps, rinds of bacon. These he put upon a used plate and carried from the room. As his back moved out of the door Mrs. Bondy watched him. The sounds above continued without ceasing. When Mr. Bondy returned, he said, 'The glass is still going down.'

Mrs. Bondy fetched him another bottle. Some one whistled in the lane outside. A girl laughed mockingly. Mr. Bondy began to take off his boots. They went to bed. . . .

Sounds continued in the house—drunken noises. The bed above the parlour still shook. It laughed and creaked and muttered. A devil seemed to be leaping upon it, turning and twisting. Old Mrs. Bondy appeared able, though tongue-tied herself, to make the bed talk. At twelve o'clock it began to rain, and rained until morning. . . .

The spring was over and the summer came and the time for haymaking. Mr. Grabben was anxious. Owing to the new machines, hay can be cut quickly. Mr. Grabben, believing that the weather was going to be fine, cut all his hay.

But hay is like a young virgin; it is a tender commodity that can easily be spoiled. Hay should only be tossed about a little and then carried happily home. If a heavy rain comes, the soft body of it is beaten and bruised, the sweet smell that belongs to it is deflowered. Ill-used by rain, the young maid becomes old and sour before her time.

The value in this maiden to Mr. Grabben lay in her being still a virgin. At the end of four days he sent out his workmen into the fields and had the hay turned with care, and the next day it was almost fit to cart. Could it be left out another day it would be better, but if the rain came and wetted it, it would be very much worse.

Such a dilemma often comes to a farmer. He would like to wait a little if he were certain of the weather, but who can be certain? Perhaps he had better consult Mr. Bondy? . . .

At Mr. Bondy's something had happened. Mr. Bondy had bought a pig. Mrs. Bondy never interfered with him. What he did in the garden was not her business. She never went farther than the house. Also Mr. Bondy's weather-glass had been sinking until Mr. Grabben had cut all his hay, and then it rose. The bed in the great room was silent. It seemed fixed into the floor.

If in a village one event happens, so does another. Upon the very day when Mr. Bondy bought his pig, Minnie disappeared. As soon as Minnie went and the dry weather came, a change came over Mr. Bondy.

He began to move about the house like a cat. His tread became stealthy; he went about like an adulterer. Even when he went out to feed his pig, he moved quietly. He grew thinner. Though he ate a great deal, he lost his fat

looks. His cheeks sank in. Mrs. Bondy didn't like the look of him; some one seemed to be stealing his fat, just as she had stolen Minnie's perquisites.

Now that Minnie had disappeared, there was no girl of the same kind to direct her husband's attention to. He went to bed sluggishly, he couldn't see her now as Minnie, because Minnie was gone.

Every one in the village knew what Mr. Bondy's barometer was, and so we need keep the secret no longer. The barometer was Mr. Bondy's own mother.

Though bed-ridden, so far that she was unable to get out of her bed, yet when a change came from fine weather to wet, she grew restive. Though old, she could move and make the bed creak. Nothing stopped her movements until the rain came; then she would be still for a little. If the rain continued, she would roll again. Sometimes she succeeded, in a great storm, in falling out of bed. But that did not often happen. When the weather was fine, old Mrs. Bondy lay as still as a mouse, but the moist heaviness of the air that foretells the coming of rain, always made her toss about unquietly—and calm, settled weather kept her mind still.

Mr. Bondy kept the key of her door in his pocket. He now had two creatures to feed.

For a week the weather was fine, and one day more would perfect the hay. Farmer Grabben visited Mr. Bondy to see how his glass went. Mr. Bondy was sitting with his wife in the parlour. He looked thin and dejected. He looked like a flabby wineskin out of which all the wine had been drained.

Mrs. Bondy, as it neared bed-time, had been talking about Minnie. She told queer stories. She told of what had happened after a fête—Minnie and five men—no, she thought there were seven. She added to the number, like another Falstaff. Instead of his eyes looking as they used to, Mr. Bondy shut them quite. . . .

'And how is your glass to-night, Mr. Bondy?' asked Mr. Grabben when he had seated himself.

'I will go and see,' replied Mr. Bondy.

Mr. Bondy was gone a long time. When he returned his step seemed shaky, but his face was flushed. 'There will be no rain to-morrow,' he said decidedly.

‘Then I will carry the hay the day after to-morrow,’ said the farmer, rising to go.

Mr. Bondy went out to feed his pig. When he returned, he remarked to his wife: ‘The pig is dead.’

Mrs. Bondy felt a little sorry. She had expected in the future some very good bacon from that pig—bacon that would increase the happiness of her and Mr. Bondy.

The next day proved very hot; the air was still, and if a man held out his hand the sun burned it. Mr. Grabben looked anxiously at the hay, but, upon the advice of Mr. Bondy, he allowed the hay to remain in the field.

That day, too, Mr. Bondy appeared more than ever interested in his barometer. Perhaps he lay upon the bed to be able to watch it the nearer. For, though heavy, he could lie as lightly as he could sit down.

The day passed, and Mrs. Bondy grew weary of it. She could not tell what thief had stolen away from her the things that she loved. She hoped the night would show better manners.

The last thing Mr. Bondy did before he went to bed was to visit the barometer. He did so silently, and then he went downstairs and let something out of the front door—the cat, perhaps. After doing so he called out to his wife that he was going to bury the pig.

She heard him go out, she heard him come in. He climbed the stairs laboriously, as a man does who carries a burden—his sins maybe. He went to his barometer and then crept to Mrs. Bondy, undressed, and lay down.

When he was undressing, she noticed a curious smell that came from his clothes—the smell of death; the pig’s carcase must have grown nasty. Mrs. Bondy turned to him and talked about Minnie, but he fell asleep.

At midnight there was a distant peal of thunder. The peal died away over the hills but came again. The heavy rumbling recurred, the storm grew near, the summer stars were put out. One by one they disappeared as the great cloud covered them.

A louder crash came, and afterwards the rain. The rain, made livid by the lightning, fell in masses. Each little lane was turned into a river. The soft body of the hay in the fields was beaten, bruised, ravished. The floods rose. The river in the lower part of Mr. Grabben’s fields overflowed its banks, and much of his hay was carried away. The remainder was spoilt.

In the morning Mr. Grabben went to Mr. Bondy; he went cursing and carried a heavy stick in his hand.

On the way there he met Minnie. She had appeared again in the village. No one knew where she had gone to when she had left it. She had been gone for six days, and now here she was again by the greenside, looking at the men. She looked more abandoned than ever. Her cheeks were hot; she looked at Mr. Bondy's house, put out her tongue, and laughed loudly.

She must have been enjoying herself of late, she was fatter. But Mr. Bondy was thinner, he also looked dejected.

'It 's not my fault, it 's not my fault,' he said to Mr. Grabben, who held his stick firmly. 'Even a barometer is mortal.'

Mrs. Bondy began to pull down the blinds.

MR. TOLLER'S NEW CLOTHES

Besides his two black horses Carter Toller had one other interest in life —a friend. He had learned to wish for a friend—so that he might be able to enjoy the true brotherly feeling—from watching carefully the behaviour of the two fine horses that he had the care of. Mr. Toller had noticed, with interest and with wonder, that the horses—both geldings—were so happy together that they never wished to be parted.

One day at Tadnol Station, he happened to take the trace horse away from the other that he left in the waggon-shafts. He led it a little distance, where he fastened it to a post. But its friend at once showed its displeasure at this separation by dragging the waggon, together with the station gate-post, to where its comrade was tied. Seeing such love between brute beasts Mr. Toller wished to have a friend. It was this wish that made him seek out Mr. Toat.

Mr. Toller hadn't to drag a waggon after him to get to Mr. Toat, who was the village cobbler, but only his own legs, though his legs were nearly as heavy as gate-posts, after a day's ploughing.

Mr. Toller had no wife. He had once wished for one, but the lady—named Susan—whom he wished for, told him, a little rudely, that he smelt of the stable, and that she preferred a baker whose coat, she said, was like a new dough-nut. Sometimes Mr. Toller would mention Susan with a sigh, and would tell Mr. Toat in confidence that he had once also heard about a Mary who might be kinder, but Mr. Toat would reply that Mary was only a name and would, for a wise reason, change the subject. This wise reason of Mr. Toat's was that Mrs. Toat, who was as stout and as red as a beetroot—though by no means so sweet—had for some years swept out Mr. Toller's cottage and laid out his food upon a newspaper, while Mr. Toller, to reward her, would sometimes leave a shilling hidden in a dusty corner of his bedroom. And Mrs. Toat always found the shilling.

With so good an example before him as the friendship that existed between the two horses, one may naturally suppose that Mr. Toller should prove to be a very good friend to Mr. Toat. One day, after watching the horses drinking together at the pond with their noses near touching, Mr. Toller invited Mr. Toat to go to the Inn that was so cleanly kept by Mrs. Hindon, and to have a drink too.

As the horses drank together at the same pond each day, Mr. Toller felt that Mr. Toat and he ought to drink at the same Inn each evening. And so they did, and sat next to one another upon the same bench, and drank from the same cup, and Mr. Toller, who was the originator of the friendship, paid for the beer. And there, sitting in all amity beside Mr. Toat, Mr. Toller would speak of his horses, telling Mr. Toat how quiet and well behaved they were in one another's company, though, if ever they chanced to be worked alone, they would show their displeasure by laying back their ears and pulling the cart sadly and mournfully.

'We two be the same as they,' Mr. Toller would remark, and Mr. Toat would hide his face and his answer in the mug.

A pint of Mrs. Hindon's best is but a small matter between friends, and a quart is better; but so often did Mr. Toat have to hide in the mug a queer look that came when Mr. Toller mentioned their friendship that the quart would soon be emptied and another ordered—which Mr. Toller would pay for, because, as there was always enough water in the pond for the two horses, so there must needs be beer enough in the Inn for the two friends.

It was not long before Mr. Toller's face grew to be a fine rich red with so much beer and friendship to his account. He became nearly as stout as Farmer Told and as sleek as the horses from whose good example he had derived all his feelings about friendship.

'You two,' he would say to his horses when he went to them in the meadow at early dawn, when only the barncock and the larks were awake, 'do think the same as Jim Toat and I. You do bide, and we do bide and bain't never parted.'

This was true enough, for whenever Mr. Toller went up the lane to the Inn, he found his friend Mr. Toat was waiting by his cottage gate to go too.

Anything, be it a clay pipe or a rake, that comes new into a village, is regarded with proper honour, and one day Farmer Told, after he had paid Mr. Toller, presented him with a new horse collar. Mr. Toller carried it at once to the stable to try it on one of the horses.

The horses were eating hay from the same manger, and each of them greeted Mr. Toller with a happy whinny. The carter put the new collar on to Tom, but Tom shook himself and looked at Tinker. It was evident that Tom wished Tinker to have the new collar.

The next day Tinker was taken out to plough with the collar upon him, and Tom rubbed his nose against him as much as to say, 'It is better to give

than to receive.'

In the Inn that evening Mr. Toller wished to guide the conversation round to the important matter of possessions. He looked carefully at the image upon the half-crown that he held in his fingers before he gave it to Mrs. Hindon.

' 'Tis the King's,' said Mr. Toller, 'and 'e be a giver, for 'tis from 'e's own pocket that 'e must 'ave taken thik money to give 'en to I—and Tom be a kind one too.'

'Yes,' replied Mr. Toat, before he hid his face for the seventh time in the mug, 'a good friend should be a good giver.'

Mr. Toller watched his friend finish the mug, and took notice, for the first time since they had been comrades, of his friend's clothes. He looked too at his own that were made of stout cord and, though worn a little, had plenty of wear left in them. Mr. Toat was in rags.

' 'Tis said,' remarked Mr. Toller, 'that no cobbler do mend 'is own shoes, but that bain't no reason why 'is wife shouldn't mend 'is coat.'

'She be always working for others,' replied Mr. Toat a little brusquely.

On the way home Mr. Toller wished to be as loving as Tom, but he could not bring himself to be quite so kind. However, he said to Mr. Toat, 'I know I bain't so good a friend as Tom be to t' other, but when I do die thee may have all me clothes.'

Mr. Toat had always eyed Mr. Toller's possessions in a more friendly manner, it must be owned, than he had ever noticed Mr. Toller, and when Mr. Toller said he might have his clothes when he came to die, he wished naturally enough that there were more of them.

Full of this desire—that when Mr. Toller came to die the wooden box in his bedroom might be full—Mr. Toat entered his cottage and informed his wife of what Mr. Toller had said.

' 'Tis all for I what 'e do wear when 'e do die,' he said.

'An' thik bain't much,' grumbled Mrs. Toat. But, in a little while, her greedy eyes twinkled. 'If all 'e do spend up at Inn did go to buy clothes, then there mid be something.' The husband and wife looked at one another.

'But I 'd lose me beer,' he said.

'There would be the clothes.'

‘True thee be,’ he replied.

The next evening Mr. Toat stood in his friend’s way and would not let him go by.

‘ ’Twould be nice to see thee well dressed on Sundays,’ he said, ‘for there may be a Mary about.’

‘I know I be dressed plain,’ replied Mr. Toller, ‘an’ Mary be a grand name to consider.’

‘Here be a man coming,’ said Mr. Toat, ‘who will make thee look different.’ Mr. Toat introduced his friend, who was Mr. Freebody, the tailor. ‘Toller do want three new Sunday suits,’ he said.

Mr. Freebody rubbed his hands: he went with Mr. Toller to his cottage. ‘I will take the measurements at once,’ he said.

Mr. Toller was bewildered by the suddenness of the visit, but he allowed himself to be measured, though he was a little shocked at the tailor’s assiduity, and, when at last Mr. Freebody took away the tape, Mr. Toller looked immensely relieved.

‘Rich folk ought to be pitied,’ he said, ‘rather than envied, when they do wear new.’

The next evening Mr. Toat attended his friend in the cottage instead of leading him to the Inn. They talked about the new clothes that were coming.

‘There be Marys in village,’ said Mr. Toat. . . .

Every evening Mr. Toat went to visit his friend and, instead of going to the Inn, they talked about Mr. Toller’s new clothes.

Sometimes Mr. Toller felt a little uneasy about them, and he was more than half inclined to offer one of the suits to Mr. Toat, in order to copy the generous conduct of the horse, Tom, in the affair of the collar. But as he had braved the ordeal of being measured he couldn’t bear to think of parting with the clothes until he died.

When the new clothes came—and the bill—Mr. Toller did not know which to admire most, the grand clothes or the fine bill of eighteen pounds. Mrs. Hindon’s beer was quite out of the question now with so much money owing to Mr. Freebody, and Mr. Toller spent his evenings in trying on his clothes—but he never dare dress in them on Sundays for fear the village Marys might laugh at him.

The winter came, and the wet weather, and it happened that Tom, the horse, overheated himself in pulling a heavy waggon laden with corn, while, after doing so, he had to stand in the wet when Mr. Toller carried the corn into the granary. Tom caught a chill that went to his lungs, and though Mr. Toller did all he could for him, the horse died.

Mr. Toller went to the farmer and begged the body of Tom. Mr. Told replied that he had been offered thirty shillings for the dead horse. Mr. Toller handed this money to his master. It was part of what he had saved out of his wages to pay for his new clothes.

Mr. Toller buried Tom the next day during a heavy rain-storm.

As he patted down the sods Tinker broke loose from the stable and galloped across the field to where the grave was. He stood there very mournfully with his head lowered. Mr. Toller remembered his friend Mr. Toat.

A cold is often caught at a funeral, and, when Mr. Toller reached his cottage that evening, he knew that he was ill. The next day he was very ill indeed. The doctor was sent for and informed Mrs. Toat that Mr. Toller was dying. As soon as the doctor was gone, Mr. Toller became unconscious.

Mrs. Toat went home to tell the news to her husband; they sat together at the supper-table and ate heartily. When they had finished they heard, out in the meadow where Tom's grave was, a horse whinny.

' 'Tis Tom's friend,' said Mr. Toat, and laughed.

' 'Tis most likely,' remarked Mrs. Toat, 'that some of Toller's relations mid come by the morning.'

'Greedy, grasping folk,' growled her husband, 'and there bain't no writing to show that Toller's new clothes be mine.'

Mrs. Toat nodded.

' 'Tis best we take they things now,' she said.

Mr. Toller was still unconscious when his friend visited him, and Mr. Toat at once opened the box and carried away the new clothes. Mrs. Toat watched him. As soon as he was gone Mrs. Toat looked at the bed.

'They be clothes too,' she said. She went out into the lane and called to her husband. Mr. Toat returned, hot for the spoil. They took all the bedclothes away except one sheet.

The night was very cold, and the wind howled down the lane like a starved dog. Mr. Toller had only the sheet to cover him, but, before Mrs. Toat carried her bundle away, the cold revived him.

Mr. Toller moaned and opened his eyes.

Mrs. Toat held up her hands in horror. She whispered to her husband, who was hunting in the corners of the room hoping to find a shilling, to come quickly.

When Mr. Toat came to the bedside, Mr. Toller saw him and smiled.

Mr. Toat smiled too. He took a pillow from his wife's bundle and pressed it firmly upon Mr. Toller's face. He held the pillow for five minutes and then he gently took it away. Mr. Toller lay quiet now, but he looked surprised.

In the meadow, beside Tom's grave, Tinker whinnied again.

A CHRISTMAS GIFT

It is a harmless wish to want a little notice to be taken of one's name, and a number of people besides Mr. Balliboy, the Norbury carrier, like attention to be paid to their names when they are written down. Children will write their names upon a fair stretch of yellow sand, young men will carve their names upon an old oak in the forest, and even the most simple peasant will like to see his name printed in a newspaper.

For most of his life Mr. Balliboy was satisfied with having his name written upon the side of his van, and he was always pleased and interested when any one paused in the street to read his name. But Mr. Balliboy's pride in his name made him do more than one foolish thing. Once he cut 'Mr. Balliboy, Carrier,' with his market knife, upon one of the doors of Mr. Told's old barn, and again upon the right-hand post of the village pound. But, on his going to see how the names looked the next Sunday—and perhaps hoping that a stranger might be regarding them with interest—he discovered, to his sorrow, that the rude village boys had changed the first letters of the name into an unpleasant and ill-sounding word.

Mr. Balliboy was a lonely man, and a bachelor—for no young woman would ever look at his name twice, and none had ever wished to have his name written beside hers in a church register.

One Christmas Eve Mr. Balliboy journeyed, as was his wont, to Weyminster. His van was full of country women, each one of whom thought herself to be of the highest quality, for each had put on the finest airs with her market clothes and, so dressed, could talk in a superior manner.

Mr. Balliboy had certainly one reason for happiness—other than the ordinary joyfulness of the merry season—which was that his rival, John Hawkins, had passed by with his van empty of customers—yet Mr. Balliboy was sad. His sadness came, strangely enough, only because he wished, for the first time in his life, to give a Christmas present.

It might have been only to give himself pleasure that he wished to do this, for whatever the present was that he should buy, he determined that a label should be tied on it, with his name written clearly upon it—'From Mr. Balliboy.'

What the present would be, and to whom it should be given, Mr. Balliboy did not know. He decided to buy something that he fancied, and

then allow destiny to decide to whom the gift should go.

When Mr. Balliboy reached the town he walked about the streets in order to see what could be bought for money. Many a shop window did he look into, and many a time did he stand and scratch his head, wondering what he should buy. There was one oddity that he fancied in a toy-shop—a demon holding a fork in his hand, upon which he was raising a naked young woman. Mr. Balliboy thought the demon might do, but over the young woman he shook his head.

Mr. Balliboy moved to another window. Here at once he saw what pleased him—a little cross, made of cardboard and covered with tinsel, that shone and glistened before Mr. Balliboy's admiring eyes.

Mr. Balliboy purchased the cross for a shilling, and attached a label to it with his name written large. . . .

Sometimes a change comes over a scene, now so happy and gay, but in one moment altered into a frown.

As soon as Mr. Balliboy had buttoned the cross into his pocket the streets of Weyminster showed this changed look. The shoppers' merriment and joyful surprise at what they saw in the windows gave place to a sad and tired gaze. The great church that so many hurried by in order to reach their favourite tavern appeared more dark and sombre than a winter's day should ever have made it.

Even the warm drinks served out by black-haired Mabel at the 'Rod and Lion' could not make the drinkers forget that care and trouble could cut a Christmas cake and sing a Christmas carol as well as they.

The general gloom of the town touched Mr. Balliboy, and, had he not had the present hid in his coat, he might have entered an Inn too, in order to drown the troubled feelings that moved about him, in a deep mug.

But, having bought the Christmas present, he had now the amusement of seeking the right person to give it to. And so, instead of walking along the street with downcast eyes, he walked along smiling.

While he was yet some way off his van, he could see that a figure was standing beside it, who seemed to be reading his name. And, whoever this was, Mr. Balliboy determined, as he walked, that it should be the one to receive his Christmas gift.

As he drew nearer he saw that the figure was that of a young woman—wrapped in a thin cloak—who showed by her wan look and by her shape

that she expected soon to be a mother.

At a little distance from his van Mr. Balliboy waited, pretending to admire a row of bottles in a wine merchant's shop window, but, at the same time, keeping an eye upon the woman.

'Was she a thief—was she come there to steal?'

A passing policeman, with a fine military strut, evidently thought so.

'Don't stand about here,' he shouted. 'Go along home with you!'

The policeman seized her roughly.

'I am doing no harm,' the woman said, looking at the name again, 'I am only waiting for Mr. Balliboy.'

'Go along, you lying drab,' grumbled the policeman.

He would have pushed her along, only Mr. Balliboy, who had heard his name mentioned, came nearer.

'Bain't 'ee poor Mary,' he asked, 'who was to have married the carpenter at Shelton?'

The policeman winked twice at Mr. Balliboy, smiled, and walked on.

'What was it,' asked Mr. Balliboy kindly, as soon as the policeman was out of hearing, 'that made 'ee wish to study and remember the name of a poor carrier?'

'I wished to ask you,' said the young woman, 'whether you would take me as far as the "Norbury Arms." Here is my fare,' and she handed Mr. Balliboy a shilling—the price of the cross.

Mr. Balliboy put the shilling into his pocket.

'Get up into van,' he said, 'and 'tis to be hoped they t'others won't mind 'ee.'

That day the most respectable of the people of the village had come to town in Mr. Balliboy's van. There was even rich Mrs. Told, clad in warm furs, whose own motor-car had met with an accident the day before. There were others too, as comfortably off—Mrs. Potten and Mrs. Biggs—and none of these, or even his lesser customers, did Mr. Balliboy wish to offend. He looked anxiously up the street and then into the van. The young woman's clothes were rags, her toes peeped from her shoes, and she sighed woefully.

Mr. Balliboy gave her a rug to cover her. ‘Keep tight hold of ’en,’ he said, ‘for t’ other women be grabbers.’

The change in the town from joy to trouble had caused the women who had journeyed with Mr. Balliboy that day to arrive at the van a little late and in no very good tempers. And, when they did come, they were not best pleased to see a poor woman—worse clothed than a tramp—sitting in the best seat in the van, with her knees covered by Mr. Balliboy’s rug.

‘ ’Tis only Mary,’ said Mr. Balliboy, hoping to put them at their ease. ‘ ’Tis only thik poor toad.’

‘Mary, is it?’ cried Mrs. Biggs angrily, ‘who did deceive Joseph with her wickedness. What lady would ride with her? Turn her out at once, Mr. Balliboy—the horrid wretch.’

‘Out with her!’ cried Mrs. Told. ‘Just look at her,’ and she whispered unpleasant words to Mrs. Potten.

Mr. Balliboy hesitated. He hardly knew what to do. He had more than once borrowed a little straw from Mrs. Told’s stackyard, and now he did not want to offend her.

He had a mind to order Mary out, only—putting his hand under his coat to look at his watch—he felt the Christmas present that he had purchased—the cardboard cross.

‘Thee needn’t sit beside her,’ he said coaxingly to Mrs. Told, ‘though she’s skin be as white and clean as any lamb’s.’

‘We won’t have no lousy, breeding beggar with we,’ shouted Mrs. Biggs, who had taken a little too much to drink at the tavern.

‘Let she alone,’ said Mr. Balliboy, scratching his head and wondering what he had better do.

‘Thrust her out,’ cried Mrs. Potten, and, climbing into the van, she spat at the woman.

‘Out with her,’ screamed Mrs. Told. ‘Away with her! away with her!’ cried all the women.

Now, had it not been that Mr. Balliboy had taken Mary’s shilling and so made her free of his van, with the right to be carried as far as the ‘Norbury Arms,’ he might have performed the commands of the drunken women and thrown Mary into the street. But, as he had taken her shilling, Mr. Balliboy bethought him of what was his own.

The woman had read his name; he had taken her fare.

‘Let she alone,’ said Mr. Balliboy gruffly to Mrs. Biggs, who had laid hands upon the woman.

‘We ’ll go to John Hawkins; he ’ll take us home,’ said Mrs. Told angrily.

Mr. Balliboy winced. He knew how glad his rival would be to welcome all his company.

‘Why, what evil has she done?’ Mr. Balliboy asked in a milder tone.

With one accord the women shouted out Mary’s sorrow.

‘Away with her! away with her!’ they cried.

Mr. Balliboy put his hand into his coat, but it was not his watch that he felt for this time—it was his Christmas gift.

‘Away with your own selves,’ he said stoutly. ‘Thik maiden be going wi’ I, for ’tis me own van.’

Mr. Balliboy took his seat angrily and the women left him. He knew that what had happened that afternoon was likely to have a lasting effect upon his future. Every one in the village would side with the women with whom he had quarrelled, and the story of his mildness to Mary would not lose in the telling.

But before very long an accident happened that troubled Mr. Balliboy even more than the loss of his customers—in the middle of a long and lonely road his van broke down.

Mr. Balliboy tried to start the engine, but with no success. Other carriers passed him by, amongst whom was John Hawkins, and many were the taunts and unseemly jests shouted at him by the Christmas revellers who sat therein. But soon all was silence, and the road utterly deserted, for the hour was near midnight.

For some while Mr. Balliboy busied himself, with the aid of the van lamps, trying to find the mischief. But all at once and without any warning the lamps went out.

Mr. Balliboy shivered. The weather was changed, a sharp frost had set in, and the stars shone brightly. Some one groaned. Mary’s pains had come upon her.

‘I be going,’ said Mr. Balliboy, ‘to get some help for ’ee.’

Mr. Balliboy had noticed a little cottage across the moor, with a light in the window. He hurried there, but before he reached the cottage the light had vanished, and, knock as he would at the door, no one replied.

‘What be I to do?’ cried Mr. Balliboy anxiously, and looked up at the sky. A large and brightly shining star appeared exactly above his van.

Mr. Balliboy looked at his van and rubbed his eyes. The van was lit up, and beams of strange light seemed to emanate from it.

‘ ’Tain’t on fire, I do hope,’ said Mr. Balliboy. He began to run and came quickly to the van.

Mary was now resting comfortably, while two shining creatures with white wings leaned over her. Upon her lap was her new-born babe, smiling happily.

Mr. Balliboy fumbled in his coat for his Christmas gift. He stepped into the van and held out the cross to the babe.

Mary looked proudly at her infant, and the babe, delighted with the shining toy, took hold of the cross. The Angels wept.

GOLD

There still survives in far-away country places, where, in May time, the fields are green and the hedges white, a virgin tenderness to religion.

Nowhere else in the world was this tenderness more carefully nursed and preserved than at Maids Madder, where Mr. Hayhoe was, as his father had been, the evangelical clergyman, and where Priscilla, his wife, knitted clothes in worsted and woollen for all who needed them.

Both Mr. Hayhoe and his wife were simple and good—so much so that their very goodness might have been taken for unlearnedness—and contrary perhaps to worldly ideas, they were both of them extremely happy.

Strange things, his wife knew, happened to Mr. Hayhoe, whose spiritual understanding sometimes changed the very nature of crude appearances. Once, when he went to visit a dying woman who lived in a lonely heath cottage about two miles away from the parsonage, and a terrible snowstorm arose, it was to him as if, instead of meeting the cold blasts of January, he was walking in June happiness and heard a nightingale.

At Maids Madder, where the Hayhoes lived, the country people possessed those simple hearts of clay that, with a little gentle watering and loving treatment, are soon changed by the divine grace of the Holy Spirit into hearts of flesh.

But, unfortunately, there was one amongst them—rich Farmer Beerfield—who had long resisted all the persuasive kindness of Mr. Hayhoe to draw him into the fold, that was represented at Maids Madder by the church of St. John.

One other there was, too, who heard the word but would have naught of it, who did much mischief in the cure, and served the Devil's ends by means of a woman's tongue. She was Mrs. Grimble, whose feet were, alas! never in her own house, and when she wasn't visiting a neighbour to hear all she could, she would be loitering in the lanes, and whenever she met Priscilla Hayhoe she would be sure to whisper into her ears some horrid scandal.

It was impossible for Priscilla, with even the kindest thoughts towards her, not to consider Mrs. Grimble as a woeful woman and a friend to the dark ways of Satan; and Priscilla would observe sadly to her husband that 'the continuing by another, in the telling of it, of a wicked act, gives to that

act—which might otherwise be dipped in the wonderful sea of God's mercy—a perpetuity and a wider horror than any wicked thing should have.'

'And one,' she would say, 'who rejoices to tell of dire and sad wickedness, with any other thought than to prevent its recurrence, must surely be in greater danger of Hell than the very doer of the evil thing.'

It is not always the case, as Mr. Hayhoe did sometimes notice, that Satan can get the children of his adoption to love one another, and so it often happened that Mrs. Grimble would have something to say against Farmer Beerfield.

When Priscilla would be going out upon some gracious mission, meaning to hurry back to cook the dinner for her husband, Mrs. Grimble would stop her by the second elm tree where a missel-thrush's nest used to be, and tell—for the hundredth time—that Farmer Beerfield was a horrid old miser who had never in his life given away a sixpence, however much it was needed, and Mrs. Grimble feared he would be damned.

' 'Tis? to Hell 'e be going,' Mrs. Grimble would bawl.

But Priscilla, who had high notions of God's mercy, would only answer with a gentle sigh, that the Lord God might one day work a wonder with Mr. Beerfield as he had done with His servant Paul.

'But Paul bain't 'is name,' Mrs. Grimble would reply contemptuously, ' 'tis John.'

She would then allow Priscilla to go.

Mr. Hayhoe was an honest man, poor both in spirit and estate, but before such a one God stoops from His height and becomes as lowly as he. Mr. Hayhoe was able, out of his own humility of mind, to set forth in a proper manner the joys of a true religion to any willing listener, and had so convinced the poor of his parish—who were, indeed, no poorer than he—that they attended his sermons in good numbers. But, with all his zeal, only a very few ever came to the Holy Supper to taste the bread and the wine.

This omission, that Mr. Hayhoe felt must endanger the souls of the otherwise faithful worshippers, troubled the good pastor in no small measure, and he was fain to consult with Priscilla, during one of their meagre meals of bread and butter, as to the best way to lead the flock to the holy table.

'I believe,' said Mr. Hayhoe, at the close of one winter's day, after the rains had washed and the winds had dried the Vicarage windows, 'I believe

that if we could only get Farmer Beerfield to communicate, many of the others would follow in his steps and partake together, in all holiness, of the bread and the wine, that is, the body and blood of our Lord and Saviour.'

'Alas! alas!' said Priscilla, who had fresh in her ears many of Mrs. Grimble's stories, 'suppose he were to receive the same unworthily, would he not kindle God's just wrath against us all?'

'To God be all honour and glory,' replied Mr. Hayhoe, 'but I have often seen an old horned ram leap a fence and draw all the sheep after him into a green pasture.'

'And I too,' said Priscilla Hayhoe, 'remember very well when I was a little girl, seeing a cock-turkey lead all the hens into the church when my pious father was catechising the children, and why indeed should not Farmer Beerfield lead in the people too?'

Mr. Hayhoe had a very small opinion of himself, but he had so huge a belief in the mercy of God, and in the kindly workings of the Holy Spirit in the human heart, that he had never thought it possible that any man could take the Holy Supper and find, instead of the sweetest unity with God, Damnation in the cup.

Mr. Hayhoe and his wife Priscilla had long ago given up those little pleasures that might be called the lesser luxuries of the table, and Priscilla, who had the greatest liking for home-made marmalade, couldn't prevent a tear or two from falling upon a little comforter she was knitting for a child, when the last pot was eaten and she hadn't the means to buy any more oranges or sugar.

She had never, however little money they had to spend, allowed her husband to give up what he took for his health's sake—a glass of beer for dinner and, now and again, a pipe of tobacco. But now even these things must be given up when Mr. Hayhoe decided to buy golden vessels for the Holy Service.

'If God's vengeance could fall upon me alone, I would be content,' he said to his wife, 'so that the poor souls under my care might escape. They are invited—only they will not come—to eat and drink to their comfort, and, by not doing so, may sorrow eternally. Though we know God's loving kindness and His mercy to be infinite, yet His judgment is infinite too, and very terrible. To regard only His shining mercies and never to look at His just vengeance is the foolish act of a poor Ignorance who, with his eyes all

a-glitter for Heaven, may fancy all to be well till the ground open before him and he is swallowed up.'

And so Mr. Hayhoe and his wife felt that even the most simple pleasures must be given up, in order to purchase golden ware in which to administer to all such as shall be religiously and devoutly disposed the most comfortable sacrament of the body and the blood of Christ.

Every day now brought its own hardship. Mr. Hayhoe threw his pipe into the village pond, but he would look at that same pond and sigh grievously whenever he went by it.

'No, we should rejoice,' he said to Priscilla, replying to a word of hers that was a little sad, 'for when Mr. Beerfield sees how we honour our God by using golden cups to His glory, he will also wish to eat and drink and rejoice with us at the blessed feast.'

Priscilla Hayhoe held her husband's hand. They sat in silence while the one candle burnt out and the fire died in the grate.

'We will not give up,' said Mr. Hayhoe, who, although the room was in darkness, felt his heart glow. 'Cost what it will we will buy the gold.'

To those who live very quietly, a sudden idea, such as the buying of something that seems almost impossible to buy, gives a new excitement to lives that are ordinarily dull. To such an idea every personal privation is a sacrifice that gives pleasure. And gladly did Mr. Hayhoe think that it might be through his means that the farmer, by the very richness of God's gold, should be brought to a proper repentance and to the Holy Sacrament.

And yet it was hard for Mr. Hayhoe, and he would often wonder how it came about that a man who had given up so much already should so miss a little puff of smoke and a mere glass of malt liquor.

But he prayed the more earnestly and visited and comforted the people with a greater ardour to ease his soul, so that when the spring-time came—though he could never pass the open door of an Inn without sniffing sadly—he was somewhat eased in his trial.

Priscilla Hayhoe and her husband were happy saving for God, but the people of Maids Madder were not so pleased to hear of the new plan, for they now only received prayers from their pastor, because all the pence that they were wont to receive from him had to be saved.

As soon as Mr. Hayhoe gave up what he liked himself for the glory of God, and found joy in this abstinence, he suggested—hoping that his joy

would be theirs too—that others besides himself should give up their beer and tobacco, in order to buy wealth for the Holy Altar. As soon as this wish was known the people began to grow less warm in their religion, and one day Mrs. Grimble, meeting Priscilla beside Farmer Beerfield's barton gate, told her plainly that if any more was said about folks saving and giving, 'most of we will bide the safe side of thik churchyard wall.'

But perhaps of all the people who lived in the village Farmer Beerfield was the most angry with the new idea.

That any money should go anywhere except into his own pocket always displeased him, and that such a poor worm as Mr. Hayhoe, with no private means at all, and only a miserable stipend, should offer to collect from others appeared to Mr. Beerfield to be the height of knavery.

When he first heard of the new undertaking, he went out and stood with his legs wide apart and addressed his men in the turnip field, calling Mr. Hayhoe a poor starveling curate, and adding many an epithet even less kind.

He remembered, he said, 'a wealthy Rector, who had a curate like Mr. Hayhoe, who chanced one day to discover his patron behaving in an unseemly manner, but received, for his pains in the cause of virtue, a sound beating upon his threadbare back from his master's cane.'

As soon as Mr. Hayhoe had told the people, in a meeting held for that purpose, what he wished to do, Farmer Beerfield held another, in which he soundly rated Mr. Hayhoe, saying that he wished he had him a-dung-hauling for a week, called him a liar and a thief, and observed, in the strongest terms, that all the clergyman really meant to do was to give the money he collected to the naughty harlots in the town of Weyminster.

This angry talk, including the final sentence, was duly reported, by Mrs. Grimble, to Priscilla, who replied, much to Mrs. Grimble's astonishment, 'Our Blessed Saviour's chief friends had ever been the sinners, and if my dear husband gave aught to those unhappy ones, he would be only following in the footsteps of the loving Master.' . . .

Farmer Beerfield had the heart of a true miser: he liked to know what was inside any heavy box, did he happen to meet one. Now and again his wishes had led him to act a little unwisely. There had once been a case of wine that had, inadvertently, it was said, got itself into Mr. Beerfield's automobile that was waiting at the station, and so was conveyed to the farmer's residence, when it should have gone instead to Squire Hatfield's.

When the wine was all drunk, enquiries were made, and the farmer agreed that a little mistake had been made by his servant who unpacked the wine and was unable to read the address.

Mr. Beerfield never drove his car so fast but that he had his eyes about him, and when he was returning from market one summer's evening, he happened to overtake Mr. Hayhoe, who was resting by the wayside with a heavy wooden box upon his knees. Mr. Beerfield, wishing to know what the box contained, invited the clergyman to ride.

Mr. Hayhoe, who, although happy, was extremely tired, lifted the box carefully and sat in the car, as he had sat at the roadside, nursing the box upon his knees. Farmer Beerfield looked at him angrily.

'I suppose,' he said, 'that 'ee 've been to town to buy they golden cups, though 'twould have been better to have paid thee's own debts wi' they given pounds.'

Mr. Hayhoe blushed. He owed the farmer twenty pounds for butter and eggs.

After speaking thus rudely, the farmer was silent, but whenever his eyes could be spared from the road, he looked at the box, and, as he looked, his eyes became smaller and smaller, until they almost disappeared because his greed was so great.

But at last he broke silence.

'Be they cups real solid gold?' he enquired, eyeing the box fiercely, as if he meant to tear it open with his teeth. But before Mr. Hayhoe could answer, the Madder Vicarage was reached, and the clergyman carried the box, with happy steps, into his house. . . .

Mrs. Grimble always heard all the news, and she would sometimes be found talking to Farmer Beerfield himself, as well as to other less worthy gossips, and so it was not surprising that she should know all that went on at the farmer's house and what he did there.

It was quite impossible for Priscilla Hayhoe—however much she wished herself out of the way—not to hear what Mrs. Grimble had to say when she met her, for Mrs. Grimble, by begging a small gift—something cast off and yet warm—would turn, before she had her answer, to the latest sorrow or trouble that was being watched so joyfully by the people of Maids Madder. And Priscilla, who had to listen, could only refute the evil story, by forgiving with all her heart, and praying to God for the ill-doers named.

‘ ’E do talk of nothing but gold,’ Mrs. Grimble said to Priscilla one August morning, ‘ ’e do talk of nothing else but they golden plates.’ . . .

A happy Sunday came to Mr. Hayhoe when the holy service of gold—duly blessed and sanctified—was to be used.

‘I may now,’ he said, upon that very Sunday morning, ‘take my glass of beer and fish my pipe out of the pond.’

‘Alas! no, my dear,’ replied Mrs. Hayhoe. ‘Our debts, owing to this blessed gift to God, are so increased that we shall have to do without all pleasant things for a long time to come.’

Mr. Hayhoe sighed sadly, but, in a little while, he rejoiced, for before the church bell stopped that heralded the blessed feast, Farmer Beerfield walked up the aisle, sat down in the front pew, and took up a Prayer Book.

The communion, to which only those who do truly and earnestly repent them of their sins, are in love and charity with their neighbours and intend to lead a new life were supposed to come, was proceeded with in a very clear and moving manner by Mr. Hayhoe. And though Farmer Beerfield seemed to gaze at the golden goblet a little longer than was right or proper, and, during that immortal moment when the juice of the grape doth change into the precious blood of God, he held the cup as though it had joined in the same wonderful transformation, and as if he wished to taste it too, yet he otherwise behaved with a proper decorum.

He placed nothing in the golden plate, wherein only a few copper mites had clinked, but he walked out of the church, when the service was done, with an altered look, and went his way.

Mr. Hayhoe, being so simple in heart, had no fear of thieves, and, as it had been customary to leave the common ware in use at the service of God under the holy table, in a box that had neither lock nor padlock, Mr. Hayhoe permitted the golden service to be kept there too.

‘How could any one,’ said Mr. Hayhoe to his wife, as they sat together after a long day of kindly doings, ‘how could any one dare to steal from Him who is the giver of all?’

A man to whom may be given an everlasting heaven, wherein dwell all glorious riches, how could such a man rob so kingly a giver, of a little plate? ‘When all is to be given,’ said Mr. Hayhoe, ‘who would wish to steal?’

Priscilla Hayhoe, going to the village shop one day to buy a pound of rice to boil for dinner, overtook Mrs. Grimble, who stopped her in the lane

in a mysterious manner, by putting her finger to her lips, looking this way and that and nodding at Mr. Beerfield's farm.

Priscilla's heart beat quickly when Mrs. Grimble told her tale, which was nothing less than that the rich farmer could neither eat nor sleep, because of the wonderful change that had awakened in him after holding in his hand the golden cup of God. All day long, instead of harrying and troubling his men as he was wont to do, or else looking through his bills and counting his silver and notes that he took from his iron safe—or perhaps, if the day was wet, slyly taking his pleasures at the market town—Mr. Beerfield would now do nothing but wander to and fro in his large rooms, muttering strange words about gold.

Priscilla—and after meeting Mrs. Grimble this was an unusual thing—returned happily to her husband, who agreed with her that the Holy Spirit was at work in the farmer's mind, which was the cause of his altered behaviour. And so they both rejoiced. . . .

A night in the late summer can be very kind, and often to Mr. Hayhoe and Priscilla the mild season, when the dark hours are warm, gave a holy blessing. But sometimes unlooked-for clouds appear that are not seen in the outer darkness, and the winds arise.

A few days after the service was administered that Farmer Beerfield had attended, the evening—though very still—closed in darkly. Mr. Hayhoe and his wife Priscilla, as was their wont, retired early, and when they reached their bedroom, Mr. Hayhoe was surprised by a strange sound outside—the sound of a rushing and a mighty wind.

Mr. Hayhoe opened the bedroom window widely. All was very still, and yet the dark trees, that were but a little way from the Vicarage garden, and near to the church, waved mysteriously, as if a fierce wind beat upon them.

Though such a terrible tempest raged so near to him, Mr. Hayhoe's own heart was more at peace than he had ever known it to be, and he said quietly to Priscilla: 'I believe, my dear, that a Holy One is coming near to us. And listen,' he said, 'do you not hear the fast galloping of a horse?'

'It may be that one of us is to be taken by death,' said Mrs. Hayhoe.

'We are ready,' replied her husband. . . .

Priscilla was snug in bed, and when Mr. Hayhoe, who still stood beside the window, said that a little light was shining in the church and that he must go and see what it was, she breathed a prayer that her husband might be guarded from all dangers wherever he went, and fell asleep.

When Mr. Hayhoe reached the church doors, he found them open, and when he entered and beheld Farmer Beerfield kneeling down before the altar and placing, one by one, the pieces of the golden service upon the holy table, Mr. Hayhoe supposed that the man's mind was tormented by an inner sickness that could alone be assuaged by receiving of the sacred elements at that very moment.

'All time,' thought Mr. Hayhoe, 'is God's time, and what better wish can any man have, whose mind is troubled with his sins, than to taste of the body and the blood of the Lamb of God?'

Mr. Hayhoe, with little delay, provided himself with the necessary creatures, robed himself, and commenced the service, glad in heart that so good a work had been wrought in the farmer.

Mr. Hayhoe administered the bread, and held the cup in his hand, but, before handing it to Mr. Beerfield, he looked over his head, and saw to his horror a pale horse and an angel seated upon him, with a naked sword in his hand.

Mr. Hayhoe returned the cup to the table. He kneeled and prayed as for one already in the grasp of death: 'Thou writest bitter things against him, and makest him to possess his former iniquities.'

The sword was raised. The sword fell.

THE END

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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.

[The end of *The White Paternoster and Other Stories* by Theodore Francis Powys]