Mr. Tasker's Gods

T. F. Powys

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MR. TASKER'S GODS

BY

THEODORE FRANCIS POWYS

BESIDES, WHO COULD HAVE THOUGHT
THAT SO NEAR THE KING'S PALACE
THERE SHOULD HAVE LURKED SUCH
NAUGHTY ONES?

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TO
GERTRUDE

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A MOTHER. LADIES. COUNTRY PEOPLE *and* OTHERS

SCENE

Two villages, SHELTON *and* SOUTH EGDON : THE HEATH : *Two towns*, PORTSTOWN *and* MAIDENBRIDGE

Mr. Tasker's Gods

CHAPTER I

MR. TASKER'S RETURN

The servants at the vicarage had gone to bed. Edith had just locked the back door, and Alice had taken the master the hot milk that he drank every evening at ten o'clock. Just after ten the two servants had gone upstairs together.

Indoors there was law, order, harmony and quiet; out of doors there was nothing except the night and one owl.

The servants at the vicarage slept in a little room at the end of the back passage. They slept in one bed, and their tin boxes rested together upon the floor; there was also in the room an old discarded washing-stand. It must be remembered that servants like a room with scant furniture: it means less work and it reminds them of home. The servants at the vicarage did not pull down their blind, there was no need; they never thought that any one could possibly desire to watch them from the back garden. Beyond the back garden there were two large meadows and then the dairy-house.

The delight of being watched from outside, while one moves about a bedroom, is rare in country circles; these kinds of arts and fancies are generally only practised in cities, where the path of desire has taken many strange windings and the imagination is more awake. As a matter of fact, these two girls were much too realistic to believe that any one could possibly stand in the dark and look at them undress. Not one of the young men that they knew would have stood outside their window for an instant, so the vicarage servants had not even the womanly pleasure of pulling down the blind.

They were both very tired; they had been cleaning the house, and they had been washing up the very large number of plates that the family—'three in number,' so ran the advertisement—had that day soiled.

Tired girls do not go to bed, it is just the very thing that they won't do; they will prefer even to darn their stockings, or else they pull out all the little bits of blouse stuff hidden under Sunday frocks, but they never get into bed.

Edith sat upon the end of the bed, partly clothed, and tried in vain to draw a very large hole in the heel of her stocking together. She knew very well about the hole, for a little mite of a girl walking behind her the last Sunday had very plainly and loudly remarked upon it, coming down the church path. Alice, for some reason or other, was looking out of the window.

To the north of the village, in view of the girls' window, there was a low down, the kind of down that an idle schoolboy with a taste for trying to do things might have attempted to throw a cricket ball over, and receive it, if it were not stopped by the gorse, running down to him again. This down was like a plain homely green wall that kept away the north wind from the village, and in March, when an icy blast blew on a sunny day and beat against it from the north, any old person could sit on the dry grass, the village side, and think of the coming summer.

It was over this hill that a road crept that joined the village to the world; at least this was one way to get there; the other way was round the bottom of the hill—'down the road,' as it was called. But the more manly way was for the traveller to go over the hill. Whoever went down the road to get at the world was regarded by the strong-minded as a feeble fellow, or else in possession of a very poor horse that could not face the hill. This was the case of the small farmer of the village, whose old horses never cost him more than eight pounds and who always went down the road to get to the market town.

Alice was peering into the summer night, watching the hill, because at the top there was a light moving. Alice had at first taken this light to be a star; she had heard of the evening star, and she thought it must be that one, until it began to move, and then her reason explained to her that it must be the light of a cart guided by some delayed wanderer in the night.

Just then the owl hooted by the vicarage hedge, near the elm tree, and swept over the house and hooted again on its way to the church tower.

Alice was now sure that something was happening in the darkness, something different from what had happened the evening before, or a good many evenings before,—something exciting. She had begun to hear voices at the dairy-house by the gate that she knew led to the meadow. She could not hear what was being said, but the sound of voices showed very distinctly that something had happened. Alice turned quickly, and her hair, that was already let down, brushed the window. She said excitedly the words of magic, 'Something's the matter with Mr. Tasker.' The voices had come to Alice out of the night in the magical way that voices do come in the dark;

she had heard them for more than a minute before she had realized that they were voices. They were curiously natural, and yet she knew that they had no business to be there.

Alice was the youngest of the vicarage servants, and it was Edith who opened the window at the bottom so that they could both lean out into the night and listen. Alice, who had the sharper ears of the two, gave expression to the mysterious sounds that floated in from the fields, the sounds themselves clearly denoting the presence of startled, trembling, human creatures.

Alice whispered to Edith in much the same tone of fear as the sounds, 'Do you hear them? They be frightened. 'Tis Mrs. Tasker and all of them; they be by the gate waiting—hush—be quiet—let the curtain bide—there's May's voice, she did always squeak like a little pig—listen—"Can't you, Edie"—that's Elsie, quite plain. Oh, I do wish I could hear what they be saying! There's the baby crying. What a shame having she out there—listen to Elsie—now they be all talking—they are all there by the gate—and they be so frightened. Something's the matter with Mr. Tasker. Six o'clock is his time to be home; it must be near twelve. Old Turnbull struck eleven ever so long ago.'

The servants at the vicarage called the hall clock 'Old Turnbull' after their master. It was their habit to give nicknames to nearly everything in the house.

'Mr. Tasker don't drink, he don't ever spend anything, he don't treat Mrs. Green, he don't spend nothing—something must have happened.' Alice was beginning to enjoy the fear of it.

Slowly the light moved down the hill, and stopped; the voices by the gate became more high and more terror-stricken as the truth grew nearer, and the girls at the window felt that the dramatic moment had come.

'He's opening the mead gate,' said Edith; 'whatever can it be?'

They watched the light now moving across the meadow; it moved rather erratically, as though it were glad to be freed from the restraint of a narrow lane. It kept on going out of the path like a lost star, and wandered here and there, the horse or the man having seemingly forgotten the right way to the dairy gate. However, after taking some wide curves, once almost disappearing, the light at last drew near the gate.

The watchers from the window noticed a change in the tone of the voices, which were now calmed down in suppressed excitement, except for

the continual wailing of the babe. At last the light arrived at the gate, where the frightened expectant family were waiting, and the servants at the vicarage heard the sound of a man's voice.

The fact that the voice was as it had always been broke the magic spell: the man's voice robbed the night of the mystery. Instead of the aching excitement of unknown things, it brought to the girls the cruel fact of nature that man rules, and has ruled, and always will rule: it brought a cold, dreary, real existence of a fact into a night of fiction.

What was the matter with Mr. Tasker that he had returned in such a way that he was mistaken for the evening star?

Mr. Tasker was a dairyman of distinction. 'He did very well in his trade,' so the village carpenter said, who knew him. Mr. Tasker went to market every Saturday, and it was to market that he had been the Saturday of his star-like return. He was a tall man with a yellow moustache that stuck out about an inch from his upper lip, and the remainder of his face he shaved on Sundays. On Sundays also, about the time of the longest days, Mr. Tasker, his long legs clothed in trousers that had been in the family for about a hundred years, moved over the dairy fields after the evening service so that he might, if possible, catch a naughty little boy or girl breaking down the hedges or smelling the musk thistles.

When Mr. Tasker talked to any train or market companion, he kept his head far away and looked upwards as though he were interested in the formation of clouds, unless it happened that the conversation was about pigs, and then he brought his head down very low and became very attentive and human.

Mr. Tasker worshipped pigs, and a great many of his gods, fat and lean, were always in the fields round his house. He killed his gods himself, and with great unction he would have crucified them if he could have bled them better that way and so have obtained a larger price.

On this particular Saturday Mr. Tasker had started out at his usual time after having given orders to his family to take special care of a certain black sow that he loved the best of all his gods. On the road he passed the usual kind of market women who had missed the carrier. One or two had even the hardihood to ask him to let them ride with him in the wagon; in answer to this the high priest of the pigs only sniffed, and flicked his horse with the whip.

The pigs were duly unloaded into a pen, where they were to be sold. One, the largest, lay down until a pork butcher reminded him of his duty with a knowing prod from an oak stick. Presently, a little bell having tinkled, the auctioneer and his followers, a crowd of eager buyers, and Mr. Tasker with his eyes upon the clouds, approached, and the future of the pigs was assured. In a few weeks they were to be transformed by human magic into smoked sides and gammon. They had been purchased by a mouth filled with a cigar and representing the 'West County Bacon Supply Co.'

The pigs had sold well, and Mr. Tasker walked very contentedly up the town, where it was his custom to expend sixpence upon bread and cheese. It was just by his favourite inn that the thing obtruded itself that delayed his return. He met his father.

The thing happened like this: As Mr. Tasker went along up North Street, his head well above the market women, and his thoughts with his gods, he saw a disreputable old tramp standing by the door of the very tavern that he himself wished to enter. The old tramp had a face splendid in its colour, almost like the sun. He stood surveying mankind from an utterly detached point of view: he even looked hard at the young ladies, he looked at every one. His look was bold and even powerful. This old tramp regarded Mr. Tasker, when that gentleman so unluckily presented himself before him, with a look of supreme contempt, and then the tramp laughed. His was the laugh of a civilized savage who had kept in his heart all the hate and lust and life of old days. His laugh made a policeman look round from his post by the bank, and even compelled him to walk with the stately policeman-like stride towards the two men, for what legal right had any one to make such a noise of violent merriment in the street?

Mr. Tasker's mind was filled with a great deal of understanding. His work as a dairyman was a mystery that required a large amount of wise handling and a great deal of patient labour. With his beasts, Mr. Tasker was a perfect father: he waited by them at night when they were ill. Once he nearly killed his little girl—he hit her in the face with his hay-fork—because she had forgotten to carry a pail of water to a sick cow. Mr. Tasker was brave; he could handle a bull better than Jason, and ruled his domain of beasts like a king. At the same time, there were events that Mr. Tasker could not altogether keep in control, and one of them was his father.

On this Saturday Mr. Tasker's mind had been so full of his pigs that he had not considered the possibility of meeting his father. The last news of his father he had received from the clergyman of the village. The clergyman had stopped him one day by the post office and had said to him:

‘I am sorry to hear, Mr. Tasker, that your father is in prison again. It must be a great distress to you all, and you have my full sympathy in this trouble, and I know how you must feel. I fear he is an old man in sin’—which was quite true. ‘I wonder if you have ever thought of trying to keep him in order yourself? You might allow him, your own father, to live with you. Don’t you think he might help you in feeding the pigs?’

As the clergyman was speaking, Mr. Tasker had withdrawn his gaze farther and farther from the earth as though he were intent upon watching some very minute speck of black dust in the sky. The allusion to his pigs brought him down with a jerk, and, bending towards the clergyman, he said:

‘You cannot mean you think I ought to do that, Mr. Turnbull? My pigs never did any one no harm.—My father feed they pigs!—Why can’t ’e be kept in prison? Don’t I pay rates?’ And slowly Mr. Tasker’s gaze went back to the sky.

The clergyman was a little surprised at the undutiful behaviour of Mr. Tasker, ‘but perhaps,’ he thought, as he walked along the grassy lane that led to the vicarage and tea, ‘perhaps it would be better if they did keep such evil kind of old men in prison.’ Mr. Turnbull was a Conservative.

When the son saw the father by the tavern his first thought was to wish himself somewhere else,—if only he had learnt a little more about his father; if only he had inquired about the time of his being let forth out of the public mansion that had so long been feeding him with bread and beef; if only he had kept his eyes more upon the people in the street and less upon his balance at the bank, he might have had time to turn out of the way. Mr. Tasker’s mind, that was always ready to work out the difficult problems of dairy management, now seemed completely lost. The situation was one that he could not master: he could not even pray to the black sow to help him. He himself had often forced and compelled others, and now it was his turn to be forced and compelled.

His father’s laugh was terrible, and still worse was his handshake. He shook hands like a lion, and would not let go. He dragged Mr. Tasker into the lowest bar of the inn, and putting before him a tankard filled half with spirits and half with beer, bid Mr. Tasker to drink his health. The old tramp sat between his son and the door. He told his son somewhat coarsely that they would stay there till closing time, ‘they had not met for so long,’ he said, ‘and he had plenty of money to pay for more drink,’ and, he added, with another mighty laugh, ‘You bide with me, or, damnation, I go ‘long wi’ you!’

Mr. Tasker did bide. ‘Drink was the best way,’ he thought, ‘to get his father to prison again.’ What if he were to repent and offer to help his son with the pigs? Mr. Tasker himself paid for ‘another of the same.’ How to keep his father out of his gate, was the one thought just then that troubled his mind. It must be done by force, but what kind of force? Mr. Tasker thought hard, and then he remembered that the tramp was afraid of dogs. After that Mr. Tasker even drank his glass with pleasure, looked at the girl and paid for another.

The father and son sat quite near each other until the tavern closed, and they gave the barmaid some entertainment, and she, being a true girl, preferred the father to the son.

CHAPTER II

FATHER AND SON

The morning after the midnight return of Mr. Tasker was dark for July, owing to great lumbering thunder-clouds that hung like distorted giants' heads over the church tower. These heads every now and again gave out a muttered growl.

Inside the church tower the owl and her brood were shortly to be awakened by the one solitary bell. They had remained, except for the choir practice, very contentedly for six days, breathing in their loud way, making a noise like the snores of an old watchman. For six days no one had disturbed them, and in their owl minds, that shrewdly think through centuries, they supposed that the happy times of peace in the church tower, that they remembered in the reign of King John, had come again. However, no such rare owl days of church silence had returned, and the old male owl, blinking through a crack in the tower, saw the clergyman's gardener, a tired, drooping sort of man that they called 'Funeral' in the village, slowly ascending the path in order to unlock the church door and enter the vestry, and pull at the solitary bell-rope that had hung for six days on a brass hook near the clergyman's looking-glass.

This lonely bell had informed the village of the same fact on every seventh day for a great number of years, and now came the little hitch that so often upsets the wise doings of mankind.

The vicarage servants, whose duty it was to serve the vicar with hot water in order that he might serve the gardener, his own son, and one old woman, with bread and wine in the church, were late. Their sacrament of rising and of lighting the fire was delayed by the fact that they were both fast asleep. This condition of theirs was brought to the mind of Mrs. Turnbull by the association of ideas when she heard the feet of the Sunday postman crunching the gravel of the drive. There seemed to her half-awake senses to be something wrong in this event happening when the vicar was in bed by her side, since it happened on other Sundays when the vicar was in church. Thus the startling thought came to her that there must be something the matter with the servants.

The postman's knock had likewise awakened Edith, Alice being, as she always was when in bed, wholly under the clothes. Edith hardly knew what

had happened; so frightful an event as the coming of the postman while they were in bed had never been known before. She endured the torment of a general when the enemy has crept round the camp, overpowered the guard, and begun to cut the throats of the sleeping soldiers.

'The postman's come! . . .'

Alice only replied by sleepy grunts to this outcry of terror.

When Edith saw her mistress and took all the blame, Alice was still at the looking-glass doing her hair. Edith had lit the fire before her fellow-servant slowly and crossly came down the back stairs. It was Alice who a few minutes after this served Mr. Turnbull with hot water. But it was not till the evening that the girls found out what had been the matter with Mr. Tasker.

The feeling of something having happened remained with them and gave them a pleasurable excitement all the day. The heavens were also disturbed: the gloomy giants' heads concluded their growling by perfect torrents of straight rain, and the vicarage servants could not go out for their afternoon. Instead of going out they sat very thoughtfully over the kitchen table, Edith turning over the pages of a 'Timothy & Co.' sale catalogue, and Alice writing a letter to her mother.

For his Sunday's supper Mr. Turnbull ate cold beef and pickles, and also talked very seriously with Mrs. Turnbull and their son, a poor simple fellow who was obliged to stay with his parents because no financier could extract one ounce of real work out of his mind or body.

Mrs. Turnbull and her son waited and listened, looking at the table. Would the conversation follow the lead of the onions, the beef, the sermon, or the Lord? The vicar's thoughts passed by the Lord, stayed a little with the onions, and last of all fixed upon Mr. Tasker. The vicar always prefaced his remarks by looking first at Mrs. Turnbull and then at his son, as if to give them due warning that he was going to speak and that it would be best for them to keep quiet. He looked at them, coughed, and said:

'Mr. Tasker spoke to me in the vestry after we had counted the money.' To the vicar 'money' was a word as important as 'church' or 'Lord.' He pronounced it slowly, and when he came to the 'y' he gave a sharp click with his tongue as if he locked his safe. Having with his usual care delivered himself of 'money,' he went on with Mr. Tasker.

'He told me he had met his father.'

'How very terrible,' said the foolish son.

Mr. Turnbull had a contempt for this son, and he never took the slightest notice of any remark that his son made. ‘Mr. Tasker’s father is out of prison,’ he went on, which led to an ‘Oh!’ from Mrs. Turnbull.

Alice left the room with an empty plate.

The family at the vicarage lived very quietly: they began the day very quietly and they finished it in the same way. A person with a large inquiring mind upon the subject of gods, watching the life at the vicarage, would no doubt have been puzzled for a long time to find out exactly what god they did serve there. One thing the person would have noticed, that the God, whatever He was, whether fish, man, or ape, was a remarkably easy god to please. He would have seen, had he been a Hindoo or a Tibetan, had he been anything except an orthodox Christian, that no persons in the household ever put themselves out for the sake of their religion. The church service and the family prayers appeared to be a kind of form of instruction for the poor, the church service being a sort of roll-call to enable authority to retain a proper hold upon the people. The clergyman was there to satisfy the people that there was no god to be afraid of; he was put there by authority to prevent any uncertain wanderings in the direction of God. At the vicarage the clergyman showed, by his good example, that his smallest want was preferred before God Almighty.

The vicarage stood, or rather sat—for it was a large low house—in a pleasant valley. Sheep fed on the hills around, and cows lay or stood about in the lowland pastures following their accustomed regulations as ordained by man. The cows had their milk pulled from them, their calves taken away; they were fatted in stalls when old and struck down in pools of blood. However, in the fields round about the vicarage they always ate the grass and looked the picture of content, except for the manlike disturbance and leapings that at times and seasons produced uncertain conduct and doubtful rovings in the bull. In the summer the creatures fed quite contentedly, or else, in very hot weather, they ran about to try to rid themselves of the flies. In the winter they stood with their tails to the big hedges. In the spring they spread themselves over the fields showing their separate backs and colours. In the autumn they got into corners and became a herd instead of mere cows.

The peace and quiet of the village was plain to any observer. No one toiled very hard and there was never any real want. There were quite enough women to take the edge off the male desires and quite enough beer to sharpen at the wrong end the natural stupidity of the countryman. If your special cult led you to write of country matters or draw Egyptian symbols on the farm gate, you could do so any afternoon at your leisure. If you preferred

to paint or tar—I think tar is the cheaper—'Our Lord, He is the Lord' on any village stile, there would be no one to prevent you. The village demon was permitted to go, within certain limits, in any direction occasion might demand or your bodily needs require. Every little act that you did was quite well known to every one else, and every one shared the personal glory of goodness or vice. Every wise gossip collected and told again the pages of the village novel. All the people lived in a world of fancy, and every item of news was exaggerated and made intensely human, just as fancy chose. News, dull or tame, was made interesting by the addition of a good end, or a bad beginning, or a needful middle. When the clergyman was angry they made him foam at the mouth, and when Mr. Tasker came home they reported him to have been very drunk indeed and gave him a black eye from his father.

The vicar of Shelton, the Rev. Mr. Turnbull, was a sensible man, and he understood a great many very important matters. He was well clad in the righteous armour of a thick and scaly conscience that told him that everything he did was right. Mr. Turnbull was sometimes troubled with his teeth, but on the whole the days passed smoothly with him; the meals coming almost as quickly as the hours, gave him always something to do. Mr. Turnbull liked the world to run easily for him; he did not want jumps or jerks, nor cracks in the floor. Mr. Turnbull thought that he was quite safe in the world: he understood his way about the village and could always find the church or his own mouth when he wanted to. 'He had a trouble at home,' so he told the people, and they knew when he said that that he meant his son.

It was not Mr. Turnbull's fault that his son was always there; the proper thing would have been for his son to have gone away as his other sons had done, one to the Church and one to medicine. The third son had never got beyond the third form of a rather poor preparatory school. And at sixteen, his ignorance being still in such evidence, the head master returned him to his father as quite unsaleable, and suggested farming and America as a cure for a hopelessly muddled education.

Mr. Turnbull, who was a man of action in some things, thought the matter over and shipped Henry off to Canada. The good vicar was a little afraid of the girls in America. In a picture paper that he had secretly smuggled to his study he had once seen a procession of them, asking for votes, in white frocks and carrying flags in their hands. They were tall girls and looked as if they knew what kind of earth they were treading on, and what kind of helpmate they had in man. The vicar had never seen or heard of any of these white-frocked pests—so he believed them to be—carrying flags

in Canada. He imagined that there the hard-worked settlers spent their time cutting down endless fir trees, while their gaunt wives, taken for the most part from the Hebrides, suckled tribes of infants outside the doors of wooden huts. Mr. Turnbull thought it over, and then he pronounced the word ‘money’ to Mrs. Turnbull after he had eaten his beef and pickles one wet Sunday evening in November.

Mr. Turnbull thought it over, and shipped his son steerage to Canada.

The steerage of a great ocean liner is not exactly the best place wherein to receive light. But Henry Turnbull was nearer heaven in that lower deck than he had ever been before. One evening, as he was standing in a kind of bypath between two evil smells, a girl from Ireland walked quickly up to him and drew his face to hers and kissed his mouth. Henry never saw the girl again, she had run away with a laugh and was gone. Henry did not understand running after girls; he simply remained where he was and allowed the kiss—kisses do not stop at the lips—to sink into him. It gave him strange new wild feelings and sank at last into that deep lake over which the poets fish for golden minnows.

Those days were the first in his life when he could use his own legs as he liked, and move where he wanted to go. Before that time his legs had not been his own property. At school they were forced to kick footballs, or else to run to the farther end of a cricket ground after a long hit; at home his legs were always used to carry messages, every one used them for that purpose. But now at last he could walk where he liked in the limits of the steerage; and after that manner did Henry Turnbull reach the promised land.

In that new country Henry found himself in a log hut by the side of a steep mountain surrounded by tall fir trees, so large that he could not put his arms round them. In his pocket he had a letter from his father telling him that his duty to God was from that moment to cut down those fir trees. His father might just as well have told him to cut down Mount Cotopaxi.

In the log hut there were twelve bottles of whisky, one empty, a barrel of flour, and his partner. His partner stayed there for twelve days, and at the end of that time there were twelve empty bottles of whisky instead of twelve full ones. His partner was always with the whisky in the log hut. This partner was a second cousin in whom Henry had invested all his capital, the money that his father had lent him. On the twelfth day this amiable partner walked away to the nearest town, a distance of about forty miles, in order, so he said, ‘. . . to buy a new axe.’ He never came back again. He had taken

with him to the town what remained of Henry's money, which, with the help of a merry negress, he soon spent.

Henry was now quite alone with twelve empty whisky bottles, a barrel of musty flour, and the odour of his late partner. He tried to do his best; he picked up sticks and cooked Indian cakes with the flour, and hacked with a very blunt axe at the immense fir trees, beginning with the smallest he could find. In two months the flour was all spent, and the fir still standing, for in one of his attempts to conquer the tree, the first of five or six hundred, Henry had given his foot a nasty blow, and the last month he spent in cooking the cakes he also spent in trying to walk.

A society for the protection of poor aliens helped Henry home again. This society helped Henry to work his passage to Liverpool, having received from him in return everything that his partner had not robbed him of. If a girl's kiss had made the steerage heaven, the sailors succeeded in giving him on the way home a very true picture of hell.

All this experience of the world's humour taught Henry to love the vicarage garden and to do exactly what he was told by every one. In the vicarage garden Henry lived the life of an industrious child. He learned to understand turning over the mould in quiet and peace. He had seen quite enough and felt quite enough to prevent his trying to assert himself in any way. The mysterious underground currents that rouse men to the vice of action were quite unable to carry him away. He longed to look at every little thing and quietly to consider its meaning, and he noted all the incidents that happened around him. So far he had seen nothing very horrible, and he was always ready to enjoy a joke.

Henry grew a beard and read curious, old-fashioned little brown books, books written by old forgotten Church Fathers who thought like angels. Henry was surprised to find that these old thinkers were very much like himself. He quite understood their reasons for loving and believing, and he quite understood their deep melancholy that was by no means like the boredom that is sad only because it wants something to play with. He liked the way that these good men spoke of religion—a way individual and restraining, a way beautiful and mysterious, that was more afraid of its own virtue than of the vice of a brother. He delighted in their manner. They spoke of religion rather as an aged housekeeper would have spoken, with great dignity and quiet and peace. Although they often lived in wild times, they seemed to be moving in old palace gardens amongst tall white lilies far from the world and ever contemplating the works of that divine Saviour artist, Jesus Christ.

There were two events, one human and one vegetable, that Henry always remembered of his travels. One was the kiss and the other was the hacked fir tree. Often at night he dreamt of both, of the tree cut through at last and falling upon him, and of the kiss whose influence over his life was not yet gone. There was not much chance of another kiss. The girls of the vicarage—the servants were the only girls there—did not like Master Henry. Alice did not like his beard, nor his quiet manner, and Edith supposed him to be secretly sold to the devil because he spoke in the same gentle manner to every one.

Alice understood quite well what she was meant to do in the world; she felt herself quite plainly budding into a woman, and was well content. This young person possessed a round merry face; bright eyes, rather too green perhaps; brown, rather dark brown, hair; and a dainty, though by no means thin, girl's body. For a servant she was good enough, for herself she was quite the nicest thing she had known. Alice was conventional, even more so than the vicar himself. She liked a man in his Sunday clothes, and to her mind a coming together must begin in the right way; it did not matter so much how it ended, it must begin with a Sunday walk up the hill, a proper sign to the villagers to watch events.

Alice delighted in Mr. Turnbull's elder son John, who was a curate, and who came to see them sometimes, dressed in wonderful clothes and mounted upon a snorting motor bicycle. The Rev. John had looked at her once or twice, or perhaps oftener, in the right way, his eyes roving over her frock and stopping for a moment about her mouth and then slowly returning to her feet. The vicarage daily bread had given Alice her rounded form and one or two romantic ideas about John; it had given her the desire for more. She wanted very much to be a lady, and to bully—Mrs. Turnbull never did bully—a servant like herself.

The older girl, Edith, was nearly worked out, she had been at it so long. The vicarage house-cleanings and everlasting plate-wiping had washed all her youth away. She went to the village chapel whenever she could, and there she sang of her last hope—'salvation.'

CHAPTER III

THE FEAST

One afternoon the vicarage was sleeping peacefully, all the leads of its roof basking in the sunshine. It was quite pleasant to witness the content of this English homestead. The different creepers that climbed about it gave the house the appearance of a friendly arbour, and if a young maiden wearing a white frock and a hat with red poppies had danced down the steps the scene would have been wholly delightful. The stone steps were warm, and the front door was open, and inside was a cool dimness. The vicarage looked at peace with the whole world, and appeared to be under the wing of a very drowsy and sun-loving Godhead.

Alas! the most sleepy content has at times a bad dream, and terrifies the dreamer by showing him an ugly thing.

The Rev. Hector Turnbull stood outside his own door; he was wearing an old straw hat, and held in his hand a note. He looked around him. He was looking for something, he was looking for his son.

And then he called, 'Henry!' The tone of his voice was sleek and moist, disclosing the fact, unknown to the doctors, that every man has poison glands under his tongue, and when he speaks most gently he is really making up his mind to use them.

'Yes, father, here I am,' came the answer from the garden.

The contrast between the voice of the son and the voice of the father was very striking. The voice of the son expressed a natural melancholy and a candour quite his own, as well as an utter obedience to the will of others.

In a very little while Henry's somewhat stooping form came up the path from the kitchen garden.

'I am sorry to trouble you, but please come to me—here. I wish you to take this note—at once—to Mr. Tasker.' And the father looked at his son with that interesting paternal hatred that the human family so well know, the polite hatred that half closes its eyes over its victim, knowing that the victim is completely in its power.

The reason for these two appearances whose voices met in a garden was that Mr. Turnbull, after his afternoon sleep of an hour, had written a letter to

Mr. Tasker about the new church lamp, and when the letter was written, appeared outside the door and uttered the command, and the voice in the kitchen garden replied.

Henry walked away with the note. There was no need for him to hurry. Outside the gate, he noticed a little garden of stones and flowers that two children were building. He watched them for a moment and then passed by and saw something else. At first he did not know what this something else was. 'What it was' was being dragged across the meadow towards the dairy.

Henry was quick to notice and ready to love almost everything that he saw. He could note without any disgust a rubbish heap with old tins and broken bottles; he could look with affection at pieces of bones that were always to be found in a corner of the churchyard. The simple and childish manners of men always pleased him, he never drove his eyes away from common sights. He allowed his mind to make the best it could of everything it saw, and so far he had seen nothing very disgusting.

He was now watching a new phenomenon. The thing in question was harnessed to a horse, and it flashed and sparkled in the sun like a splendid jewel. The noise it made was not as pleasing as its colour. There was a sort of slush and gurgle as it moved along at the heels of the horse, sounds that suggested to the mind the breaking out of foul drains.

Henry noted the colour and the noise, and then the appearance coming nearer, showed itself to be the skinned body of a horse.

As he watched the thing, Henry felt as though he held the skinned leg of the horse and was being dragged along too. Anyhow, it went his way, and he followed the track of the carcass towards the dairy-house. Sundry splashes of blood and torn pieces of flesh marked the route. At the yard gate the procession stopped and Henry waited. He wished to know what happened to dead skinned horses that were dragged across fields; he had a sort of foolish idea that they ought to be buried. Anyhow, he had to take his note to the dairy.

There was something wanting in the field as he went through. At first he could not think what he missed, and then he remembered Mr. Tasker's gods. There was not one of them to be seen. However, a grunting and squealing from the yard showed that they were alive. All at once Mr. Tasker's long form uprose by the gate, chastising his gods with one hand while he opened the gate with the other. And then the strange thing happened. The carcass of the skinned horse was dragged into the yard and the gods were at it.

Henry Turnbull wished to see what men do and what pigs eat. He walked up to the gate and delivered his note, and watched the feast with the other men.

The pigs, there were over a hundred of them, were at it. They covered the carcass and tore away and devoured pieces of flesh; they covered each other with blood, and fought like human creatures. The stench of the medley rose up in clouds, and was received as incense into the nostrils of Mr. Tasker. At last the horrible and disgusting feast ended, and the pigs were let out, all bloody, into the meadow, and a few forkfuls of rotting dung were thrown upon the bones of the horse.

Henry was beginning to learn a little about the human beings in whose world he dwelt. He had had hints before. But now there was no getting away from what he had witnessed. There had been no actual cruelty in the scene, but he knew quite well where the horror lay. It lay in the fact that the evil spirits of the men, Mr. Tasker's in particular, had entered into the pigs and had torn and devoured the dead horse, and then again entered, all bloody and reeking, into the men.

It seemed to Henry that he needed a little change after the sight that he had just witnessed, and so he wandered off down the valley through the meads that led to the nearest village, that was only a mile from their own. He thought a cigarette with his friend, who was the priest there, would be the best way to end that afternoon.

This clergyman was not a popular man. He had the distinction of being disliked by the people; he was also avoided by Mr. Turnbull and his other well-to-do neighbours, and was treated with extreme rudeness by the farmers. He lived in a house sombre and silent as the grave. He possessed a housekeeper who did two things: she drank brandy and she told every one about the wickedness of her master.

There were great elm trees round the house, so that in summer only a little corner of the roof could be seen. The place was always in the shade and was always cold. It was one of those old church houses through which doubts and strange torments have crept and have stung men for generations, and where nameless fevers lie in wait for the little children. The place was built with the idea of driving men to despair or to God. Inside the house you felt the whole weight cover you. Outside, the trees, overfed with damp leaf-mould, chilled to the bone. A list of the vicars and their years of office, that was hung in a corner of the church, showed how quickly the evil influence of the house had dealt with them. In the time, or about the time of the Black

Death, five different priests had been there in the space of one year, and since then there had been many changes; hardly any incumbent had stayed longer than five years. It was a house intended for a saint or for a devil. Young Henry often went there, though his father very much disapproved of his going, but he went all the same, and Mr. Turnbull never missed him at tea.

The fields were delightful and cool as Henry loitered along them. Summer, full of her divinity, lay stretched before him. No heart could move without beating fast; the life of the sun was lord and king. The sounds that Henry heard were full of summer. The July heat was in a dog's bark. The colours of the clouds were July colours and the stream trembled over little stones, gaily singing a summer song. A kingfisher darted down from under the bridge, and Henry could hardly believe he had seen it, because it looked so lovely.

Henry's mind had regained its balance, and he could now drink of the cup that the summer held out to him. He breathed the sweet air and saw that the sun painted the upper part of every green leaf with shining silver. The July dust lay thick like a carpet along the road to the vicarage.

Henry pushed by the heavy gate. It could only open enough to let him pass: the lower hinge was off and the gate was heavy to move like a great log. The postman, who knew how to go about, had made a private gap through the hedge. In the way up to the house there was silence: the tall trees kept out all the wind, and the grass path appeared scarcely trodden.

A grassy way to an English home is a sign of decay and want. In the middle-class drives, clergymen's or doctors', a very long time is spent by the gardener every summer in digging out with a knife the seedling grasses that grow between the gravel, and farmers' daughters are seen, in their shorter drives, performing the same office, kneeling on a mat, not praying to God but grubbing for the wicked trespassers that bring calamity to the household.

Henry's feelings were not of the ordinary kind; once inside the gate he only felt the very rare human delight of being welcomed, welcomed, do what he might. He knew that if he were to die there of the plague, the hands of his friend would carry him into the house and lay him upon his own bed. He could not possibly have come at an unwelcome hour; no other guest could be there who would prevent the master receiving him with pleasure; there was no business so pressing as his business, that of friendship.

Henry walked up to the house. There was one low window wide open, a window that opened out into and touched the long grass. Henry went up the

slightly trodden path towards this window. Mr. Neville, the vicar, was within, reading; his head was bent a little over his book. Had an artist seen him, an artist like William Blake, he would have thought at once of that romantic prophet, Amos the herdsman. The face was more strong than clever; it had indeed none of those hard, ugly lines, those examination lines, that mark the educated of the world. His beard and hair were grey, and his heart, could it have been seen, was greyer still; and no wonder, for he had found out what human unkindness was.

He had, unluckily for himself, broken down the illusions that the healing habit of custom wraps around men, and especially around the clergy. To tear off this vesture, to arrive at nakedness, was to open, perhaps, a way for heavenly voices, but certainly a way for the little taunts and gibes of the world, the flesh and the devil.

In casting off the garments of the world, this priest had not, like his comrades of the cloth, provided himself with a well-fitting black coat made in Oxford. On the other hand, it was easy for him to stay in the Church. He had no desire to make a show of himself or to set himself up in any kind of opposition to his religion, he was too good a catholic to allow any personal trend to undermine the larger movement. He held himself very tenderly and at the same time very closely to the altar, not from any sense of human duty, but because he knew the want of a divine Master.

Henry Neville, for they were two Henrys, these friends, shut the book he was reading and jumped up hastily. A pile of books and papers beside his chair was overturned; he put out his hand to prevent them, and then, seeing that they fell safely, allowed them to lie on the floor, while he, stepping through the window, went out to meet his visitor. They both returned to the study and sat down in cane chairs before the window.

The housekeeper, Mrs. Lefevre, a stout creature, old and unpleasantly human, knocked at the door, and without waiting for an answer, came in and produced a soiled table-cloth, and retired again for cups and plates, leaving the door wide open.

CHAPTER IV

HENRY NEVILLE

Henry Neville had around him always the hatred of nature and of man. Nature scorned him because he was helpless to dig and to weed and to plant, and because he was always catching cold. He had drawn to himself the malice of man because he had tried and failed to defend the victim against the exploiter. All kinds of difficulties and worries lay about his path like nettles and stung him whenever he moved. Naturally his health was not benefited by this treatment, and he was developing a tendency to cough in the mornings. By reason of all this unkindness Mr. Neville's appearance was certainly very different from the Rev. Hector Turnbull's, and Mr. Neville's smile was not in the least like the smile with which Mr. Tasker greeted his black sow at five o'clock in the morning. There was nothing so different in the world as the smiles of these men.

By the merry means of the hatred of the people Mr. Neville's mind had been brought to the proper state for the mind of a priest. He had seen himself so long despised and loathed of men, that he had even before our history opens begun to look towards a certain welcome release that would one day come; meanwhile he felt there was no running away at present for him, he must drink the cup that was prepared for him to drink.

The dislike of the people towards him kept him a great deal indoors, and if ever he ventured out into the cornfields he took care to walk apart from the eyes and jeers of the labourers and the coarse jests, always referring to his housekeeper, of the farmers.

Mr. Neville had left town because he had committed an offence. He had been for some years working in the East End of London, but one unlucky evening on his way to church, meeting a girl—he never knew who she was—in a ragged pink frock, he caught her and kissed her. It was the first time he had ever kissed a girl, and it was the last. The people stoned him out of the street and then broke the windows of his mission. His rector and the bishop were filled with amazement at the conduct of this unthinking curate and requested him to remove, because of the anger of the people, to the country. That is how Mr. Neville came to be in the gloomy vicarage of South Egdon.

When he first came down into the country he tried very hard to battle with the place; he tried to cut his own grass, he tried to make his own hay, but he did not succeed any better than Henry Turnbull succeeded with the fir tree. And so he held up his hands and surrendered to the enemy and learned to admire in his prison the beauty of long grass. His polite neighbours saw the long grass, or tried to open the heavy gate, and drove quickly away without calling, poverty in England being regarded as something more vile than the plague.

The bishop of that part of the country, a worthy man whose face resembled a monkey's, shook his head over Mr. Neville and sighed out with a typical frown, 'Poor fellow!' and went on dictating a letter to his lady secretary.

It was part of Mr. Neville's nature never to retaliate: when the nettle overgrew his garden he let it grow, when his housekeeper robbed him he let her do it, and when this woman told tales in the village about his immorality he never answered them. He knew quite well the kind of men who escape scandal, and he was sure he could never be like them. The people of the village were his warders, the vicarage was his gaol; and to be delivered therefrom, an angel, the dark one, must come to unlock the gate. He attended to his spiritual duties with great care, though he did not visit unless he was invited first, because so many of his parishioners had shut their doors upon him. This pleasant pastime of shutting the door in the clergyman's face provided the people with many a good story, explaining with what boldness the deed was done, and boasting about it in the same way that the village boys boasted that they had killed a cat with stones.

Mr. Neville was not a great scholar, but he understood the soul of an author and he knew what he liked in a book: and that was the kind of deep note that Bunyan calls the ground of music, the bass note, that modern culture with its peculiar conceit always scoffs at. There was, besides this bass note, a certain flavour of style that he liked, a style that in no way danced in the air but preferred clay as a medium.

The first week he was at South Egdon he brought upon himself the extreme and very weighty dislike of the largest farmer, a man of much substance. Mr. Neville had been down to the village, and heard while at the shop two gun-shots at the farm fired one after the other. On coming out into the road he saw an unfortunate small black dog rolling and struggling along in the gutter, more than half killed, with blood and foam coming out of its mouth, mingled with unutterable howls of pain. The women came out of their doors to watch. 'The dog,' they said, 'had been like that in the ditch for

some minutes.' The reason being, that the farmer, whose income was seventeen hundred pounds a year and who owned two or three farms besides the one he rented, would not expend another twopenny cartridge to destroy it properly. He had used two, and if the dog would not die it was its own affair: anyhow, that is how the farmer left it.

The clergyman had no stick in his hand with which to kill the creature, and the farm-house being near by, he hurried there and knocked loudly at the door. No one came. He waited, and the dog howled and snarled more despairingly down the road; it was furiously biting its own leg. The priest knocked again, and at last Miss Bigland, the farmer's plump daughter, came to the door and smiled, and while she arranged a pink ribbon, she replied to the clergyman's hasty request for her father.

'Oh yes, isn't it a nice afternoon? You've come about that nasty dog. Father has just shot at it. It would go after my chickens. How silly of it not to die!' and the young lady smilingly explained to the clergyman the trouble the little black dog called 'Dick' had given them, the yells of agony continuing only a little way down the road. Just then the father, coming out from the barn, saw the clergyman, and his smiling daughter told him that Mr. Neville had come about 'that bad dog.' The farmer, without saying anything, but in his heart cursing the priest for interfering and the dog for not dying, went out with a great stick and beat the dog to death in the road. The girl, composed and plump and smiling, watched this event from her front door. The priest strode away, and meeting the farmer, who carried the dead dog by one leg, walked past him without speaking a word, to his own house.

The farmer, to revenge himself against the clergyman for taking the side of the dog, presented to the village a carefully prepared report that Mr. Neville had a wife and ten children in Whitechapel, and that every night at the vicarage he drank brandy with his housekeeper, out of teacups. The village imagination enlarged and magnified and distorted these tales until they were believed by every one, and a fine time they had of it, these village story-tellers, rounding off their little inventions when any new item of vicarage fiction came their way.

It was easy for the people of the village to hate Mr. Neville, and they hated most of all the vicar's face. Perhaps because he looked at them gently and forgivingly, as if he forgave them their sins. They did not like his kind of forgiveness; they much preferred a brutal scolding, they asked for the whip. The children very soon learned to call out rude words at him as he

went by, their favourite yell being a doggerel rhyme about the Lord's Prayer, that began:

'Our Father which art in Heaven,
Went up two steps and came down seven. . . .'

This they shouted out as loud as they could when they saw their priest in the road.

Only that foolish fellow, Henry Turnbull, loved him. And the two friends sat together that July afternoon, and smoked cheap cigarettes, regarding with wakeful interest the great trees and the long grass.

Henry had really been very much shocked that day, and he wanted to see his friend shocked too. Henry had not understood what he had seen. It was to him an isolated incident of terror in the homely life of the village, and he wanted it explained away. Its horror had made a very distinct impression upon his mind; he had never been told before so plainly that all was not right with the world. The girl's kiss had been wonderful. He always remembered that. And the failure at cutting down the fir tree was only a failure. And his hardships abroad, like a trying campaign, had given him a lasting contentment at home. But now this new thing had appeared, and he wanted his friend to tell him what it meant. He opened the subject by talking about his father's churchwarden.

'He is a very hard-working man. He goes to church every Sunday and gives milk to the school tea. He is really a great help to my father. He sits amongst the boys at the back and prevents them spitting at each other, and turns them out sometimes. Father likes him very much, and praises the way he makes his little girls work. Father says there would be no idleness nor want in England if every one were like Mr. Tasker. Only, how can he drag dead skinned horses into his yard to be devoured by pigs?'

Mr. Neville watched the trees as he answered. He said quietly:

'You must expect men like that to act rather crudely. Mr. Tasker would tell you that he must pay his rent; he would say that, like the Jehovah of old, his pigs cry out for blood and his children for bread. Mr. Tasker wants to get on, to rent a larger dairy, a farm perhaps, or even after a time to buy land, and his pigs are his greatest help. The fault is not Mr. Tasker's, the fault is in the way the world is made. Mr. Tasker worships his pigs because they are the gods that help him to get on. The symbol of his religion is not a cross but a tusk. Mr. Tasker fulfils his nature. Nothing can prevent your nature fulfilling itself. Every one must act in his own way. No one knows what he may be brought to do. We can enjoy ourselves here and smoke cigarettes,

but at any moment we may do something as ugly as he. It is horrible, it always will be horrible, but it is also divine, because the Son of Man suffers here too. Not iron nails alone, but tusks and teeth are red with his blood.'

Henry had listened to his friend with great eagerness. But it was now time for him to go, and his friend of South Egdon conducted him by a new way to the road round the low garden wall, that shut out a field of corn and harboured under its shade a large kind of nettle. When they came opposite the road they found the wily postman's gap, and there they said farewell rather after the fashion of schoolboys.

CHAPTER V

COUNTRY MATTERS

Henry Turnbull wandered homeward, but he did not return through the meads. A desire had come to him to see the sun before it finally set. In order to do this it was necessary to climb the hill behind which the sun was hiding. Henry proceeded very much at his ease to climb a grassy lane that led to the top of the rise. He was contented to be alone, and needed quiet. 'Perhaps it was a good thing,' he thought, 'that he had seen the way the dairyman fed his pigs.' He did not wish to hide from himself anything human or anything that it was well for him to see, his nature was inquisitive enough to wish to know the worst and the best.

Once upon the top of the ridge, he was met by the fresh sweetness of the sea wind. The ridge of down overlooked the village of Shelton, his own village, that spread itself out in a desultory fashion between the downs. Upon the other side, the side of the inner world, the outer world being the way to the sea, the scene was grander and stretched with more varied colour. Towards the north were spread out acres of green woods, the remnants of an ancient forest much loved by King John, who came down there, no doubt, to relieve himself of his spleen against the barons. Farther away still there were, all along the skyline, blue hills over which the sun was loitering, very loath to leave the summer day. Occupying all the middle of the valley was the wild expanse of heathland. The mid region was entirely dominated by the heath, that only allowed a few green fields and fewer ash trees to poach upon its domain. In three or four places the wilderness, with its grey fingers, even crept up and touched the main road to the town.

While Henry stood there watching the last of the sun, a carrier's van, that had been slowly coming down the main road, stopped beside the white lane that led to the village and was marked by one oak tree. It stopped there because the horse was unable to climb the hill. The small farmer who drove it was forced still to follow the big road in order to return by South Egdon, his customers, however, preferring to walk from this point over the hill to their homes. The van had no cover, and its human burden of country women, and one or two men, was plainly visible from the hill, and there were one or two splashes of red that denoted tiny girl children. Henry could easily see the women stepping out, and once he heard a child's voice coming very clear out of the vale. Henry was aware that the people who were leaving the

cart were bound for the village, and he preferred to stay where he was until they passed by. He knew that they were often met by other relatives, and he wished that evening to have the homeward way to himself. He lay down upon the short grass near a bunch of thyme to wait until the villagers, drawn on by their homes, passed him. He watched the groups slowly appear round the bend of the road that had hid them for a while from his sight. The women carried parcels, paper bags, and each held one or two heavy baskets.

Henry soon recognized the first that moved round the corner as the innkeeper's wife. She walked with her son, a child who ran in little darts this way and that across the road like a field mouse. After her came the gardener's wife, a short, stout woman in a heavy black dress that made her look very toadlike in the lane. She was surrounded, almost eaten into, by three or four children,—Henry could not tell how many, as they were always getting behind her, 'in order,' so Henry thought, 'to take sweets out of her basket without being seen by their mother,' whose efforts to climb the hill were at that moment all she could manage.

Another party, a couple, came slowly along some way behind. These two laggards were strolling along even more slowly than the woman in front of them—and they betrayed themselves. They were a man and a maid, that ancient mystery that was even beyond the wisdom of Solomon to unravel. The man wore black, the symbol of a Sabbath, or of a holiday, in the town. His bowler hat was also proper for those delights, and he flicked, as a gentleman anywhere would flick, at the knapweed by the side of the road. The man—and Solomon wisely puts him first—walked a little way ahead of his companion. She who followed at his heels was very much overloaded with parcels. She was dressed in her holiday white. Often she was so teased by the parcels—they would keep on slipping—that she placed one foot a little way up the bank and tried to rearrange them, letting them rest for a moment upon her knee. The man hardly ever took the trouble to look back at her—he had seen a girl before—but, with one hand in a pocket, he kept on flicking at the hedge. The narrow lane bore the burden of the mystery of these two.

The sun had just departed, leaving behind it a painted cloud to show where it had once been. The road, when it reached the top, ran for a few yards upon the brow of the hill as though to give the traveller a chance to look at the village below him before he descended.

Near this high level of road Henry was resting. When these two last from the van came by, Henry saw that the girl was his mother's housemaid, Alice. She had seen him too and whispered his name to her companion, who turned

his head disdainfully and for just a moment glanced at Henry. Henry knew him to be the son of Mr. Turnbull's gardener, so wisely named 'Funeral' by the village.

'Funeral' had been married twice. His first wife he had buried, digging her grave himself. Alice's companion from the town, an infant then, had been the cause of her death.

Henry's father had employed 'Funeral's' son for a time in the garden, but after his own son's return he found him a place as under-clerk in a coal merchant's office in the town, where he took to himself all the airs of a young man who knows things. Just then this young man's knowledge took the form of annoyance that he was seen by a clergyman's son walking with a servant.

Henry waited until the form of Alice, the last of the evening's travellers, had left his vision, and then he followed the same road, descended into the village and joined his father and mother at supper, it being the habit in this clergyman's family to devour the remains of a liberal early dinner at nine o'clock in the evening.

The following morning Henry was awakened by a rough wind. For a moment he thought he was lying again in the log hut, until he heard the rude, sharp knock of Miss Alice against his door and a water-can merrily hitting the floor just outside. Henry's blind had not been pulled down—it never was,—and he watched the angry summer clouds, like mad black sheep, racing each other across the heavens, and he noted the tortured movements of the green leaves of the elm tree that resented being beaten by the wind. Henry was soon downstairs waiting for his father, his mother being already in the dining-room.

That morning Mr. Turnbull came in to read prayers in a friendly mood. He even smiled at his son, who sat looking out into the garden as his habit was. Mrs. Turnbull was finding her place in the Bible. Mr. Turnbull had received that morning a dividend, larger than usual, the reason of its extra value being that in the town where the works were—and in the works was a portion of Mr. Turnbull's money—there had been much distress amongst the poor, and the factory could hire female labour at a very low price. The babes in the town died in vast numbers of a preventible disease, the most preventible disease of all, simply starvation. The out-of-work men stood about and talked of the 'to-day's bride.' They stood at street corners and said 'bloody' a great many times, this particular word denoting a mighty flight of imagination like the sudden bursting of a sewer. The 'to-day's bride' in the

picture paper was the niece of a duke. Some of the men thought her very pretty. One of the men, who was especially taken with the innocent look of the young bride—she owned all the poor part of the town—returned to his 'home,' the bride's house too, and found in there a gaunt, haggard woman who was not his wife leaning over a bundle of dirty rags upon which lay his little son, starved, stark, and dead.

Mr. Turnbull's dividend carefully placed in the study drawer, he sat down to his breakfast with a 'Thank God for this beautiful morning' upon his lips. The eggs were good, Mrs. Turnbull very pleased and patient, the idiot son very thoughtful and silent.

Mr. Turnbull began to speak about the poor in his parish. He gave to the poor certain shillings sometimes out of the communion offerings, and twice a year he gave the children a tea. Just as he broke his egg he remembered, or rather his thoughts ran back, and fell down to worship the large dividend. He decided that the extra amount would more than pay the cost of the two teas, and that none of the few extra shillings that did get out of his pocket into the hands of the poor would have the chance to do so this year. Mr. Turnbull was glad. He looked around him, at the room, easy-chair, food, silent wife, silent son; he looked at the garden, at the little black clouds. He was satisfied; all this was very good, and after breakfast he went to the study to lock the dividend inside the safe. Mr. Turnbull then sat down by his table; he was content, he was ready to do what was right—to try to do what was right. He was making a sermon: it was his business to make the people understand sin. He felt serious when he thought of sin, and he also felt hungry.

Mr. Turnbull took an interest in the young women of the village; he always called them 'young women.' He spoke to them at the evening service with fatherly prudence, recommending 'household duties' in preference to summer evening walks in leafy lanes, and he gave them solemn hints about the fate in store for backsliders. To this subject—about the leafy lanes—he appeared to be bound by a magic spell. He could never let it alone; the sight of a dainty white hat trimmed with a rosebud, in the back pew, was enough. He began, and somehow or other the word—not a very pretty word —'uncleanness' came in at the end. It always did come in at the end, and the hat with the flowers often bent forward to hide the face beneath when this peculiarly unpleasant word was uttered.

To Henry it was quite a proper word, and he always applied it to a nasty heap of dirt that had found lodgment in a corner of the vicarage pew and naturally grew larger every Sunday because the church cleaner swept it there. 'No doubt it was,' he supposed, 'against this heap of church dust that

his father lifted up his voice in holy anger,' and Henry wondered if this dust would ever rebel and try to get into his father's eyes. The sermon was finished, the word 'uncleanness' being underlined, and the day passed as quite a usual vicarage day, a day of meals and lazy endurance, a day of slow kitchen labour.

There was, however, a slight activity shown by that stout good-humoured lady, Mrs. Turnbull, who gave sundry directions about the preparing of a bedroom for her eldest son, the Rev. John Turnbull, who was to come the next day.

The Rev. John Turnbull was, as we know, a curate in the West End, and, while enjoying himself in the best possible manner, he had the very serious business of finding a wife with money always before him. He went forth every afternoon, like a hunter, and followed respectable rich families almost to their bankers' doors. He was polite and genial, the sort of young man who gives cigarettes out of a silver case to tramps. He was very friendly to every one, and enjoyed a good reputation amongst the Church well-wishers because he once or twice a week strode up a side street, in a long black garment that touched his toes, smoking a cigarette and talking to any one he met, and all for the encouragement of the Church. His rector watched him with a kindly eye and a daughter. He was really a very hard-working young man, who could always sign his name quite clearly in red ink. He was indeed a good fellow in his own way and understood his mystery, and lived a very cheerful life in the kindly bosom of the Anglican Church.

His religion was to him a part of the game, a very good game. He could pass the bread and wine, smile condolingly at a drunkard, and sadly, a waywardly sad smile, at a girl of the streets. One hundred poor typists wrote to him every week, or more often, and he referred them to the parish magazine, in which was his photo. He spoke to a member of Parliament about the typists, and the member undertook to look into their long hours. The curate told them all about the member and his kindness in the parish magazine.

The Rev. John began work in his church quite early in the morning, and was really tired when he left off for lunch. At that meal, except on Fridays, he indulged in a half bottle of Burgundy. After lunch he sometimes went to see an old man who was ruptured, so that he might have a little time to compose himself before continuing his hunt after rich girls. At the afternoon tea-table, his quarry having been run to earth, he talked of Socialism and about the way poor people are trodden down by the greedy rich. And if the quarry was touched at his account of the slums, he then went on to tell of the

temptations to growing children, in those evil places. And then, if his hearers were not bored, he told them about his friend—he always called him his friend—who lived in a garret. He was the old man with the rupture. The Rev. John explained how his friend lived a beautiful life, spending his sad eternal bedtime in reading the Gospels, and that his friend was writing a book about St. Luke because his own name happened to be Luke.

This happy curate spent his evenings at the Workmen's Club, and talked a great deal to a radical tailor, who did not go very far with the red flag because he had saved enough money to buy two houses. The young clergyman had a special kind of sickly smile that he brought out for the good tailor. He likewise played billiards with a printer's devil, holding at the same time a cigarette at the very outside of his lips in true Oxford fashion while he aimed at the balls.

His stroll home at night had been once or twice delayed for a few hours —there is always something a man must do—but generally speaking he arrived at his lodgings at twelve-thirty and read a paper volume of short stories for an hour and then went to bed, very pleased with himself and very pleased with the world, at half-past one.

When at his country home, he patronized his younger brother, the idiot, and gave him cigarettes, a cheaper kind than he gave to tramps, and he talked to him in quite a friendly tone as he did to the gardener. He had now come home to tell his parents that he was engaged to a dear girl, who had Two Thousand Pounds a year. She was the daughter of a manufacturer of glass bottles, and her name was Ruby. He told his mother what a dear girl she was, and how much they loved each other. He spoke of this at dinner while Alice waited at table. Alice was neat and pretty; she meant to be pretty that day, and succeeded. The curate told her that she had grown to be quite a woman. She thought so too. She believed in the curate, and she said to Edith afterwards 'that she would do anything he asked her to'; she said this in a tone of abandonment. He was just the gentleman for her: his clothes, his way of taking up a book, his cheerful cocksureness, his polite manner, all held within a proper gentlemanly decorum she loved. The Rev. John was attracted to Alice: he liked a pretty servant and Alice liked a nice kind gentleman.

CHAPTER VI

DOCTOR GEORGE

August, the month of holidays, had come to Shelton vicarage. It was the time for delightful family meetings, and the third brother, George the doctor, joined the Turnbull party.

In his profession George worked very hard, and he was not as gay as his brother the priest. He was married because he thought that a doctor ought to be married. Dr. George Turnbull possessed, besides his wife, one little girl of twelve years. This young lady and her mother were left behind to take care of the gentleman who mixed the drugs and saw the patients while the doctor was away. Dr. George had come to Shelton because he wanted a holiday and because August was the proper time to take one.

Dr. George's life was wisely settled. His practice was large and gave him constant employment. He passed over miles of rude country roads in his grey car, visiting the people who sent for him. He knew a great deal about medicine: he knew what drugs to avoid—the expensive ones—when he filled and corked the bottles. His little girl was pale and sickly owing to the fact that he thought more about leaving her rich than about keeping her well.

Mrs. George Turnbull was made into a proper lady by her marriage. Before that date she had only been a governess. Once married, Dr. George consoled himself with saying that a doctor ought to have a wife, and he made the best of it by turning her into a maid-of-all-work: the real servant, a plump cheerful cook, being very much more the lady.

Dr. George was a man of habit. What he did one year he did the next. Only in his savings did he desire to see a change: he liked that side of events to show a progressive balance, and it was to that balance that the grand trunk line of his thoughts ran.

The first happy day when this family party were all together ended at half-past ten, that being the proper hour in the country for bed. Henry took his candle and walked along the passage to his end room. He was thinking how kind his brothers were to him: they had praised the way he worked in the garden. The two elder brothers found the place quiet. When at home, they were wont to converse and rest upon the garden seat under the great elm, from which they could generally hear the click of Henry's hoe in the kitchen garden.

The day after the arrival of the doctor the two brothers were sitting watching the flower beds and talking about incomes. Then it occurred to them both at the same time that a walk might be the proper Christian preparation for the next meal, and John thought, in his nice way, that it would be kind to take Henry if he had finished picking the currants for his mother's jam. Henry had finished and was delighted to come. They even went with him along the road through the village without a word about his old hat and his beard, and John, with brotherly affection, took his arm.

Mr. Tasker, passing them on his way to the farm, touched his hat, a kind of salute that churchwardens do not generally make a practice of using. The three went along the chalk lane that led up the hill, by which Mr. Tasker had descended in the night, and by which young Henry had watched the arrival of the carrier's cart. Dr. George saluted the lane side with prods of his stick. He was looking for herbs that, he explained to his brothers, were used for medicine.

John, the eldest, was likewise the tallest, and he could gaze over the hedge. Over the hedge there was a pleasant meadow and a girl helping her uncle, the small farmer of the village, load up some late hay upon a wagon. The girl, whose name was Annie Brent, had come from the town to help her uncle with the hay. She was upon the top of the load and her uncle below. The girl was employing her youthful strength to trample down the hay; after taking it in her arms from the top of the fork, she in turn placed it in the middle or the corners of the wagon. Her uncle, whose movements were very slow owing to his having a deformed foot, gave her plenty of time to place the hay and to jump on it, after which she lay down and waited until her uncle could persuade his foot to bring him to the wagon with some more. All this pressing of the warm hay brother John watched from the road. The pearl buttons that held the girl's cotton frock behind had become undone, partly by reason of her jumping and partly because she was just over sixteen years of age.

The Rev. John Turnbull had a practical mind. He had found a rare girl —'a dear girl,' he called her—the proper prize of his hunting, and he decided that the time had come for him to turn another part of his attention to common girls. He did this whenever he had the chance, turning his eyes and his desires and his will-to-power in whatever direction the girl happened to be.

The other two brothers wandered on, leaving John looking over the hedge. They thought, no doubt, that he was watching a very rare bird,

perhaps a green fly-catcher or a large black-footed shrike. George and Henry loitered along talking very seriously.

'I hope you do what you can to help Father,' George was remarking. 'Poor Mother can never understand his feelings, they are really very deep,'—which was true; 'her thoughts are of a lighter kind. I hope you always help them whenever you can and try to save them expense.'

It was one of the doctor's plans to keep the family property intact. He kept on looking round the family property to see if there was any leakage, as if the stocks and shares were a large pond. He feared that his younger brother, being half-witted, might forget to apply his heart to money or his understanding to its value, and thus he gave him a little advice. Dr. George had counted up all the gains he was likely to make himself, and all the capital his father ought to leave him as his share. He expected his father to live until he was eighty; he hoped his mother would, in the proper order of nature, die first, as she was six years the elder. After these two events, Dr. George expected to inherit about One Thousand Eight Hundred and Fifty-six Pounds, and his own savings he expected by that time would be about twice that amount. He feared that Henry might prove himself an expense by suddenly doing something 'queer.' And that is why he was always giving him good advice.

Henry was pleased to listen. His early travels had made him pleased with any quiet talk, and besides, had not the Church Fathers taught him to forget himself? He received his brother's warnings very gratefully.

'You are very kind to me,' said Henry. 'I have been spending the last three weeks in picking strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries, and black currants. I am the only one who can do this work. The gardener is always very busy, and he says that picking fruit makes him nervous. Alice began to help me, but she was always putting the currants into her mouth instead of the basket, so that I sent her in, and now Mother has nearly all the pantry filled with jam.'

'It saves the expense of buying,' remarked Dr. George.

This pleasant walk, the genial employment of an English afternoon, came to an end as walks and afternoons will. The Rev. John Turnbull had been in the hay-field; he had found the gate, and his brothers called to him as they passed. He had been talking to the small farmer with the club foot and had at the same time begun to think of his tea.

The mother of the family, Mrs. Turnbull, had been well brought up. Her father, decently dead, was in his day a small county squire, his estate only being a farm or two better than a yeoman's, so that he had never been made even a justice of the peace. He belonged to the old fashions, and used to wear in the summer time—he always talked about the summer time—a pair of white cord trousers and a soft brown hat, so that he appeared to the public to be somewhere between a bricklayer and a South African trader.

This good man had more than one daughter, wise, sensible girls, who helped in the dairy and fed the chickens. Jane, the eldest, married the Rev. Hector Turnbull, who came courting when the cherries were ripe and helped her to gather them, up a ladder, and to collect the eggs from the home farm, that was not more than a hundred paces from the squire's house. One brown hen hid her nest half-way up a hay-stack from which a slice of hay had been cut, and to this nest Jane climbed every day by a ladder. On the afternoon of the proposal Hector Turnbull climbed there too, and in his hurry and excitement to kiss her he sat down upon the new-laid egg, and Jane forgave him and married him.

When she married, she gave up her fortune to her husband and began to make home-made jam. At first she used to cover the jam-pots with paper bought on purpose and cut into rounds and dipped in a saucer of brandy. The rich odour of brandy was one of the delights of Henry's childhood. As the years grew longer and the sun behind her life began to go down, she gave up the brandy, and, instead of special paper, she tied up her jam with cut pieces of the *Standard*.

Mrs. Turnbull had very few thoughts of her own. She gave up what she owned in the way of ideas with her fortune to Mr. Turnbull. And after his arrival she could hardly call her prayers her own; even her religion belonged to her housekeeping, for when she knelt down she could not prevent herself praying that this year at least the rhubarb jam might not go bad.

Mrs. Turnbull was a woman who accepted her daily life just as she accepted her daily bread, prayed for, and presented to her by Mr. Turnbull upon the end of a long knife. It was her pleasure to sit at one end of the almost square table and to watch Mr. Turnbull eating his tea. When she said her prayers she forgot Mr. Turnbull, but she remembered the jam. There was a motion in the act of kneeling that reminded her of tying up the pots.

Mrs. Turnbull was a large woman with something of the Central Empire about her, with a round and homely face. It was only when she chanced to look up from her mending that she disclosed a doubt. This doubt was the

only thing not quite right about her, the one beat out of place in her normal pulse. It was a look of doubt that waited for something. It was in her eyes when she raised them from her needlework and let them rest upon the one dark corner of the drawing-room. In that look of a moment one read the strange news that all was not right even in her sheltered world.

Was that the look whence the idiot had come?

Mrs. Turnbull was fond of one chair, and she generally sat in the same room. She was one of the easiest people in the world to find if she was wanted, because she was a lady who never went out.

CHAPTER VII

THE MASTER'S VOICE

The Rev. Hector Turnbull sat down to tea with his sons and his wife, and Alice, dressed daintily for the occasion, brought in the toast. Mr. Turnbull was in a good humour that afternoon. He had been scolding a new school teacher because she wore a blouse too gay for the national school. He told her 'she must dress more plainly,' and explained to her that a teacher's duty is to guide others 'in the paths of virtue and decorum.'

'In my school, in the school of our church,' and he looked at the roof, 'we expect our assistants to be plain.'

Mr. Turnbull saw with secret pleasure what was coming, and so did the other watchers who were there to learn their lessons. And it came. Not the least important part of the poor girl, her feelings, were outraged, and she bent over a desk and sobbed, holding both hands, girl-like, over her eyes.

The clergyman noted the white skin of her neck—the blouse was certainly too low for a teacher—and then he put his hand on her hair and said, 'Don't cry,' and leaving the girl and the school, he walked to the vicarage. And his thoughts were the thoughts of a male hyena.

Mrs. Turnbull watched him eat his tea and received from him a piece of bread at the end of a knife. The meal over, she retired into the drawing-room followed by her son John, who felt it would be kind to talk to his mother a little. Her elder sons did what they liked with her: they smoothed her down, they flattered her, they pinched her cheeks,—John even sat with his arm around her waist and breathed the smoke of his cigarette into her ear. She always smiled and appeared never to mind what they did. He now told her about the dear girl and her charming ways. He said she owned a maid and beautiful dresses—'frocks,' he called them. And he said with a kind of playful laugh, 'that she wished to be married very soon.'

'If we have a baby, a little girl, we will call her after you,' he said to his mother; and the mother answered, 'Just as you like, dear.' 'And, Mother,' he said, 'it is heavenly the way we love one another.'

The Rev. John Turnbull might be called 'clever.' He was able to talk about one thing and think about another. He talked to his mother about 'the dear girl,' and he thought about a little bit of torn lace—at a penny-three-

farthings a yard, bought at Maidenbridge—that he had seen when a certain female creature, young and warm with hay-making, was slipping down from a wagon on to the white clover. And then his inner vision was able to change again, even with his arm round his mother's waist. He damned to the very deepest hell his bankers, who had refused him an overdraft of Fifty Pounds, even though he had told them all about 'the dear girl,' just out of pure love for her, as he had told his mother. The banker said 'that they would be very glad'—the second manager rubbed his hands as he said,—'very glad indeed to see him again when things were more settled'; and then they wished their customer 'all happiness.'

John Turnbull had inherited from some distant Turnbull a character very different from his brother George. He was fond of spending money. There were a great many expensive pleasures that John liked, and his London rector, even though the Rev. John had a loud rich voice, only gave him the paltry salary of Two Hundred and Fifty Pounds a year. 'Twice as much as a pig of a dissenter gets,' so the rector told him, whose habit it was to allude to Low-Church curates as 'pigs' and 'dissenters.'

John's London rector was a rich man of bold opinions. He had been a great sportsman in his time, and owned a large house in Wales. When he was down there he strode over the hills with an alpenstock and taught his three servants, nice town girls, to play golf. There was a wife, who remained somewhere, dressed in black, behind the girls.

With his arm round his mother, the Rev. John turned over one or two more pages of thought matter not quite proper to be printed, and then he remembered that he had promised Mr. Tasker that he would go down that evening and look at his pigs. Dr. George was writing letters, and John, who liked to have a companion, decided that it would be a Christian act to again take his brother Henry out, and he sent Alice into the garden to find him. He watched her stepping down the bank.

Alice was delighted to obey this master. When she obeyed him she fancied that she was obeying some one else, a more mighty master. A master that sometimes tells his slaves to set out for Paris on a stormy night, or to hunt up a house with a queer side door in Chiswick, or to stand for two hours in an east wind by the side of the statue of George III. of blessed memory at Westminster.

Henry was willing, he was even delighted, to go—how nice it is to be thought of. Alice had asked him rudely enough, and ended with an invention of her own that he 'had better hurry up'; and he was quite willing to hurry

up. Henry had been debating, whenever he saw his brother John, whether he ought to tell him about the disgraceful and horrible way Mr. Tasker was wont to feed his pigs. The appearance of the ugly thing that he had witnessed the afternoon when he had been there with the note kept very clear in his mind. He could see those pigs at it again whenever he shut his eyes.

He had told his friend, and was a little disappointed. His friend had not fired up against the horror as he ought to have done. Somehow or another, Mr. Neville never blamed any one and never judged any one. Neville had explained that an incident like that was the natural appearance of a man's nature.

Henry had no doubt whatever that his brother John would take a more distinct view, and Henry was sure that his brother would express his view to Mr. Tasker and so prevent the recurrence of that disgusting feast. Henry did not find it very easy to begin. The subject was to him very important, and it was a nervous matter to him to tell any one. He did not like to tell tales, but he knew this tale ought to be told.

Henry looked at his brother, who was walking over the soft grass and the yellow hawkweed. He appeared silent and slightly bored, his thoughts being, perhaps, with his next sermon. He was allowed to preach sometimes on weekdays. Or maybe he was considering a proper quotation from Dr. Keble, or was he wondering about the manner of loading hay-carts? Anyhow, he was a little more serious than usual, and Henry felt that he ought to try to say what he wished to. He knew his heart was beating very fast—this matter meant so much to him—and his hand trembled as he walked. However, he did say it, as he unfastened a gate for his brother—opening the gate gave him the chance. He felt the tremble in his voice: 'Do you know, John, Mr. Tasker feeds his pigs on dead horses?'

The horror once out, he left his brother to deal with it. His brother's face showed no signs of disturbance, and he replied in his most offhand way, as though he were asking for the marmalade: 'I expect they do not like to waste anything here. Country people are so careful.'

Henry tried to explain. 'They don't cut the horse up; the pigs ate it like vultures. They pull at the flesh and bite each other and squeal like wild beasts. They would eat a man—and Mr. Tasker watched them with pleasure ____'

'Oh, they will watch anything about here; they have nothing else to do.' The Rev. John's voice hung over the flowers a little wearily. 'And for all we

know, the meat on a dead horse may be very good for pigs. In town, dairy-fed bacon is considered the best. My landlady buys it for me.' The Rev. John looked at Henry and said rather more feelingly, 'My dear boy, you must not be so squeamish about your daily bread. It is best to let these kind of men feed their pigs on what they like. It does not do to interfere too much with the liberty of the people. And besides, there is the S.P.C.A.; I believe their officers walk about the farms. And there are policemen; they are paid to see to these things. No doubt Mr. Tasker asked the policeman. He fed his pigs in the yard, away from the public road. A man may do what he likes in his own yard. I know this kind of thing makes one feel a little queer. Some rather odd things happen in my parish. I often notice things. But it is wiser to forget them if you want to get on. It is better to pay no regard to the common people. They have their manners: we have ours.'

By this time they had reached Mr. Tasker's. This good man came out to meet them. His family, as was their custom, had reported the approach of visitors. Mr. Tasker had just been eating his tea, and as he came out of the door he wiped his mouth with the sleeve of his coat. He stepped out of the little front garden, and, shutting the gate carefully with a click, welcomed his guests, shaking the curate heartily by the hand and saying how pleased he was to see him amongst them again. And John replied that he was very glad to see Mr. Tasker looking so well, and that he very much wished to see the pigs. Mr. Tasker at once strode across to the sties at the back of the cow-yard.

To the unenlightened eye of the casual visitor, old farm buildings—and old dairy buildings are much the same—have a comfortable and homely look. The low thatched cow-sheds, the big barn, the rickyard wall, all denote rustic peace and security and gentle labours in Arcadia. They lie pleasantly amid the green fields and peaceful hills, the abode, no doubt, of the pretty dairy-maid and the quiet cow. The visitor, if he be wise, will keep, however pleasant the outlook, at a little distance from these abodes of joyful labour, because most pictures of man's making are best admired a little way off. The old barn might speak, the rough local stones of which the cow-sheds were built might tell tales. And even the oak posts with their heavy feet rotting in the dung have a way of whispering of fair things sullied and deflowered by the two in one, beast and man.

Mr. Tasker led the brothers past the great cow-yard. It had recently been cleaned out, that is to say, the six feet of mingled dung and straw removed and placed in a heap in the fields. The great yard now appeared like a pond

that had been dried up. About the bottom were bones, and the skull of a cow lay in the middle. Mr. Tasker led the way to the pigs.

In the first sties lay the largest of the gods, the sows; and farther on were the fat pigs, creatures that were destined shortly to receive by the hand of man a not too deep cut in the throat. At first the brothers were introduced to the contented sows, some of which lay on their sides while little pigs, politely named 'suckers,' pulled at the many founts of milk most eagerly. Every little pig looked as though it was afraid of being robbed of its share by the others. Life, happy life, was to them a sow's teats, and they struggled for their joys manfully, like their masters. Some of the sows were expecting a litter. One of the largest was lying in the straw at the farther end of the sty, and although its lord and master tapped the trough with his ash stick, pointed at the end, she would not come forth. She knew, her musical ear told her, that 'wash' and 'stick' strike a different note.

All at once, without any warning, Mr. Tasker held out his head like a barn-cock and shouted, 'Bring . . . thick . . . pail . . . t'auld . . . pig!' This shout was so sudden and came with such volume out of Mr. Tasker, that both John and Henry stood back a little. They had been used to hear Mr. Tasker speak to them or to their father after church, but they had never before heard him speak to his own family. All the hatred and malice in the world, all the hatred of the man-master to the woman-slave, fought for the best place in that sound. It was uttered not by Mr. Tasker but by something that was joined to Mr. Tasker by mighty bonds. John, who was always a gentleman in his sounds, was startled and looked another way. Henry watched Mr. Tasker.

A small girl, with a very dirty face, appeared from the house in answer to the shouted command. She carried a very large and evil-smelling bucket, the weight of which dragged her slight form to the ground on the bucket side. Her pale face, distorted with her effort, looked down into the wash as though in that mass of filth she saw her destiny written, as indeed it was. Henry watched her coming and noted the way she leaned. His brother looked at the sow.

Of the two females, the one in the sty certainly had the best of it. She was the master's favourite in every sense. She had brought him some splendid litters and had never been known to eat any of her children. Her master always spoke to her with consideration, even with a kind of love, in his tone. He saw her fed with the best wash, and made his own child kneel in the mud and slush to scratch her back with an old comb, while he, the master, with neck stretched out, listened to her contented grunts.

From getting up at 4.30 A.M., from carrying huge pails of wash, from milking fifteen cows a day, from scrubbing the dairy every night, the child had become a stooping, undersized, badly fed, for ever tired slave of the swine. And although she was only thirteen, she could not be called a little girl. That dainty appellation would not do for her, she was not that kind of thing at all. Her form, surrounded by the foul smells of the yards, had become like them. Her kind parent had nearly turned her heart into dung.

Mr. Tasker took the pail from his girl into his own great hand, and burst out with, 'Get . . . long . . . whome. . . .' Then he tossed the stuff into the trough and stood with one hand on the sty gate, that was half open, making a noise in his throat—a beast's call to a beast—a call that only swine understand. The onlookers had not to wait very long before the favourite appeared. She proved to be a large black monster almost too huge to move.

Mr. Tasker looked at her with great admiration. She was to him the most beautiful work of art in the world: she was a work of art designed with special care to meet the wants of his understanding. He really did understand her points, her lines, her curves. He knew how carefully she had been made, he knew how she had been cared for and nourished. When, as a little sowlet, she had run about amongst the others, he had chosen her as a queen amongst his gods. He had set her apart and had made his own girl, even in those early days, her slave. When the time and season were ripe, he, with the help of Elsie, had driven the sow into the yard of Mr. Bigland at Egdon, who possessed a pure-bred boar. This was the only occasion all that summer that Elsie had any time to pick daisies. She made quite a long daisy-chain while she waited to help her father drive the sow home. Her father had not sent her away to the meadow, she had left the yard because she had no wish to stay. There was a farm-boy of her own age looking over the gate with her father at the boar. Elsie was neither interested in the boy nor the boar, and she loved daisies.

CHAPTER VIII

TRUTH OUT OF SATAN'S MOUTH

The Rev. John Turnbull complimented Mr. Tasker upon the care he must have taken with the sow, and the dairyman explained that all the well-being of a pig depended upon its having proper food when it was young.

'You must never,' he said, 'let pigs run about in the fields unless they have plenty of barley meal at home.—Pigs want attention!' he kept on saying.

Henry had been looking at the bottom hinge of the sty gate with a rather fixed stare. He had not been taking any part in the conversation. He was thinking about men and their real selves and was wondering what the eyes of God made of a man's heart. Henry believed in God and he was sorry for God. He felt that God must see some very horrible things.

The dairyman was now talking in the usual rather absent-minded way that he used with gentlemen of the Church, and with the auctioneer who sold his pigs.

Henry had discovered something queer: that this harmless, quiet churchwarden, this vestry-meeting Mr. Tasker, was not really Mr. Tasker at all, but a sort of mask that was worn by a brute beast of the most foul nature. Henry had heard the shout. It had come from somewhere that is below humanity and from something of which man is but the surface. Looking at Mr. Tasker's face, Henry had a momentary glimpse of this thing, and a sudden impulse overcame him to strike at it—he saw blood. A moment later he was himself again, staring as before at the rusty hinge of the sty gate.

His brother, the curate, expressed himself as very interested in the weight of the fat pigs, that were the next exhibit, and that were shortly to be killed. He talked to the dairyman about the different ways of curing bacon in order to make it a fit and proper article for a gentleman's breakfast table.

The pigs in the sties were finishing the remainder of their afternoon tea. They had some of their feet still in the trough, and they squealed and sucked and stamped in the dung.

And to Mr. Tasker they were—pigs. No word to him was more sacred.

By this time John considered that he had been polite enough to his father's churchwarden, and, thanking him very much for letting them look at such very fine pigs, the brothers departed. As soon as they had left the yard, the pigs and Mr. Tasker were lost to John's mind, while other little problems presented their petitions.

The visit in Henry's case quite outweighed the cares and troubles or the joys of the garden that he had to think of. He could not forget the heavy-laden, overworked, dreary look, and the eyes dragged open fixed upon a great bucket of swill. And he could not forget the ugly thing out of which that human shout had come. His spirit, so light hitherto, had received a weight upon it, a weight that had begun to make him feel what man is, a weight harder to bear than the cross. He could not understand his brother, who at once began to speak of something else. The something else was the interest that bankers charge upon lent money. Henry, for the first time in his life, did not even hear his brother.

On their way to the dairy Henry had walked lightly and had picked some white clover, but now he even forgot to open the gate for his brother, who, however, by standing back, reminded him of his duty.

During the afternoon Alice had tidied and dusted the best rooms, and had read, to her great contentment, a letter that she had found upon the floor of the room occupied by the Rev. John. A letter that came from an address that Alice knew well enough was not 'the dear girl's.' It was time for her to lay the cloth for tea when she entered Henry's room. Henry never left his things about, and the room was arranged like a monk's cell. Alice did not mean to waste her time there, so she gave a flick with her duster at the bookcase. Her blow, directed with a maidenly violence, dislodged a volume, that fell down and lay open upon the floor. Alice left it there. 'Those dry books had best lie upon the floor,' was her comment.

When the two brothers returned from their visit to the dairy they found the doctor reading an article called 'Money' in the *Hampton Magazine*. Henry did not wait for the meal that was called supper; he went up to his own room, and nobody missed him. One of the brothers said in answer to the mother, 'Oh yes, Henry is home, he has gone to bed,' and there they all left him.

In Mr. Turnbull's mind's eye there was the sobbing form of the new teacher. The Rev. John was thinking of the old power that the barons used to exercise over the maidens in the villages. He had read English history at Oxford. Dr. George was wondering whether a certain patient would pay his

bill, and Mrs. Turnbull was thinking of her jam, and they talked about the new expedition to the South Pole.

Henry had gone to his room in order to go to bed, and it was then that he saw the book that Alice had knocked out of the shelf. It lay there open upon the floor, but the dying twilight was too far gone to show what was written upon the open page. Henry, like all souls who breathe quietly, was profoundly superstitious. He recognized the book as Milton. He had taken it into his keeping together with Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying* some weeks before. It was an old volume of a dull brown colour and contained, he knew, a poem called 'Paradise Lost,' that others besides Alice have called 'dry.'

Henry partly closed the window, there was almost a taste of autumn in the air, and he saw one figure carrying a basket of potatoes away from the allotment. He lit a candle and took up the open book so that it remained as it had fallen. Then he shut his eyes and passed his finger over the page until his finger stopped of itself,—he had done the same thing before,—and he read the lines that his fingers, guided mystically, had pointed out:

> 'O earth, how like to heav'n, if not preferr'd
> More justly; seat worthier of gods, as built
> With second thoughts, reforming what was old!
> For what God after better worse would build?'

Henry knew quite well that the last line of the four was the one that was meant for him. In his voluntary lessons with the Old Fathers, he had learned to think a little for himself. The atmosphere of the Schoolmen was thought, and from the Schoolmen the Church Fathers had learned and in their turn begotten thought.

Henry had no doubt that God had created the heaven before the earth, because He dwelt there. Henry had also, that evening, learned a little about man, who is an important part of the earth. He had beheld the true nature of the best part of the new creation, and now he read:

> 'For what God after better worse would build?'

There was in the tone of that line a blow for some one, and for whom? Even though the words were uttered by Satan newly entered into the serpent, Henry could not set it aside as one of his lies: it was a question and not a lie. The truth of that fatal question was too plainly appalling; it had come out of the serious and long-suffering mind of John Milton. A well-meaning man might have thrown at Henry's head a thousand books written by German

free-thinkers, or English modern poets: Henry would have smiled, they could not have hurt him. The seed of doubt had this time been sown by a different hand, by a man who could not lie, and who uttered dread truth out of Satan's mouth.

'For what God after better worse would build?'

Henry slowly undressed; he too was being turned out of the garden by a remorseless angel, and he had begun to take his first steps in that outside desert place. That night his sleep was broken: a dog howled continually somewhere in the dark, and he dreamt of a great snake that could speak living words.

CHAPTER IX

THE TUG-OF-WAR

The morning of the first tea! This festival took place when the village school broke up for the summer holidays.

The Shelton National School was a dingy building built about the year 1835 by Squire Rundle. The back part of the school pushed its way among the tombs in the grave-plot, and the front jostled the village street, into which road from an open pipe the school drains fell. On the street side there was no window, the only window being on the side that looked out to the gravestones. Into this pleasant retreat, hung round with maps, the children of the village hurried every morning. It might be that half a dozen times a year their education was interrupted by a funeral or a wedding. On these occasions they were allowed for a few moments to look out of the window. A large brown stone, bent with age, leaned dubiously outside to mark the resting-place of Thomas Pitman, Esq., and his wife, Amelia, who died about the year 1812; the date was hardly legible.

The festival of the first tea had come, the tea of the summer. And the people of the village were invited. The poor were invited from the reading desk when Mr. Turnbull gave out his usual notices. The two maiden ladies, sisters of a retired grocer—Mr. Collis had passed away from a worldly life somewhat too mixed up with brown sugar—enjoyed the privilege of a personal invitation from Mr. Turnbull. The farmers' wives were invited by letter, and the blacksmith's daughter, who used to play the piano, was asked to come by Edith, who was sent to see her the evening before. Any other people who wished to come just walked in as they wanted to, in time for the tug-of-war.

For Shelton this tea was the event of the summer. It was the day in which the mothers dressed their girls in Sunday frocks, each little girl easily persuading herself that she was a triumph over the others. During this day there awakened the great illusion of joy that had been a little inclined to fall asleep during the long days. All the people believed fine things would happen that would set their plain lives on fire. The vicarage field became the scented garden of Haroun al-Raschid, and racing for a packet of sweets was a thing to be remembered and talked of for years.

The good people went to the party clad in their best, chattering along the road like magpies. At the field they stood in groups and said, 'Yes, miss,' and 'Yes, mam' to the one or two farmers' wives who spoke to them. And after they had done that it was nearly time to go home, and even then it would have been hard to persuade them that something wonderful had not happened.

The event that promised so much joy to the people meant almost nothing at all to the giver of the feast. The life of the vicarage hardly disturbed itself. It was only Edith and Alice who were able to catch any of the fire flying in the air. If the Rev. John Turnbull happened to be at home on the day, he used to hand over his cigarette case to the blacksmith, who came with his daughter, and the blacksmith, after some little fumbling with awkward fingers, abstracted a cigarette. The Rev. John would then walk about with a smile and start a race for little boys and walk away before the race was finished, leaving the competitors somewhat bewildered. It was Mr. Turnbull's habit on these occasions to take one or two turns in the field and then sit upon a chair, where he remained until the second part of the tug-of-war, and in his chair he consulted with 'Funeral' about the conduct of certain small girls who had crept through the laurels and were eating the currants in the kitchen garden.

After the tea and games were finished there was always a tug-of-war and a prayer for the King. The tug-of-war was pulled first by male and then by female warriors. The male tug was of the nature of a preface to the real thing, it was a sign that the great event of the day was near; one just glanced casually at the men who, in shirt sleeves and black trousers, pulled at one another, and very little notice was taken when one of the sides collapsed or was drawn over the line. After the men had retired people became interested, and there was a general movement towards the rope where the fray between the married and the single of the village ladies was to be fought.

On the day of this particular tea, event had followed event, under a blue sky. The village had assembled at the gate, had been admitted by Henry, had eaten cake and had run races for sweets. Mr. Turnbull had already looked six times at his watch, and the Rev. John had handed to the blacksmith two gold-tipped cigarettes and had talked with a pale individual who had once in his life bought a labour paper.

Henry had been fetching and carrying, and was the only one who tried to make the thing a success. All the unpleasant tasks were left to him. He was the proper one to be called when anything very heavy required to be moved. He was commanded by the sultan in the chair to catch and chastise certain

little boys who had crept in from the next village through a hole in the road hedge. He was expected to carry heavy cans of hot water from the house, and to find the only cricket ball that some youthful giant had hit into the allotments, and, in the middle of the afternoon when Henry was most busy, his brother George sent him to the village to post a letter to the wicked patient who would persist in not paying.

Girls laughed and pushed one another as the detached groups assembled in the middle of the field. To go out and pull a rope in public required a naughty daring that needed some little preparation and holding back. It was almost as bad as running upstairs before a man. The married women, headed by one lean, scraggy figure, the ancient Rahab of the village, were the first to take up the rope, and after a little persuading—in this the Rev. John distinguished himself—the younger girls assembled at the other end. The heaviest, a farmer's daughter whose mother smoked her own bacon, was, by the law of custom, placed at the end, and somehow Alice found herself facing the woman from the shop, next the line.

The battle began and the married women pulled with great vigour, taking their task in a serious matronly way. The unmarried girls pulled in jerks, except the two old maids, who found the whole affair rather tiring. Alice, who was nearest the line, threw her head back with a reckless toss and sent her hat flying, her hatpins having been all too hastily adjusted. Pulling so manfully, she could feel hooks and buttons bursting all round her frock with a sound like the cracking of ripe gorse pods in the sun. Alice did not care: she pulled well at her work like a girl hero, and wanted, above all things, to see the woman of the shop move towards her.

Somewhere or another it is written, in perhaps some holy book, that it is better to let one's eyes encounter Mother Earth than to let them rove over the form of a maid. The pose of the servant-girl Alice provided an instance of the unwisdom of allowing a man's eye to overshadow a girl, a girl with head thrown back and buttons bursting and a panting bosom—a girl wearing a cotton frock that was bought when the wearer was not so well grown.

The vicar of Shelton, the Rev. Hector Turnbull, stood about two or three yards away from Alice; he was standing there to see who was pulled over the line, and as Alice was the nearest to the line he watched her. On the other side of Alice there was also a male eye watching, so that she was caught between two fires. This other watcher was the young man from the town, the gardener's son: the same young man who had flicked at the knapweed when he walked in front of Alice from the van to the village. He was just as disdainful as he watched the game. This young man looked at Alice

casually, disdainfully, but meaningly. He looked at Alice as a hawk would at a lark that sang below him, and he looked at her with all the cruelty of heart of the young.

On the other side of the line Mr. Turnbull went on overshadowing her with his eyes, for the attitude of her tugging was beginning to get itself a place in his mind. There was no help for it; the work was being done by a mightier than he, even by that photographer who takes his designed snapshots with zeal, more carefully than wisely.

The married women of the village proved to be the stronger, and Alice was at last pulled over the line. Three cheers were given for Mr. Turnbull and his family, and the family were forced to eat a rather late supper. The tug-of-war had been fought and won, but Mr. Turnbull had forgotten the cheers for the King.

There was under the bookcase in Henry's room a narrow table that he had arranged rather like an altar, and there—he was a queer fellow with his things—he had set up a Christmas-card in which a round-faced child dressed in a dainty red petticoat was holding out a rose to a silver cross. It was an old-fashioned card, with cornflowers and roses in the corners and a golden halo over the cross, while the child's white legs stood upon the blue ground.

When Henry entered his room that Saturday night after the village tea, he put the child's face to his and kissed her.

CHAPTER X

ARCADIA

The Rev. Henry Neville had the care of a little village as well as his own large one. This small and innocent offspring of South Egdon bloomed and blossomed and shed its leaves among low meadows by the riverside. It was pure in its poverty, and it owned a tiny church, but no inn, one or two small farmers, and a dairy. The church, with its one bell, lay curled up like a mouse asleep. It had been built by a very pious gentleman who had lived ages ago in the Hall, that was now the dairy-house; the stones that made the church were brought from his own quarry, and he had imported three wise stonemasons through the woods from Old Sarum. One ancient man who lived there had told Mr. Neville that he quite well remembered the church being built: so easily do memories pass from father to son that they appear in the seventh generation quite as clear as when they were recorded by the first.

Mr. Neville's home Sabbath duties occupied the morning and the evening of the God-blessed day, and in the afternoon he visited the little village, the name of which was West Heath. He always enjoyed the walk and much preferred the little village to the big one, partly by reason of its primitive habits and partly because down there the river mists were able to melt a little the ice of the human heart, so that the people were not so aggressively cruel as at South Egdon.

At West Heath they lived on river mist and white cheese made from skim milk, and their thoughts hardly ever got beyond their little flower-beds and meadow gates. No young woman ever wandered there in the paths of sin, they got up too early in the morning for that. If ever the maidens had a desire to see life, they chose to go to service in a seaside town with a clean white beach and new villas. Sometimes they returned to the village and married a peaceful cowman and sent presents of mushrooms to their late mistresses, receiving in return little shoes for the baby.

The Sunday morning following the village tea disclosed a state of unrest in the vicarage of Shelton, the abode of the Turnbulls. Henry's brothers did not remember to offer him a cigarette, and they talked about trains. A creature with horns had got hold of a kind of bell-rope somewhere at the bottom of Mr. Turnbull the elder, and, climbing up into his heart, whispered to him that Mrs. Turnbull was too easy and too near to satisfy him now and

that his happiness was a something farther off. For a moment or two Henry had thought about a cigarette, and then he thought of his friend, and after the early dinner, for which the sermon gave an appetite, Henry went out to find the priest. He planned to himself to walk with Mr. Neville to West Heath, and he hoped he would be in time to catch him before he left his house.

A short way down the road towards the next village there was a gate near to a tiny copse of nut bushes, and upon the upper part of this gate some fierce inventor of Bible texts had put in flaming letters of red paint the words, 'Repent or be Damned.' Other lesser drawings, symbols, and descriptions, more human perhaps, and certainly not more immoral, were inscribed in pencil upon the posts.

When Henry passed he found this gate occupied by Alice and the niece of the small farmer; they were there in their Sunday frocks talking to two young men, one of whom was the dark young man from the town. Alice was almost doubled up with laughter as Henry went by. Henry smiled and remarked about the pleasant weather, and the young man replied with a nod. He knew an idiot when he saw one. And again Alice laughed, and blushed shyly.

Henry found his friend Neville just climbing over his worn hedge into the road; 'In the same manner,' so he said, 'did the robber in the *Pilgrim's Progress* get into the way.'

The two, for a while, walked along the dusty high road, and then turned down the lane that led to the hamlet of innocence.

The two friends wandered down the lane and entered the tiny church with its seats of plain unvarnished wood, and altar table that just suited the plain wooden cross. Though he could not mend his own gate, Neville had made that cross. Three young girls with brown hair brushed out were already seated as quiet as mice. They were the choir. And one out-of-work cowman sat with two small and neat boys near the door. In another corner, the sexton, a peaceful old ditch-cleaner in black, pulled the bell. When he thought the priest was ready he stopped pulling, and, brushing his trousers, went to his seat and knelt down and closed his eyes. There was a softly smiling silence in the little church as though the air were only breathed by children, and when the service began the voices were children's voices.

Henry Neville understood the primitive feeling in his church, and he told the children, the cowman, and the sexton a fairy story about a mother who had once lived in the bottom of the sea and had left her children, 'little maids and little boys,' he said, and had taken away their happiness, a tiny

kitten, in an amber casket; and that the children pined away and nearly died for the want of that kitten at the bottom of the sea. At the mention of the kitten the children in the church smiled, which was just what the priest meant them to do, for that was why he told the story. Henry too was pleased; there was nothing ugly or gross there, only a poor priest telling a story about a little cat. And he smiled too, and thought that no doubt the priest really meant that the kitten was our Lord.

It was almost dark as Henry Turnbull walked up the lane that joined the two villages. A little in front of him was a couple, a girl in white and the dark figure of a man. They separated in the middle of the village, the girl taking the way to the vicarage and opening and shutting the gate just before Henry. Henry knew that the slim, shining figure was Alice, who had begun to walk out with the young man from the town.

'Other people,' Henry thought, 'were trying to get something.' He had never tried to get anything unless it was the fall of that tree.

With the melancholy of his friend upon him, Henry went into his father's dining-room, the room of many meals, to supper. His two brothers sprawled on chairs. They were both fleshy men. His father was still eating; his sermon had made him hungry. He had preached about the Lord of the Vineyard. Together they talked of Mr. Neville.

'Funny cheap!' the curate called him.

And the father remarked, 'A disgrace to the Church!' and cut a reeking onion in half and conveyed the largest portion into his mouth.

The vicarage dining-room was filled with odours, there was a smell of salad dressing and a smell of stout, and Mrs. Turnbull had eaten some of the new jam; on the side of her plate there was a shining heap of sucked plum-stones. The family pushed back their chairs. They had eaten after the fashion of the English middle-class who always show by their looks when they have had good food. The family sauntered into the drawing-room, leaving the dining-room empty until Alice came in, rather flushed, to take away the plates.

The following morning was chosen by the Turnbull family to separate from one another. The two elder brothers went their different ways to the fields that they cultivated in the earth.

The doctor followed his usual custom, departing by an early train, and found time that same afternoon to take out his car and to see a few sick persons. The doctor's well-ordered life was passed in a rural district, and

with the help of the new Insurance Act he did very well there. His house was as proper as his life, and his wife and child made up, together with his savings, what he considered to be the right thing. He was the doctor for the rich farmers and poor clergy to send for, and as a rule they paid their bills. And a modest half-dozen of the poorer class were sure to cut their throats in his district in the year. He had trained his pliant mind to think of the guinea fee and not of the face of the death worshipper. The doctor quite understood what part he had to play in the game as a kind of upper servant of the rich. It was not likely that he would ever turn against his masters, and for a very good reason—because he could afford a glass of wine, like the glebe farmer, on Sundays.

The Rev. John Turnbull, with plenty of cigarettes and picture papers, departed by the mid-day train to town, and the next morning he called on 'the dear girl.' He found her at home nursing two little white rats. She stroked them and made John stroke them—'she loved them so—the dears!' And then she tossed them one after another into a silver basket, where they lay upside down, and asked John to tell her all about his dear mother; 'they must go and stay there after they were married,' she said.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. FANCY

Hung up in the window of No. 12 Mill Street in the gallant city of Portstown there was a notice telling passers-by that a bedroom and a sitting-room were to be let to a respectable couple. The house and the street were just like a million more in that beautiful brick country of English homes. The house had four windows and four pairs of dirty curtains, and a narrow back-yard; and Mrs. Fancy, who rented it, was one of the happiest women in the town.

A few weeks after the good vicar of Shelton had entertained the village at tea, one of his late guests, the gardener's son, the dark young man from the town, knocked at the door of this very No. 12 Mill Street, while another of the clergyman's late guests, without her servant's box and with flushed cheeks and eyes like a frightened hare's, waited a little nervously in the road.

Mrs. Fancy, the occupier of No. 12 Mill Street, had once been married to a local rate-collector, until the local rate-collector was eaten by a cancer, and dropped rudely—they really did let the coffin fall—into a hole in the graveyard, leaving Mrs. Fancy free. Mrs. Fancy had bravely borne the sight of his sufferings, and he had at least enjoyed the pleasure of being a trouble to Mrs. Fancy. During his last hour upon earth he damned her to hell once, twice, and thrice, and then, with a hideous ape-like twist of his face, died.

Mrs. Fancy's fortune amounted to four shillings and sixpence a week, and upon that she lived in ease and plenty. She obtained her rent from the letting of her rooms, and she obtained her life's joy from watching the downfall of young girls. Her neighbours' children she preferred, to any others, to see go down, and she liked to see them struggle a little before they were submerged. She had lived in that No. 12 for twenty years, and her husband Mr. Fancy had been dead for fifteen. In that period of time she had seen a good many of the kind of falls that delighted her heart.

She attended the chapel, a place where women sometimes preached, and once or twice she had prevailed upon a fallen girl to tell her story and return to God for the space of time that it took to sing a hymn. It was upon the girls that Mrs. Fancy always had her eyes. She did not care about the men. 'They

were all so openly wicked that she hated them'—so at least she told the grocer at the corner.

Often Mrs. Fancy was to be seen out of doors at night, and she knew all about the young people who went to the pictures with the sailors, and about the houses that they sometimes went to afterwards. When a victim was in trouble, Mrs. Fancy rubbed her hands and was glad and talked about hell to her neighbours and about the sailors to herself. Ah, Mrs. Fancy was a lady of morals.

'Mr. and Mrs. Turnbull': Alice had decided to take—not in vain this time—the name of her master. 'Mr. and Mrs. Turnbull' were admitted and were shown the two rooms. They were slightly cleaner than the other rooms in the same street. Mr. and Mrs. Turnbull told Mrs. Fancy they had just been married, and they explained that they were a respectable couple taking a holiday: they said they had saved some money in their other employment. Mrs. Fancy looked at Alice. Mrs. Fancy had her doubts, and doubts of this kind were the roses in her garden. She took—whatever her doubts were—a week's money from her new lodgers.

At the beginning of the adventure the young man from the town had wisely asked Alice to give him her savings. The young people were left alone while Mrs. Fancy went out to buy something for their tea and to talk over her doubts with one or two neighbours. Her instinct told her that she had caught something this time. Mrs. Fancy had set her rooms as a trap for white mice, and she caught many a pretty little creature.

Alice had carried the little basket that she had brought with her upstairs to the bedroom, and she took therefrom—her hands shook rather—a new skirt and a blouse, and looked at them. She had sent away for the skirt, and had spent many Sunday evenings, quiet Sunday evenings, with the kitchen clock creeping round, in deciding which to have, and last of all she had written out the order and sent the money.

Alice had got into the habit of always 'cleaning herself,' as she called it, in the afternoon, and as she had not had much time to wash on this particular day, she now looked round for some water. There was none. 'Of course not,' she said aloud, and it was not the first time that a frightened girl's voice had been heard in that room. 'Of course not! how could she expect it?' She had always been the one to carry up water in her place, she must go for it now. She went down for it quietly, like a servant.

Alice was beginning to wish she had not listened to him. When he had suggested this little holiday she had in her thoughts only the dullness of the

vicarage and a certain heavy hungry look from the eyes of the Rev. Hector. Day after day had passed there in the same stagnation, and then John Turnbull came and she knew how he looked at her, and she wished that she could go away with a gentleman.

This was the kind of wish that young Roude liked to find amongst the aspirations in a young girl's mind. He waited for it, and when she said, '. . . how nice to go away with a gentleman,' he made his little proposal that they should take a holiday together. 'They would be very careful'—he knew, like his betters, all about that. And she could easily find another place when they had spent her money. They chose her afternoon out and drove down to the station in the milk-cart, telling one or two easy lies, a simple thing for a servant to do. And Alice took with her all her savings, about eight pounds. The looks of three men—we leave out the good doctor—and the words of one had decided Alice, and she felt at her ease with Roude, who was one of her own class.

Once at Portstown, affairs were not quite so cheerful. She looked at Roude. He did not seem to feel that she was so near. Alice had heard stories, and now she thought of them. She remembered hearing that her young man had done this kind of thing before—not once or twice!—and that something had happened to one of his girls, something in a hospital.

She went downstairs. He was smoking a cigarette and reading *Dainty Bits* by the window, and he looked as if this kind of honeymoon was not new to him. Neither was it. He had been put up to the idea by a commercial in the coal trade, over a glass of beer. At last the new Mr. Turnbull spoke, and not very politely.

'When's the blasted old woman coming back?' he said.

Mrs. Fancy did come back, and the lodgers began their tea, the gardener's son grabbing at the teapot himself and spitting the stones of the plum jam very neatly into the fireplace. Tea over, the young man kicked about the room with a cheap cigarette in his mouth, and pulled the chairs from Mrs. Fancy's favourite corners. Together they went out to the pictures. They saw a fat old man making love to a girl in a boat, and the girl's real lover hooked the old man from a tree, and he toppled into the water. And then they saw the mighty doings of a masked burglar in a girl's bedroom. And at last came the heads of five British generals.

After this was all done they returned to Mrs. Fancy's, where they had supper of bottled ale and ham. By this time Alice's head ached and she grew more and more nervous. She remarked that 'she did not want to go to bed,

she would stay downstairs all night; he could go if he liked.' Her young man addressed her after the manner of his class, and, gripping her by the arm, forced her upstairs.

At Shelton vicarage the matter made very little noise. Young servants do run away sometimes. And Mrs. Turnbull had noticed something in her husband, and had decided—wise woman—to choose next time a less attractive handmaiden. Edith went on doing the work—the work still remained, like Mr. Turnbull's appetite, whatever else ran away. The policeman of the village called to inquire if any of the spoons were missing.

CHAPTER XII

THE DROVER'S DOG

In the bar of a little public-house just outside the village of Kingston, the village that lay between Shelton and the town, a company were assembled watching a dog. The most prominent amongst them was the owner of the dog. He was a drover from the market, a kind of Caliban, whose joy in life was to beat dumb creatures until they did speak. This drover was a man very friendly to one thing in the world—beer. His face was bestial. On his head was a torn, foul hat. He held a large stick, and a great toe protruded from a hole in his boot.

This man, like the rest of the company, watched the dog. The beast, a tawny creature, was holding fast in his jaws one of the legs of the table. His great red eyes were filled with biting murder. His attitude denoted fury, almost madness.

'Damn 'e, 'e won't let go—damn 'e!' shouted the dog's master.

'What made 'e lay 'old on it?' inquired a shepherd, whose own curly-haired dog was asleep under the bench.

The drover took up his ash stick and carefully turned it round so that the heavy knob leaned the right way, and then he spat in his hand and with a quick blow brought the stick down upon the dog's head. At the same time he yelled, 'Bloody damn thee!' and gave it another. The dog winced but held on. It thought it had the leg bone of a man in its teeth.

The group of men became more interested. Meanwhile another guest arrived. This was no less a person than Mr. Tasker, who was on his way home from market. He had found something wrong with his harness, and he hoped to be able to get a piece of cord at the inn to mend it with.

Mr. Tasker's mind had been much troubled of late with the thought of his father, who had, ever since his last holiday in prison, been hanging around the town. Mr. Tasker had seen him, once, twice, three times! Mr. Tasker feared that one day he might come to Shelton and refuse to go away. He might lie about in sheds and come and demand every day to be fed at Mr. Tasker's expense.

The dairyman's long lean face was lined with trouble; the harness was broken, and he might have to pay for a rope wherewith to mend it. 'He

might,' he thought regretfully, 'have to buy a glass of beer.' 'Would a penny packet of Woodbine cigarettes be enough?' Mr. Tasker looked at the group of serious men round the table, who watched the dog. The savage way that it still held the leg of the table impressed every one. It was the kind of fury that they liked to find in themselves at times. Mr. Tasker looked at the dog and thought. Then in his market voice he spoke to the drover.

'Do 'e fetch up cows? Would dog keep away a tramp? I wants a dog like thik.'

The drover was willing to deal.

'Sell 'e to you, master, ten shillings down and a pint. 'E be the dog for you. See 'ow 'e 'olds thik bloody table! See—I let 'e 'ave it!' And he gave another exhibition of his skill with the thick end of his ash stick.

There was some difficulty about the removal of the dog from the leg of the table, but a piece of meat, stale and putrid, having been found, the dog was persuaded to fasten his teeth into it and was then thrown into Mr. Tasker's cart. Mr. Tasker paid the drover his money, refused to share the pint, borrowed a rope and mended his harness, and drove away. As he drove along, he heard under the seat the low growls and fierce crunchings as the beast devoured the stinking flesh for which Mr. Tasker had been obliged to pay twopence. The sound under the seat pleased Mr. Tasker. The drover had explained to him that the dog had once had hold of a tramp's throat, and the drover had sworn that he would kill a man.

It was a lovely late summer afternoon, and Mr. Tasker drove home slowly. Near a tiny cottage he passed two little girls with hoops, running up and down, dressed in clean print frocks, and a pretty boy, in socks and overall, merrily trundled behind them a wooden cart. Mr. Tasker drove slowly along the white road. Over the hedges were the pleasant fields. The golden corn, now partly cut, was set in shocks ready for the wagon. It seemed fat and full of grain. Here and there were the meadows, very green, shining and lit with bright fire by the still burning afternoon sun. Cows and sheep were feeding.

To Mr. Tasker's mind all this had one meaning—'value.' The fields, the barns, the sheep, the hazel copses, the set-up corn, the cows—what were they worth? The pretty children, the colour, the rooks, the odorous feeling of late summer—what did he know or care about all this? He had his work to do—he believed in pigs.

A gentleman passed on a horse; Mr. Tasker touched his hat. A tramp shuffled along. As he did not get enough into the hedge, Mr. Tasker brushed his coat with his wheel. Mr. Tasker was thinking of his children. 'The big girls,' he could make them work. But all ate his cheese.

'Too much live stock indoors,' he said aloud, 'too much live stock indoors!' It was a favourite saying with the farmers.

A growl from the dog made him think of his father, and he growled too. And then he considered if it would be possible to make his wife get up at 4 A.M. instead of 4.30. He had once—unlucky man—had to pay a doctor on account of her, when she had strained herself with the great churn just before one of her confinements.

With the dog under the seat, Mr. Tasker drove into his yard. He let down the back of his cart and kicked out the dog, chain and all. Daisy Tasker, aged five years, was watching her father's return, and was standing near. In a moment the enraged beast sprang upon her and mauled her face. Mr. Tasker pulled his prize away and conveyed it to a tub, where, at his leisure, he tied it up. Meanwhile his little girl, covered with blood, half mad with terror, lay screaming. She was at last carried in, and fainted. Mr. Tasker went out to milk the cows.

After milking, Mr. Tasker, much against his will, sent for the doctor.

'You know what people will say, if she dies,' he told his wife.

The bites were serious. The child had to lie for a month in bed, and then went to school with fearful scars and was made fun of by the boys.

Mr. Tasker went about his work as usual. He liked the dog, and the dog was beginning to like him. It happened, one evening, that Mrs. Tasker found her husband rummaging in the bottom of a large cupboard that stood in their big kitchen. His long lean arms were pulling out things from the bottom, where old clothes were kept. He was looking for something he could not find. Mrs. Tasker watched and waited.

'Where be thik wold 'at of father's? Thik 'wold 'at 'e wore at mother's burying?'

The master moved out of her way and Mrs. Tasker stooped down and found it, a soft black felt, dusty and worn.

'What do 'e want it for?' she said.

'Mind thee own work,' he grunted, and went out into the yard.

He went straight up to the chained dog, and he began to tease it with the hat. He swung his long lean figure about, bent himself double, grinned horribly, hissed and kicked and growled like another dog, and at last, when the beast was almost mad with anger, Mr. Tasker threw him his father's hat. Then he went in to his tea.

CHAPTER XIII

TWO LETTERS

Henry Turnbull had been too busy these harvest days—he had been helping the small farmer—to visit his friend. In the evenings he had been too tired to do anything except to sit before the little cross upon the Christmas card. Upon this first day of mists there was nothing for him to do, and he walked between the heavy moisture-laden hedges and heard the moaning of the coming storms.

Henry was that day thirty-one, and he had begun to feel old. So far he had not allowed a girl to intercept and to steal the feelings that would, if unhindered, love all mankind. He had never thought of taking the hand of a cottage girl. He could not bring himself to make love to that sort. Something or other would have to break in him before he could dare to. Though he wanted a second kiss, he could never ask for one.

The young ladies, the clergyman's daughters of the neighbourhood, called him 'an old dear' when he pumped up their bicycles, or held their ponies at his father's door. Unless he was required for work of this kind, they left him to his own thoughts, and to his prayers—and prayers are dangerously wicked thoughts for a young man.

Henry reached the vicarage gate and was surprised to find it open. The gate had been dragged back, and was fallen against the hedge, and the marks of a motor car were plainly seen in the long grass of the drive. Henry was so used to finding everything quiet and snug under those great trees that he was quite taken aback by these new signs. He walked nervously up the drive and saw a large motor in front of the door. He knew the car belonged to the town doctor.

Henry knocked with his stick; the bell had long ago been broken. He waited a little until he heard the uneven shuffle of Mrs. Lefevre, who opened the door. With a dirty handkerchief held to her red eyes, she led the way upstairs to Neville's bedroom. The door was wide open, and, as he went upstairs, Henry heard the cheery voice of the town doctor asking Neville if he had ever played golf. Neville was lying on his bed. The cheerful doctor sat by his side. Henry was welcomed by them both.

Neville had not replied to the question about golf, and now he spoke quite at his ease.

‘How long do you think I shall live? You must have seen hundreds like me, you must know.’

‘Well,’ said the doctor, ‘I should say about a month under your old woman’s care. With a good nurse, perhaps six weeks. Abroad, possibly a year. Yours is not a simple case, not a case that gives a chance of treatment: it is one of the deadly kind. The evil, you know, has been in your family for generations. The worst kind of vermin’—the doctor smiled—‘have attacked you.’

‘You must get a nurse. Your old hag drinks, I am sure of it. And besides, think how much trouble I shall be saved if you are under good care. I must be getting along. You had better continue to lie as still as you can. Do be persuaded about the nurse. Good day—Turnbull; your father—pretty well, I hope?’

And the cheerful doctor departed.

Henry took the chair by the bed. Neville was smiling, a really amused smile.

‘Before we talk, Henry,’ he said, ‘I want you to write a letter for me to my sister. You did not know I had a sister. Well, I have. She is in India. I am the older. She is a missionary. A voluble preacher caught her and shipped her off before she could say no, and now she has been in India for ten years. I think this is the moment for her to come home. I can just manage two months or thereabouts. I have seen, I think, nearly as many of these ‘cases’ as Dr. Hawkins. Will you write for me? Her name is Molly. On that table you will find ink and pen.’

Henry took the paper, and after the priest had rested a little, Henry wrote as directed:

> *Dearest Molly,—Do not be frightened by the handwriting, it is only Henry Turnbull. What has happened is, that I have got father’s old complaint. When I answered your letter last week I could not say anything, because I was not sure. Come home if you can. But there is no hurry. I am quite anxious to live at present. It would be very jolly to have you home, and there ought to be enough money for you to live very cheaply in England.*
>
> *Mrs. Lefevre still enjoys brandy. There is something the matter with my front gate, and grass grows everywhere. I have never seen before such wonderful grass.*

I cannot help thinking it is quite time you gave up your work.

I am sending to you all the money I can lay my hands upon.—Your ever loving

Henry.

‘She will have plenty of time to come, and she has not got on well there. She is not happy. She ought to come home. Just read her last letter to me. She has begun to worship an idol—lift up that red book, the letter is underneath.’

Henry found the letter.

From the top of the nearest elm, a dead leaf out of a branch of gold, the first leaf to fall, fluttered down. It drifted in through the window and fell upon the bed. Neville took it up and held, this first yellow leaf, in his hand. He knew that in two months’ time the leaves would still be falling. His friend was reading the letter.

Dearest Henry,—I have just had a dreadful quarrel with my superior about—idols!

I have only myself to blame, for I foolishly told him a story of a visit I made to a native hut.

It was a mud hut, smeared with cow-dung, in one of these central-plain villages. The women in the hut, two wives, shared an idol, not an ugly earthy demon, as so many of them are, but a wonderful carved human head, calm and beautiful. Its look made me feel the eternal suffering, the eternity of the depths of joy, of the world. The body and legs of the idol were a rude lump of clay.

The women were kneeling before it. They expected me to blame them. I could not blame them.

And I knelt down beside the two women and covered my face. I saw the native villages all over the plains, and dark human beings, all suffering and bearing their sufferings. And I saw the cruel priest, our missionary, who would bind the body of the poor native to a munition factory.

I wish, Henry, you could stand up here on some little hill, and just tell the people to worship anything they like.

I left the women—they thought I was quite mad—and went back to the station. Our missionary was playing Bridge. I told him I had been worshipping an idol.

'I don't like your jokes,' he said.

I saw him feel the knee of the girl next to him,—a favourite. And then he dealt the cards.

Surely the natives are wise to worship the cow.—Your loving sister

Molly.

Henry posted Neville's letter, and then walked slowly to his own home. The mist had changed to rain. The warmth of summer had not gone, but the shroud was upon the body, and the limbs would soon be cold.

CHAPTER XIV

UNDER THE HUMAN MIND

The next day being Sunday, Henry went down again to his friend's. He found him lying just as he had left him the day before. This time he was talking to a young clergyman. This gentleman was the Rev. Edward Lester, the curate from the town. He was lent to Mr. Neville to entertain the people of the village in the church. The little hamlet by the river on this sort of occasion was quite forgotten.

The Rev. Edward Lester was a modern. He was a curate in a parish of the country town of Maidenbridge. He had given it out as his idea more than once that he believed in the people, and he also used to remark sometimes that he believed in himself. As Henry took the chair by the open window next to the bookcase, Neville had been speaking, and the young clergyman was replying.

'Our religion is up to date,' he said. 'Worship, and playing the game, that's what our Church teaches. It's a splendid body, and we are all gentlemen. What we try to do is to make the rich give and the poor pray. Look here, Neville, our club boys like games better than they like girls!'

The curate made a queer noise, a sort of clucking in his throat.

Neville answered slowly, looking out of the window. His voice was tired, and he spoke in quite a new way for him.

'The English Church is humanly organized,' he said. 'It has become a very successful business. It took a great work out of loving hands and built in the Master's name a jam factory. They boil the stones of the fruit and call it "Christ's Church."—Without Jesus our Church is really splendid. I can easily conceive of a bishop suddenly waking up and crying out, "What fools we have been, all listening to a dark man, a fellow little better than a nigger, a fellow nearly as black as Dr. Johnson's servant!" '

Mr. Lester rose from his chair, stretched, lit a cigarette, and said:

'Jolly long grass you've got, Neville, out under the trees.'

Henry Turnbull had been asked by his father to bring the curate home to supper, and he now intimated that it was time for them to be going. Once

outside the priest's broken gate, the curate, like a schoolboy, began to chatter.

'A queer sort of old boy, Neville—not the right kind for our Church. Don't tell anybody—but do you know what he did once? Ravished a girl in the street! He's a regular Hun. I heard it from Canon Allfreem, his vicar. That's what Neville's come down here for. The people stoned him; you can always trust the people to do the right thing.—Do you know what I do, Turnbull? After our evensong I carry a flag. A good chap, A1, a sidesman, helps me to hold it. We go to the town green and sing a hymn, and I preach a little sermon. We have quite a good time. The girls bring their young men to hear us, and one or two old topers from the pubs have been known to come. I do these services without the vicar. He didn't like the idea at first—called it ranting—I brought him to it. He's a good chap—keeps old port, you know—gives me a glass sometimes after a tiring celebration.'

He took Henry's arm.

'You should see our men's club; we are all socialists there—real red ones. We must bring down the very rich, Turnbull, we must make them give. I told our mayor so, and Miss Rudge, at dinner. Our mayor's a rare old sport. Can give away a thousand; he can write the largest cheque in the country, and not miss it. Look here, Turnbull, Kitty Rudge will have every penny when he dies—this is between ourselves—a jolly nice girl too!'

The Rev. Edward Lester sidled into the dining-room of the vicarage at Shelton, and his face beamed with smiles and his eyes glistened when he saw the family porter-jug.

'We used to get good stout in Hall,' he said, and put down his glass empty.

'Edith, Mr. Lester will take another glass.'

'Your pickles are home-made, I expect, Mrs. Turnbull? What lovely sweet-peas, quite heavenly! Miss Rudge, you know, takes all the prizes in our town. I believe she sometimes waters the plants herself, and I know for a fact she chooses the seeds, though they keep gardeners. She kindly sends some flowers over to our men's club sometimes. Good fellows, our men—rough and ready, you know. You would be surprised how they love flowers.'

Mr. Turnbull was eating. Henry and his mother listened quietly.

'By the by, one of our men told me his father lived here. I think he said his father was your gardener. Such a serious young man. I have had him up to my rooms—he is rather too advanced, though—a red-hot socialist, but a

dear good chap! He said it was awful the way young girls followed him about. I met him at the station this afternoon. He said he had been somewhere on business.'

Mr. Turnbull coughed. Mrs. Turnbull looked at a dead wasp in the jam, while Henry was left to explain that the curate's friend, 'the red-hot socialist,' had seduced their simple servant-maid Alice.

'And no doubt he must have deserted her, as you saw him to-day.'

Mr. Lester's face, already flushed with talking and eating, now flushed with anger.

'And I gave him three Turkish cigarettes, and a whisky and soda, in the station bar! What kind of a person was your servant?' he asked Henry. At the same time his flush deepened.

'Quite a pretty girl and little more than a child,' said Henry. 'We would like to know where she is now. Would you mind asking your friend?'

The story of Alice cast a gloom over Mr. Lester's smile, but at the same time awakened within him certain thoughts. How could he overcome the virtue, already beginning to fade, of a young girl that *he* knew? As became a modern clergyman, he did not like to be overreached in any way by a red-hot socialist.

As he walked back to the town—his bicycle had unluckily been punctured that morning riding from his 'diggings' to church—he strode along through the dampness of the night and his thoughts wandered over one or two things that had happened to him not so very long before. He dwelt upon every detail in these little experiences even to the taking off of the stockings—he always insisted upon that.

The town was quiet, and he entered his rooms with a certain determination in his heart. He sat down for a moment and looked at his boots, then he took a drink and went to bed, having in his inner thoughts overcome the last feelings of modesty in a girl who could hardly write her own name. The happiness of a natural man is certainly a wonderful thing, and Mr. Lester was no stranger to it!

While this reverend gentleman who had taken the duty at South Egdon was returning to his lodgings, enjoying his own thoughts, the sick priest whose place he had taken at the altar was holding a conversation with a stranger, who had been admitted after protest from Mrs. Lefevre. This stranger was the same repulsive drover whose dog had taken such a fancy to the leg of the bar table at Kingston. The drover was sitting in the chair that

Mr. Lester had placed by the bed, upon his face was a strange look, a look that seemed to plead. He sat there and watched the priest. He held his heavy stick tight. He had come there to confess.

'I beats 'er—I took 'er money—she starved. She ate naught. To-day they buried she over there,' he nodded out of the window. 'I beat she—poor maid—like thik.' And the drover hit as though he were beating something on the ground. And then he went on to explain. 'I watched through rails—they bury 'un up at Shelton—parson Turnbull, little black cap on 'es 'ead—they drop she in like thik,' the drover dropped his stick. 'I heared she go thud! into thik hole.—I beat thik dog—thik maid. Thik dog, 'e growl—she, whine, whine—and now to-day—thud!—Will she bide still? That's what I wants to know—will she walk? I drives stock late—shall I meet she when I go by thik wold tree where a man were 'anged? Can you keep she down, parson, like she wented—thud. Let she bide still in ground!'

The drover had never uttered so long a speech in his life. After it was over he looked at the priest. Then he turned to stare again at something white that he saw between the trees.

Neville lay with his hand upon his forehead.

'Have you any money?' he asked.

The drover, with a slow downward motion of his hand, carefully laid his stick upon the floor and took off the coat, stained with cow-dung, that he wore. Very slowly he folded it and placed it gently upon his stick; after that, with much care, he unfastened his belt. There was attached to the belt a purse. The drover turned it out upon the bed, shaking out therefrom seventeen sovereigns and one shilling.

'Take it—take it all—it belonged to she. I'm fear'd of she—take thik money and keep she in the ground—thud! like she wented. She saved thik money in service—I beat she—I took 'en and to-day she went, thud!' And the drover brought his hat with a heavy motion to the floor.

Neville put the gold, pound by pound, into the purse, and gave the strap again to the drover.

'Listen to what I say. Go on with your work and keep the money for a while. Remember it is still hers,—the woman that you beat. She wishes you to keep it till you meet a maid in trouble, unhappy like she was. And when you find a girl in trouble give her all of it, only keep the shilling; and when you go "thud," let them put that shilling with you into the ground. The devil will not dare to face that shilling, and Christ will not forget it. Now go.'

The drover slowly picked up his coat, and, taking up his stick, went out to find the maid who should save his soul.

CHAPTER XV

DESERTED

Mrs. Fancy folded up and put away the clothes from the lodgers' bed. They had left her. But the girl lodger was still hanging about.

'Funeral's' son had used the last few shillings of Miss Alice's money to buy a ticket to Maidenbridge. It was there that Mr. Tasker sold his pigs, and there too the Rev. Edward Lester resided. Roude had managed to slip away from Alice in the town, and when she reached the station, the train, and her last shilling, and her lover were all departed. The girl wandered back to the street that had been her 'home' for a week.

Mrs. Fancy had not been at home when she knocked, but all the same she had seen Alice tearfully walking up the street, and then she watched her coming down the other side, and, by setting her head at the very corner of the window, saw Alice enter the small lodging-house near the lamp-post.

Mrs. Fancy was pleased. She rubbed her hands. She knew that house, and two gentlemen of the sea had followed the girl in.

Mrs. Fancy dusted her rooms and again set up in her window the notice directing visitors to her good lodgings. After that she looked once more out of the window. This time the figure of a big sailor swayed along taking up nearly the whole pavement. Mrs. Fancy prayed that the sailor might enter the house by the lamp-post. She wanted Alice brought down a little; that white dress was a bit too white in Mrs. Fancy's eyes. The sailor was drunk. She watched him stoop a little as he entered the door.

Then Mrs. Fancy counted again the money that had been paid her for the week's lodgings. She counted ten shillings and sixpence. The ten shillings she wrapped in a small piece of paper, a piece of the *Dainty Bits* that had been left by her late lodger. She laid the sixpence on the table, the ten shillings she put aside for her rent. Then she cut herself a thin slice of bread and margarine, and poured some hot water upon the lodgers' tea-leaves that still lay at the bottom of the pot. She helped herself to a cup, and, after drinking, gazed at the tea-leaves that were settled at the bottom.

During her life Mrs. Fancy had amused herself more than once telling her fortune with tea-leaves. Now she thought she would find out by the same means what was going to happen to her late lodger. She knew pretty well

what *would* happen to Alice, but she wanted a sign. She shook the cup and peered; then she laughed,—a mocking, aged, female laugh.

'What funny people!' she said aloud.

The leaves in the bottom of the cup had taken the form of two devils.

'What funny people!' remarked Mrs. Fancy, this time to herself. She picked up the sixpence, and, putting on her bonnet, went out, after carefully locking her door. In one hand she carried a string bag and in the other her purse.

'They will think,' she said to herself, 'that I am going to buy a tin of salmon for my supper.'

But the people of that street knew quite well what the woman of the chapel was going to buy.

As she passed the house by the lamp-post she heard sailors singing. Mrs. Fancy walked fast when she got away from her own street. She took the first turning to the right and then entered a little public-house, out of which she presently emerged without the sixpence.

Of course Mrs. Fancy had taken that walk before, but this time the outing gave her especial pleasure. She walked along the street slowly and piously, like a good English matron going to her home, and she lapped up, like a thirsty hyena, the noise that came from the lodging-house by the lamp-post.

About four hours after Mrs. Fancy's return, the church clock that was nearest to this particular lamp-post struck two, and the door of the lodging-house at the corner noisily opened. A girl in a white soiled frock was thrust out in the street. She was thrust out by the big sailor who had passed Mrs. Fancy's in the afternoon, and who now shouted:

'Cut away, kid! Damnation, I've paid for your going.'

And so indeed he had, for he was covered with blood, and with one eye black. As he let the girl out, three heads appeared at the upper window, and an empty rum bottle was hurled after the retreating figure of Alice. Luckily for her it burst upon the lamp-post, and she was followed only by a volley of obscene abuse.

The girl was dazed. She felt only like a sick creature, beaten and trampled upon. She hurried away from that street, the street of her week's honeymoon. As she went along she heard the wailing of a new-born infant.

Alice waited. The babe wailed again.

‘A girl,’ she said aloud, and passed on shivering.

A sick feeling overcame her; there were pains in her body, and her feet had no feeling in them. She fell forward on the pavement. Then she crawled. Just beyond her she saw an open space with a seat under a tree. In the dim light it seemed a refuge. Inch by inch she made her way to the wet board. At last she reached it, and leaned against the rough bark of an old elm. She even pressed her lips against the tree.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Because Alice was young, she slept a little. In her dreams she stroked the tree with her hand in a strange crazed way. The fatherly charity of Providence and the strange jesting of men had given to this child a bed under a tree. Together the divine under-force and the human upper hand had made her feel that she was a rather weakly girl—but entirely a child.

She shivered. Time had grown from a night with lamps into a grey day with smoke. Around her there were the fog and dumbness of early morning. She could just manage to move a little. She found that she had, all the time, held tightly clasped in her left hand a coin that the big sailor had put there. When she could open her stiff fingers, she found that it was a two-shilling piece.

She found her way slowly to the station. The first down-train was nearly due. An aged porter was brushing out the waiting-room. When the ticket office opened, Alice timidly asked the price of a ticket to Maidenbridge. The clerk looked at her through the opening. He knew by sight the local users of this early train.

'You had better go back to your friends, miss,' he said, not unkindly.

The only friend she possessed in that town being a tree, Alice told the clerk that she lived near Maidenbridge, which indeed was true, though her only idea was to follow after her lover. She asked how far she could book for two shillings, and the clerk gave her a ticket for Tadnoll, a little wayside station that came just before Maidenbridge, and was about five miles from that pleasant market town.

Alice sank into the corner of an empty carriage. The train moved out of the station. She tried to watch the trees. Everywhere she saw unreal things move. A new gate-post looked to her like the bare neck of a sailor with protruding black veins. She thought of Tom Roude. They had started away from their lodgings together, and then he had sent her back to Mrs. Fancy's to see if he had left his cigarette case under their bed. He had said he would hold her bag and wait for her by Johnson's Stores. The train moved slowly, and smoky dust passed by the carriage window. Alice wondered what Mr. Roude had done with her clothes.

He had, as a matter of fact, left them in the carriage when he got out at Maidenbridge. He had thought—clever young man—that a girl of sixteen-and-a-half, with no belongings, would not travel very far that day. And he knew her fear of the police. Roude was a realist. He believed that if you pluck a flower and it fades and you cast it into the gutter, the fault is not yours if it dies.

The train travelled slowly and stopped at three stations before it came to Tadnoll. At each station there were the same things—a clatter of milk-cans, wet dairymen trundling cans along the platforms, and a sleepy porter who looked at Alice and then came back and looked at her again. She read the name of the station, and climbed down from the train. She was the only passenger to leave.

A burly dairyman was rolling a churn up the platform when Alice alighted. He stopped at once when he saw her. She moved out of his way, and he proceeded to roll his churn deftly with one hand, explaining the presence of Alice to himself by two expressive words, 'Them soldiers.'

The train moved on, and Alice, after giving up her ticket, asked a porter, who was filling a lamp, the nearest way to Maidenbridge. She had been to Tadnoll before, but she could not remember which road to take. The porter could not get the wick of the lamp to turn up, and, hardly looking at Alice, he told her the way and said it was six miles; then concentrated the whole of his attention upon the behaviour of the lamp.

There were three dairy carts outside the station, and as the girl walked on, they rattled past her loaded with empty milk-cans. Each driver looked back at her, but none offered her a ride. Perhaps they thought she looked too young and too ill to be respectable—and besides, what would their wives at home say? Each man remarked to himself, 'T'ain't no business of mine,' and drove on.

Before Alice had gone three miles, she dropped like an overdriven calf by the side of the road and lay in the long, soaked grass. All she knew was that she just lay there on the grass, and she began to count the dead leaves that came floating down from a tree near. She had never before known how cooling wet grass was to a girl in trouble; she felt it through her frock, and she took some up and sucked the water from a leaf.

She had counted seventeen leaves, bright golden leaves, that fluttered down; then another one came, then no more. Alice turned a little and looked up the road. A man had just come round the corner, and he stopped suddenly

in the middle of the road. Alice wondered why the man had stopped, and how long it would be before he would begin to walk again.

Drops fell from the tree above her, and one almost fell into her mouth. She opened her mouth and waited for the next. She looked at the man in the road. He was walking towards her now. He carried a knotted stick in his hand, and his face was more beast than human. How different he looked from one of the sailors—the one that had held her down. She saw this sailor again quite plainly, a good-looking boy. She had begged him to let her go. She remembered begging, crying, even biting—there had been blood on his arm, and he had held her with the laugh of a spoilt child.

The man with the stick stopped in front of her and appeared to be lost in thought. His face in this condition looked so queer that Alice almost laughed. The man slowly unbuttoned his coat. What was he going to do? The others had done everything, nothing mattered to her now. A drop of water fell upon her nose, and she smiled. What was this strange man doing now? He had folded up his coat neatly, and now he laid it in the dry mud of the road; he was undoing a strap. Alice pinched her leg to see if it could still feel, and then shut her eyes.

Another leaf came down and then another—they were very heavy; they all fell into her lap—and clinked. She opened her eyes. They were not leaves at all but golden coins that this strange man poured into her lap. She could only smile and wonder what was going to happen next.

It was then that the man spoke. Was she a little maid again, late for school? And was he going to tell her the bell had rung?

‘ ’Tis all yours—ye be in trouble. *She* give it thee—let I tie it up for ’e, poor maid.’ The man spoke in a queer way as though he feared she might refuse to take the money.

Alice, still smiling, took her handkerchief from her pocket and gave it to her odd companion, and he, placing it on the grass, collected the gold again and tied it up in her handkerchief, and carefully put it into the very bottom of her pocket. He had kneeled down beside her to do this, and when he was sure that she had the gold safe, he got on his legs and turned a very ugly face upwards to the sky and shook his fist.

‘Now let she out if thee dare!’ he shouted; and added as an afterthought, ‘Damn theeself to hell!’

The strange man began to walk away, but he soon turned and came back to Alice. He had remembered that a calf, when it is down, has to be carried.

He took Alice up from the grass as he would have taken up a calf, and carried her along the road.

A farmer, driving a light trap, passed them, walking his horse up the hill that they were going down. This farmer knew the drover by sight, though he never employed him, and was for that reason his enemy.

‘Hallo—got a ’oman with ’e—when did pick up she?’ shouted the farmer, who liked a joke on market days.

‘Drown theeself in thees bloody horse-pond!’ growled the drover, and passed on.

By the side of the road were three cottages. The drover knocked at the door of the first. A woman with red arms opened it, but shut it at once in the face of the two wayfarers. The next cottage gave them a word or two, but refused to take in the girl. These two replies had sharpened the drover’s wits, and before his third knock he sat Alice down with her back against the gate, where she lay white as a ghost and with her eyes closed.

‘Young lady,’ he said, ‘found she in road—better take she in, ’er parents be rich.’

While he said this the woman was looking at Alice with surprised interest; then going up to her, she cried out:

‘Why, ’tis our Alice! How came she like this?—Lord, bain’t the maid bad!’

And in this way was Alice brought back to her mother’s house.

The drover, leaving the cottage, closed the gate carefully behind him. He knew what a bother open gates were to him and his cows. Sometimes he even went out of his way to close gates. As he walked along the heath road to Maidenbridge, he thought of a nice word or two should he meet the farmer out of his light gig.

CHAPTER XVII

THE VISITATION

Certain weeks passed, and on the seventh of October, at 7.30 A.M., just fifteen minutes earlier than his usual time, the Rev. Hector Turnbull chose his best razor. He possessed three, and he generally took one of them to the shop in the town once a fortnight to be sharpened. After leaving the razor, as a general rule he paid a visit to the bank. He now stropped the razor very slowly and carefully.

He shaved with even greater care than usual, going cautiously round a little red pimple on his right cheek. He didn't want to make this pimple bleed as it had done the day before. Mr. Turnbull felt like a man who had something to do that day, and he put a sort of fussy diligence into all his motions. Every minute or two he looked out of the window at the clouds. He felt his own bigness, his importance rose up within him, his chest expanded, and his deportment expressed wisely directed vigour.

Mrs. Turnbull had laid out ready for him, on the family bed, the clothes that he wore when he paid a visit to the bank. She had also placed a clean clerical collar, of the 'town and curate' cut, upon the dressing-table. Mr. Turnbull dressed, put on his carpet slippers, and came downstairs.

The great event of the day was the Archdeacon's Visitation, which was to take place at Maidenbridge. This important ceremony, as a rule, happened in the spring of the year. But in the spring of this particular year, the Archdeacon had, without any proper warrant or leave, betaken himself to the sunny lakes of Italy—he wanted to see the fire-flies. Besides, this year there was another person to be consulted about dates. Every third year the Bishop descended with the Archdeacon upon the assembly of Shepherds. This was the year of his advent, and what with confirming tittering girls and owlish boys, and sitting in lawn sleeves in his own choir, the Bishop could not arrange for his visit earlier than the month of October.

Certain tersely worded letters had passed between the Archdeacon and the Shepherd-in-Chief, and after some polite and dignified reminders, rather like the letters in the *Times*, to one another, they had decided that the seventh of October would be the best day to call up the 'blind mouths' and their dogs, the dogs being the churchwardens, that in most cases attended the Shepherds.

Mr. Turnbull looked at his son. His son, according to the eyes of the father, had nothing to do that day. He was just—there, in the room, sitting with a book upon his knee, looking into the garden. What could such a son have to do? With the father, with himself, it was another matter. And he raised himself in his carpet slippers and left the table before the breakfast was finished, even while Mrs. Turnbull was eating her jam. He crossed the hall with stately strides and went into his study to put on his boots. He chose the pair in which he generally creakingly celebrated the Holy Communion.

In another house in the village there were happenings. The usual time for awakening in this other house in the winter was 5 A.M. On this particular morning, the master having to go out for the day, it was necessary for the household to bestir itself earlier. At 3.30 Mr. Tasker was awake, and, without wasting any precious time by dabbling in cold water, he pulled his clothes upon him in less than five minutes. Then he banged into the inner room to wake his girl.

The child slept with her two almost infant brothers. She whom the dog had bitten slept with her parents. With one hand Mr. Tasker took the bedclothes and tossed them to the other end of the room; then he laid hold of the girl by one arm and a thin leg and threw her after them. He then went softly out into the yard to let loose his dog and to prepare for the milking.

It added, in a village sort of way, somewhat to Mr. Tasker's glory to be called a churchwarden. Yet he was not very pleased to lose a day from his pigs. He wondered how he had come to promise to drive the clergyman in his best light gig to Maidenbridge. It would look well—he felt this, as he tied up his favourite cow;—it would look very well to be sitting beside the parson, but the flinty roads were sure to take so much good iron from his horse's shoes, and it would be necessary to pay some greedy hotel-keeper threepence at least, even though he went to the worst inn, for allowing his horse to stand and eat the chaff that Mr. Tasker himself always carried.

He remembered, with a twinge of pain, while he milked, that it was the custom upon these occasions toward the close of the proceedings for the churchwardens to sit down round a festive board and partake in all friendliness and rustic love of a dinner, the lawyer of the diocese presiding. And for this dinner, without wine, the churchwardens were called upon to pay out of their own pockets the sum of three shillings and sixpence.

Mr. Tasker was a man who always kept his word, and at half-past nine, with a face shining after a recent shave, and black clothes shining in the morning sun, he drove up to the vicarage gate and coughed.

Henry, who had been set in the garden to watch for him, went in at once and called his father, whose feet moved with an 'I-tell-you-I-am-important' crunch upon the gravel. The vicar proceeded to mount into Mr. Tasker's high trap and carefully adjusted the rug round his legs, while the dairyman with a click turned the horse's head and drove down the road. Going along by the village green, they passed old Sammy, the drunkard, who touched his hat respectfully to the clergyman, receiving, however, no acknowledgment of his salute.

On the road Mr. Turnbull talked to his churchwarden about the affairs of the nation, and the lack of God-fearing people in the world. And the dairyman replied from his own thoughts 'that pigs were dearer.'

Mr. Tasker and his vicar were a little late, and the service that opened the proceedings had already begun in the big church. This service the churchwardens attended if they very much desired to do so, though they preferred as a rule a snack of bread and cheese at the 'Rod and Lion,' that was just round the corner near the harness shop and that sold the best beer in the town. It was there that Mr. Tasker retired to wait until the proper time for the reappearance of his vicar.

Mr. Turnbull entered the place of worship. The scene inside was curious. The front seats were filled with the clergy,—there were old dull Low-Church faces, young sharp Anglican, sickly priests dreaming of Rome, and hail-fellow-well-met Broad-Church beef-devourers of the middle school. It was a service that began with prayer. After that was over, the Archdeacon, an ancient fox-hunting ruffian, half-brother to Lord Bullman, began his address.

He explained, with a short cough, that 'My Lord Bishop' was there, and that it was meet and right and the bounden duty of all the clergy there present to pay their fees. That this most important part of the proceedings had sometimes escaped their notice, and that often the old lawyer was encumbered with the duty of sending out certain bills, in cases where one or two of the clergy had left their purses behind in the top drawer of the study at home! He then called out the names of those who were present and excused those who were not. After he had read the names in the same voice in which he called his dogs, he gathered up the ends of his robes and returned to a chair near the choir.

My Lord Bishop, leaving his chair, approached the pulpit. 'He had come to their town to meet them,' he said, 'six times, and he thanked God who had in His Almighty Goodness allowed him to come the seventh.' He then

proceeded to give, in a tired, far-away voice, a gentle lecture trying to explain to the clergy how to stem the current of the growing wickedness of the age. 'He wished'—he lowered his voice—'all to come together in love'; and 'our dear dissenter friends, too,' he added a little louder. 'He prayed for unity in the Church and unity in the family life of the home. He would like them all to insist more on plain Bible teaching and to try by individual visitation to bring the people back to God.'

A day or two after, lying upon his bed, the vicar of South Egdon read this address. He said to young Henry that 'his Lordship would have done better if he had advised his clergy to catch God and bring Him back to His people instead of whistling to the people to come back to God.'

The clergymen listened meekly, wrapped in the odour of gracious words. Then they all sang a hymn and were blessed, these kind Shepherds, with the pastoral blessing. They then adjourned to the town hall, the end of which was converted, by means of pen, paper, and a green table-cloth, into the office of the lawyer. Of the holy communion of fees the churchwardens partook; together with the vicars and rectors and rural and town curates, they presented tokens of a blessed understanding to the old lawyer and the Archdeacon.

The good Bishop, meanwhile, had retired to the drawing-room of his niece, a pretty dainty girl who nursed a pet lemur. She was the wife of the rich banker of the town. In a very easy-chair the Bishop talked slyly and tenderly about his new motor car that he had put up in the King's Hotel garage.

Inside the town hall, Lord Bullman's brother handled the clergy as well as he did the foxes. He made them pay for their run, and he got through them much faster than the lawyer liked: the lawyer's plan with a client being to blind his eyes with many sleek words, then turn him round and round ten times and ask him where the cat had run to.

In less than two hours the whole flock of black-clothed Shepherds were in turn lectured, robbed and turned out into the street to hunt for some convenient place in which to provide a hard-worked belly with sustenance. They had left their breakfast tables and smoking hot coffee quite four hours before. It was not their custom to go so long between meals.

The faces of the clergy, tinged in diverse colours of ecclesiastic manners, swarmed like carnival masks about the town. They were to be seen, lean and civil, buying tobacco from the hairdresser. The latter welcomed the Visitation as a day of gains. His smile rounded with pleasure as his

customers came in. On other days he saw them scattered here and there, one black coat and two black coats, one to have his hair cut, and one to buy four ounces of bird's-eye tobacco. The good barber knew well the tired smile of the curate with the old-fashioned bicycle, and the oily mouth of his motor brother. On this day of days, instead of floating down like leaves in early September, they came in parcels, four at a time. The following morning when the boy brushed up the shop, very reverend hairs were found by the bushel.

The genial atmosphere of the barber's shop exactly suited the curious make-up of the clerical mind. It could expand under the haircutter's scissors, and show itself friendly to the world when within reach of a glass case of pipes. In the eating-houses, matters went not so nicely. There the primeval instinct of caution predominated, necessitating thoughtful reverie and many mental changes between lamb with mint sauce and roast beef with potatoes. Besides, were not the waitresses rude, ungainly girls, so unlike the servants at home, and so very unlike the lady in her morning blouse who had poured out the coffee four hours ago—four hours of pained exposure to blows and fees.

The clergy in the eating-houses shuffled painfully in their seats. It was not easy to know exactly what one ought to do. Was it the proper thing to get up and say 'How do you do?' to a friend, or ought you to sit tight and eat your beef? You hear Mr. Freeman come in, sit down, cough, and order 'cold ham, cold ham!' And a two hundred pounds richer living than yours. And then you distinctly hear him send out for a bottle of bass. To the best of your remembrance Mr. Freeman was a temperance reformer. You wonder why you had ordered lemonade, why you hadn't sent out for a bottle of bass—that address of the Bishop's had made you feel so very young!

Even away from the main street there were clergymen, driven by the thought of the old lawyer's fees into solitude, or the companionship of baker-boys and little girls with hoops. Here the clergy walked shyly along, wondering about the words of the Bishop, and whether the parcel from the grocer had better be left at the cloak-room, or safely under the seat in the governess car at the 'Rod and Lion' inn. Among these last outcast wanderers was Mr. Turnbull.

After the service he had found Mr. Tasker and had been drawn with the dairyman into the net of the lawyer. When that was over the dairyman still clung to the vicar, hoping thereby to be provided with beef and potatoes. The vicar, however, shook him off at the hairdresser's, knowing very well

that the dairyman would not adventure himself into the sixpenny room even for the sake of a plate full of pure ox.

Mr. Tasker wandered down the street and waited for his clerical companion near the fish-market, where he watched for some minutes, with greedy eyes, a great cod. Mr. Turnbull took the other way, and arrived, unseen, at the ‘Amy’ restaurant with pink curtains and side tables. His affairs at the ‘Amy’ over, he strolled away, for it was necessary for him to await Mr. Tasker’s convenience before he could return home, and Mr. Tasker was bound by all the rules of the Visitation to attend the churchwardens’ dinner in the evening, to be held at six o’clock at the ‘Rod and Lion.’

CHAPTER XVIII

HIGHER FEES

Mr. Turnbull's legs, that bore without any weakness his sixty years—although their present after-luncheon inclination was to allow his body to recline—Mr. Turnbull's legs conveyed him toward the Town Gardens. Here, as elsewhere, a certain assembly of drifting clergy had been blown by the winds of the Visitation. There were also within the spiked gates young ladies, little children, and nurse-maids.

Mr. Turnbull moved along one of the more sheltered walks of the gardens and shamelessly stumbled upon the Rev. Edward Lester, who was sitting upon a lonely seat, very much at his ease, between two girls.

Mr. Turnbull did not take off his hat. The look of the young ladies did not warrant such a proceeding. It was necessary, however, to do something.

'Do sit down,' Mr. Lester said mincingly. 'These are two young people of my parish—one of the girls of our club and her friend,' he added in a lower voice to the vicar.

Mr. Turnbull shook their hands, at the same time getting very red in the face, for he saw that one of the girls was Alice. However, being grave and kindly, he sat down beside the other. Who she was, he did not know, but he thought he had seen her before.

The girls sat perfectly silent, like two little white mice disturbed at their play by an old barn owl.

Edward Lester, seeing things were not so bad as they might have been—after all, he had not been interrupted by a woman,—began to talk again, in not exactly his sermon manner, to his companion, this time Alice. She was quite recovered from her troubles, and was older, plumper, prettier, and dressed like a young lady.

Things always came to Mr. Turnbull slowly, but at that moment his mind jumped—it jumped to a sunny afternoon just before the Oxford 'Commem.,' forty years behind him. It landed him in one clear, daring swing of time on to the green lawns by the Cherwell, and it led him along by the river under newly budding trees, with his companion, young Rushbrook. They walked along beside the delightful river, and paused to watch two laughing girls playing catch with a penny ball near the bank. Sometimes one or other of

them would throw too high, and the other would lean gracefully backwards to try to catch it that way. The girls' skirts, under normal conditions when they were standing up, reached down to their ankles, but during the evolutions of the game of catch, a pleasant vision of a gracefully rounded leg, and even a sparkle of white, had sometimes appeared. The ball, having been thrown by an unlucky chance into the Cherwell, it was perfectly natural and right that Turnbull should fish it out again.

So far Mr. Turnbull had been danced by his thoughts, and at that tantalizing point they brought him back with a jump again to the present, and showed him his companion, whose serge skirt hardly reached her ankles.

The Rev. Edward Lester, having caught a glimpse of Mr. Turnbull's mouth and knowing that look, suggested that they might go and view the roses at the other end of the gardens. There were two paths. It was quite a natural chance when they came to them that Mr. Lester and his companion should go one way, and Mr. Turnbull and his companion the other.

The Rev. Hector Turnbull looked down sideways at his companion. For all he cared, the roses might have bloomed in Gilgil, for Mr. Turnbull sat down upon the first empty seat that was hidden from the world. If he could have seen through two rather thick hedges of box, carefully trimmed by the corporation gardener, he would have beheld Mr. Lester taking his place upon a seat exactly resembling theirs, with Alice at his side.

Mr. Turnbull's curiosity was the first of his needs that he always liked to satisfy, and, even upon this occasion, he began to ask questions. He set himself to find out all about the young girl who sat next to him, and who had started his mind travelling so far in the past. Her name was Annie, and besides being the niece of the small farmer at Shelton, she was the town cousin of the vicar's late maid, Alice, and it was with her that the latter was staying. Annie's mother kept a fried-fish shop near the great bridge at the bottom of the town. And Annie remarked gaily:

'You ought to come and see the fish jump up in the river after the flies.'

The vicar looked at his watch. Time had passed, but there was yet time for a little walk before the churchwardens' dinner that he had promised to attend with Mr. Tasker.

Human affairs vary. Our friend Mr. Turnbull, instead of, with a greedy hand, locking in his study drawer a fat dividend, was now wondering how he could prevail upon a young lady of nearly seventeen to accept a pound,

so that she might buy a new Sunday hat. Near the little narrow gate beside the river, Mr. Turnbull decided that the best way was simply to give her the pound-note, saying while he gave it, in a fatherly way, that he expected she might like a new hat with a feather of Saxe blue—the only colour that his fatherly mind could think of just then.

They watched the river a little longer, while a fat trout rose and gobbled up a little brown fly.

In the largest commercial room of the best hotel in the town, the churchwardens gathered for their annual dinner. They sat like gate-posts, painted black, very still and very silent, except that one farmer remarked to his neighbour:

'Going to rain, bain't it?'

And the other replied:

'No rain to-night, Master Williams.'

The old lawyer, that master mind who understood not Lord Bullman alone, but his daughters and his tenants, perceived one clergyman amongst the gathering. Raising himself a little above his chair, he invited Mr. Turnbull to say the grace.

Mr. Turnbull did not, for a moment, obey. Somehow or other, after the excitement of the afternoon, the proper and suitable grace escaped his memory. He could only remember the most simple form: 'For what we are about to receive——'

The dinner proceeded, the light of gratified sensation shining in the eyes of the eaters. Each farmer, working his jaws so well, carried with him the heaviness, the density, and the hungry greed of his fields. They were peasants, but peasants with the greed and cunning of the tradesmen. They bore the head of the shopkeeper, and the body and legs and belly of a field labourer.

Some of the sly ones, the long-heads and greybeards, with shifty bloodshot eyes, were more shopkeeper than rustic, and these were even bold enough to hold a kind of conversation with the old lawyer, who beamed upon them all.

'I lost sight of you, sir, up the town,' said Mr. Tasker to his vicar.

The proceedings of the day ended with this dinner. All the clergy, except Mr. Turnbull, had long before returned to their homes, where a kindly tea

awaited them, and a drawing-room, and a meekly dressed lady perhaps doing her weekly accounts.

Mr. Tasker and his vicar, the last of the black-coated ones, drove away from the town. During the drive home they had not much to say to one another. The vicar of Shelton spent the time in thought. Going down the hills, he remembered; going up the hills, he feared for his salvation. As the horse walked up one long hill, Mr. Turnbull carefully premeditated a reply with which to meet her question—an answer to her natural request as to how he had spent his day.

Sitting at last in his own chair—he always used the one with the low back—and helping himself to a shining onion, just taken out of the pure malt vinegar with a spiked fork, he said to the expectant Mrs. Turnbull:

'It has been a tiring day to me, my dear. I'm sorry to say the fees were higher, owing to a new extra payment. For some years it has been dropped, and now it is—woe to a poor clergyman of sixty!—now it is insisted upon again. I was obliged this time to pay a pound more.' Mr. Turnbull looked down at the half onion left upon his fork. He then glared at Henry.

'I am afraid I must deduct that pound from your allowance.' And the vicar of Shelton crunched the other half of the onion.

He had begun to give Henry one pound a quarter, because Henry rang the church bell, read the lessons, taught the Sunday school, cut the churchyard grass, weeded the paths, and read the Bible every day to a dumb imbecile.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DYING MAN

Neville desired very much to see his sister before he died. It was the thought of seeing her that kept him alive. He also longed to explain to Henry what he felt about the world he was leaving so soon.

'Upon the world,' he said one day to Henry, 'thought has written the word "man" in blood.'

'Thought and pain,' he said at another time, 'are the two terrible wheels of the world.'

Less and less, during his last week, did Neville cling to his old thoughts: they broke away from him like withered leaves.

'I have been too much of a mystic,' he said. 'I would like to throw myself upon a splendid hill and lie and bleach in the sun. I have lived behind the curtain of the Church. In there the light of Christ was dimmed. I would even now laugh, and catch joy and throw it into the sun. I would like to get again the joy of reaching down over the bank of a river to pick a purple flower.'

Neville talked strangely at times as the days passed, and the fever drew his life away.

'Perhaps, after all,' he said one day, smiling, 'Jesus may have been only a flower of light, a purple flower growing by the side of the river of life and loved by a tiny boy. Perhaps the boy who loved the flower was hated by the other children. They saw him one day stroking the leaves of the Christ-plant by the water's edge, and together they rushed out and trampled down the plant with their heavy boots, and they spat upon the little lonely boy and chased him to his home. And in his own home his mother beat him for bringing riverside mud into the cottage.'

Then Neville slept, and Henry walked home thinking of what he had said.

Nearly two months passed, and the ragged grey coat of autumn, rough and wet, covered the land. For almost three weeks Henry did not 'slack down,' as his father called it, to South Egdon. The reason being that Edith and the new servant, a sturdy maiden of thirty winters from the village, had

both caught influenza and were too ill to leave the servants' bed. Instead of waiting upon others they themselves had to be tended, and the doctor had a chance to tell his wife about the old-fashioned furniture in the servants' bedroom.

To act as nurse to the two servants and as a help in the house, Mrs. Turnbull had opened her doors to a large woman whose duty in private life was to sweep out the National School, and whose pleasure was to break, out of the vicarage hedge, sticks with which to boil her tea-kettle. Besides nursing the maids, there were other household duties to be done. Therefore it was needful, for the proper well-being of the house, that Henry should give his help.

He began at six o'clock by lighting the kitchen fire. After doing this he swept out the study, drawing-room, and breakfast-room, lit two more fires, laid the plates for breakfast, got in the coals, sifted the cinders, cleaned the knives and boots, helped to make the beds and looked after the lamps, and then he went into the garden to fetch the vegetables, and the large woman cooked the dinner. In the afternoons and evenings another long array of tasks was set before him, and he, with a quiet aptitude, performed them.

While he was busy, his thoughts were with his friend, and when, at last, the servants were better—it was almost December—Henry, fearing that he might be too late, hurried down the Egdon road. Upon turning the corner near Neville's trees, he almost ran into a lady, a lady who—he could hardly believe his own eyes—was mending the vicarage front gate. She had already, in a business-like way, fastened into the post two hinges to hang the gate upon. The trouble with the gate had all been because the hinges had broken away from the post. The lady had hammered them in again in a new place, and all things were ready for lifting the gate into position. Henry came forward, took hold of the heavy end and helped to set the gate up, and had the satisfaction of seeing it swing wide open and then shut again without let or hindrance.

Henry's first impression of the lady was that he had never before seen any one look so clean in his life. She seemed to him like a mountain pool, clear and deep, showing a pure stratum of shining rock, above which the water lay serene and deep—and alone. The lady was pale; she looked neither old nor young, and had, Henry felt, been always like that. Around her, and part of her, was the deep wisdom of hidden pools.

Henry had guessed who she was, and the two walked along a new-trodden narrow path to the house. She told him that her brother was in great

pain, and that the end was not far off. In the house she settled herself upon a chair with six cushions, and took up a little dark-red book while Henry went to see his friend. As soon as Henry was gone, the little book sank upon Molly Neville's lap. Deep within her she was feeling, touching, and loving the mystery of death.

Henry found Neville far worse than he had expected. He found him in torment. But he was still nobly aware that he lived. Pain, fearful grinding pain, was with him. He lay with his eyes closed, he could only move his hand to meet Henry's. For a while the two sat silent. Then Neville, with an effort, told Henry that his sister had been there three days. He had one trouble.

'It hurts her so,' he said, 'to see me like this, in pain.'

Henry bent over the white hand of his friend and cooled its burning heat with his tears.

On his way downstairs he met the housekeeper. She was dressed a little better than usual, but looked as though she had lost something. Henry opened the study door where he had left Molly. She was lying just as he had left her upon her store of cushions, fast asleep. Henry saw that her forehead was white and noble like her brother's. He quietly left the house, and, overcome by sorrow, walked back to his home.

Two days after this visit, at fifteen minutes past one, the vicarage hour for dinner, the gong reverberated, round, under, and about the hall chairs, certain overcoats, and an old silver dish for callers' cards. And yet Mr. Turnbull did not appear. For ten minutes the leg of roast sheep remained under its leaden cover, and Mrs. Turnbull and Henry sat in silence and waited. The warning click of the gate prepared them for the coming of the master of the house.

Mr. Turnbull's manner of walking up the drive showed the state of his feelings. If the news was a death in the village he crunched the gravel slowly and warily so that the whole of his foot, beginning at the heel, pressed the ground. When, at the village shop, the story that Alice had gone off came to his ears, he returned home putting little jumps and half leaps into his walk, rather like a young raw soldier changing his step. If Mr. Turnbull happened to have heard of the birth of a love-child in the village, the reverend gentleman's heels hardly touched the ground, although his stride shortened into the walk of an ordinary person.

After hearing the gate click, Henry watched his father coming round the curve of the drive. Mr. Turnbull held his umbrella by the middle, and tapped the gravel rather than crunched it as he walked. His overcoat was loosely buttoned and swayed behind him, and his knees, in his black trousers, preceded his feet. The same kind of a step carried Mr. Turnbull upstairs and then brought him down again, and placed him in the chair before the covered carrion. He looked at his son from under his eyelids, and cut out slices of flesh from the sheep's leg.

'Edith, some more potatoes for the master.'

It was just then that the news came out. The father looked at the son and said:

'I have seen Chaffin, and he told me that Mr. Neville has destroyed himself.'

Henry continued quietly to eat his dinner. Somehow or other this news took away, rather than increased, his sorrow at the death he knew would have to be.

Mr. Turnbull helped himself to the potatoes, and having a shrewd idea from the steam that they were hot, he expanded his story.

'Chaffin has seen the housekeeper. The woman thinks that his own sister bought the poison. Mr. Neville's mind was clear—he was sane. The doctor believes that he might have lived for months. A terrible disgrace for the Church.'

The potatoes were cooler now.

The figure about which Mr. Turnbull had spoken lay very still. Death was with him.

CHAPTER XX

GENTLEMEN

The policeman of South Egdon was a man wisely servile to a magistrate, familiar with the clergy and large farmers, rather inclined to be surly with smallholders, and a bully to the labourers. He had ridden down to the local station upon his wife's bicycle in order to take the first train to Maidenbridge, so that the coroner might have time to arrange for the inquest the next day.

That superior officer was a retired doctor who carried with him a bold look to the world and to dead bodies, and a modest fear of his two daughters. These young ladies regarded their father as a kind of black-beetle killer, and they always opened the windows when he came into the room. His pay from the town for his labours was Forty Pounds a year—and certain legal fees,—making up in all rather more than Fifty Pounds. This sum went annually to his two daughters as their allowance.

His daughters did not object to the source of the money, as long as they received it. Corpses cut down from bedposts, corpses fished up from backwaters, dead infants taken from sewers, shepherds from barns, girls from rivers, and old gentlemen from under trains, all generously helped to provide these young ladies with new hats. So, from their point of view, killing oneself or getting murdered became a deed of Christian charity. And an extra decayed corpse or two in the year gave them a chance to buy a king's box of milk-chocolate or a motor veil.

The policeman was shown into the coroner's office and explained his case. It was a serious case. One witness whom he knew very well, the clergyman's housekeeper, had told him that same morning that Miss Neville had poisoned her brother, to get his money. The policeman said he had searched the room and found no less than four little bottles of morphia tablets, one empty. He had taken them into the safe custody of his own pocket. He had seen the doctor, who had told him, in confidence of course, that he had not ordered morphia, but had recommended massage.

The coroner looked grave.

'Be careful in the choice of your jury, officer. You must get educated men, men who can understand what I say. In a case like this the common

labourer will not do—it may be murder. Will you kindly tell me—I hope I am not detaining you, officer——?'

'Oh no, sir!'

'—Will you kindly tell me, has this sister, this Miss Neville, a good character—is she known amongst the families in the neighbourhood?'

'From India, sir,' said the policeman, and having written his orders in a book, he departed.

The following morning, at ten o'clock, twelve men in their Sunday clothes were hanging about in or near the vicarage drive. They were all 'honourable men,' and they were there to view the body. Although they had a laugh or two at its expense, they were, in their bellies if no higher up, rather ill at ease. In a road beside a homely hedge of red berries, a man may have his jest about a corpse, but going right up to one, as they by law were forced to do, was another matter.

The jests of these men, under the trees and by the drive gate, were taken from the housekeeper's stories about her master. They were the kind of stories that the gentlemen of the jury liked, and they were passed to and fro by the tongues, and were pleasantly chewed by the foul mental teeth of the innkeeper, two dairymen, one coal merchant, a thatcher, a doctor's son who knew about horses, two farm bailiffs, and four farmers. They could all write their own names except the thatcher, and he could set a drunken cross by the name of Sir Hugh Winterbottom at the elections.

The memories of these gentlemen threw out, each from its own cesspool, many a droll tale of the housekeeper's. Their laughter was loud enough for Molly Neville to hear as she lay in her brother's study looking upon the pages of a book. She knew quite well that they were laughing about her brother.

She rested there, gathering up what strength she could out of the deep places of her soul, wherein there was no mud, to prevent her thoughts from sinking. Her eyes were strangely deep and luminous.

The merry jurors continued to walk amongst the trees in the garden, and to jest about the long grass and the nettles. Earlier in the day the doctor had been with the body. The sudden arrival of the coroner transformed all the merry jurors into servile rustics. Even the farmers and the merchant touched their caps as the grand official drove up in his motor.

The policeman opened the proceedings with a legal prayer to Pluto, the jury were sworn, and the largest farmer, the one who had killed the dog, was

created foreman. The gentlemen trooped upstairs, and each one passed by the dead body. The face was uncovered. They looked and retired, much preferring the journey downstairs. With a sigh of relief, for the worst was over, each juror sat down by the long table.

The doctor from the town was the first witness. Sometimes he played golf with the coroner, and now he was in a great hurry to get away, being busy with influenza amongst his customers. The coroner understood the feelings of his fellow-tradesman and brought his questions to a point at once.

'You opened him, and what did you find?'

'His lungs were, of course, very bad,' gossiped the doctor, 'but the morphia finished him—heart.'

The two gentlemen smiled at one another. The gentlemen of the jury smiled too.

'Did you order morphia?'

'Oh no!'

'Do you know who gave it to him?'

'Dear me, no!'

'Do you consider that Mr. Neville was in his right mind at the time of his death?'

'Quite right—yes, certainly, no mental trouble.'

'I will not keep you any longer, doctor; you are busy, I know—the time of year—influenza——'

The coroner wrote out the medical man's cheque, and the doctor's motor hooted away from the village.

'Call Miss Neville.' The coroner's voice was changed.

The kindly jurymen who expected a scene, or at least tears of repentance, were very grievously disappointed. Miss Neville appeared quietly in the room. To her the men around the table were shadows. She wondered what they all had to do with her brother.

'When you bought the morphia for Mr. Neville, did you know he would try to kill himself?'

'Yes.'

‘Did he tell you?’

‘Yes, he told me.’

‘And he thought it right that a clergyman should take his own life in this cowardly way?’

‘Yes, he thought it right.’

‘Why did he do it?’

‘My brother did not wish me to see him suffer any more pain.’

‘And you gave him the poison?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you understand that I might have you tried for murder?’

Molly Neville was silent, she even smiled.

‘Before I allow you to go, Miss Neville, I wish to say in the presence of these gentlemen that your conduct appears to me to have been very wicked. You knew that your brother contemplated this dreadful act, and, instead of restraining him, you even went so far as to help him to do it. You helped to kill him, and now you are bold enough to smile. You preferred that your brother should become a corpse, rather than that you should suffer from seeing him ill. I have considered your case. I might commit you for trial. As it is, I have decided to very strongly censure your conduct. One more question I must ask you, a very important one—when you saw your brother last alive, when you bid him good-night for the last time, knowing quite well what he was going to do, was he in his right mind?’

‘Yes.’

‘Thank you. You may go. I think I will see Mrs. Lefevre.’

As Molly Neville went out she saw the shadows by the table move; one coughed, one brushed its sleeve, one wrote or pretended to write notes upon three different sheets of paper.

The housekeeper came in. She had, like the old woman in the fable, only lived upon the smell of the bottle since Miss Neville had come there, and for that reason she would have been only too delighted to have seen Molly hanged. Mrs. Lefevre informed the coroner, somewhat breathlessly, that while she was dusting the sickroom:

‘I likes to keep it clean, you know, sir,’ she said. ‘And I heard the master and ’er talkin’—about killing ’eself. She says, “Be ’e going to do it or bain’t

’e? Take thik poison and leave your money to I.” ’

‘Did you hear anything else?’

‘She took me keys, sir.’

‘And when you went up with his breakfast the next morning you found him dead?’

‘Yes, sir. I know death. I smell it. I smell it sooner than most folks.’

‘Have you anything else to say?’

‘In the night when the wind rumbled, I peeped me face out, and there was som’at black like a wicked soul flies out of master’s window among the great trees.’

‘Let the woman go. Gentlemen of the Jury, I have a sad duty to put upon you. I have given a good deal of thought to this case, and I must advise you to give a verdict of *felo de se*. The sacred life that God Almighty has given cannot be taken away in this wicked manner without a punishment. The growing idea of modern free-thinkers that to kill oneself in cold blood is a right and lawful act, must be stamped out. I censured Miss Neville. I might have done more. I did not do so. The death of her brother will be her punishment—on her soul. Without her help he would have been alive now. I fear, gentlemen, that we cannot, by any stretch of our feelings, call Mr. Neville mad. Your verdict will bring sorrow upon the people of this parish, it will bring sorrow upon the Church—but we must do our duty.—Your pastor committed this terrible crime, not insulting his own soul alone, but insulting the Church, insulting the law, and last but not least, insulting God Himself.’

An hour after the inquest, when the coroner entered his own dining-room for lunch, his daughters opened the windows very wide.

CHAPTER XXI

‘OLD LANTERN’

At the sign of ‘The Puss and Bottle,’ the inn by the road to Maidenbridge, where the labourers of South Egdon used to meet in good fellowship, a discussion was going forward the evening after the inquest. The discussion was commenced by a thoughtful man, a tinker whose beer-can happened to be empty. It was necessary for his pleasure that it should be filled at the expense of some one else, as his pocket was as empty as his can.

This good man, in order to attract attention to his emptiness, declared to the assembled company that Mr. Neville was to be buried at the cross-roads in the true old Christian fashion, with a stake cut out from the squire’s wood rammed through his body and held and hammered there by the king’s hangman.

‘What do they do that for?’ asked a rather nervous ploughman.

‘To stop thik wicked parson from walking the village, sure, carter.’

Some one paid for the tinker’s pint.

In the parlour of that same inn three other persons were consulting. Two were well known in the village, and the third, the estate agent, had been seen there before. His presence now prevented the gentlemen in the bar from using their favourite national word ‘bloody,’ and caused them to say ‘damn’ instead, a word much more genteel and more fit for the polite ears of a land-agent.

This same agent had arrived there with instructions from the Church and from the squire. The sexton was there to give his advice, and the village undertaker, who was rather deaf, was there to take whatever might be said loud enough as his orders.

The sexton had been explaining to the agent the nature of a piece of waste ground close to the blessed field of bones. He advised that this last departure from the right way should be buried in this waste corner.

‘I knowed it would end like this, sir,’ said the sexton. ‘I seed ’e peeping through thik little ’ole that the nippers ’ave knocked out of vestry window the same year the old cow fell into ditch. Parson said ’e liked God’s air to get in—I could tell you some fine tales——’

‘Never mind about that now, sexton. Get your lantern and show us the ground you consider suitable.’ The agent buttoned his coat.

Leaving the friendly glitter and clatter of the inn, the three proceeded to the churchyard, where they were joined by the policeman. Just outside the churchyard there was a narrow strip of ground used by the farm-hands as an allotment, wherein they grew potatoes. The hedge in one corner between the potatoes and the graves had been beaten down by the boys on Sundays. The workers of the potato gardens had left a little corner angle of grass and nettles. Just at that point of the churchyard side there was nothing of any particular importance laid to rest. There were a few shaky wooden crosses marking the spot where infants were planted a few feet below the surface, those who died so young being carried to that corner in a bovril box and placed in a hole suitable for a dead cat. Over in the corner, on the potato side, there were nettles and long yellow grass.

After tumbling over and breaking down at least half a dozen of the little wooden crosses, the four men clambered over the already broken bank and stood together in the little disused plot three yards from the consecrated ground, that is to say, the ground upon which the magic feet of the Bishop—who bought his boots at Jeffrey’s in the Strand—had trod. The gaze of the four men, though they pretended otherwise, was directed towards the vicarage just across the road, and their eyes were fixed, even the agent’s as well, upon a glowing bright light that shone streaming through the black trees, making a burning pathway of light.

The men knew that the light came from the suicide’s room, where it seemed that all the candles in the village must have been lit. The evening being misty and the window of the room open, without a blind, the light, like a silver sword, pierced the outer gloom, as though it tried to cut a wonderful path in the heavy darkness that lay around the house.

The agent, thinking that the hour was becoming rather unsuitably late, hurriedly gave directions about setting up a wire railing, and marked the place where he wished the grave to be, in the Squire’s, instead of in God’s, acre. The funeral had been arranged for the next day. The newly appointed clergyman was going to be there, to appear, robed, and ready to be of use in keeping proper order, to watch the coffin put into the ground, and to keep his mouth legally closed all the time.

The next morning came, and amongst those who awaked that good morrow were the undertaker and his silent bearers. They passed along up the vicarage drive, that was now, by reason of the death of the master, almost

trampled into a proper drive-way. The funeral was to be as early as possible by direction of the new clergyman. He feared that a scandalous Unitarian minister, a man of no private means, should, in the malice of his heart, take a turn that way from the town and make a scene by trying to shout out a service of his own invention, that God Himself might hear above the noise of His own winds, and in that way the law and the devil would be cheated of their rightful booty.

The Rev. Edward Lester, for it was he and no other, through the interest of Miss Rudge with the patron, who was the new clergyman, waited at the gate, keeping an open eye down the road. He had risen early that morning, and had driven out from the town so that he might be able to see for himself that a proper way had been cut through the broken hedge into the potato garden where the new grave was.

A certain amount of talk, of house-to-house conversation, was caused by the strange fact that in the process of digging the grave very early that morning by the light of his lantern, the sexton, who was known as 'Old Lantern' to the youth of the village, had turned up human bones. What could this mean? Was it, after all, a mistake that this corner was outside the churchyard? Or had, at some time or another, the whole potato patch been blessed by some former holy boots made by Jeffrey's in the Strand, perhaps even a more expensive pair than the present Lordship could afford?

'Old Lantern' had declared it as his opinion to one or two persons—and his opinion was considered of value—that the bones he had cast out had once belonged to the flesh of a young man or a young maid. 'They were,' he said, 'snaky bones,' and though he had sent his spade 'crash!' through the skull, 'it was,' so he expressed it, 'a pretty one.'

Mr. Lester, being informed of this find, said very wisely that no doubt the same spot had been used before, probably for another wicked suicide. His opinion was confirmed by old Mr. Parks, who remembered, when he was a little boy, in the same year that the old barn was burnt, seeing the very same gap through the hedge, and even helping other youthful sparks to break it down again after the then clergyman's gardener had fenced it up. Old Parks affirmed that the bones undoubtedly had belonged once to a live maid: 'he minded his mother talking of it at Sunday dinner and saying, "What a wicked maid she were for drowning herself in Farmer White's horse-pond because she were expecting." '

The Rev. Edward Lester received the coffin at the church gates, and preceded it up the path in silence. A lady in black and one man with bowed

head followed as mourners, and passed in silence amongst the graves. Two short halts had to be made. One of the bearers had put his pipe while still burning into his trousers' pocket, and had to stop to take it out again. A little farther, near the new gap, another of the bearers caught his foot in a bramble and nearly brought poor Neville's remains to the ground before the right time.

Without any prayer being uttered, the body of Henry Neville was lowered into the ground to rest beside the crushed skull of the girl. The two mourners returned to the vicarage. Quietly and serenely Molly arranged her cushions upon her favourite easy-chair and lay back, her eyes looking wonderingly, not towards 'heaven,' but towards eternity. She had loved the silence of the funeral. It was to her more full of meaning than many prayers. To her the silence had been in itself a prayer, the deepest, the holiest, the most illuminating. A light, shining and clear, filled her heart. He was no more in pain; the end had come, the eternal silence was reached.

Waking out of what was nearly a trance, she saw that Henry Turnbull was still sitting there, sadly looking out at the tall trees. If Henry had not walked with her she would have been quite alone. The housekeeper had crawled under the dining-room table, declaring that she had seen two little black dogs run under the dresser.

Unlike Molly, Henry had felt the silence as an insult to the dead. He had read in it the hatred of 'the people' that stone to death the best lives amongst them. And he prayed that they too might be trampled in the earth where no bishop's holy boot had trod. He felt the hatred of the people upon the poor corpse, a hatred vindictive, savage, and cruel. Gently, and in quite an ordinary way, he said good-bye to Molly, and the sweet winter wind crept and sighed round him as he walked home.

The grave was slowly covered in, 'Old Lantern' pleasantly smiling as he slid the earth upon the coffin. Around the grave, the nettles and thistles, after having been beaten down by winter rains, were now quite trampled into the ground by human feet. There had been no flowers to waste and fade and die at this funeral. Neville had grown only nettles in his garden. The sexton cleaned his spade, using a broken bone; then, gently placing it upon his shoulder, he made his way down the road to his home, stopping here and there to enjoy a conversation with one or two doorway women. The potato patch was left to one inquisitive robin that had discovered a worm thrown up out of the ground.

Besides the uninvited robin, an unnoticed human face had been watching the burying; peering through the hedge next the road. When all the sombre actors were gone, this face and the dirty and ragged body that belonged to it broke a way for itself and shuffled up to the brown mound, that heaped witness that told the winds how it had been taken out and a man put in. The stumbling figure of the newcomer carried a heavy stick, and he also held a bunch of late winter roses tied with stolen twine to a root, shaped naturally like a cross, pulled from the vicarage hedge. The drover, more foul than ever, planted his cross firmly into the loose mould, and again shaking, this time with terror, climbed through the hedge. His protector had gone thud: who was there now to save him from ‘she’?

CHAPTER XXII

ROSE NETLEY

Mill Street in Portstown had changed its character, though Mrs. Fancy still lived there. The street was not the same, had not been the same since that night when poor forlorn Alice crawled to the empty seat under the tree. A social worker, a mild-eyed, merry young person, more determined than she looked, and always brimming over with hatred against any injustice to women, had penetrated to Mill Street and had even dared to enter the upper room of the boarding-house near the lamp-post.

She made it her business to visit certain houses to find out whether young girls were admitted to them, and if they were, Miss Rose Netley was inquisitive enough to want to know the use they were put to. She was quite without fear, and had been born with, or perhaps she had invented it for herself, an affection for girls. She went so far, quite out of all truth and reason, to call them all her sisters, even the fallen ones.

She was a perfectly normal young person, and nursed, girl-like at the bottom of her heart, a desire to marry. Among her men friends the one she liked and trusted most of all was a very quiet, harmless, bulky, simple-minded bank clerk who loved warm slippers and chess, was forty years old, perhaps a little German to look at, and at the same time one of the most sure and sincere fellows in the world.

Rose Netley liked the simple element in this good man's nature, but he, honest fellow, when he was with her, used to curse himself for being so big, and could never bring his simple mind to believe that Rose would take him for a husband. He was entirely on her side in the war that she so ruthlessly waged against the use that young maidens are put to in our rich towns. When she was up to anything dangerous he was allowed to follow behind, taking with him, hidden under his three-year-old overcoat, a heavy Indian club that he exercised with in the mornings. Once he had broken the bedroom door at his lodgings with a back-handed stroke, forgetting the long stretch of his arm. If it came to blows, Mr. Maiden could deal them, for he had a fine straight-forward swing in his arm, and a most determined, never-give-in look in his grey eyes.

While drinking tea in Mrs. Netley's drawing-room, Rose had told him that she was going to tap a new district. She had heard a girl tell what would

be called a droll story, about her ruin in a certain lodging-house near the lamp-post in Mill Street. As Rose poured out Mr. Maiden's fifth cup of tea she told him that she was going to visit that house in the disguise of a young girl out of work.

Mr. Maiden had heard of that street, and he advised his young lady to tell her story to the police. But Miss Netley, smiling at his dear simple-minded ignorance, explained that the police were just as likely to help her sisters as the Grand Turk, and it was her intention to find out what went on there for herself. Maiden had seen her go off like this—at anything—before, and he was well aware that if there happened to be a sister in hell itself, Miss Rose would try to find a way in, if only to ask the girl if she were happy. So he had to content himself with permission to wait in hiding near the house. Rose had found out that the room the girl had been trapped in looked out into the main street, and if things in there were very nasty, she told him, she would simply break a window and he would be sure to hear that.

The next evening, according to orders, Maiden waited near the chapel, with his Indian club stuffed under his coat, trying to hide his bigness as well as he could. He had not to wait long. Soon a remarkably little working girl trudged wearily by carrying a bundle, dragging one leg after the other, and looking about as though she were seeking some place to stay for the night. She stopped for a moment to ask the big Maiden whether there was a boarding-house near 'that was cheap,' and Maiden, as arranged, pointed out the one near the lamp-post.

He watched her go in, and then sauntered by smoking a cigarette, as any quiet young man might do after a hard day's work, but keeping the front windows of the house in sight. After a time it began to rain, and he huddled in an archway opposite and saw two sailors go in and one come out. The sailor who came out lit a pipe and spat into the road, and then he heard some one inside lock the door. He was just dreaming to himself about carpet slippers and a kiss, when smash! out came half a window from the upper front room.

Within a few seconds this crash was followed by another, caused by the Indian club falling upon just the place in the street door where Maiden judged the lock to be. The door burst inwards, and in a moment the club was at work at another locked door, and once inside that room it did its work just as boldly. The onslaught of the big Maiden was so overwhelming that in less than a minute, Rose Netley, trembling in every nerve, not with fear, but with fierce rage against men, was led into the street by her rescuer.

The doctor of one of His Majesty's ships was relieved of his usual idleness for some days by having the heads of four sailors to mend, such good work had the Indian club done.

This little adventure of the social worker's destroyed the trade of that house, and indeed, of the street, routing out certain ugly black spiders who blinked at the daylight and then vanished. Besides turning out the spiders, Rose Netley brought a new spirit into the life of the street. The girls began to hire bicycles and to ride out into the country, they were learning to be gay and to enjoy themselves. The landlord of the lodging-house, by a lucky chance, was able to rent his property to the Salvation Army, who brought music into the street. And the sailors, who always join in whatever is going on, performed wonders with tambourine and cymbals. As Miss Netley said, 'It is only blind drink and blind lust that works the havoc.'

There was one person who did not appreciate the change in Mill Street, and that person was Mrs. Fancy. She did not approve of the way the Salvation Army did their work, and worse than that was the fact that the social worker, who had got herself so nearly strangled at the house near the lamp-post, came again. She even, 'paultry thing!' went so far as to make friends with the girls in the family three doors away. And on Sunday mornings this social worker, 'she was certainly no lady,' would come down and take the two girls for a run in a hired motor car. 'Where do these people get their money?' thought Mrs. Fancy.

Besides these evil changes in the street there appeared a new kind of sailor; the other ones had followed the black spiders into new haunts. Mrs. Fancy could do nothing but look very unpleasant, and very well she did it, when she saw, as she often did, a former victim walking out to hear the band in the Winter Gardens beside a smart young gentleman with 'H.M.S. *Trident*' on his cap, who was to marry her at Easter. Mrs. Fancy piously prayed for her destruction.

Mrs. Fancy—good Christian woman—found life very dull when there was no sinning to watch, and no degradation and sickness and shame to enjoy. The only pleasure these sin-loving girls deserved, so she thought, was the short run they had before they made their last leap; that was their allowance of joy, then they could struggle and sink and drown at their leisure.

Mrs. Fancy's chapel had rubbed sin in, as the preachers believed, for the glory of God, contentedly damning the sinner with the rage of a parent. For the moment they were confronted with the horrible possibility, 'what would

happen if no one sinned?' The Salvation Army with its counter attraction of joy was fast taking away the members of the chapel congregation. They had begun to start an 'Army Picture Palace,' and were going to introduce to the people a surprising story showing the very exciting and dramatic pilgrimage of a poor, much-troubled man called Christian.

Mrs. Fancy and one of the preachers who was her friend talked the matter over together. This preacher's usual occupation was to cheat old maiden ladies into believing that he was a good gardener. Mrs. Fancy said to him, looking upward with a white smile, that she had dreamed the night before last of Miss Netley carried through a red-hot sky by three large black devils, like the ones in the chapel picture of the Broad Way.

CHAPTER XXIII

MRS. FANCY'S GENTLEMAN

One bit of luck was after all to come to Mrs. Fancy. It came in the morning, a week or two after Christmas. Mrs. Fancy happened to be peeping out from behind her curtains. She had not let her rooms for three weeks, not since a bold farmer had run away with his dairy-maid. And Mrs. Fancy had been praying, morning and evening, that God might send her a guest for her rooms.

She was just on the point of turning away from the window when she noticed a rather stout gentleman coming along the street. He wore a dark, sombre-looking overcoat and carried an umbrella and a bag. She thought there could be no doubt about it, that he had come from somewhere by train. 'Was he looking for rooms? And such a gentleman!' Mrs. Fancy's mouth watered.

And then he was stopping at her door. Mrs. Fancy, full of smiles, opened the door, and he expressed his pleasure and even stroked her cat. The gentleman informed Mrs. Fancy that his name was Roude, and that he wished to hire the rooms for himself and Mrs. Roude for three days. Mrs. Roude was to come by an afternoon train—she was a young lady—'we have not been married very long'—he coughed. A gardener whom the gentleman had met near the station had advised him to go to Mrs. Fancy.

Mrs. Fancy understood. She had heard about that kind of young lady before. And how good of the chapel preacher to send the gentleman to her! For some reason or other, after explaining about Mrs. Roude, the gentleman became rather flushed. Mrs. Fancy valued that colour at two shillings and sixpence a day extra, above her usual charges.

The gentleman went on to explain that Mrs. Roude had been staying with her mother for the day at a small town near by, and that he had come on first to try and find rooms for their little holiday. The gentleman said that he liked the peaceful look of the street—'it was so quiet'—and he did not wish for very expensive lodgings. 'The young person'—the gentleman coughed—'Mrs. Roude will like tea as soon as she comes. I shall fetch her from the station in a cab.'

This was the moment that Mrs. Fancy chose to name her price. It had been rising by leaps and bounds during the conversation. Mrs. Fancy said

that for the three days the price of her rooms would be one pound ten shillings—'she never let for less than that for such a short time.'

The gentleman took out of his pocket a very proper and religious-looking purse and paid her the money. Mrs. Fancy felt that for that moment the Lord had forsaken her. Why had not He told her, only just a little whisper in her ear, and she would have said two pounds. The gentleman's high colour, that Mrs. Fancy had so pleasantly noticed, was gone and had left him with a pale and even a bluish look.

Mrs. Fancy just stood in the passage a moment to see what he would do, and the gentleman, feeling that he ought to do something, carried his bag upstairs. After a little while he returned with an unopened paper in his hand. The wrapper he very carefully folded up and put in his pocket. That wrapper, had he thrown it into the fireplace, would have interested Mrs. Fancy. She had, however, the pleasure of seeing that the paper he read was the *Standard*, of the day before. The gentleman returned to his room again. Was it to read yesterday's paper that he had paid one pound ten shillings for her rooms?

Mrs. Fancy had to disturb him three or four times in ten minutes to see if the fire burned. The gentleman did not seem to get on very well with his paper. He turned it over and rattled it, she could hear that outside, and when she came in he was always looking at a different page. At last he was satisfied, he had found something. She could not help seeing, as she was trying to tie the curtain a little better, what it was. Mrs. Fancy smiled—a divorce case, with a clergyman as co-respondent.

The gentleman waited and read. The legal aspect of the sex question was really most interesting. He looked at Mrs. Fancy's clock. The hands pointed exactly to twelve. There was something wrong about that, the clock must have stopped. He could not understand the clock remaining in such an idle condition. He thought that clocks were always sent to the watchmaker's if they stood still at twelve o'clock. To look at that clock was to have come down in the world. Thank goodness he had a watch, a gold one. He now looked at that, his watch anyhow was going. It was almost time to think about walking to the station to meet the train. But first he must see Mrs. Fancy—only a minute before she had come in, careful woman, to poke the fire.

He opened his door and waited. There was no sound. He called gently, 'Mrs. Fancy!' A shuffle in the kitchen, was it the cat? 'Mrs. Fancy!' rather

louder this time. The figure of Mrs. Fancy appeared in the passage. Where had she been?

'I wonder if you could get us some wine, Mrs. Fancy, some port wine? I think perhaps two bottles of port wine.' And Mrs. Fancy received into her hand ten shillings for wine. She thanked her God for His infinite mercy, and asked the gentleman whether he would like anything else. 'Would they like muffins for tea?'

'I think I had better give you a pound, and you can cater for us,' he said.

Mrs. Fancy's joys were falling thick upon her. She hugged herself when she thought how thin was the partition between her own bedroom and the lodgers'. She was sure to be able to hear all that was said.

The gentleman put on his coat, looking round as was his custom at home for the clothes-brush. Seeing nothing of the kind, not even a proper hall table—there was no room for one in Mrs. Fancy's passage,—he, for want of anything better to do, looked again at his watch. His watch told him that the proper time had come, the right minute for him to go to the station. He began to shuffle about, timidly trying to find the door handle. Mrs. Fancy, who had stepped a little back so that she might the better watch events, came politely forward, opened the door, and let the gentleman into the road.

Beyond the Mill Street area there were shops. One or two of these were already lit up, foretelling that the sour gloom of the winter afternoon would soon change into brilliance. The gentleman moved along, walking rather on his heels. He seemed to be nervous. The high colour came in his face and went again, leaving him unnaturally pale.

Once, perceiving a dignified looking clergyman a few yards in front of him, coming towards him and walking slowly in the middle of the pavement, Mrs. Fancy's gentleman, seized no doubt with a sudden hatred for the cloth, dashed blindly into a shop, one of the shops to light up early. Arrived at the counter, he stood, not just then having anything to say. The shop, and lucky it was too for the gentleman, happened to be a tobacconist's. So no very great harm was done when he—his mind felt so queerly green—inquired whether they sold any warm woollen gloves.

Luckily, the cigar dealer with the gold watch-chain had once or twice before seen his customers on winter afternoons behave a little queerly. He had even once gone so far as to invite a gentleman, a retired banker, to snugly sleep under the counter, wrapped in a fifty-guinea fur coat, and with a great cigar sticking, like the funnel of a collier, out of the corner of his

mouth, a cigar for which the customer had put down a pound note, but had forgotten, on waking up, to receive the change.

In answer to Mrs. Fancy's gentleman's inquiry for gloves, the worthy trader replied that he had some special new brier pipes of a wonderful grain —'Lord South had only the day before bought three of them.' The dealer very much advised the gentleman to take one for two pounds; as he had only three left, and he went on further to explain that the particular kind of brier root out of which the pipes were made, had, alas, for the smokers, become, owing to the ravages of a certain little grub, as extinct as Adam. The gentleman paid for the pipe, thrust it into his pocket, and left the shop.

The train from Maidenbridge was due at 5.30. At the station human creatures in felt hats and furs were walking up and down the platform looking at one another, not very lovingly. One little old lady was sitting alone upon a seat. She wore a bonnet, and sat there a very gentle and kindly clergyman's widow. But to the amazement and terror of every one, she was talking to herself, quite loud, about a nephew who was wounded in the Great War. He had since, so she said, been exported to Egypt to ship dates to England.

When any one passed this widow lady, they very hastily looked in another direction, for fear that the rest of the waiting passengers might imagine that she was speaking to them. Not regarding whatever they chose to think or do, the old lady went on telling her dear nephew's story, quietly, pleasantly, seriously, sitting quite still, with her gloved hands in her lap and her rather small and delicately shaped head a little bent forward. Her voice was soft but extremely penetrating.

She was to all appearances the most harmless, friendly, and gentle of clergymen's widows, yet here she was, making a whole platform load of people uneasy, so uneasy that no one would go within four yards of her. Every one passed, curving, when they came opposite to her seat, outwards towards the line; while she talked quietly and quite reasonably—to no one.

Just as the lady was explaining how the poor dear boy had been left wounded at the bottom of the trench for nearly three days, the train came in. Taking up a little bag with a black tassel, she quietly entered a third-class compartment. Choosing a seat and putting her bag by her side, she went on with the adventures of her nephew in just the same tone, going through it all for the fifth time, addressing herself to a rather good picture of Old Sarum just above a lady's head in front of her, making the journey a perfect

nightmare to the other passengers in the carriage, who did not know which way to look—the nephew was everywhere.

A fair number of people had scrambled from the train, with the usual noise and hurry and bustle, amongst them being, and rather showing herself off, a young girl with fair hair. She jumped out, chaffing merrily with two soldiers. She was talking very loudly and excitedly, but no one took the slightest notice, because she addressed her remarks, far madder than the widow's had been, to the two soldiers and not to thin air. She was telling the soldiers, not at all privately, 'to stop their nonsense,' because her uncle, 'such an old dear!' was waiting for her on the platform.

It was then, the crowd having cleared a little, that the gentleman from Mrs. Fancy's saw the group, and was, most naturally, a little shocked. He had come to the station expecting to see a young lady alone. Why should we not say that he expected to see Mrs. Roude stepping out demurely in the same dainty way that one or two other ladies of his acquaintance would do, stepping neatly, with only just the smallest show of ankle? He did not quite understand what the soldiers were there for. They had, he could see that much, been travelling in the same coach with the young lady. The gentleman had seen soldiers before in his life—he had seen them in church,—but he was not quite sure what he ought to say, or ought not to say, to these two, one of whom had, at that moment, caught Mrs. Roude by the hand. It was at this juncture that the gentleman decided to practise the Christian virtue of patience—it was certainly the only virtue he could practise just then. So he waited, as an onlooker, to note what would happen next.

The girl had seen him standing, with his square-toed boots growing, as they looked to her, into the platform. Freeing her hand, she broke gaily away from the soldiers and fled—it looked like that—into the protecting arms of the gentleman whom she called her uncle. This performance of hers was not exactly, according to his idea, the way it had been planned, and from somewhere inside the gentleman uprose the unpleasant fear that Mrs. Fancy might be creeping about behind, and he entreated his companion to remember that she was Mrs. Roude. Her reply, 'All right, old dear!' though gaily and girlishly spoken, was not exactly reassuring.

Once safe in the cab, she became more docile and only laughed a little to herself, the effect of the soldiers' conversation in the railway carriage having passed off. At Mrs. Fancy's, things did not go quite so well. There was something in that good lady's behaviour that evidently amused Mrs. Roude. When Mrs. Fancy came in to clear away the tea, she beheld Mrs. Roude openly laughing at her; the rude young person! Her laughter was trial

enough, but after the laughter came Mrs. Roude's speech: 'Right-o, mother! I'll look after me old man; don't worry, mother.' And the young lady laughed again.

Mrs. Fancy possessed a sofa, and upon it she kept her best sofa cushion. When Mrs. Roude laughed at her, Mrs. Fancy looked at her sofa, and she was comforted. Her sofa was not intended for general wear, because one of its legs had become, after many years, a little loose just where it was fastened into the body.

Mrs. Fancy always made a point of telling her lodgers that one lady, a gentle, peaceful, quiet lady, a lady who never rudely kicked, could, if she felt tired, lie upon the front-room sofa quite safely; but that two ladies, or a lady and a gentleman, if they both sat upon it, even keeping as still as mice, the wounded leg would be sure to come off. All this Mrs. Fancy explained to her new lodgers, just as she always did, after tea. And the gentleman promised very kindly to obey her; but the lady, who used any tone rather than a refined one, laughed out at Mrs. Fancy, 'Furniture all right upstairs, mother?'

Mrs. Fancy left the room. She had never before, not even by her late husband, been spoken to like that.

CHAPTER XXIV

SOUND AND SILENCE

Mrs. Fancy valued her furniture. When she prayed for protection, she thought about her furniture. She had bought the greater part of it during the reign of her husband and Queen Victoria. She knew every piece by heart; she could trace them back to the shop, to the day, to the hour, that she had bought them. She could even remember the weather, and a little storm of rain that came on at half-past three just thirty years ago, on the day that she bought the rocking-chair. That was before the plush suite came into being. The rocking-chair was then placed by the window in the best room: it was now in the lodgers' bedroom.

The only matter about her furniture that changed in her memory was the price that she had paid; that price grew larger every year. When once an old-fashioned ware-dealer called upon her and asked if she had anything old to sell, she took him upstairs and showed him the rocking-chair, and she said that he could have it for nine pounds. The dealer fled the street and only stopped at last in the bar of the Commercial Hotel a mile away, where he demanded hurriedly a glass of rum and milk.

Once a rat had devoured a corner tassel of one of her plush-covered chairs. Mrs. Fancy went upstairs and had a good cry over it. She dreamed of rats, large brown rats, for six months. At last, in answer to her many prayers, her friendly chapel preacher, the gardener, saw the rat and chased it under some rubbish in Mrs. Fancy's back yard. There he kicked it to death in the corner of the wall. After which gallant deed he was compelled to borrow some blacking to clean his blood-covered boot.

Mrs. Roude's laughter worried Mrs. Fancy's nerves almost as much as the rat had done. The gentleman, when a little time ago she had taken in the wine-glasses, had politely told her:

'We shall want nothing more, thank you, to-night, Mrs. Fancy. We will be sure to remember to take great care of the sofa.'

Mrs. Fancy determined not to go to bed until her guests made the same move, and every creak and clatter, or movement of a chair, brought her back in haste to the parlour—to know if they wanted any hot water. Once, on being invited to come in, she was greeted by half an orange and a mocking

shower of naughty laughter. As she fled to the kitchen she heard herself called:

'Come back along, mother, and catch old uncle for a kiss!'

Such a merry young lady was Mrs. Roude!

Mrs. Fancy's worried state of mind continued in the kitchen. 'Her lodgers ought not to be,' she thought, 'like this.' She could quite enjoy, she felt that very strongly, the harm, the ruin that came to young girls by being caught in her spider's web, but there was no need for any harm or any ruin to come to her, or, what was more to her than herself, her furniture. Suppose they spilt a glass of wine on one of the plush-covered chairs? Suppose her new green table-cloth—it was, when she went in last, nearly on the floor—got itself entangled in the feet of Mr. Roude? Or what if the grapes were trampled into the carpet? Mrs. Fancy saw her thirty shillings dwindle, die out, become extinct.

Were they, these two lodgers, playing leap-frog? Such was the clatter, Mrs. Fancy imagined they might be playing anything! Whatever game it was—could it be blind-man's buff?—her furniture must of necessity suffer, because her furniture and her lodgers were shut up together. Some one, so the sound came to her, was running round the table, and some one else, rather more heavy, was stampeding after.

'Would he pay for all the damage?' Mrs. Fancy wondered. 'Oh, why was not the good gentleman, the kind and generous Mr. Roude, a working man?'

It was all very well, for the thirty shillings and for the damage, that he was a gentleman, but in her heart Mrs. Fancy preferred to see wives and other young girls dealt with by the lower classes, who are not in the habit of running round the parlour table after them, but prefer to attend to this unvoiced side of life in a more popular manner. Mrs. Fancy regretted that the young person who was now making such a noise in her parlour, could not be subjected to a little polite handling by a casual labourer after his return from the corner public.

'What would happen,' she thought, 'if Mr. Roude, with his square-toed feet, kicked a chair? Where would her varnish be?'

Mrs. Fancy felt half inclined to return to the fray. Then the door of the sitting-room burst suddenly open, and the young lady, covered with her own hair—Mrs. Fancy thought at first that it was the best yellow rug that she kept under the table by the window—darted like a bird across the passage and leaped up three steps of the stair. Alas, for the stair carpet! Then Mrs.

Fancy beheld the young lady take the rest at a run. Looking back, she called out, ‘You won’t catch me now!’ and ran into the lodgers’ bedroom and threw herself on the bed in the dark.

After her, on her trail, panted the gentleman. When he reached the room he lurched forward, clutched at the bed and the girl, missed them both, and fell heavily on the floor, where he lay still and silent.

Mrs. Fancy had never in her life felt a silence so full of meaning, as the silence that followed the fall. Nothing moved in the house, nothing moved anywhere. She could hardly at that moment believe that anything had been going on at all. Had she, after all, been dreaming?—she might have fallen asleep in her kitchen chair—or had her lodgers flown up the chimney like bats?

‘Could she reach her own front door?’ she wondered. The hour was not late. It was only ten o’clock. There must be people somewhere. All the town could not suddenly have become silent. That dreadful stillness could not be everywhere.

Mrs. Fancy moved. Never in all her life had she been so utterly terrified as she was at that moment by the sound of her own feet. Each step to the door was a frightful, living, ugly fear.

Once outside, she knocked at her nearest neighbours’. The first two did not reply, they were not in. At the third house there was laughter, the joyous laughter of an evening party. Mrs. Fancy knocked louder, and a rosy, round-faced woman, the mother, came to the door. Mrs. Fancy told her that ‘something,’ she did not know what it was, had happened to her new lodgers in their bedroom. ‘Could she come? Or if not, was there any one there who could come to help her?’

Her neighbour replied very readily, ‘that there was in her house, at that moment, a lady who was her daughter’s friend, and William, a sailor——’

William, hearing his own name, came to the door to see what he was wanted for. He was always being needed to mend something or other.

Terror communicates itself very speedily to human beings.

William was sure, by a sailor’s instinct, that the lady who had joined his girl’s party was the proper person to take command. He asked her to come, because, being a sensible person, terror of the unseen was not the kind of fear to touch her.

The appearance of Miss Netley at that moment was, even to Mrs. Fancy's mind, a relief: who but she could dare to face the silence that she left brooding in her house?

Even her Mill Street did not look the same. The houses seemed to bend towards one another, and the pavement narrowed and slipped as though it went downward. Mrs. Fancy felt the need of a few more lights. Worst of all, there was something queer about her own door, the step to it from the pavement looked red. She explained to Rose Netley that her gentleman and lady had gone upstairs to bed, and she had heard the gentleman fall. What had happened to the lady, she did not know, and she shook too much with the sound of the fall in her ears to go and see. 'Would Miss Netley mind just going upstairs?' The door was not locked. Mrs. Fancy did not wish to go in herself, she said, until they had discovered what it was.

Rose Netley found the lamp still burning in the kitchen. The sailor had matches in his pocket, and there was a candle upon Mrs. Fancy's dresser. Rose led the way upstairs. Once in the room, it was quite clear to Rose what spectre had been there. Mrs. Fancy's gentleman lay upon his face, a part of the counterpane that he had clutched at when he fell still in his hand. On the floor about his head there was blood. He looked dead. Miss Netley, with the aid of William, turned him over in order to make sure, and found, as she had thought, that he was dead.

On the bed lay the form of a trembling girl, partly covered with a blanket that she had pulled over her eyes. The silence had been with the girl as well as with Mrs. Fancy. It had hung about her like a black cloud, closing in nearer and nearer. She felt its dense folds penetrate the thin blanket and touch her face.

The girl, driven nearly mad with terror, stopped her ears as well as she could with the blanket. Rose, seeing how matters were with her, tucked the blanket round her more securely, and, telling her quite cheerfully not to be frightened, asked the sailor to take her up as she was, and to carry her to the neighbour's with orders that she was to be put to bed at once, 'and tell them not to ask her any questions.'

Miss Netley stayed a few moments longer to see if anything could be done for the man. In the meanwhile, Mrs. Fancy, not caring much for standing before her own door, had gone off to the nearest police station. And within an hour Mrs. Fancy's gentleman was conveyed, at her earnest request —'it would ruin her rooms,' she said, 'for the body to stay with her'—to the town mortuary, where it was destined by a capricious Providence that the

gentleman should spend the night sleeping by the side of a drowned fisherman who had that afternoon been picked up at sea.

In the presence of the men with blue clothes, Mrs. Fancy opened the bag that the gentleman had brought with him. He had—she had managed to find that out—left it locked when he had gone to the station, but he had opened it upon his return to take out a very household-looking corkscrew, that he so thoughtfully must have brought from his home. Mrs. Fancy's soul was shrewdly cunning, and the dead man having been taken away, her fears went with him. She began to see the matter in a new light. She began to reason that 'a gentleman who died a little queerly and suddenly, clutching at a bed,' might have relatives who would be ready to make it worth her while to tell one false story rather than two or three exaggerated true ones.

Mrs. Fancy was a widow, and all that the officers could get out of her were copious tears, and the much sobbed-out words, 'Poor gentleman—dear gentleman—kind gentleman!' and also a little help in opening the dear gentleman's bag. Mrs. Fancy took out a clean shirt, quite a new one, and a suit of pyjamas and a toothbrush and a razor. At the bottom there was a pair of socks, not quite so new, they had been washed; they were marked, and marked carefully and clearly, upon a piece of tape just inside the leg, that was sewed very daintily and with neat little stitches into the wool. Mrs. Fancy's tears did allow her to read the name, and she handed the sock to the inspector, who read likewise the very plain words—'Hector Turnbull.'

CHAPTER XXV

THE DEAD AND THE LIVING

Towards the middle of the afternoon of the day after the death, a grey motor car splashed up to Mrs. Fancy's door, after having first remained for quite an hour in another street in front of a doctor's house. The car contained the Rev. John Turnbull and his brother, Dr. Turnbull.

They were shown into the lodgers' sitting-room, where they sat down upon two plush-covered chairs. Their business with Mrs. Fancy lasted quite a long time, though her clock still pointed to twelve. The sudden death of their respected father had not been a greater blow than these two brothers could decently bear. They took it very bravely.

When the telegram came from Henry, who had received one from the police, the Rev. John was sipping his coffee in the morning-room of his father-in-law's mansion at Marlow. He was happily married. The edge of his plate was littered with certain contributions of ash from a very fragrant Turkish cigarette. At the same moment 'the dear girl' was pouring out cream for her 'wee doggie,' who lapped it up without taking the trouble to rise from his cushion.

The Rev. John daintily presented to the atmosphere, that was already pleasantly charged with the odour of a rich breakfast, a cloud of highly scented blue smoke, while he read the telegram. Just as he was reading it, the wee doggie, having lapped the cream rather too greedily, became suddenly unwell, and a footman was called to attend. How could that possibly be the proper moment to trouble the dear girl about his father? or about any father, whether on earth or in heaven? She was quite enough occupied by the sick dog.

To Dr. Turnbull the telegram came when he was in his surgery attending to a woman with a swollen neck. The woman had just explained to him that in her cottage she had to put a plank across the kitchen because of the water, and the landlord's man-of-all-work had told her 'not to worry' when she asked him to raise the floor. Dr. Turnbull told her the same.

'Oh, don't worry, Mrs. Scott, we'll put you right! A teaspoonful of this mixture night and morning, Mrs. Scott; only, don't leave it near the baby.' He always said that. How could he know where the babies lived? 'Yes—

very well—Mrs. Scott—quite so—the weather looks like clearing. A week will put you right, Mrs. Scott. Good morning!'

And the doctor opened his telegram. Shortly after came another from the Rev. John, saying that he would come down, and that they could motor together to Portstown. The first telegram had set the doctor's mind soaring like a hawk; after hovering for a moment over the Shelton vicarage, it swooped and fell upon the Will! How had his father arranged that little matter? he wondered.

Towards the close of the brothers' visit to Mrs. Fancy, the Rev. John, in a fit of sudden charity—this kind of fit came to him as a rule when he was in the company of rather younger ladies—promised, the generous feeling so rose in his heart, to pay Mrs. Fancy's rent for the current year. He must just then have felt very strongly about the hardships that poor landladies have to bear.

'I could always see your dear father was a gentleman.' And Mrs. Fancy put the whole of a musty handkerchief to her eyes.

At this inquest—the doctor said 'there really need not have been one'—nothing disturbed the jury. It was a case, quite a natural one, of an old gentleman dying suddenly of heart failure. He might just as easily have died in his pulpit. What a kind old gentleman he must have been! He rescued a young girl—the doctor, in his evidence, said that she was too ill to attend—from two wicked soldiers. Mrs. Fancy's friend, the gardener-preacher, had seen this at the station. He had taken her to his own lodgings in a quiet part of the town; he had even let her rest upon his own bed, and had gone upstairs himself, good kind clergyman, instead of sending the landlady, to see if she were rested, in order, no doubt, to provide a more proper accommodation for her for the night. Just as he had asked her how she was, he had fallen down stone-dead by the bedside. Really quite a sad story!

Upon reading the account of their vicar's death in the weekly paper sent out from Maidenbridge on Thursdays, the Shelton people felt that their clergyman had really died very comfortably, doing, as he had always done there, quite the proper thing. Had they been told the truth, they would not have believed it. How could so mad a folly have seized so good a man? What could compel him, at his age, to dance round tables in the wake of a chit of a child only just seventeen? What could a gentleman with his money want with her, when he could at any moment go about with real ladies? If any item of the truth did tap at their minds, the villagers packed it off at once. They believed that a gentleman would treat that kind of matter, on the

whole, just as they would, and certainly a rush upstairs was not the way a working man would do it, or the way a poor girl would expect him to do it.

The local paper sympathized very deeply with the bereaved family. 'It was a sad ending,' so the writer said, 'to the pastor's well-earned holiday in town, where he had gone to do a little shopping after his tiring Christmas duties.'

At the inquest Miss Netley told the plain truth, as shortly as possible, as to how she had found the body. She might have told a good deal more as to the condition in which she had found the hidden Annie. There was, she knew, one thing to be said for Mrs. Fancy's story, and that was, that it saved the girl's reputation as well as the clergyman's. Therefore Rose, who knew the world, allowed the matter to rest as it was, and quietly arranged that Annie should return to her home at Maidenbridge, the next day, under the care of Mr. Malden.

The body of Mr. Turnbull was removed from the honest though silent company of the drowned sailor, and was conveyed with all the proper and lawful ceremonies to Shelton vicarage. There the remains waited, caring nothing at all where they went next.

Mrs. Turnbull had, that very morning when the news came, been thinking that the right time was nearly come for making marmalade, an employment that, though it came second to the making of her jam, was none the less delightful to her. And how her husband used to eat it! The proper kind of orange, the Seville, was—so her grocer's man who came for orders from Maidenbridge told her—on the way, and the stores would shortly be able to send her, he promised, at the lowest price, six dozen of the very best, —'and, madam, would you care to look at this sample clothes-brush?'

It was a good chance, as he was away, for Edith to sweep out the corners of the master's study and to clear away the old *Standard* newspapers. 'They would be wanted,' the mistress said, 'to light the fires in the drawing-room.' Mrs. Turnbull was very much upset—she had thought about it all night—because her dear husband had gone off, in his hurry to catch the train, with a new unaired shirt in his bag, a shirt that she had never marked! What had made him, generally so fearful of colds, seize upon that particular garment? And why had he sent her away—she always liked to help—while he packed the bag himself? Suppose that anything should happen while he was away?

The train that bore the Rev. Hector Turnbull's remains to Tadnoll, the local station, also conveyed Miss Annie Brent to Maidenbridge. The girl sat in the corner of the carriage, a limp creature, with all her colour gone. The

kind of self that she had become in her month or two of dissipation was in hiding. Her late shock had, for the moment, taken it away.

Before the train had moved out of Portstown, Malden was deep in his paper, following what was to him the most interesting subject in the world, a chess problem. All at once he remembered that he had a girl in the train. All girls were to him children; he remembered that he ought to make this girl happy. Children are created to play, and, of course, must eat. He was sure of that. And they ought to be sent to bed at a proper time.

What a brute he was not to make this child in the train happy!

Annie was quite alarmed by his rush at the carriage door; the guard was waving his flag. On the platform, Malden pounced upon an extremely small boy who sold chocolate, and he hurriedly purchased five shillings' worth. Jumping in again, as the train moved, he poured the whole lot into her lap, much as the drover had poured gold into the lap of Alice.

This unexpected shower of sweets quite restored Annie's inner girlhood, and a share of her old gaiety returned to her. Before they were half the distance to Maidenbridge, Malden was explaining to her how to play chess, and he very much commended the way she understood him. The other passenger in their carriage, a minister of religion, was quite sure that Malden was trying to seduce a young servant-girl he had caught on the way to her first place. As to Malden, he liked the young girl very much. She made, now and again, such quaint, shy remarks, remarks that came to him like a squirrel's rustles in the boughs; though he felt that amusing her was rather like holding an October buttercup under a child's chin.

She was, of course, a crude half-made creature, who always thought in the plain terms of the mob, the way, indeed, that most people think; but to be able to understand chess by means of half an envelope with screwed-up little bits of paper for pawns, showed a certain amount of adaptable genius. There was in her a chance for better things. Malden felt sure of that. If she could enjoy chess in the train with him, a big fellow, old, and not exactly handsome, she had it in her also to enjoy a great many other harmless pleasures, and might in the end come to see that the sun gives wonderful colours to the earth, and that a child of the world can, if it likes, dance in the colours.

On their way through the streets of Maidenbridge, Malden told her stories about his own adventures. He could remember, he said, what he did when he was a little boy. Once on his birthday, he was just six, he fell into the river. He had seen, he remembered it quite well, a wonderful stone

glittering and shining at the bottom. It was the most delightfully glowing stone, and leaning forward he had just comfortably rolled in.

When they arrived at Annie's fried-fish shop, he had done things for Miss Annie. He had entirely changed the light of the garden of her thoughts, that mystic garden of light or darkness that surrounds every human creature. Malden had driven away from her garden that ugly thing with the tusks and the tail, and the merry sunlight of a girl's forgetfulness blotted out the path that it had made through her daisies.

She ran into the house and took up again what she had not touched for two or three months, a silk blouse that she had begun to make for herself.

CHAPTER XXVI

MEERLY HEATH

Within a tiny cottage on Meerly Heath, about three miles from Shelton and one mile from any other house, Molly Neville was making tea for herself and for Henry Turnbull, who had that afternoon called upon her.

Soon after her brother's death, she had collected all the little odds and ends of property that lay about in the vicarage, and, together with what was in the bank, bought an annuity, receiving therefrom the sum of sixty-five pounds a year, With this income of about one pound a week, she retired to the heath cottage. Henry giving her all the help he could, she soon got the cottage into liveable condition.

While with Molly, Henry's troubles, that clung to him elsewhere, fled. She had about her a stilling atmosphere of absolute contentment. It was not by any means the contentment of one who has taken his neighbour's ox, and, after shutting his own gate upon the beast, returns to his fire, stretching out his legs at ease. Molly's was the contentment of one who saw a shining path to follow, and found within it more and more delight.

When near her, Henry felt other realities, other truths, other joys, than any that he had ever before beheld. There was about her a clearness of effect like the delicate curve of a snowdrift. The clear brightness of her pathway made it impossible for her ever to lose the way. If the brute passions of men ever crossed her light, she looked right through them, and her light shone still.

Henry was delightfully at his ease with her, and loved her cheerful serenity. He knew that nothing in the world could ever make her different. He sat with her, enjoying every tick of the clock, with the background of the heath and the near approach of his lonely walk to enhance the lamplight and the warmth. Henry lingered with her and listened to the wind moaning about the cottage, and smoked cigarettes. He was as happy with her as he had been with her brother.

He was trying to prepare her for the inevitable rudeness of the people, a rudeness that might, at any moment, become persecution. She would most likely have to put up with it from the two villages. They had already begun to talk of her living in that cottage. She had felt a warning, too. She expected that those shadows round that table, those shadows whose questions she had

answered, would encircle her again. She feared that they might surround Henry as well. She knew how the snarling dogs of public opinion could stretch their foul jaws to bite any who offended them. Unluckily Henry and she belonged to the type that do offend the people.

'I'm going to live in this cottage. There always has been a witch here.' Molly knew as well as Henry that she was putting herself into a sort of danger, and that she would most likely be hooted at and even stoned by the ill-mannered, spoilt children of the two villages: these little amusements of the people not being as extinct as our gentle reformers seem to think them.

For the time being, the villagers had lost sight of Molly in the excitement of the change of vicars. She had, while the people were so absorbed, slipped into that little cottage on Meerly Heath, that so exactly suited her. How long she would be permitted to remain there with sound windows, she did not know. If the people thought she had come down in the world and was without friends, they would soon proceed, according to their well-established custom, to cast mud, and to hide sharp stones in the mud.

She felt them coming with their sly lying tongues, their almost impossible ignorance, and soon their open insults. She knew how they would delight to cast her at the feet of the new clergyman, an offering of human flesh to their god. She might then become his slave and help him in the righteous cause of keeping the people down. The people preferred things like that. They liked to know how hard the rich worked at keeping them down. It shows what fine fellows the rich are, and how brave!

Why should this lady stay alone and read, and not even once put her white ringless hand into their mud-pie? Let her come out and go round collecting for some charity: the people love that kind of beggar. Why does not this lady do her proper work? What right has she to live alone on Meerly Heath with her money? Was it not her business in life to help the Church and to make clothes for their children?

'Can you depend upon the lady who owns your cottage?' Henry asked.

Molly replied that she did not know the owner of the cottage, she had made arrangements about going in by post. But she understood from the small heath farmer, who knew everything, that the owner of the house, Mrs. Netley, used formerly to come down there every summer from Portstown, but that Miss Rose had told him when she was last that way that she was much too busy to ever think of a holiday, and that was the reason, no doubt, why the cottage was to let. Molly gathered, she said, from the talk of the

farmer that the mother and daughter were not the kind of people to listen to the complaints of the villagers even about a supposed murderess.

Henry had walked over to see Miss Neville on the afternoon after his father's funeral. He was glad that his father was dead. After the funeral he could not help feeling a longing for clean air, so he had taken his stick and had gone out on to the heath.

A little later at Shelton vicarage, when the Will was read, the two elder brothers looked blank. The Rev. John had given much thought to this matter. What he had expected his father to leave was, at the very least, Four Thousand Five Hundred Pounds. It turned out to be only Three Thousand Eight Hundred. His father had spent money. How had he spent money? He had dipped his hand into his capital and had taken out, once or twice, a big plum, and these plums had certainly not been handed to their mother to make jam of. Whom had he given all that money to? Not to the S.P.C.C.—surely it could not have been that? Was it worse than that? The Rev. John was aware that only a certain kind of curate could have a certain kind of pleasure without giving plums for it. Older gentlemen had of necessity to buy what they enjoyed.

CHAPTER XXVII

MR. DUGGS COMPLAINS

Walking along to the church, before that hour of reckoning, the Rev. John had had certain fears. In the merry cage of the Rev. John's mind there were divers little whistling robins that led him sometimes a pretty dance. But their antics were his own affair, whereas in the matter of fathers, the Rev. John's ideas were very pronounced. He allowed them, these fathers, a certain latitude at Oxford. They could, in those old days, if it pleased them, loiter for an hour or two on their way to college from a lecture, and they might sometimes be permitted in the Lent term to visit queer addresses in the town. One visit, with the expenditure of five shillings, should provide them with at least a dozen different stories to boast about in smoking-rooms afterwards. But when they had children of their own it was the proper time, the Rev. John thought, to give up all that, and instead, quietly, peacefully, and surely, to round in the belly before the ever-recurring roast joint, and to learn, from long sitting at it, to eat home-made jam.

'Capital,' the Rev. John believed, should come next in the celebrated Thirty-nine Articles to the one about God, and should be looked upon and learned by heart with all the proper reverence of a good-humoured sinner. And what, after all, had fathers to do with anything else?

And then came his fears.

Was that short holiday after his Christmas duties, during which he met the girl Annie, the only trip of the kind his father had taken since the Rev. John had last seen him safe at home? As he thought about it, the funeral procession had turned the corner by Mr. Hodge's house. He was a retired dealer in cattle. The blinds were down. Mrs. Hodge liked to show a proper respect. The Rev. John caught a passing glimpse of the head of the general servant peeping round the corner of one of the blinds.

Since his marriage the Rev. John was compelled to be occupied, rather too much occupied, with 'the dear girl' and her affairs. He had not had the time to notice the doings of his father. He did remember hearing, however, that his father had been to London two or three times about his teeth. He had felt at the time that his father was involving himself in needless expense, and that his old false teeth ought to have lasted out his day—which, due praise being given to the dentist at Maidenbridge, they really had done.

The moving of the procession took time, and the Rev. John could recall certain things. He remembered once, while walking through Maidenbridge with his father, he had noticed, with a certain surprise not unmixed with apprehension, and a kind of 'what will happen if he does it again?' feeling, that his father's glance had gone upward to a window out of which leaned a servant-maid, to catch, no doubt, poor, hard-worked girl, a whiff of afternoon air. Seeing Mr. Turnbull looking up at her, she actually had had the cheek to smile. There was nothing in her smile. It might have been a prime minister's. His only suspicion was, that his respected father might, before then, some time or other in his already quite long life, have looked above the ground-floor level for smiles! The son knew the danger of looking at windows. Why had not his father directed his gaze somewhere else in the street?

The Rev. John had not suspected any very heinous crime about the money. He knew his father's habit was always to keep a balance of Forty-five Pounds in the bank. Even if the teeth had been rather a trouble—but why a London dentist?—it would only mean that, written in a neat, bank clerk's hand, a balance of Thirty-five Pounds would be set at the top of a page in his father's bank-book.

Passing the village shop—the blinds were down there too—the Rev. John decided that the holiday at Portstown might have been an isolated instance of his father's flight to sin. Virtuous John bethought him of arguments concerning abandoned young girls, old in sin, who waylay nice old clean-shaven gentlemen, and pull them along by their coat-tails into some neighbouring night-club, and there, in the full bright light of electricity, wickedly rob them of their characters and their gold watches.

The Rev. John was not a sorrowful figure even then. If it were only a matter of just a few pounds, no more than a slight difference on the wrong side in the usual bank balance, the good-natured John would forgive the rest. He felt, himself, the possibility that home-made jam might, in some seasons of the year, taste a little sour. It was, then, only just this one doubt, this one hint at Portstown, that was all the trouble. Why then, by all means, let the matter drop.

The Rev. John's mind had hinged itself, during that homely walk, rather too long upon the topic, whether or not his father had done it more than once. It was the kind of subject that he could not very well dismiss from his thoughts, and naturally, during that walk there was nothing to interrupt the decent regular flow of his reasons, that threw light, as their custom was, on one side and then on the other side of his doubt. The Rev. John wanted to

leave it at that, at the window, or better still, at the dentist's. It must all come out when the amount of money that he had left was known. If the money was any less than John knew it ought to be, that simple fact would prove that the servant girl had been a true sign, a sign that he who knew the world ought to have heeded at the time. If, on the other hand, the money was all there except a pound or two, it would show that his father had only looked up, perhaps, because he wished to sneeze.

Before being called in to take up their load the bearers had stood in a row, very meek and harmless, against the vicarage wall. They were dark-clothed, nervously afflicted men, standing ceremoniously with their backs almost rubbing the stone wall. The people of the village watched them, to see, no doubt, as though any one could not guess, what was to be their next move. A whisper came from a little child:

'They be the bearers.'

This child's private knowledge very properly gave her the right to know what they were. She had seen her father, a poor widowed man with a black drooping moustache, amongst them, and she had felt the household trouble that her sister, who was lame, had had that morning to contend with, in going from house to house to borrow his clothes, having to take a coat here and a pair of trousers there, and a hat much too big from old Jonner. If she failed to collect the proper broadcloth, in what other way could her father earn three shillings and sixpence, the price of an adult bearer? And how could he without that three shillings and sixpence pay off the debt that he owed to the landlord for beer?

The people and the bearers had been looking at each other for about an hour when a black figure, in a high hat, arrived at the vicarage gate. The row of men shuffled shamefacedly along the drive to commence the walk that was to give the Rev. John such beautiful thoughts.

In a country village the proper pace to walk at a funeral is set by the bearers. A hearse is almost unknown. The distance being two or three hundred yards from the vicarage to the church, the bearers intended to take their time over it. There was, indeed, no need for them to hurry. Their pay for that day, at least, was assured to them, and after all was said and done, Mr. Turnbull was not so heavy a weight as a sack of beans that any one of them could carry up the eight steps of Farmer Dane's granary stairs. The bearers saw that their duty to their God and their duty to themselves were in perfect harmony. They could, at the same time, please religion and take their

walk easily, enjoying themselves, while they gave the simple people of Shelton a longer treat than they had expected.

The last bearer on the left-hand side of the dead, just in front of the Rev. John, had taken the precaution, since his coat was his own, to run his thumb over the bottom of the coffin as it rested upon the two hall chairs, so that he might prove to himself that the varnish did not come off. He had been caught like that once and had never forgotten it. Had it been any other of the bearers who dared to test in this rude way the workmanship of the undertaker, who had himself given this elegant piece of furniture its coat of varnish, he would have been, more than likely, sent about his business. But no one could remember a Shelton funeral without this particular bearer being present. Unless he were ready with his strong right shoulder, it almost seemed that Death himself would not have dared to enter the village.

This man's name was 'Duggs.' He worked as a labourer upon one of the large farms, but his fancies led him to other tasks as well. He was the best man in the village at skinning a horse. And in all the countryside no one, except Mr. Tasker, understood pigs, their manners, and customs, and life history, better than he did. When an old blind cow was lugged out of a ditch by the neck, Duggs was there to help. And when the cow was cleverly strangled in the process, it was Duggs who cut its head off, to bleed it, with his own pocket-knife.

'It must have been only once,' the Rev. John thought at that moment. And from a dull depression his mind glided imperceptibly into gladness. His pace unthinkingly increased. He was beguiled by his pleasant conclusion into looking, not at the back of Duggs, but at the sky. Unwittingly, the Rev. John dragged his mother too near the procession. She, poor lady, saw nothing. Then he realized, his wits returning to him, that he had kicked something with the toe of his boot. What he had kicked, was Duggs. Walking all at once faster than he had any business to do, faster than any proper mourner would have done, he had kicked the right ankle bone of Mr. Duggs with a sharp tap, and the Rev. John's boot was none of the smallest.

This unforeseen incident was one of those rude little hits that life gives when we least expect them, turning us from calm, quiet, steady Christians into outrageous and blood-thirsty Turks! It was just the kind of untoward incident that ought not to have happened at that moment when the strained gravity of man was performing wonders. That kick ought to have found a more proper home in the world. It ought to have been born and bred and delivered in New York or Bombay. Anywhere except just outside Shelton churchyard.

Mr. Duggs could not tell who had kicked him. It was quite impossible for him just then to look round. Mr. Duggs was not used to that kind of treatment at his funerals, and all Shelton funerals were his. He would have as soon expected to be kicked by a skinned horse.

'Why, they might have upset,' so Mr. Duggs, in his black coat, expressed it at the inn that evening, 'the whole box of tricks.'

One impossible act brings forth another. Never before in the local history of funerals had the bearers dared to make the smallest sound, but with the pain of that kick still ringing in his ankle, Mr. Duggs emitted a grunt, a gruff, ugly, unmistakable grunt, the meaning and sentiment of which was clear to all, the sound coming, as it well might, from the very bottom of his boots, where the evil deed had been done. In his mouth it became a distinctly uttered 'Damn!'

Even though the hidden rumblings of his rage crushed the word a little, the immortal English 'damn' was quite a fact to everybody near. 'What,' the people wondered, 'could be the matter with Mr. Duggs that he should grunt out, within ten steps of the church porch, and within ten paces of two clergymen, one inside and one outside a coffin, the word "damn"?'

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE WILL

The odour of the drawing-room of the Turnbulls' residence was not so marked as that of the dining-room. There was, if you liked to notice such things, a certain musty scent hovering about the chair with the covered back, in which the so lately buried master used to stretch his legs after supper. There was likewise a sort of woolly, clammy, pink-stuff odour that hung about the work-basket and the little side-table on which Mrs. Turnbull kept her mending.

She was now there, sitting beside her work-basket in her drawing-room, with her two elder sons. The state of her mind was a blank. She hardly knew what had happened. So many days had she sat at her end of the table and watched—Mr. Turnbull had had the lamp so moved that she could see him—the coming and going of his knife and fork, and the regular tipping forward of his teacup towards her. She had become so used, so settled, to his table manners, to his study look, to his bedroom fancies, and to the Sunday prayer, that she expected the appearance of these signs and wonders to last for ever. It had never occurred to her—how could it?—that such a regular exponent of the art of eating could ever die. She had seen him so often go to funerals, with the words 'I have to take a funeral this afternoon, my dear,' and the return up the drive from his church very hungry for tea.

During the Rev. Hector's time at Shelton there had been a fair number of these natural occasions. Once Mrs. Turnbull—it was the black-currant season—had almost sent down a wreath out of her greenhouse, when the matter in hand at the altar required, or nearly required, a set of infant's clothes.

The fact of his having gone the same road as so many, could not, in so short a time, break a pathway into her inmost mind. She did not feel even during that walk that anything so portentous could really have happened. The crust of her established customs was still entire. It would require more than his just going out of the house in that boxed-up way to make her believe. So far her imagination had not been touched. She, poor lady, wept, of course, but she really did not know why.

So far, since his death, all she felt was that a sound, a groaning, grumbling, crunching sound that she had heard continuously for forty years,

had ceased. With an oddly detached stare at her work, she was listening to the conversation of her sons about the money.

Henry had gone off to visit the lady of the heath, and a business letter from the lawyer lay, lately handled by the Rev. John, open, and leaning its crisp fat blue sheets against Mrs. Turnbull's basket. It transpired that in August, two weeks after the vicarage tea, the Rev. Hector Turnbull had come to his lawyer in London.

'Then he was there that time for business,' thought the Rev. John.

The invested property that the Rev. Hector appeared to have possessed then was somewhere between Four Thousand Four Hundred Pounds and Four Thousand Five Hundred Pounds. Unfortunately since that time, during the autumn months, a dangerous period for old gentlemen who live in the country, the Rev. Hector had expended certain large sums. He had, without thought or wisdom, grabbed at his investments by the handful, and thus his estate had diminished by more than Five Hundred Pounds. A large sum to a legal eye. The money had not been gambled away on the Stock Exchange, the lawyer would have been sure to have heard about that. It had not gone to Germany or to the desert of Gobi. But it must have gone somewhere. Not having Duggs to kick this time, the Rev. John kicked his father's chair.

'This, then, is what must have happened, the worst of all things: he must have given them money, family money.' The truth was out, it was not only that once at Portstown! And he, like the fool that he was, had promised to pay Mrs. Fancy's rent in order to shield his father. That girl was not the only reprobate; there must have been two or three, perhaps half a dozen. There must have been a swarm of them settling upon his unprotected father like wasps, forcing him by the pain of their stings to run to the bank for gold ointment.

For almost the first time in his successful career the Rev. John felt annoyed with the world. It was, he thought, a very wicked world to live in. He could now see, all about him, so many temptations that lie in wait for the clergy. If only his father had been, what is politely called, 'in the know'; if only he had been trained in the proper way, the way that the Rev. John himself used when he licked the honey out of the pot. It was a pity that the home-made jam of the vicarage had not stayed sweet longer. And to think of those women! For the first time in his life the Rev. John thought of them with pain. They were now, curse them! spending those pounds. And he might have had that money for himself! The Rev. John for the second time kicked his dead father's chair.

It was then that the two brothers decided what to do about their mother. The Rev. John knew that ‘the dear girl’ would scratch her out of it in a minute if she came to him, so the only thing to be done was for George to have her. She did not look just then as if she cared where she went. She would pay George for board and lodging three pounds a week, which would help the poor doctor with his rent. Though he had, however, secretly bought his house three years before.

The Rev. Hector Turnbull had left the interest of the family fortune to his widow during her lifetime, and then it was to be divided in the following manner. The Rev. Hector Turnbull had some years before studied at college certain problems in figures, and he wished to show by his will that he had understood them. At the death of his ‘relick,’ half of his estate was to go to his eldest son John. Two-thirds of the remainder was to go to his second son George, and the residue of the estate to his third son Henry.

George looked at John. He wished, like the prophet, that he held a sword in his hand, or were not his nails long enough? Alas, they were always cut short as a doctor’s ought to be. And then he remembered. Was not his mother going to live with him and pay three pounds a week to help with the rent? Ha, ha! the rent! Thank God, his wife, who had been a nursery governess, did what she was told, that was one comfort. She had brought him no money, but she never spent any. John’s ‘dear girl’ was another matter.

The two decided that the household furniture was to be sold at once. George preferred the money, and John knew that such old stuff would not do for his ‘dear girl.’ After a moment’s silence, both the brothers thought, with almost the same matter in each mind, about Henry. What could be done with him? There was not, as far as they were concerned, anything very wrong about the will, even if certain ladies had brought the amount down by some hundreds. The unequal division of the estate had brought the amount for them up again. An equal division would have told against John. As things were arranged, George would be left much the same. And as regards Henry, no doubt their father had remembered the money that had been given him to start his farm with in Canada. They always spoke of that log hut as Henry’s farm. Was it their fault that he had not succeeded in making his farm pay?

When Mrs. Turnbull asked meekly, ‘What shall our dear Henry do?’—‘We hope,’ said the Rev. John, ‘that he will be able to get some work.’

CHAPTER XXIX

THE SWORD OF FLAME

It was quite dark when Henry returned. A sharp sea wind had made his walk home a slow one. He had battled against it on the moor, enjoying its wild vigour, until he stood in its full blast upon the hill that overlooked the village, the hill that Mr. Tasker had descended after the meeting with his father. By the chalk lane a thorn bush, alone on the hill, bent like a doomed thing away from the wild sea winds and gave the traveller a momentary rest from the gusts. It was there, under the shadow of that thorn, that the weary stayed their steps—lone women, a weary cow, any strayed wanderers.

After a moment's release from the wind Henry moved a little farther. Not a light showed in the village. He had sometimes before, of a dull winter's evening, climbed the hill, and the village had always looked a blank darkness. Turning, with his back to the wind, Henry looked over the valley whence he had come, and there, in the middle of the heath, shone a star that had settled like a splendid glow-worm on the blank waste. He knew, as he watched it, that it came from the cottage he had left half an hour ago.

It was then that Henry's soul, catching the fire of that light, began to strive within him for freedom. On the one side, in the village, there were human beings of divers kinds. There were full-fed, greed-haunted, soul-starved farmers; work-worn labourers, scraped almost to the bone by their toil; mean-mouthed women, whose tongues rudely garnished their homes, and poisoned the beauty of the village; and children, who from the very first, even from the breast, were taught to hate all thoughts that are noble. They were, the people down there in their mud caves, shut out from all the fair gardens of wonder, of life, shut out by their own hands. Henry knew them now, his eyes were open. He saw that all their lives they were ruled and dominated by the greed of getting, longing always to get, never to be; the under ones waiting, like gaunt cattle with starved eyes, for their chance, for their chance of rising from stealing broken bits and sticks and cinders, to openly putting money, pulled from the already wasted souls of other labourers, in the bank. Henry knew their closed huts were there in the darkness, bound, chained, and dug into the earth, and he knew how they were ever ready to cast dung upon any shining spark of heaven-sent light that fell amongst them.

On the other side, alone on the heath, there was that one light shining, the burning symbol of the living fire. That fire could not be held in darkness, its freedom had come wonderingly. It had broken out upwards from the bands that held it chained to the earth forces.

Henry left the hill, and, after passing through the village, entered the house from which his father, earlier in the day, had been carried. As he passed the door, the first drops from the clouds that rushed by overhead struck his face. Closing the door behind him, he heard his brother's voice, the doctor's, asking him to come into the dining-room, for they wished to speak to him.

The Rev. John Turnbull was stretching his legs in his father's dining-room chair. He had been smoking a cigarette, and was sitting in silence, considering, no doubt, what he was to say to his brother. The Rev. John explained the Will: he explained that, after their dear mother's death, Henry would no doubt be able to start a small market garden, 'but he must be careful this time to make it pay. Our own hands, you know, are full of expenses.'

Their father had spent a fortune lately, the Rev. John languidly said, 'on women.' There was no need for him to hide the truth, as their mother was not present.

'It is of course a great sorrow, and must be borne by us three,' he said. 'George thinks that our dear father's mind has not been lately quite normal; he complained last August of the sun. It is a great blow to the family, and to me, being in Orders, a deep disgrace. And besides, he has spent money. You will lose your share of what has been spent that way. I am afraid that you will not receive quite what you have expected.'

Henry had stayed rightly attentive, showing no sign of what he thought about the exposure. He really did not think anything about it. If his brother had said that the Rev. Hector had spent his money in buying kittens to eat at breakfast, Henry would have taken the news in the same way, because there was nothing in him that desired to do as his father had done.

John leaned forward and lit a cigarette by the lamp. He went on to explain, with the silent approval of the doctor, where his mother would live, and finished up by consolingly remarking, 'that it was a mercy their father had been taken before he had squandered all their fortune.'

So much harm had Alice done by looking pretty and pulling so hard at the village tug-of-war.

All his life Henry had been the idiot in the house, whose duty it was to dig in the garden, and whose pleasure to accept and make the best of the smallest and the outside slice of the family beef. All he desired now was to be left alone in the garden. But in the garden, no man since the Fall may stay.

The Rev. John had used more than once in his talk to Henry the polite and genial term, ‘old fellow.’ And he would have been glad, no doubt, to have old-fellowed Henry across the Atlantic. He began, when Henry was bidding him good-night, like this:

‘You know, old fellow, how fond we are of you. You have to push a bit, you know, to get on in the world. A chap needs some go in him to get on even in the Church. Look here, old fellow,’ he said, getting up and smacking Henry on the back, ‘you must make up your mind to do something.’

Just at that moment Henry experienced a sensation of lightness and freedom, and a longing for cool deep waters, for wide rivers, and peaks towering above them, for far plains and everlasting primeval forests; he quietly left the dining-room, and, gently shutting the door, he went upstairs to his own room, and lit a candle.

He took up the Christmas-card, his altar picture, the cross and the child. They were there as they are upon earth—the cross and the child. A pretty card of bright colour. And the child—what was the little one doing near that cross? Would it not have been better to have no cross, or no child? Henry held the card nearer the light. The pink cheeks of the child burned him, the cross dropped blood. He tore the card in half.

He looked round the room at the furniture. All this was to go. He had no place now to sleep. Often, coming in tired from the garden, he had rested on his bed, waiting half asleep till the gong sounded. He knew every inch of his room. The sheep’s skull that he had brought home once when he was a child was still there. That foolish girl feeding the ducks—she looked strangely at him now. And the two china cats that a nurse-maid had given him. The nurse-maid had been deaf.

He thought of the garden. He was turned out of that too. He could touch, in his mind’s eye, the first daisies of spring. He saw the scented white violets; he had made a wreath from them for his father. He thought of the old wheel-barrow, and of the aged mowing machine that required so much care, and of the sweet, cool grass as he pressed it in the barrow. And he thought of the soft brown earth of the kitchen garden—he must leave that too, and the delightful scent of the herbs; there was no sage or thyme as sweet anywhere

as theirs. He remembered the old-fashioned roses that grew by the tool-house. He had broken one off once, and given it to Alice. She had not cared about it.

How often had he weeded that long border near the lawn, separating the weeds from the flowers in the rich dark soil. And how far the laurel hedge threw its shade on late summer afternoons. There was the seat, under the ash that he had planted. He had often taken some brown-covered Church Father to read under that tree's shade. He remembered some odd, terse remarks of Hall, a bishop of Norwich. He must leave the garden, there was no staying there for him now. He must break away from his loves and go out into the night. The angel with the sword of flame bade him begone.

Henry left his room and went quietly downstairs. Without taking his hat or overcoat, he opened the front door and let himself out into the night. At the first rush of wind and rain, the feeling that all matter had broken up came to him again, as though the earth itself were passing away like a cloud of mist born in the night. How fast the wind drove in great sweeps from the sea! Was it like himself, hurrying, fleeing, drifting, towards the east; and the rain with it, flying in haste, flying, seeking the new dawn—towards the east? He, like the wind and the rain, would escape and be free. He stepped lightly on, even gaily, the wild west wind rushing, calling, and beating behind him, hurrying him towards the hill beyond which lay the great heath. A little brook that crossed the road was swelled into a large stream. Henry walked through it. To him it seemed a river of fire.

At the other side of the stream he stopped; another thought held him. The pull-back of the wave caught him up. He had left the garden and Alice behind him! He saw the girl, Alice, her full lips pouting; she was complaining of a scratch as they picked gooseberries together, for his mother's jam, in the vicarage garden. He had not looked at her then; he looked at her now—and loved her.

Why not return to the garden and find her there picking gooseberries, and kiss her lips—the lips he had not noticed? he knew quite well how she stood. But he felt the girl Alice spit upon him, while his brothers patted him on the back.

He climbed one of the tumuli at the top of the chalk downs. The howling storm made it almost impossible for him to stand. He began a battle with the wind for the possession of the hero's grave. During a lull he laughed aloud, he had won the battle. Quite near him, just under a hill, he heard a lamb bleat.

Henry wandered down the road towards the heath. He longed for space, wide open space. The wind drove the dark night before him and danced by his side. Away on the heath he saw a light shine. His thoughts were now quite merry, almost childishly merry. They dwelt, as a child's would, upon the happenings at home—how his brother had reasoned upon the value of goodness, how seriously John had spoken about money, and how he had talked about their father because he had slipped. It was quite ridiculous that he should have slipped—but then he had always had such bad colds in the winter, he must have wanted a change from those colds. Henry laughed aloud. Why, what queer little dancing devils his father must have kept in his study drawer beside his account-book and sealing-wax! And had he carried them down into the village when he went to visit his people? How cunning he had been, how sleek and important! What a strange house he had left behind him! Why had his mother cried over that neatly dug deep hole in the ground, wherein the profound joke of the man that had been his father was laid? There was no need to cry over him. It was odd indeed that his kind of form and feature could ever have come out of the clay. The return into the clay set him, at least, right with nature.

And there was John, sitting in his father's chair, his look serious, even rather worried, like a father's when he wants to say an unpleasant thing without giving offence. John was talking about work, and was quite concerned to see how Henry would take it.

Henry had now strayed out on to the heath. He wandered along the path that led out into the wilds. All at once he was conscious of a light burning by the roadside. Henry found himself near a garden gate. He leaned over it and watched the light.

Henry unlatched the gate and went into the little garden and knocked at the cottage door. Molly opened it to him. Seeing a lost wanderer standing there, soaked with rain, she brought him in.

Henry sank on to the cottage sofa. He could not explain how he came to be there.

CHAPTER XXX

A GIRL'S DESPAIR

Mrs. Allen, the mother of Alice, lived three miles from Maidenbridge in one of a block of three cottages, near the high road that breaks the heath in two.

Before Alice, much to her mother's dismay, was conceived, another girl belonging to Mrs. Allen was already in the world. This other girl, whose name was Hester, was married very young, and none too soon, to a sailor. This sister was not best pleased that Alice had come home, and therefore spent the time teasing her about her holiday at Portstown. This teasing made Alice pay a visit to her friend Annie. It was when out walking with Annie on the day of the Visitation that the two girls had met the Rev. Edward Lester. He had asked Annie to meet him, if possible with a girl friend—a new member for the Church Girls' Club.

Alice, who always called a man in black garments 'sir,' fell into this second trap because of the gentleman, as easily as she had fallen into the first because of the man. Alice believed in God and in gentlemen. What they did with their lips and feet, was, when they did anything to her, just like their reading the Bible or ordering a lobster tea at 'The Pink Arms.' Her Portstown visit had been so hurried and dreadful, like a nightmare, that she wished to try something better.

There were stories printed that fed her daydreams, penny stories; she had to hold her eyes very near the fine print to read them. There was all that nice part about the girl who wedded her mill-owner. Nearly every tale in the *Weekly Joy Ride* was set to this tune. There was a half-page picture of the servant, in cap and apron, scrubbing the floor, and a lean, snake-like clergyman in a long garment watching eagerly from behind. The picture was a very personal temptation to Alice. She too had been in that very same knees-to-the-floor attitude, and had known—how girls do know things!—that she was being watched. It happened that her friend Annie came to her senses just too late to save Alice, who had already been taken out a good many times by Mr. Lester in his motor to see old churches.

The shock of the climax of her trip to Portstown *had* caused Annie to change her ways. She began to think that an unmarried, odd-shaped tradesman who kept the Penny Shop looked at her in church; he certainly

followed her about in his shop. Annie loved the shop, and would have taken the forked oddity that belonged to it if he had offered himself.

The morning of the day wherein Henry Turnbull burst his bonds, found the heath garmented in the whiteness of a windless winter's morn that promised a boisterous ending to the day. Seawards, upon the higher uplands, the light came first, while the sleepy mist still hung over the valley, deadening even the sound of a sheep's bell.

Mrs. Allen had, at the back of her cottage, a shed where stood a copper. It was in that copper that the water was boiled for washing. The dread of washing-day hangs over a cottage woman almost as heavily as the burden hung upon the back of Christian. And, as if to mock the poor creature, every new soap pretends to lighten her task with vain promises, and every old soap has a pretty picture in each morning's paper, saying, almost like God, 'I can do it all.' The woman may try to procrastinate by pushing the clothes into a dirty cupboard or up the stairs, but in this world the end of all clean things is always in sight.

Life had been easy of late to Mrs. Allen. She had cast her burden of the wash at the feet of Alice. Besides washing and helping in the house, Alice had been paying for her lodging with part of the money given her by the drover. Much of that money had gone, by the advice of her friend, the Rev. Edward Lester, to fit Alice out in a dainty costume and hat so that she might be a proper person to walk with in the gardens. Because of this, and certain other expenses, the drover's money had now been quite exhausted, the last shilling having gone on a wedding ring. For a fortnight Alice had paid her mother nothing.

The fact that Alice's store was come to an end led Mrs. Allen to tell the baker every time he called what an expense it was ' 'aving a great girl to keep at 'ome.' She also pointed out to Alice the list in the local paper of 'Servants Wanted.' These and other hints made Alice bite her tongue but say nothing.

The father of Alice was a detached person. He was one who never regarded any human happening as having anything to do with himself. He worked on a farm as a carter. He had a thin, careworn, inquisitive face, and smoked a clay pipe. His wife and daughters were of far less importance to him than the dirty loose matches that he always had at the bottom of his pockets. He came home to his dinner at two, and sat and ate, without a word, whatever was put before him. Then he would push back his plate, haul out of his pocket the clay pipe, strike a match on his boot, and shuffle off to the

stable to bait the horses. It was his habit to look at his family as if they were ten miles away from him. He would have been just as likely to touch the moon or the stars as his wife or daughters.

In one way he possessed an extremely sharp instinct for gain, and that was in the matter of getting odds and ends of clothing from the farmers for whom he worked. He watched the farmers' clothes like a Jew, and knew the exact moment when an extra patch was considered one too many for them. It was then that Mr. Allen, slowly and cautiously, brought out the oft-recurring request for an old pair of trousers. Yet he never wore any but his own old garments. There were fourteen old suits, that various farmers had given him, huddled together in a wooden chest at the back of his bedroom. No one dared touch them. On Christmas day he sometimes looked them over.

Mrs. Allen was a believer in chance. She let everything slide. She let things that she cooked burn, then she got into a rage, and ended up with a good cry. Her washing-days were blank despair. But now that Alice did the washing, Mrs. Allen went into her neighbour's for a short respite from the world's cares, a respite that generally lasted the whole day.

The washing-day now come was no exception. Seeing Alice with her arms bare and the tub full, Mrs. Allen just stepped up to her neighbour's door to borrow a morsel of tea, a commodity that she was always forgetting to buy. After nearly four hours, during which the other neighbour, the proud one, had been pulled and torn, and at last cast into a drunkard's grave, Mrs. Allen saw Alice knocking at the window and heard her calling:

'Our mother must come at once!'

'Our mother,' hoping that something had happened, flustered out into the garden and found Alice under the clothes-line with a large basket full of washed clothes all ready and waiting to be hung upon the line, with the pegs in a small basket near by.

Around the sullen weariness of the winter's afternoon there moved the signs of a coming storm. Airy messengers, dark, scraggy clouds, followed each other, rat-like, over the sky; and gusty, dissatisfied rushes of wind brought, even so far inland, the smell of seaweed.

Alice and her mother turned to watch a country gentleman strolling by on the road from the manor-house. He was something for them to watch, like a shadow on the side of the world. He took off his hat to a lady riding a bicycle, and called his dogs to heel as the lady free-wheeled past. He had

only glanced casually into the garden. Poor women do stand in their gardens. He too passed on, and the women turned back to each other.

Alice told her mother that she could not reach the line, though the line was just the same as it had been on other washing-days. She asked her mother to hang up the clothes. Mrs. Allen, with the bells of scandal, hatred, and malice still ringing in her ears, began to take the things out of the basket and to hang them on the line. Turning to pick up a sheet, she saw that Alice was not helping.

'Bain't thee goin' to do nothink?'

'You can hang out to-day mother; I be tired,' the girl said.

There was something in the feeling of the garden, maybe a grin from the mould, that made Mrs. Allen stare hard at her daughter.

A motor whirred by in the road. Neither the girl nor the woman this time turned to look round. There was another movement in the wind for them. Alice, with her hands by her side, meekly looked up at a shirt of her father's. She remembered a patch of dirt near the collar that she had not been able to rub out, and there was the dark patch, still showing, on the line. She wondered why that dirt had hurt her so, for when she had soaped it and rubbed it, a sharp pain had passed like a burning bullet through her body. She had felt faint and had nearly fallen.

'Oh, bother the dirt!' she had said when she felt better. 'Let it blow out on the line!'

She was still a girl.

In the shed, after that faint feeling had passed, she wrung out the water from the shirt and tossed it into the basket. With her hands limp beside her, she looked at the shirt. The wind blew it well, but the patch of dirt was still there.

Mrs. Allen looked at Alice. Around the two in the garden there still lurked that creeping grin. Mrs. Allen understood. She threw down the clothes, and grabbed Alice by the arm, dragging her indoors.

'Now I'll talk to 'ee!' she said, as a country mother would say it.

Mrs. Allen gave her daughter the plain sermon of the poor, the girl having betrayed her condition by her refusal to hang up the clothes. All the morning, Mrs. Allen and her neighbour had been gloating over and enjoying the excitement of 'a case' in the next block of houses by the heath. Besides this case, their conversation about their neighbour had been what Mrs. Allen

would have called ‘tasty.’ Had not the baker said next door, ‘that he would have the money she owed, or else . . .’? That was something for them to have overheard! This news and the case by the heath really had lightened for them the heavy January day, with a ticklish sense of trouble coming for another. And now here was ‘our Alice’ in the same way, more far on perhaps. This time other mothers would lap from her dish of country cream, and put a stop to her conversations.

Once before she had been in just such a fury with Alice, and that was when she first felt her move in her womb; for was not the other brat tumbling and screaming, and making a mess of the floor? Instead of walking nicely down to the inn she had to get its clothes off and put it upstairs to bed. This bother was enough for her without any inside movement. On that occasion, the last that her man had touched her, her first anger subsiding, she had to take what would come; but what good it was going to do to any one, she did not know. And so Alice had taken her turn at falling about and screaming.

A country woman passed by in the road carrying a string bag. She glanced, or rather, her eyes hung inquisitively about the Allen garden. It was empty except for the few things that Mrs. Allen had pinned up on the line; most of Alice’s work was still in the basket. The passing woman looked up at the dim sky. ‘It was going to rain,’ she thought; ‘Mrs. Allen would never dry her clothes.’ The woman’s steps quickened with joy.

Indoors, her mother used towards Alice all the established word-clawings that come so naturally to the peasant in a case of this kind. She began with the usual:

‘And me was a farmer’s daughter! I gets this, seein’ to you so good. I’ll put ’ee in road, little ’arlot. Slut! Bringing this insultin’ talk upon your poor parents. Damn ’ee, little whorin’ toad! That’s what swung ’eeself ’ere for. I knowed thik money came from they men. Get out of ’ouse! Father can’t abide kids.’

While this gentle mother was rebuking her, Alice cried. When her mother had quieted a little, Alice left the couch where she had sunk down, and without replying, she went out of the door that led to the road. At the same time her mother went out of the back door, meaning to visit her neighbour. She found her neighbour very close indeed, being just outside Mrs. Allen’s own door, where she had only that moment taken her ear away from the keyhole. She had come there with the pinch of tea.

As Alice walked out into the road the sharp pain came over her again. This time no faintness followed, because her mind burned with the thought of what she was going to do.

Returning from the walk that was needed to prepare his appetite for his afternoon tea, was the country gentleman. One little long-haired dog had been giving him some trouble. It had had the shameless audacity to follow, barking, a motor car almost twenty yards down the road. The gentleman was tying on to its collar the strap that he carried in his pocket for that purpose. In front of him there was a girl—Alice: he noticed that she was there. It was her business and not his to know what she was there for.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DELIVERER

The same morning that Alice washed her clothes, the Rev. Edward Lester was lunching with Mr. and Miss Rudge at their house called ‘New Place,’ near Maidenbridge. He was asked to say grace before the meal commenced, and did so, looking meekly down at the table flowers.

Alice’s steps followed the road, and then turned off by a little muddy lane that led to the heath. Her foot sank in the mud; taking it out, her shoe came off. She picked it out of the mud and tied it more securely. Around her and beyond her was bare heath. She looked up sometimes towards a black clump of firs about one mile away, just the kind of grove to suit her just then.

Alice and her sister, when they were little, had gone one day in the spring to those very trees and had played near a deep pool at the bottom of the gravel quarry just across the road. She now passed along the track that the heath carts had made. The touch of the earth, the mild smell of the heath, tried to catch her attention; they would, these quiet things, have tried to call her back, so that she too might be found ready for another spring. In their many voices they whispered to her to wait.

Going over from the trees to the quarry, Alice crossed a few yards of rough heath. A gorse bush made a last effort. It pricked her leg. She pulled at her skirt and rubbed, but she still went on. Climbing up a little heap of gravel near the quarry, the girl saw that she was not alone. A tramp was bending down and filling a can with water. As she stood there he turned round and saw her.

The tramp stood and watched her. Was this girl alone? his look questioned. He lifted up his tin can to his mouth—a great bearded mouth,—drank, and spat into the pond.

Alice sank down before him and became a mere patch of humanity upon the face of the heath, being to the eyes of the tramp a limp, trembling bit of carrion.

The tramp was not behindhand in taking advantage of what he saw, his fears of the police being stifled under three quarts of beer. For was there not a female here and darkness coming? The place where Alice had sunk down

was exposed to the view of the heath, the tramp was not too drunk to understand that. Taking her arms, he dragged her over the brow of the pit to a spot by the water where not even the clump of trees could see them. The trail of her dragged body was left in the sandy soil.

While he dragged her the tramp had his back to the water; that was why he did not see a tired cow, come down to the pool to drink, upon the other side of the quarry. It was only when he got the girl there safe in his power that he looked round and saw the cow. The cow slowly lowered its head and drank. The tramp was content. This was the kind of pastoral picnic that he enjoyed, where he could take and eat at his leisure. Never had a sick ewe-lamb fallen so easily into the claws of a wolf as Alice had fallen into his hands. He might afterwards throw her, she was so near fainting now, into the pond; no one had seen them. The tramp rubbed his hands and cast a long look upon Alice.

Above, in the darkening sky, ravening clouds passed racing each other. The girl lay with her head sunk down and with bits of gravel and heath in her hair. She was entirely at his mercy. From the sky and the girl, Mr. Tasker's father looked again at the cow that just then raised its head and stared at the tramp. And at last Mr. Tasker's father did notice something queer about the cow.

It was quite proper that the tramp should understand something about cows. He had been bred amongst them and had been laid to sleep on their warm dung while his mother milked. He knew very well the look of the thin, lean kine of the heath, and he knew that the last thing the heath kine would think of doing at this season of the year would be to go down to the pools to drink. And why had this beast a rope round its neck? The cow was now standing very still the other side of the pool, with its neck stretched out, looking with soft, strange, bewildered eyes at Mr. Tasker's father. Mr. Tasker's father turned to the girl. She lay just the same. He looked away from her, there was the cow still regarding him with her soft stare. Then he saw the dim form of a man climbing down towards the cow.

Near by the lonely clump of trees, on the fast darkening heath, there had now come together three persons and a cow. The newcomer brought a new chance upon the scene, a possible change in the event contemplated by Mr. Tasker's father. The newcomer did not look at his own thirsty cow—any one could see that it was there—but at the tramp and the girl. His was just as inquisitive, though not as harmless a gaze as that of the cow. After regarding the fallen girl and the man above her for a moment, out of the mouth of the third person came words:

‘What the bloody hell be ’ee doin’ to thik maid?’

There happened to be two females that the drover had for some time past kept in his mind’s eye. One of them was ‘she’ whom he had beaten and who had a week or two later gone ‘thud,’ and the other was the maid to whom he had given his gold in order that the one called ‘she’ might not haunt him. In the girl lying there upon the rough gravel so near to the tramp, the drover recognized the maid that he had once carried to her home after pouring his gold into her lap. She looked in much the same doleful state now, only instead of a homely elm shedding its leaves from above, a huge man overshadowed her.

The fear of his former mistress had become a moving spirit in the brute mind of the drover. Night or day, he knew that wherever he went, she was with him. After Neville died he expected at any moment to see her bruised body, with the scar by the lip, moving beside him. He still had the words of the priest, like a shield, before him, and when a cow would not go the right way he withheld his hand from beating her, and twas often damned by he farmer who employed him for not hurrying his charges along the road faster. Ever since his visit to Neville his life had been a marked life. His old brute nature was there still, nothing could alter that, but there was something there with it that gave a new tone to his life—a sense of unnaturalness about himself had appeared, a feeling that he was being guided, a distinct prod from somewhere else. He now knew what a cow felt like when it is being driven by an unknown purchaser into a new pasture. In the tavern brawls, in the market rows, the fear of ‘she’ was a cloak over his tongue.

But now, beholding the maid whom he had once, following the priest’s counsel, befriended, so foully used—for he had seen the tramp drag her to the pit—he snatched at the idea that ‘she’ had this once loosened his chain, and was throbbing at him inside to revenge. The cow ceased to look at Mr. Tasker. Seeing her driver walking away from her, she lay down.

The tramp stood beside his prey, that seemed now very poor and worthless carrion. Mr. Tasker’s father had no wish to give up the event that the darkness and the pond had put in his way.

In the wild moan and creak of the clump of trees, in the dim gathering darkness, there was formed again out of the mouth of the drover words:

‘What the bloody, blasted hell, be ’ee doin’ to thik maid?’

Receiving no reply to his polite inquiry, the drover began to draw nearer to the two, slowly moving round the pit.

Mr. Tasker's father was generous in his temper. There was no needless jealousy in his way of life. He was willing to share, in a friendly way, his spoils with a friend, when he could see his own safety and pleasure in that line of conduct. The situation of himself and the girl had become, by the advent of the other figure, one of sharing. He met the arrival from the other side with the suggestion, delivered in mild language, that they, one after the other, might obey their profound elemental instinct, and then vanish quite decently into the night. The girl could, if she wished to, walk into the pond.

The generous offer produced no response. The drover's mind could not be led by more than one idea at a time. He was aware just then of a direct impulse from 'she' to throw Mr. Tasker's father into the deep end of the water. His brute nature had taken another line from that of the tramp's and had gone back for it just as far. It was perfectly natural that two brutes should struggle over a fallen female, but with these two the naturalness was not complete, because the drover, taking his orders from 'she,' was there as the deliverer. The convenient suggestion that Mr. Tasker's father met him with, had the effect of making the voice of 'she' sound in him like a war trumpet. He advanced towards the tramp with a perfectly plain mission in his mind, and with as good a will to victory as ever Christian had shown to Apollyon.

Mr. Tasker's father, unwilling to let his victim go without giving her something at least to remember him by, bent his form down almost to cover her and struck a heavy blow at her upturned face with his fist, enjoying the satisfaction of seeing her blood before he turned to meet the drover.

The drover went at Mr. Tasker's father as his old dog would have done. He went at his throat, and seized it after having first delivered a well-placed blow with his fist. Before two minutes were past the tramp found himself rolled, kicked, beaten, and at last shoved into the deep end of the pond. Thence he crawled out, some minutes later, taken rather aback at this ending to his plans, and went his ways.

The drover, having won the battle, turned to see what had happened to the girl. She was lying in just the same place where the tramp had left her.

There were two creatures for the drover to deal with that night, the girl and the cow. It would be awkward for him if 'she' met him driving the cow, having left the maid to her fate.

The drover carried water from the pit and bathed the girl's face as tenderly as though she were a new-born lamb, while the gusty winter's night closed in about them. What was the next thing that 'she' meant him to do?

The night was there, the cow, himself and the maid. He could not take up his stick and walk away from the other two, and it was not likely that every heath cottage he took her to would prove to be her home. Besides, there was the cow. She had to be driven to a Shelton farm, and Shelton was a good six miles away.

The drover considered. About half-way to Shelton, on the heath, there was, he knew, a cottage. He had stopped there a few days back for water, and a lady had given him a cup of tea. He would have to pass that cottage on the road to Shelton. But how to get both cow and Alice that far? He took up the tramp's tin and walked over to the cow. The first need of a sick calf is milk. With one or two knowing prods he induced the cow to rise. He filled the tin with milk, carried it to the girl, and slowly fed her.

At the moment when Alice was drinking the milk, the man who had been permitted to give her a place in the world was returning home to his tea from the stable. Mr. Allen moved slowly, with his head held sideways and his cap drawn over his face because of the wind. Under his cap he was smiling. The farmer had given him a waistcoat. This gift had been brought to him in the stable, the result of the carter's many hints while following the plough. He now tenderly bore it towards his home.

After kicking his boot against the sill of the door to loosen the mud, Mr. Allen entered the house. He sat in his chair before the table and looked at the lamp, and his eyes half closed like a bat's. He sat for half an hour. Certain moving, sometimes speaking, figures who were in the habit of putting his food before him did not come. Time passed. Another thirty minutes completed the hour. Then some one opened the back door. It was Mrs. Allen, who came in from the neighbour's, and, as was perfectly natural, she began to make a noise, crying, moaning, ejaculating, wringing her hands, and enjoying all the excitements of a mother's feelings.

'What had she done or said to make Alice run away?' And she considered the different ways by which a young girl can end her life. She pictured herself, the sobbing, bereaved centre of attraction at the inquest, kissing the Book.

While all this telling of the story was proceeding from his wife, Alice's father was still smiling at the lamp. Perceiving that the noise from the woman near him had quieted a little, he very tenderly took from under his coat the soiled waistcoat. He held it out in the light and brushed it with his hand. Smoothing it down, he noticed the name of the maker on the buttons. Then he laid it very carefully on the table.

The wife, bringing her mind from her daughter's coffin to her husband's waistcoat, stooped over the table to touch the precious gift. The farmer's present reminded her of her husband's tea. They ate, and after the meal she was pleasantly aware that the usual three slices of bread that Alice would have eaten were still attached to the loaf. The loaf had not diminished like the one she had cut from at the last meal.

Far out on the heath, Alice was able to sit up, revived by the drink of warm milk from the tin can. The drover had defeated the tramp, but there was now the night to deal with. From the scudding black clouds fell a dozen wind-driven splashes of rain, that stung and bit the face, telling of more and worse to follow. Attached to the cow's head was a rope. There usually was a rope on a driven cow's neck, but the drover's mind struggled dimly with some other recollection, of a cow in a picture with a rope on its neck.

Slowly his mind pieced together, himself, as a little boy, being hustled out into the night by a great red-armed mother. He was sent to beg for dinner at the ivy-covered parsonage at Old Stoke, two miles from his parents' dwelling. While the dinner was being put into a basket, the cook sat the little dirty boy beside the kitchen table, washed his hands, and gave him a large picture Bible, that she took from beside the tall clock, to look at. The first picture he had seen had been a cow being led by an old man with a light on his head instead of a hat. Riding on the cow was a very grand lady holding a smiling baby. For fifty years the picture had been hidden somewhere in the mind of the drover. Now he remembered it quite well—as well as the two lumps of sugar that he had stolen when the cook turned her back to him.

He now went up to the cow. It had not moved from the place where he had milked it. He led it by the rope up to Alice and put her upon its back, where she held on as best she could. Through the blinding rain and driving gusts they trudged, taking another path from that by which Alice had come. At the rate of about a mile an hour, they at last reached the heath cottage about half an hour after Henry had been driven there by his vision.

Tying the cow to Molly Neville's little garden gate, the drover carried the dripping girl, almost dead with cold, to the cottage door and knocked. Henry was asleep upon her sofa, and Molly naturally wondered what other guest the winds had sent her that night. The drover told his story. He had found the girl on the heath, and had brought her there with the help of his cow.

He now promised to call out the doctor on his way to Shelton, so that Alice received proper attention during the miscarriage that her despair had

brought her to.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE LOST SOUND

The flight of Henry caused a comparatively slight ruffle in the home circle. Dr. George had, at that point, taken over command. The day after the funeral he carried Mrs. Turnbull off, explaining to her that Henry was staying with a farmer on the heath, who had kindly accepted his help for sowing the early spring wheat.

The Rev. John had duly seen to the selling of the furniture. He directed the auctioneer to forward the cheque to his mother.

Mrs. Turnbull hardly understood, at the time of leaving, what was happening. Some one had taken away her jam-pots—and why was she to go for this ride in a motor car? Any morning that old creaking sound might reappear, and she not there to hear the study door open, and her husband go upstairs to wash his hands.

At last, this new move upon her, she did try to understand. She was, she knew now, to go and live with her son George. She remembered how the baby George had screamed for two or three days after the monthly nurse had left. And she remembered the groans 'the sound' had made because the babe had kept him awake in the night. What a soft, round, chubby face George had had then, and how he used to nestle up to her breasts! She appealed to him about her jam-pots: 'might she be allowed to carry them with her to his house—would he mind taking them?'

She asked her question timidly, as a girl of ten would who wants to be allowed to wash her doll's clothes. Her son answered her very seriously, as though he had obtained his answer from the churchyard. He explained to her very carefully that it might harm his practice for jam-pots, empty ones, to be unladen from his car into his house, under the very eyes, perhaps, of a patient.

The jam-pots were, in consequence of this mandate, placed in two old clothes-baskets and sold at the auction, the two lots being placed together and bringing one shilling.

Mrs. Turnbull settled at the doctor's, performed her duty, her profound and ever-recurring duty, of writing cheques for her board. She did this every week on Monday morning. Nearly always she was to be found in her own

room, for when she stayed downstairs she was forced to watch the busy thin features of her son's wife, who arranged and tidied up and down the front rooms, just as though each room were a cross old woman who had to be tidied and petted into a good humour.

Everything that went on in her son's household was ruled by the totally featureless tyrant of convention. Every little detail was arranged so that the way of life of the doctor's family should reflect, as in a glass, the manners and customs of the middle order of the people whom he attended. The maid was taught just the tone to use to the front-door bell ringer, and the right way to speak to a farmer's servant-girl who came to the back to have a tooth out.

It looked as if the art of torture was brought very near perfection in this quiet way of living, the soul being set upon the rack so that the body might have a balance of three figures in the bank.

No one understood the doctor's virtue better than himself. When he stayed for ten minutes with a dying patient while the nurse went to the shop, his charity, his kindness to the poor, would not, he felt, be ever forgotten in that household. Neither was it, until he sent in his bill. Once Dr. George even went so far as to speak to a farmer about the overcrowding of one of his cottages, where two little girls slept in a closed cupboard, to come out in the morning, dazed and stupid, like white owls at noon. The doctor felt that that time his goodness had carried him a little too far, because the farmer taught him to mind his own business by giving his custom, available after an occasional drunk, to his rival.

The doctor's plan of life was formed before his marriage, his wife and daughter were a part and parcel of it, and now his mother and her cheques must fit in too. Mrs. Turnbull tried to be good. She tried very hard to fit herself in. Being an old mother, she thought that she might help with the child. One afternoon she read a fairy story to her granddaughter, a story that she had herself loved.

'How silly, Granny!' was the reply to the story. 'Dad says that that sort of writing is all tommy-rot. Have you begun to save up for my bicycle yet?'

Mrs. Turnbull had a place by her son at meals. At other times she sat in her little room with her darning on her lap. She missed something. She could not exactly tell what it was. Something of her old life, something that was nearly connected with 'the sound' that had so strangely died away, taking with it her home. Always she sat still and looked at the strange view from her window. What were those great beech trees doing there? Where were the round, chipped laurels that she had always seen? Where was the keeper's

wood? What had happened to those homely noises—'Funeral's' voice heard in the kitchen over a cup of tea that Edith,—kind, ever kind Edith—had given him? And the man who milked the cows by the hedge? Where were the cows gone?

What she heard now were the proper movements in a well-ordered house, but these sounds awoke no response in her heart. The maid could go on dusting; even in her own room while she sat there, the fact never stirred her. In her life with him the dusting was not done like that, and her gardener had never been a smart young man who understood motor cars. And why was not dear Henry there, taking up his odds and ends of books, looking out into the garden, with one book closed on his knee with his hand upon it, while 'the sound' in the big chair read prayers?

She had been for so many years looking around her at the things her own form and life had created, and now the very sounds and voices of the earth were changed. What was it, she wondered, that she especially missed? Not 'the sound'; not dear Henry's thoughtful look into the garden, nor his quiet movements as he tended the flowers; neither was it the click of the drive gate when 'the sound' came in from the village. One day she knew. She found in her mind her lost child.

It was summer, and below her, in the doctor's kitchen garden, there was something shining red amongst the leaves, and white flowers. Yes, there the strawberry was, and she, old broken-hearted woman, dared to make one trembling last effort to boil jam! She went out into the garden, forgetting her bonnet, and picked a basketful of the coveted fruit. She carried it into the kitchen and looked toward the range. There was no fire. The cook had let it go out, and had gone herself into the village. Leaving the basket of strawberries on the table, Mrs. Turnbull slowly made her way upstairs, and sat in her chair, holding her handkerchief to her eyes, crying like a child.

It happened once more, later in the summer, that her old desire took hold of her again, and brought upon her a rebuke from her son. She had been for a walk to the other end of the village. On the way home she saw in the village street two stone jam-pots, thrown out by some unthrifty woman, 'only,' as Mrs. Turnbull feelingly said, 'to get them broken.' She bent down and took the pots out of the dust and carried them, one in each hand, all the way up the village, showing, so her son politely told her, 'the common vulgarity of her mind to all the world.'

As she was not allowed to make jam, she spent nearly all the hours of the day in darning stockings for the family, which was the only kind of

mending that her son's wife would let her do. She had once tried to mend Lorna's, her little grand-daughter's, summer coat, but she had only made the rent worse, and her daughter-in-law had been forced, in the midst of a busy day, to unpick the stitches and do the work all over again. So she could only be trusted to darn stockings, wondering all the time why there was nothing now that belonged to her in life. She could never more touch the simple realities of coming and going, now that 'the sound' was hidden away. A white patch, where the paper had been torn away from her vicarage drawing-room wall, was more to her than all the new primness of her son's house.

Look as she might about her, she could find nothing, nothing that reflected her as she really was. Her needle would not take the same way as it was wont to do when it laid a woollen line across a vacant space in the heel of a stocking. When the turn came, instead of going in and out across the first row of lines, the long foolish needle took up two or three threads at a time, making a disordered knot instead of her usual neat patch. Mrs. Turnbull would sit for hours bending her head over her work and wondering why, instead of neatness, there was confusion. She could nowhere obtain the strength wherewith to break the spell that those long years with him had cast over her. The air of her son's house was too clean and simple and varnished for her to breathe. She missed the thicker, heavier air that she had been used to with him.

Mrs. Turnbull had given herself, as was the fashion in olden times, to her home. And her longing tears could never bring that old taste back again. Slowly the truth, bare, as it always is, came to her. Something terrible must have happened in her life when 'the sound' was carried away.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A SUNSHINE HOLIDAY

‘One must do the right thing.’

Besides this remark the Rev. John said:

‘Fools will take their own course, and what can you do with a chap who goes off the rails?’

The right thing that came most naturally to these two brothers was to drive the black sheep out of the fold. What else could they do? How could Henry with his quiet manners be set to work in the doctor’s garden beside the gardener, who understood motor cars? How could he be allowed to clean the silver with ‘the dear girl’s’ butler?

To prevent any foolishness on the part of their mother, any sign or symptom of a desire to give money to Henry, the doctor, acting by the everwise advice of John, explained to her one evening at dinner, while he wondered whether she would notice that he had given her the leg of the chicken, that he was ‘glad to say that Henry had found other work, and was most happy helping to feed the pigs and doing other duties with another of the small farmers on the heath, and that by his industry and his digging his presence there was very much valued, so much so that the farmer was glad to pay him a regular wage, even more than was necessary for his moderate wants.’ Mrs. Turnbull ate the leg of chicken without noticing where the breast went.

There was a certain amount of truth in the doctor’s story. Henry, though still living with Molly Neville, went out sometimes to help the heath farmer in the hope of earning a little money, for which there was grave necessity. Alice’s illness had been a heavy drain upon Molly’s purse. The girl was still with them in the house, for her mother, naturally remembering the bread, refused to have so wicked a child home again.

Certain weeks passed, and Mrs. Netley, one morning at breakfast in her neat villa at Portstown, happened to think that it might be well for her daughter Rose to visit the new tenant at their heath cottage. The new tenant had written to ask if she might put up another room against the south side of the cottage, where there was neither window nor door nor wood-shed.

Mrs. Netley decided that it would be best for Rose to go and see about it. Besides, her daughter had been working too hard of late at the 'saving of her sisters.' The hard labours of Rose had given her a nasty cough, not downright enough to be 'just a cold,' but more than enough to worry her mother. The doctor's sage remark was, 'Nothing to worry about yet.'

'It might be well,' Mrs. Netley thought, 'for Rose and me to live in the country for a time.'

The farmer who lived near Mrs. Netley's cottage on the heath let rooms. It was there that she thought Rose had better go after she had seen the new tenant at the cottage, and see what the rooms were like. So Rose and the faithful Malden set off on the early down-train the next day, which happened to be Sunday, and therefore a holiday at the Bank. And at 10.30 this early spring morning, Mr. Malden and his lady left the train at Tadnoll and began their walk over the heath.

Malden believed in Rose. He rejoiced in the month of June, and never forgot the game of chess. Farther back, he was dimly conscious of God, feeling that the month of June, Rose, and chess must have been made by Him. There was no doubt in his mind that any fellow who loved chess must be on the right road. That was the way big Malden understood the world.

With Rose there, he intended to enjoy every step that day. Rose seemed to turn the whole heath into a girl. His work at the Bank calmed and steadied every day his joy in life. When his work was done, he rejoiced in his freedom. Work polished the surface of his appreciation, so that the slightest thing, a bud or an opening leaf, brought him all the joy he needed. It was nothing to him whether the rich exploited his powers, so long as they allowed him some time in which to go out into the fields or to enjoy a game of chess at his club. He was, there is no doubt about it, at heart a servant, a noble, contented, and trustworthy servant.

But all the same he was a servant bound to the wheel, helping to hold up and keep going the tyrant's chariot. The tyrant, when attacked, simply points to the big Maldens as the best and most moral type in the world. Without his help and the help of his kind the tyrants would have no chance at all, for a tyrant cannot rule without good servants.

Malden enjoyed himself on the heath like a child. He followed the sly track of an adder to where he believed it lived in a crack in the ground. He watched the rush of foaming water near the mill, and threw a penny into the stream for luck. He filled his pockets with specimens of flowers to show to the manager at the Bank, a polite old gentleman whose interests in life were

botany and money. He broke off some May-blossom and insisted on putting it into Rose's hair, after which she could do no less than put up her face to be kissed.

Malden stretched his long form over one of the heath dykes and peered down into the deep clear water. Just below him was a pike, about a foot long. All at once, fearing the great shadow above, it flashed away. Malden was delighted. It was the first pike that he had seen in the heath pools. That pike would be something to talk about over those columned and figured books.

All around him the earth was yearning to yield up her charm and colour. He could not walk two yards without seeing something that he wished to look at nearer. There was the delicious delight of touching the flowers. He could hardly bear to leave the bush of May underneath which he had kissed Rose.

Together they opened the cottage gate and knocked at the door. A lady, who had been reclining in a very pleasant-looking cushioned chair in the little garden at the side of the cottage, came to meet them and took them indoors, where a fair girl, who was somewhat nervous, gave them chairs. The lady made immediately a good impression upon Rose. She felt sure at once that she was one who walked on the hills. Malden was quite as pleased as Rose, but then he always expected a great many delightful surprises to happen, as they always did happen to him on Sundays.

After a few minutes a quiet bearded young man, rather pale, entered the room and shook hands with them. It was quite natural that Malden should wander away with this new companion, and find within a few yards of the gate whole garlands of pleasantly boyish conversation. Malden's enjoyment of a companion was never spoiled by the question 'What does he do?' that an Englishman usually puts to himself when he meets any one for the first time. Though he would glance, sometimes, a little curiously at a new friend, to find out as soon as he could whether, later on in the day, among the other pleasures, there might be the chance of a game of chess.

The two men had wandered a few hundred yards along the white chalk lane when Malden all at once dropped on his knees. Henry did not mind, there was no reason why he should not pray there if he wanted to. But prayer was not at all in Malden's thoughts. What he did was to pick up a narrow grooved pebble that had about its shape something of the look of a bishop. He was overjoyed to find that it would stand. Henry, who knew a little about chess, entered readily and eagerly into the new quest. And the two friends

were at once very busy here and there in the path looking for pebble chessmen. Henry was lucky enough to find a stone that would do for a castle. He was so delighted with his find that he walked across to Malden, who was a little way ahead, to show it to him. After that they decided to concentrate their efforts upon pawns, for which piece they chose a special little round mottled pebble, and no other colour or size would do. Malden was greatly pleased with Henry, and they came back together to the cottage with their pockets full of curiously coloured and oddly shaped stones.

While they were taking their walk, Molly had with great care divided the cushions equally between two chairs, so that both she and Rose might recline in comfort. Alice, without waiting to be asked, had gone off to the farm for eggs. Molly, when they were settled, spoke quite candidly about the relationship in which the dwellers in her house stood to one another, and she said to Rose that 'it was quite natural that Alice should sometimes look girlishly and thoughtfully at Henry.' She surprised Rose by telling her that the people who lived in the villages would be very glad to burn the cottage over their heads, and that no doubt Mrs. Netley would shortly receive letters advising her to turn such deplorable ill livers into the road.

Molly explained further to the astonished Rose, that to live quietly in the country without a motor car, or two little dogs, or a gun, was considered by the peasant of England a heinous offence for a lady or a gentleman to commit. To be popular, they should join the others in wounding birds or holding a ferret over a rabbit's hole. She explained that in her case, there were other reasons why the people of the countryside hated her, regarding her, as they did, as a murderer and a witch. As to Alice and Henry, they had come to her for protection, 'because, poor children, they had nowhere else to go.'

She was poor: that fact in itself was quite enough to set the little boys throwing stones at her window. She had taken in Henry, who ought to have gone off in the steerage to America. And what business had she to give shelter to Alice, who, by the approved law of God and her neighbours, should have drowned herself on the heath, becoming a scandal and a joy to every one?

Rose did not hide her surprise. How could she have known how deeply the manners of the country become the people who wear them? Molly explained that the pretty cottage was looked at by the people who came that way and knew the story, as the abode of unlicensed wickedness. Henry had done his best to remedy their poverty by aiding, as Dr. George had truthfully told his mother, the heath farmer. But beyond the gift of a few eggs that

knowing gentleman had been unwilling to go. Besides Henry, Molly said, there was Alice to think of. And the two could not help looking at each other.

Then Rose told Molly how she and her mother were coming to stay near, because they wished to study, at first hand, the kind of life the people led in the country. She knew a good deal, almost too much, about the affairs of the town. Rose said she wished to know how the cottage women were treated, and what the men did for their homes, and how the farmers and the others who held the money-bags treated the poor. Besides all this, she was anxious to see how the popular feeling would express its distaste to Miss Neville and her companions; and if the people from the two villages were to come and snarl, Rose was quite prepared to snarl too and show her little white teeth at them.

Thus the golden bond that must at last chain all rebels together, whatever their habits of life, was cast around the two women who sat together looking up out of the valley towards the hills.

Malden, in his way, in his own pet manner, had found a friend. Henry, who for all he knew or cared, might have just stepped out of Maidenbridge prison, could play chess. Malden had already pencilled out a chess-board upon a portion of deal plank, and each player moved with dainty deliberation, after looking for inspiration across the moors.

When it was time for Rose and Malden to go to the station, they expressed themselves most delighted with their day. Rose, eagerly, arranged for the hire of the room at the farm, while big Malden splashed in the marsh and filled both hands with Yellow-flags.

CHAPTER XXXIV

TWO CLERGYMEN

When the Rev. John Turnbull accepted the living of Shelton he told the people, by letter, that ‘he hoped to enter as a friend into their quiet lives, cheering them in their sorrows, and sharing their joys. He looked upon the village of Shelton as his home. He prayed that his ministrations among them might be blessed, though he knew that he could not be as good a man as his father. He hoped, he said, to follow in his steps.

‘He was sure that the helpmate whom he had married would join with him in bringing to their homes all the comfort that they could. A village community, he very much wished to impress this upon them, was bound together by the bonds of labour and love. There was the squire, who took the rents and concerned himself with the administration of justice; the priest gave spiritual consolation to all the people; the hard-working farmer willingly provided employment for the industrious labourer; each gave up to each a proper proportion of his time. He was coming there to take his father’s place, hoping that he might have God’s blessing and the people’s love, so that he could with gladness perform the duties of his calling.’

A printed copy of this letter was sent to each of the householders whose names the Rev. John could remember, and those who did not receive one were not a little offended by the omission. A week or two after this letter ‘the dear girl’ made her appearance, showing herself in a new white motor, with two long-haired dogs, a chauffeur, and a footman. She came there to see ‘if the place would do,’ and she thought it ‘rather small.’ To deal with its smallness she wrote a cheque to a Maidenbridge builder.

This cheque produced groups of working men, each an artist in his own line. While some attacked the house, others laid out new lawns and trampled upon the quiet earth which had been cultivated by Henry.

‘The dear girl’ had managed her life quite as she had wished to. She believed in the most simple of all enjoyments, that of being above some one else. She had, however, not been quite pleased until she had become a wife to the Church. In that manner might be washed away the last vestige of the glass-bottle trade. The town had not been quite the right thing. In the town there had been too many like herself. She preferred that her money should

glitter and shine upon the grey surface of the country in order to make an impressive picture of herself to the common people.

'The dear girl' had married the Rev. John because he was part of the country idea. His place was to be fed, to be obeyed by the servants, to be always there at breakfast with a well-washed, bacony look, shining manicured nails, and great pointed dancing pumps, making ready to read the morning prayers.

'The dear girl' battered at the wooden vicarage gate, and it became iron. Her cheque could do more than that. It turned out all the odds and ends, all the flotsam and jetsam that had been washed or driven by rains and winds within the Turnbull walls. One by one, white-faced cringing creatures, amongst them 'Funeral' from the dust of his tool-house, made their escape. Poor 'Funeral' drifted here and there, hustled about, until at last he was forced, through the taunts of his wife, to become a jobbing gardener in the town.

Often two events of the same nature happen together, and no farther off than South Egdon vicarage there was the same kind of change proceeding. The Rev. Edward Lester had, early that spring, married Miss Rudge, because her father was kind enough to die, like Shakespear, of a surfeit, though two London doctors were in attendance. Thus favoured, in process of time Mrs. Lester arrived at South Egdon vicarage with *her* two little dogs, tailor-made coat and skirt, brown boots, and a long whip. She patted the dogs, walked round and condemned the place, the legal repairs of the Nevilles being, in her eyes, quite inadequate. She decided on her plan of change more impetuously than 'the dear girl' had done. The wood was to become a lake with an island in the middle, the kitchen garden a lawn, and the front drive a Swiss rockery, while the high road was to be moved three hundred yards away to accommodate those vulgar plebeians who were still rude enough to want to walk there. Her taste in alteration darted here and there like a swallow. Almost everything about the place had to be taken up and put somewhere else. The red tiles of the back yard must be replaced by paving stones and the garden hedge by a brick wall. Feeling a drop of rain, she looked upwards and saw that the chimney-pots had not the proper glaze. The front of the house, she felt sure, looked the wrong way. It should, like every Godly parsonage, face the church and show its back to the village.

During the period necessary to these changes, the Rev. Edward Lester and his wife lived at Maidenbridge, the Rev. Edward being motored to his service every Sunday. Mrs. Lester used sometimes to go and take her place in the church too, just to please him and to show herself as a coming shining

light to the people. She received the Holy Communion as a priest's lady should, all by herself in state, before the one or two farmers' wives who attended were called up.

The two aspiring young clergymen, who lived so near to each other, and whose wives possessed incomes that no successful munition dealer or jam merchant would have been ashamed of, were, considering all the difficulties of life, very pleased with themselves. They followed the right path, the path wherein lies human happiness. They were the blessed ones of the earth, the pleasantly fat kine for whom the world is made. In their growth, nature blew them out as the hawker blows out the little red bladders he sells to the children on the sands.

By the time that the delightful month of June had sung itself into the Shelton valley, the Rev. John Turnbull and his lady were settled in Shelton vicarage. Mr. Duggs, walking past just to see how things were going, could not believe his own eyes. It was all so different from the times of the Rev. Hector. Mr. Duggs, noting the changes, remembered the heavy weight that he had helped to carry out of that drive, and that he had seen set so snugly under a pleasant canopy of good chalk in the Shelton churchyard.

Mr. Duggs, walking on, happened to be just by the church steps when the cart that brought the stone cross for the Rev. Hector's grave arrived. He walked up with the men to see them put it at the head of the grave. Upon its face when it was got upright, he read the promise of the great awakening. From the good upland situation of the grave, Mr. Duggs studied the alterations at the vicarage, and fell to wondering what would happen next in the world. He knew that workmen had gone up there for many days, and now he beheld the result. Leaving the tall white cross, he walked back very mournfully through the village, stopping now and then sagely to shake his head. Getting at last into his own cottage, he delivered his one and only description of the changes to his wife:

'They've give thik wold brew tub to Mr. Tasker.'

The arrival of a household of such wealth set all the finger-tips of the people of the village itching for their share. They were quite prepared to touch their hats to the very shadow of the lady or of her dogs. Some half-dozen or so began to attend the church who had never entered it before, moving crestfallenly up the path, impelled by a far-fetched idea that if they went in and sat with a book in their work-worn hands, some coins might, with the blessing, fall upon them. There was always the chance, the possibility that the Rev. John after preaching from the text, 'Cast thy bread

upon the waters,' might follow it by throwing out handfuls of shillings and pennies among the people. There was no knowing in what way the golden ship of the vicarage might spring a leak.

The vicars of Shelton and South Egdon lived so like each other that they might have been brothers. Together they rightly deserved the blessing of a religious Church and the praise of their fellow-men. They received likewise proper acknowledgment from a grateful world, that looked up to them as being able to make any village happy—if they chose to give away enough money.

They were, these happy frocked ones, eating their dinners through their own efforts. At every turning they had most carefully chosen the road that led to the greatest amount of pleasant sensation for the body. A little outing between times provided just the right and merry appetite for their meals.

One day the two clergymen confided to one another, after a little dinner given by 'the dear girl,' how the days went with them.

'Time simply swims away,' the Rev. John was saying. 'I can hardly remember what I do in the day. We have breakfast rather late, you know, a habit of the dear girl's. And after breakfast, well, one must read the *Times*, and then a pipe or two, and after that—I'm always awfully astonished how time flies—it's the gong for lunch! After lunch I just take a tiny nap in the study. The afternoon is rather dull in the country; somehow or another it bores me to hear the clock strike four. Some people, I know, despise afternoon tea; the dear girl and I take the chance that little break gives us to talk about my village work. She really gives me all the help she can, you know. We dine at seven: perhaps a little early, but one does get hungry in these wild fields, we become almost like farmers. Only, dining so early hardly gives a chance for a motor run after tea—one can't be a sloven over meals. Suppose we finish dinner by half-past eight, what time is there left to read? No one sits up after ten in the country, except servants.'

The Rev. John held a glass of port to the light.

The common people of the village were the very things that the two clergymen's ladies wished them to be: they were the dull background in the picture in which they shone out as queens. How kind the ladies were to the poor! How kind the ladies felt when they spoke to a cottage woman! How they prided themselves on the way they could come down to the lowly and be one with them, talking quite naturally about scarlet fever and the price of sugar, or whether Lyons' tea was better than Lipton's.

It was a pleasure to be taken, as Mrs. Edward Lester was, by a smallholder to see his calf. She stepped in the dung just as though she thought it was plain untrodden straw. What a sweet white spot the calf—it was intended for veal—had upon its forehead. It was so homely, the way it touched her hand with its nose. The ladies were always so affable, so charming, and dressed so suitably, that it was a real pleasure for a tired labourer, coming home from his work, to meet them and touch his hat.

This was a vision to be remembered, even when the labourer reached his own cottage which a newly lit fire had filled with smoke. And why should he not have the little dogs in his mind's eye while he waited and watched a dirty sloven of a woman, his wife, bring out the bread and heel of cheese, explaining rather ungenerously that butter was much too dear for her to buy any for him? And then, thank goodness, he had the lady to think of!

The people of the villages were respectfully pleased with their pastors. Their chief pleasure in the Rev. John began in this wise. It once happened, by some almost impossible error, that the proper replenishing of the vicarage sideboard decanters had been overlooked when the last order had been sent to the stores. That was why an extremely valued order had been received by the 'Soldiers' Return' for a dozen of whisky. This order being placed so locally, pleased not only the innkeeper but the people; even the little boys who rolled on the green knew about it. It brought to the people's mind the good old days when the clergy used to find time to drink, when a farmer could bleed a sheep to death for pleasure, when all the children of a labourer were allowed to die of smallpox.

The special pleasure that the Rev. Edward Lester gave to his people was of another kind. He gave out a notice in church that he himself would go the round of the village to collect a few 'widows' mites.' He did not wish the people to give more than they could afford. The gifts were for a 'poor clergy's motor fund.' 'So many poor vicars,' he said, 'have no proper way of getting about the country roads.'

What the clergyman collected for, no one cared a halfpenny. What they noticed was that even Mrs. Lester lowered herself to flutter round, going in and out and here and there for subscriptions. They saw the Rev. Edward, with his shining face, write down in a notebook that Mrs. Mells had given fourpence, just as carefully as the baker would have done.

The people were gratified to see the way their minister of the Gospel walked down the main street, after a light lunch, smiling here and there at the children, even chucking one remarkably plain little girl under the chin,

and giving her a penny. The Rev. Edward Lester smiled, as he walked, at the cottage chimneys. They were quite low enough for him to view without holding his head very high.

As he walked along, with his dark trousers neatly turned up, he noticed a small boy, who was, so he said, searching for a yellow frog that had hopped into the ditch. Mr. Lester leaned over, and peered and smiled through his shining glasses. He prodded about with his walking-stick, causing the frog to jump into the road. He wished to help the boy with his sport. The boy pounced upon it, and tying its leg with a bootlace, flicked it into the faces of the girls he met, much to their mutual delight. To finish up, he trailed the frog along the road before a large black cat.

Seeing the frog jump safely into the road, without waiting to see what the boy did with it, the Rev. Edward Lester passed on his way laughing.

CHAPTER XXXV

A COUNTRY WORD

It is the instinct of wolves, if good fortune brings a lamb into their path, to devour it. No doubt they prefer, for the pleasant flick to their appetite, that the lamb should try to run away. When such a pack of wolfish creatures have once started to scent out a victim, they never give over the trail until the victim is devoured, or, by good fortune, escapes.

It was this kind of hunt that Neville had heard coming behind him, and though it had had to give up the chase at that corner where were the nettles, it had started a new cry after that 'harlot'—as they called Miss Neville. Neville had given them, through his housekeeper, plenty of fiction and droll stories, but they could never forgive or forget the way their late vicar had looked at them, and the way he forgave them their hatred. All the pleasure they had ever got out of him, besides the droll stories, was an inquest. The people felt it a pity that he should have escaped their teeth so meanly by getting himself underground. There was still, however, his sister living near.

In diverse ways and from different tongues, the Rev. John heard the snarling sounds uttered about his brother Henry. One morning he heard a new accusation, delivered, in really worried tones, by 'the dear girl,' who had heard it from the woman up the lane. 'The dear girl' even went on telling her story while the maids and footmen sat on their row of chairs waiting for their master to begin to read the fourth chapter of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians. 'The dear girl' ought to have stopped when the servants came in, but she really felt that something must be done about Henry.

After prayers and breakfast, the Rev. John entered his study. There was something that morning that he had to do, and the interval between meals being so short, his expectant ears already almost caught the sound of the gong; he must needs begin to do it at once. He lit a cork-tipped Turkish cigarette. When the luncheon gong sounded his letter was finished.

Some might regard the letter he wrote as holding up the ideal of rural virtue a little too high, but the truth is and always will be a queer affair to take hold of, not only in the country but everywhere.

Shelton Vicarage, August 9th.

Dear Henry,—Although I am particularly busy this morning, I must write a letter to you without any further delay, and I must speak plainly, and come to the point at once.

I advise you to go to Canada.

From the experience that you have already had in that country, you must quite well know the way to look out for an opening when you get there. Your dear mother, who is living happily and so quietly with George, would, I feel sure, help a little in the matter of your passage, and George and I will try to pay the remainder, though it will be a hard pull for us.

I am quite sure that you are strong enough to attend to a fruit farm, or even a dairy. A hard-working young man can do, so Mr. Tasker says, a good deal in that way.

I must, of course, leave the matter of going to Canada to you. As I am only your brother, I cannot force you to do the right thing. You will, I know, go your own way in the world.

My dear wife and I most earnestly pray you to leave Miss Neville. The village people, both here and at South Egdon, are talking about you. You know what that must mean to me. They say that if they lived like that—a woman said so to my wife this morning—she said if any of her class lived like Miss Neville, Mr. Acton, the landlord's agent, would turn the offending one into the road.

To me this matter is very serious. I pray you to consider the moral tone of Shelton, where your dear father laboured, and South Egdon, that is now, I am glad to say, in such good hands. To live in sin, as you are doing, adds to the burden of our already hard task with the poor. Surely the thought of Father must come to you at times.

I trust that you will, anyhow, think the matter over, and if you decide to meet our wishes, we will at once inquire of the ship agents about the cost of a steerage ticket.—I remain, your ever affectionate brother,

John Turnbull.

A wily pryer into the human soul would perhaps suggest that the Rev. John was now become more old in days and more orthodox in the middle

order of the Church, perhaps even stouter in his faith as well as stouter in his belly. All of which guesses may be equally true.

It was a fortunate thing that when the postman carried this letter to the cottage on the heath. Rose Netley, who had settled in at the farm, should have been there for an early lunch. Henry opened it, and noticing its sermon manner, at once handed it to Molly, who passed it on to Miss Rose.

Rose read it in the proper spirit, taking it as a huge joke. She laughed immoderately over it. Although Rose laughed, she by no means despised the forces of the enemy. She only wished to show by laughing that she was not afraid of them, and to give confidence to the others.

And now the spiritual life of the two villages proceeded in its gently devout circles. They were rightly proud of the way their churches were filled on Sunday.

The people of South Egdon began to be very familiar with their vicar. He was always walking about amongst them. And since those blessed days when he had collected their money, he was always welcome to go wherever he wished.

The proper time had now come for the clergymen in the two villages to ferret out of their holes candidates for the Confirmation that the Bishop was to hold at South Egdon. As with everything else, the villages went together in this programme. The two vicars during their longest interval sought in the cottages for boys and girls who had completed their education and were old enough to say ‘bloody’ or to be nurse-maids.

The Rev. John fished in his cure, and the Rev. Edward in his. The Rev. John landed the greater number of fish, and he prided himself that it was his grand manner of talking to the people that did it.

The next thing that had to be done was to instruct the candidates, and the Rev. John had to get both the boys and the girls into one interval. He could not possibly spare two. By squeezing in the girls at five-forty, and by hurrying out the boys at half-past six, he had just time to get ready for his own dinner at seven. Inside the vicarage the children were very good, docile, and meek. And no wonder! They had to report all about the furniture to their mothers. They might be asked, not by the Bishop but by their more earthly father, exactly what there was on the sideboard, or what kind of coal went into the fire. When the end of the lesson came they all knew the dining-room by heart. They had got used, besides, to the sound of the Rev. John’s voice,

it seemed to help them to remember the pictures. Of course the Bishop was much too wise to ask any one a question.

His Lordship's other important duties compelled him to hold the service in the morning. The Shelton girls found to their sorrow that it was all over and themselves home before dinnertime. They had the whole afternoon at home to talk about one of their companions who, from what they knew about her, certainly ought not to have been there at all, 'unless,' as one mother put it, 'the good Bishop wished to kill two birds with one pat on the head.'

The Shelton boys were left to come home as they liked, it had been trouble enough to get them there. Several of them loafed out toward the heath, hoping, as it was a cold day, to stone to death a blackbird, or, with luck, even a wren.

Through years so many that no man can count them, these boys had been arrived at. Out of the dim background of immortal nature they had come, and their ever-recurring answer to the mystery beyond them and to the depths behind was the one word 'bloody!' That was their right word to use when, after long waiting through everlasting years, at last the wonder of thought was with them—'bloody!'

'Dear children'—that was the way the Bishop had begun his address. The dear children loafed out on to the heath, killing, on their way, a thrush and a hedge-sparrow. The earth that had brought them forth remained pensive about them.

Out on the heath, near where they passed, a solitary figure stooped, cutting gorse. The boys watched while this lonely one made the bundle ready to carry. The boys, so lately confirmed in their attachment to the Church, recognized the figure. It was Henry Turnbull. All the children of Shelton knew about him. They knew about his wicked life. Their mothers had often used a word to express the sin they supposed that he was guilty of, and these dear children, so sweet from under the Bishop's very hands, likewise named this sin after the approved Shelton manner.

When Miss Neville had first gone over to the heath, she had brought the little furniture that she needed from Maidenbridge. There was only one piece that she had taken from her brother's house, and that happened to be a small bed. This bed had been conveyed in open daylight, through Shelton towards the heath, naturally going up Mr. Tasker's hill. Having once seen the bed, and a great many of them did see it the village mind began to plod in sweet

thought about it, reasoning, in their usual able manner, that three persons, two of them females, and one bed opened the way to a nice kind of problem.

They hoped to have learned something from Alice, but she, alas! had turned traitor to them, wholly giving herself up to the enemy. If she went anywhere, it was by train to Maidenbridge; so although they often lay in wait, not even the young men were able to pounce upon her.

The confirmed boys, with their knees still dusty from the floor of the pew, evoked the Shelton idea, with one or two merry additions from South Egdon. They called out polite questions about that bed to Henry, who continued to do up his faggot. The boys followed up their words with stones, and saw with delight, when Henry took up his bundle, that his face was bleeding from a nasty cut that a sharp flint had made over his left eye.

CHAPTER XXXVI

TOO LATE

In the cosy bar parlour at the Maidenbridge ‘Rod and Lion,’ some farmers sat at their ease, partaking of a few last drinks, and discussing, in the style of the local paper, their hard times. They had been damning a certain small strike of farm labourers in one of the eastern counties. Mr. Dane of Shelton had been treating the company to a discourse upon wages, and, as he was known to be the worst payer in the district, he was looked up to as an authority by the others. Seeing how interested they all were, he went on to tell them, after another pull at his glass, that there was ‘up his way, a damn agitator, brother to the parson at Shelton, and living with that murdering whore woman on the heath.’ Parson Turnbull, a good Christian man, had told the farmer himself that he wished his brother was in Canada.

‘And what do ’ee think happened yesterday? You do know me cowman Bill?’

They all nodded.

‘He asks I for a shilling rise! That’s what we get by letting them damn agitators in. Shoot ’un! I say, shoot ’un!

The farmer, seeing how important the subject was, raised his voice, that was by nature loud enough. Even the bottle and jug department hushed their clamour in order to hear, hoping that a row, a row with blood in it, was going to happen amongst the gentry.

‘I’d pay a man to kick ’un! Setting up Bill against I!’ yelled the farmer. ‘Damnation!’ The glasses on the table shook as he brought down his fist.

In the lower bar a tall bearded tramp was drinking out of a quart mug with a man called, by local custom, ‘Tim the Cheat.’ This man was a mender of kettles, but he often made off and sold the kettles for old iron. He was now treating the tramp, to whom he owed a small favour. Hearing the rage of the farmer in the other room, they both stopped certain polite remarks they had been making about a servant girl, and listened. After a few quiet words with the tramp, the head of the tinker presented itself respectfully through the doorway of the upper bar, and without the body following the head, explained, ‘how his friend Tasker was quite willing to deal with any

bloody agitator in the world.' 'Tim the Cheat' slowly retired, and returned with the tramp, whom the farmer welcomed by name.

'You be Mr. Tasker's father, bain't 'ee?'

It was then arranged that Mr. Tasker's father should attend a little meeting of friends at the Shelton public-house the next evening, to talk over the best way to manage the wicked agitator, Henry Turnbull. The farmer treated the tinker to a drink, and gave Mr. Tasker's father a shilling.

On the heath Henry's life was beginning to take a new turn. He did not always look down, as Rose had begun to do, for he now had Alice to look at. These two were going to take a small holding in the spring, somewhere on the heath where there were gooseberries, so that they could pick them together as they used to in the vicarage garden. They were to be married, and the big Malden had blessed them.

In the beginning of November when the leaves were falling, Alice and Henry journeyed to Tadnoll, and from there to Maidenbridge, to buy the ring. A few hundred yards away from the cottage Henry remembered that Molly had asked him to purchase one or two little things for her. He had forgotten what they were, and returned to ask. Alice waited for him, sitting under a bank.

'Bad luck for us, your having to go back,' she called, seeing Henry coming.

On their way to the station they saw a strange thing, an adder out in the road basking in the November sun. It raised its head and hissed. Henry had never seen one out so late in the year.

A ragged group of heath ponies, startled by something that they saw near a distant clump of trees, galloped toward them. What had frightened the ponies the lovers could not tell. The train was late, and Henry and Alice watched three men loading great fir logs from a wagon into a truck. One of the logs fell on a man's hand and crushed it. They saw the blood as the man was led away to the station inn.

'These be all mortal bad signs. Don't 'ee buy the ring to-day, Henry, my dear,' said Alice.

But Henry only laughed at her, and suggested that they should return home by the last train from Maidenbridge.

In the South Street at Maidenbridge a tramp passed them. Alice felt sure that he had turned and followed them close behind for some yards up the

street. She clung tightly to Henry's arm. They wandered together in the walks of the town. Passing through the gardens, they turned down North Street and found a shop, where they ate cakes and drank tea. After their tea they visited the museum.

After glancing at the spear-heads, they came all at once upon a skull that grinned at them from a case. Alice did not like to look at the thing. She went on a little farther and examined the skin of a snake. Henry lingered by the skull. Just above one of its eyes there was a piece broken out. Henry wondered whether the blow of a flint axe had killed the man. It certainly grinned as he turned away to join Alice. The caretaker showed them a mantrap that had once held a man all night in a wood near the town. In the morning the man had been found dead.

Outside in the street there were now lights. Alice suggested that they might go to the pictures before they bought her ring. They took their seats. A few chairs in front of them there was a dark young man and a pretty servant girl with a round smiling face and a plump white neck. She always bent her head forward when she laughed. The dark young man looked sometimes at her and sometimes at the pictures. She was excited and glad to be there. He looked rather bored.

Alice knew at once who the dark young man was. So far Henry had not noticed him. She longed to get away, but she could not move just then. At last—it had seemed an age to Alice—Henry thought that they had better go to buy the ring. In the street some tradesmen were already closing their shops. The book shop was shut and the chemist's. They had forgotten about the shops closing so soon. When they reached the jeweller's it too was closed. There was no gold ring for Alice that night.

Again they wandered, this time by a side street. They were walking beside a great building with high windows and lights. Near the great building, they knew it was the hospital, there was a narrow shed. A window looked toward the road and showed a light. Alice, for fun, peeped. She saw that it was the place where the dead were taken. A woman had just been carried in, a weeping nurse bent over her. The woman had died of cancer, the nurse was her daughter. Alice knew them both.

The dead woman's daughter raised the sheet and Alice saw the face. The nurse wept and kissed the forehead of her mother. Henry called to Alice to come on. She did not tell him what she had seen.

The most important passenger, waiting like themselves for the train, was a convict covered all over with broad arrows. He was in charge of three

policemen. He was being taken away by night for some reason that the police alone knew. He stood handcuffed, waiting for the train.

Henry led Alice into the waiting-room. It was filled with dust. A surly porter had begun to sweep it out so that he might have less work to do the next day.

CHAPTER XXXVII

DANCING STARS

The main road from Maidenbridge to Portstown sank at times into the valleys, and then rose again, winding like a white snake over the hills. It passed through two or three hamlets before it reached the narrow lane that led to Shelton, the largest village on the way being the one in whose principal inn Mr. Tasker had bought his dog. Travellers moving along this southern roadway passed each other, or dropped behind, according to the different pace of their legs, or their beasts or their machines.

Along this road Mr. Tasker's father slowly moved. His feet were tied up in rags, through which his toes broke away to the mud. One foot dragged, the other shuffled, so that behind him there were two grooved lines in the silt by the wayside, as though an old woman had dragged along a heavy forked clump of wood. This was the tramp's peculiar way of walking that he had cultivated ever since he had taken to the road, so that his feet never left the ground.

Rounding a bend in the road, where lay a heap of flints ready to be broken, the tramp heard in front of him certain noises. From occasional calls and rough shouts, and from the sound of feet with sometimes a low or a bellow, the tramp judged that cattle were being driven ahead of him. For a mile or two Mr. Tasker's father heard the same sounds, until he arrived at a point where he could see, a hundred yards or so ahead, a drover with a rough ash stick struggling to keep his charges free of the traffic; which was no easy task considering the number of high-speed cars that passed. Every time one of these went by the drover had to hustle his beasts into the hedge.

There was something about the look of the drover's back that made the tramp's shuffle more than ever drag up the sand of the roadside. He allowed the two hundred yards that separated him from the cattle to become half a mile. There was no reason for him to be tossed by a cow or beaten with an ash stick, he wisely reasoned.

An oak tree marked the turn from the main road into the Shelton lane where grass grew between the chalk. Seeing the oak the tramp quickened his steps. He hoped that the cows and the drover had gone along the big road towards the great dairy pastures of the valley. The tramp gladly turned up the lane. But before him, where the line of the down touched the sky, he saw

the form of a man following a cow and he heard a call. There was no mistaking the voice, he had heard it all along the road from Maidenbridge.

Half an hour later Mr. Tasker's father was snugly settled in the bar of the Shelton inn within two hundred yards of his son's dairy. The landlord drew him some beer. At seven o'clock the men, the usual nightly customers, began to come in. They sat around, staring at the hanging lamp, their looks empty and drugged with toil. Amongst them came in the drover, who had safely delivered his cattle. He sat on the farther side of the room to that chosen by the tramp, with his head slightly bent forward, and he uttered no remark at all. No one noticed whether he drank or not.

When Farmer Dane made his way amongst the men they received him with a respectful 'Good evening, sir.' He was followed, oddly enough, by Mr. Tasker himself. This unusual visit to the inn on Mr. Tasker's part occurred because he had been to Mr. Dane's farm to pay his quarter's rent for the dairy, and the farmer, having business at the inn, carried Mr. Tasker with him, so that he might partake of the usual drink that was due on the payment of a bill.

Mr. Tasker looked round the room and saw his father. There was no chance for him to retreat. He could not allow the farmer to gain the price of that drink. He felt that it would not be polite to the landlord if he turned away. By the irony of fate, the only vacant seat in the crowded bar was the one next to his father, who sat next to the door; for even a labourer feared to sit too close to him. In this vacant seat Mr. Tasker placed his own long frame and looked, as the others had done, at the lamp. Thus it happened that Mr. Tasker and his father sat side by side on one settle, ready, if need be, to drink together out of one mug.

Farmer Dane began at once to talk about the hard times, telling the company the enormous price the merchants asked for linseed cake.

'In these hard times,' he said, 'one has to look about in order to live at all.'

One of the men, a tall, gaunt, twisted creature, a carter, who after every puff of tobacco spat on the floor, told of a visit he had once received from Henry, who had come to him to buy some seed peas. Henry had been, as he always was, very polite and friendly over the purchase, and had praised the man's garden. This lowly manner of his was, in itself, quite reason enough for the man to denounce him. This he now did, using the common expressions of the English working man towards any one who happens to have the popular public-house opinion against him.

The other men loudly applauded. Then, curiously enough, they all, at that moment, looked at Mr. Tasker's father.

The innkeeper, who hardly ever gave a bone to his own dog, when in drink would sometimes throw things away. He had heard a tale told that the dwellers in the heath cottage did not admire his ethics. Besides this, he had against Henry a most pertinent and simple grudge, a grudge that made Henry his eternal and hated enemy, so that he would have had him, with great pleasure, kicked to death. This grudge was that Henry never treated the landlord when he came to the inn for cigarettes.

No one of the company had noticed the momentary absence of the landlord, but they all looked at him when he returned, because he held in his hand what they could see was not a pot of beer. The innkeeper placed in the middle of the table a pair of boots, heavily toed with iron, and studded on the bottom with huge hobs. When the boots had been enough admired, the innkeeper handed the pair to Mr. Tasker's father.

It was then that the genius of Mr. Tasker saw in those boots his escape, and the chance of his father getting to prison again. 'Kick 'un!' the son said, 'Kick 'un!' Mr. Tasker, as he said it, looked up at the ceiling and smiled. 'Would his favourite black sow farrow that night?' he wondered, 'and would the Maidenbridge auctioneer notice in his books that he had only charged him for six little pigs when the number that Mr. Tasker had brought home the day before from the market was seven?'

The carter whose daughter had been carried to the churchyard a few days before, finished his mug, spat on the floor and laughed.

Mr. Tasker's father had thought out his plan. He would catch 'thik bloody fellow' that very night. He explained in the gentle English tongue as used by the people when they mean business, that he had seen ' 'e and a maid,' and had heard them say that they were going to return by the last train from Maidenbridge to Tadnoll. He would 'catch 'un' and 'kick 'un,' as his son had advised, 'on the heath.' Mr. Tasker's father looked at the loud ticking clock above the fireplace. There was plenty of time.

The farmer called to the landlord to fill up the mugs. The settles were moved round the table, and the men leaned over so that their heads almost touched. Each one cursed Henry and drank to the farmer. Clouds of tobacco smoke surrounded the uncombed heads that were filled with the lust of hate. No one noticed that the drover sat behind with his head bent forward as though he listened to some one speaking to him from the darkness outside.

The reward that the farmer promised to give the tramp for teaching Henry a lesson was a bottle of whisky, to be handed out of the inn window if he returned victorious. Looking again at the clock, Mr. Tasker's father slowly and carefully put on his new boots. He rose almost at the same time as his son, and they left the inn together. The father turned down the road to South Egdon in order to reach the heath that way. The son made off as fast as he could stride to the dairy. He went at once to his dog, loosed the chain from its collar, and entered the house.

The drover soon left the inn. A few of the nightly customers remained, knowing how sorry the landlord would be if they all left his inn a whole hour before the right time for turning out. The drover stood a few minutes by the gate that led to the dairy. He knew that he could overtake the tramp, and he wished to hearken: perhaps 'she' might speak. Looking towards Mr. Tasker's dairy, he remembered his dog. He would have liked to pat its head. He often felt sorry that he had let the beast go. Even with its evil temper he had liked it. Had it not been his companion in the days when he could enjoy himself, before he took up the burden of 'she'?

He opened the gate into the dairy meadow. A light that had been burning in a bedroom at the dairy went out. Mr. Tasker had gone to bed. The drover crossed the meadow. He looked up and wondered at the stars. He walked up to the yard gate. The huge black sows lay like monstrous slugs just inside.

Towards the sea a meteor darted across the sky, leaving a trail of light.

A dark creature moved silently towards him, with a wolf-like tread, from behind the shelter of the wall. A rush, a muffled growl, and the drover felt the teeth of his old companion, who had not recognized the changed nature of his old master. The drover delivered no blow. His pain could not force him to strike because 'she' was very near just then. He bent over the fierce beast and stroked its head, speaking to it in a kind tone, the changed tone that he had used to Alice. The dog let go, shook itself, and slunk off under the shadow of the wall. The bitten drover limped down the road toward South Egdon.

The drover felt blood in his boot. It had run down from the wound. He knew the length of his old dog's teeth. Would the tramp escape him? He could not tell. What would 'she' say about this bitten state that he was in? 'She' seemed so very near. He heard her voice just by him. What was 'she' crying for now: who was hitting her? He would find her and see.

Near the church at South Egdon, the stars began to behave oddly, moving about in the sky till they danced. The horns of the bull romped

round the Seven Sisters, and Castor and Pollux whirled up and around the man with the little goat. The sick drover thought that they were a great flock of sheep that he was driving. All the gates of the sky were open, the sheep were running into many heavenly gardens.

He turned wearily into the churchyard and found his way to the corner where Neville was buried. The boys had again broken a way over the fence. He felt with his hand for the mound. He could feel only nettles. He remembered the wooden cross that he had set there. And now he was lying just where he had put it. He could not see anything but stars. He looked longingly at the sky. Perhaps his cross was up there. Yes, there, sure enough it was, the cross of stars above him.

'She' was not crying now. 'She' was singing. The cross was falling out of the sky. It came down quite low. Each star burned with a wonderful light. He tried to move away so that the stars might fall and shine on the grave.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE REWARD

The tramp had the fortune of a victor with him in his walk. The beer that he had drunk lent him wings. There was no need for him to shuffle now. He could even strike fire with his new boots on the stones in the road. ‘See what drink does for a man!’ he kept saying. He meant to earn that bottle.

The passengers who left the last up-train for Tadnoll were a girl and a man, Alice and Henry. The day had not been a great success for them. They had come home without the ring, and Alice had not enjoyed the pictures. Henry was surprised. He had thought that every girl liked the pictures. He was amused that he could not get the grin of the skull out of his head.

On their way between the turf banks, Alice cowered against him. She could not hide her fear of coming evil. Henry was happy. He loved her. He talked of the stars and told her their names. All at once he felt her whole body tremble, and he saw in front of them a man who stood right in their way in the middle of the path.

For a moment Henry felt the terror of Alice. She hid her face against his shoulder, but he still led her on. When they came up to the man, Henry knew him to be the local tramp, Mr. Tasker’s father. Henry turned a little to one side so that they might get past. He wondered if the tramp had been drinking. The man moved again in their way.

‘Do ’ee see thik bloody ditch? That’s where ’ee be goin’!’ the tramp shouted, shaking his huge fist.

Henry spoke cheerfully to Alice, telling her, as if she were a child, to run home and get supper.

Alice still clung to him.

‘Run, dear, and tell Miss Neville about the ring. Tell her we could not get the ring, we were too late. We spent too much time at the pictures. Run quickly!’

Henry tenderly released her hold, and she like an arrow darted past the tramp and was gone. And Henry faced the Ancient of Days, the dread, everlasting presence that had entered into the tramp.

‘What do you want with me now?’ Henry asked.

‘I’ll break ’ee’s blasted ’ead!’ was the response.

In Henry’s eyes the tramp’s form grew to a stupendous size. Having taken into his being the whole brute force of the world, moving through the eternal ages, he was become as God himself. At last Henry knew that the monster from below, the immortal beginning and ending of man’s nature, the first and the last, was before him; even the everlasting mud, the background of all life, to whom our few days are as nothing, and we, leaves driven before the wind.

Through Henry blazed a fierce lightning. His soul burned with fire. He had felt a spark of the same anger when for the first time he had heard the dairyman speak in his real voice to his family, and when his brother had spoken to him on the stormy night when he had fled from the vicarage.

Henry shook with anger. He too would defy, he too would strike once, one blow and die! Henry rushed at Mr. Tasker’s father—and was met half-way by the tramp’s boot.

Natural instinct had informed Mr. Tasker’s father that a man does not die of a kick, and can, if need be, very well stand more. Acting by this knowledge, he repeatedly kicked the face and body of the fallen Henry.

At last after a final good one, the tramp left his victim lying unconscious, and bleeding badly from a deep wound over the eye, caused by the iron of the boot-toe.

The tramp left the scene of his victory and crossed the heath by a different path, that passed the back of Miss Neville’s cottage. As he went by he saw three women with a lantern come out of the cottage and go in the direction of Tadnoll station. The tramp quickened his pace. He was thinking of the reward that a man gets when he fights on the strongest side in the world. The God-like power that he had drawn out of the earth had given him a divine thirst. He longed to put that bottle to his lips and drink. He stood for a moment upon the hill beside the lonely thorn, and listened to the voice of some creature that made a low moan near the dairy. From quite near him, he heard the almost human scream of a hare caught in a gin. He would have that hare after his drink, he thought.

Mr. Tasker’s father lightly descended into the valley. Making his way to the inn, he climbed through a gap in the hedge. He had once or twice before entered that way to steal eggs. Under the innkeeper’s window he took up a little clod of earth and threw it, striking the lattice. In a minute or two the window opened, and the innkeeper’s voice said ‘Damn!’

‘Kicked ’un,’ was the reply.

‘A damned lie!’ said the innkeeper.

‘Kicked ’un,’ came again from below.

This time the tramp was believed, and the publican, leaning out, handed him the coveted bottle that the farmer had paid for. The innkeeper closed the window and retired, just having time to see Mr. Tasker’s father draw the cork and drink.

Outside the inn, the gentleman of the road sat down under the hedge and drank again. He would have liked to do a little more dancing with his new boots that night. He drank again, staggered to his feet and leaned over the dairy gate, looking towards his son’s home. The dark cow-sheds slumbered under the stars. A hungry grunt came from a pig.

The warmth of the tramp’s feelings made him unbutton his coat. It was the only upper garment that he had. His coarse hairy chest received the cool night wind. Mr. Tasker’s father tilted up the bottle and drank.

The autumn wind moved about the fields. The church owl flying homeward with a rat in its claws was aware of a man crossing her path. She passed to the right instead of the left of the vicarage.

Mr. Tasker’s father, bottle in hand, staggered across the meadow. His happiness was complete. He belonged to the élite for whom the world is made. A black shadow crossed the cow-yard and slunk under the wall.

Leaning over the yard gate, he finished the bottle and held it upside down. Two drops of spirit fell into the straw. Mr. Tasker’s father had never felt so complete a happiness before. Why should he not go in and smash the head of that huge black sow with his foot? It would be a pleasant early morning sight for his son. He unlatched the gate and entered.

A dark beast crouched under the wall, ready to spring. The huge sows lay sleeping. Others of the gods lay about in the soft dung. There was not room enough for so many in the sties.

The tramp raised his foot to kick. The other foot was unable to bear his weight. He lurched forward, staggered, and fell. A wolf-like shadow sprang from the wall and had him by the throat. A beast’s cry—and silence. The teeth of the dog gripped deep. It had not forgotten the smell inside the felt hat, torn bits of the hat were still in the bottom of its tub. For five minutes it held on. Then it let go the body, and curled up at the end of its barrel, sniffing angrily at the pieces of torn felt. As it passed the largest sow, the

dog moaned. It was a way it had, to moan in the night. It moaned like a beast in pain.

The two sows raised their snouts. They grunted greedily at the stars. They smelt blood. They had been taught by man to devour carrion. A day or two before they had torn to pieces the carcass of a cow that Farmer Dane had sold to Mr. Tasker for five shillings. The largest sow struggled to its legs and sniffed. Was there still some cow left? She moved towards a dark object that lay in the straw, and from whose throat blood oozed. The other gods were roused. They had no desire to be left out of the feast. The tusks of Mr. Tasker's lately purchased prize boar were quite able to break the outer covering and the inner skin of a man.

That last cry, of the father, did awaken the son. Mr. Tasker heard a noise in the night. He thought for a moment about the little pig that he had got for nothing, and fell again into a sound slumber.

The hare died in the gin. The owl tore out the bowels of the rat. In the heath cottage, Molly covered the face of the dead Henry.

CHAPTER XXXIX

GONE TO CANADA

A friendly feeling towards the world awoke Mr. Tasker early the next morning. Besides the recollection of the little pig, he felt sure that something had been about in the night. At 4.30 he carried his lantern into the yard and saw his father, or rather what his gods had left of him.

Mr. Tasker had never suffered from nerves. He dragged his father into the corner where the cow had been eaten. Fetching a fork he covered up the remains of the man and of the cow with dung.

That same morning the officious policeman of South Egdon had the happy surprise of reporting two deaths to the local coroner. One a common cattle drover found dead in the suicide's corner of the Egdon churchyard, and the other, Henry Turnbull, a clergyman's son who had been kicked to death somewhere on the heath.

Besides the policeman, there was another happy man who rejoiced in the village. He was Mr. Duggs, who helped to carry Henry Turnbull to the Shelton churchyard. On this occasion he was careful not to be the last of the bearers, having learned by experience the size and weight of the Rev. John's foot. Mr. Duggs passed a remark at the inn that Henry's sins could not have been as heavy as his father's.

'Only God Almighty knows about that,' said the undertaker's man, who went to chapel.

Mr. Duggs looked at him, but did not reply.

Dr. George brought his mother in a closed hired car. His own happened to be out of order. Mrs. Turnbull, seeing her old home so altered, burst into tears, and only recovered herself when she came to the grave, remembering, as she afterwards said to her loving sons, 'that we all have to go.' She was permitted by George to accept a pot of black-currant jam from a village woman. She longed to taste it to see whether it was as good as her own used to be.

Unluckily, when they returned to the doctor's house the careless chauffeur let the jam fall, and Mrs. Turnbull wept again. She cried all the way upstairs, and sat down and cried again with her knitting on her lap. The black-currant jam was mixed with the mud of the road, and Mrs. Turnbull

was unable to do anything else for three days but cry; her son even being obliged to guide her hand when she wrote her weekly cheque for her board. That week he explained to her that it must be a pound more, to help to pay for the hire of the closed motor car.

There now remains only a thimbleful of sand to trickle through the glass of our story.

Miss Annie Brent, who once figured as Mrs. Roude, married the gentleman of the Penny Shop. She had her troubles, for her husband used to give brooches to a dark-haired young woman who lived in Station Road.

'They are all alike, these men!' thought Annie. When her little boy was born, she smiled and said she was glad baby was a boy, and, sleeping with little Harold in her arms, she dreamt that he was running to the grammar school to learn Latin.

As time went on, the Rev. John grew stouter, and the intervals between his real work in life became so short that he had no time to fill his pipe, and was forced to buy expensive cigars with 'the dear girl's' money. His desires had learned, with the help of many rounds of beef, to wisely stay at home. Besides the cigars, 'the dear girl' gave him two children, who were undoubtedly impressed by the size of their father's boots.

The Rev. Edward Lester likewise followed the excellent counsel of the Book of Wisdom, and partook, without asking needless questions, of the bread and the wine. In course of time, he became a canon of the Church, because his face grew to the proper length required for that place in the upper ranks.

At Portstown, happiness came again to Mrs. Fancy's door. The Army of the Lord had been obliged to move, for the most simple of all reasons—that their place, even with the pictures of the devil, did not pay. The poor in that street grew tired of giving their souls and their pence. Men and women of the old type came again to the lodgings, and more than one young girl found it fit into the order of things to walk into the backwater to hide her shame.

This change was not Mrs. Fancy's only good fortune. She married the jobbing gardener, and they walked to chapel together when he preached. When there was another preacher they watched the behaviour of the street from their front room. But her real triumph came when she could afford a new sofa. She then moved the one that had been so great a danger to her lodgers, upstairs.

Alice lived with Molly Neville on the heath, and was always quite a respected visitor in her friend Annie's house at Maidenbridge.

Molly Neville, in her cushioned chair, read many books. But her happiness always remained in her own thoughts.

Rose Netley returned to the town with her mother, but her girlish gaiety never came back to her. Her old occupation, the social work of saving her sisters, had been taken up by others, who had as their head the mayor of the town, who had made his money letting furnished flats. The accepted plan of the new order of reform was to turn every man, woman, and child into the unthinking slave of the wealthy owners and managers of a rich empire.

The faithful Malden used to sit by Rose as she lay in her garden. He looked so sad, that to make him smile she agreed to learn to play chess.

About three weeks after the death of Henry Turnbull, Mr. Tasker found fault with a certain corner of his yard. He damned it every time he went out to milk. 'The cows were always slipping down just there,' he said. He damned his wife for suggesting that the manure might be moved.

There was in the winter more time to spare for the dairyman, as many of the cows went dry and the others gave only a small yield of milk. There was always an hour or two in the middle of the day that Mr. Tasker might spend as he chose. One morning Mr. Tasker took out his horse, called his dog, and, borrowing a dung-cart from Farmer Dane, led the horse and cart to a chalk-pit that was a few hundred yards up the farmer's lane. Taking off his coat, he quickly filled the cart with chalk.

'You be working,' said the farmer who rode by.

When the load reached the dairy, his girl slaves pulled and lugged at the gate to open it wide enough to let the cart through. Why did not Mr. Tasker remove the precious dung from the corner before he turned up the cart? Was it possible that he could have forgotten the value of dung? He had girls who would move the foulest mess at his nod. Had Mr. Tasker forgotten that he was a father and owned children? Anyhow, to the utter astonishment of his wife, here was Mr. Tasker turning out load after load, three loads a day of chalk upon a wealth of rich manure.

Having at last satisfied himself that he had made a safe path to his cowshed, he returned the cart to the farmer. When he had finished milking the cows, he came in to his tea, after first throwing a sheep's leg that Mr. Dane's shepherd had given him, to his dog.

While she helped her husband to a large slab of cheese, Mrs. Tasker said:

‘They police ’aven’t catched father?’

‘No, they ’ant,’ replied Mr. Tasker. ‘Father be gone to Canada, right enough.’

And Mr. Tasker went out to feed his gods.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Mr. Tasker's Gods* by T. F. (Theodore Francis) Powys]