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Beside Still Waters

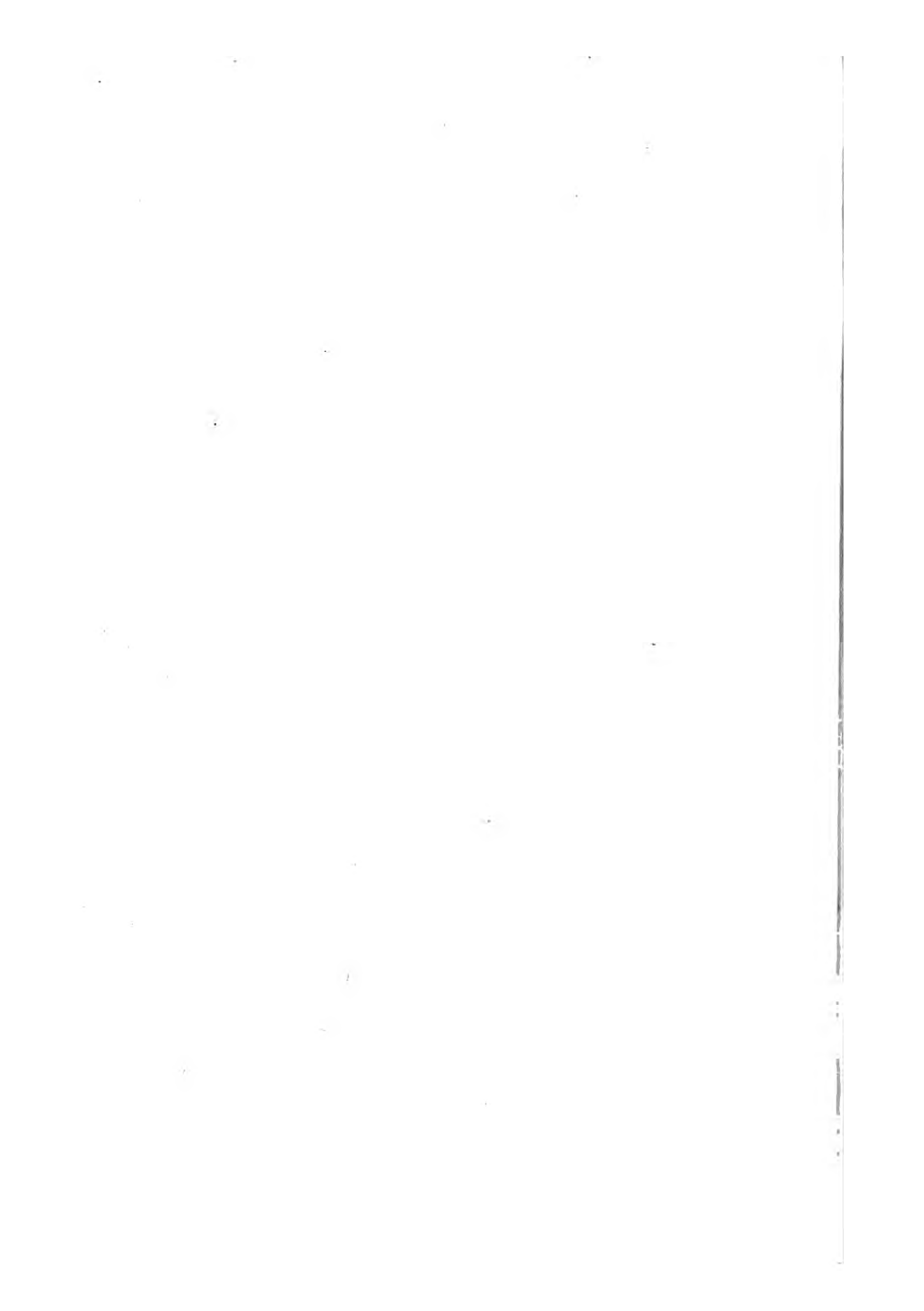








BESIDE STILL WATERS



BESIDE STILL WATERS

A NOVEL

BY

WILLIAM MACKAY

AUTHOR OF 'THE POPULAR IDOL,' 'PRO PATRIA,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I

London

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1885

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'Sweete Temmes ! runne softly till I end my song.'

SPENSER'S *Prothalamion*.

TO
EDMUND YATES
OUT OF
RESPECT, ADMIRATION, AND REGARD
FOR
THE NOVELIST, THE JOURNALIST
AND
THE MAN

NOTE

LAST year I submitted to my publishers a rough sketch of the fiction, which they, in turn, now submit to the public. At the same time I gave them the title of my book. That title was 'SINS OF THE FATHERS.' In the early part of this year, a novel, by another writer, was issued by other publishers. The new work was entitled 'THE SINS OF THE FATHERS.' For me this coincidence was unfortunate. It meant the time and anxiety involved in hitting upon a new name—handicapped as I was with the knowledge that no other title could be so appropriate as that originally selected. Moreover, when my namesake appeared, two volumes of my work were already in type, and a considerable number of

copies had been struck off. Those copies bear the original title at the top of the pages. To me the discrepancy is a matter of great regret; and I fear that it may appear offensive in the eyes of less lenient judges. I can only trust, however, that, after this explanation, my critics will not attribute a technical blemish, either to want of care on my part, or to want of confidence on the part of my publishers. To my readers, I can only say that if, owing to their indulgence, there should be a demand for another edition, the ghastly error will be rectified therein.

W. M.

LONDON, *August* 1885.

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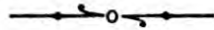
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SINS OF THE FATHERS



CHAPTER I

HOPPY'S FREEHOLD

A NO-MAN'S LAND—a strip cut from the edge of the common—a poor garden lot, bounded on this side by the road, and on that by the common itself. The patch of land is triangular in shape. It is an isosceles triangle, showing thirty feet or more at its base, and gradually dwindling to a point whereat a solitary cabbage luxuriates in rank magnificence.

VOL. I

A

At the base of the triangle stands a house on wheels. It is a disused gipsy van—having indeed served for many years as the residential caravan of John Cooper and his family. After many wanderings in many counties the structure was sold to Mr Molt, its present proprietor. In its journeyings from fair to fair it had become rickety. Strange rattlings, symptomatic of dissolution, disturbed the Cooper family as it was drawn along the Surrey lanes. Its days of usefulness were at an end. A new and more gaudy carriage, with a door picked out in green and gold, and with a real brass knocker in its centre panel, was purchased, and the old machine was knocked down to Mr Molt for a mere song.

That worthy was already in undisputed possession of the No-man's land. It was not a part of the common, being fenced off. The parish made no claim to it. Nor could any private individual be found to assert his title to a few perches of weeds and brambles.

Molt entered upon it as a squatter, an original settler—growing his beans and cabbages and potatoes, with no one to say him nay. Indeed had he chosen, and were such a thing possible, to grow his own vine and fig tree, he might have sat under the shade thereof, no man daring to make him afraid.

When he purchased the discarded tenement of the gipsies, and had it wheeled up to the base of his triangle, and finally settled there, some slight remonstrance was made by the authorities. As, however, the authorities were unable to produce any title to Molt's lot, their efforts may be regarded as being merely experimental. Molt's motto was '*Je suis je reste.*' And at the commencement of this history he had been in possession of his estate for ten whole years.

The hedge is high now that divides his holding from the road, and the pedestrian can just catch sight of the flat roof of his tenement, with its tall zinc chimney black from age, and the thin column of blue smoke

mounting into the summer air. Those who have entered upon the domain testify to a certain air of comfort which pervades the house, and a pleasant appearance of plenty which characterises the kitchen garden that stretches in front of it. They also speak to the ferocity of a famous lurcher that is chained between the wheels of the house—an animal that exhibits its sagacity rather in avoiding wounds and bruises intended for him by a despoiled society than by any great solicitude about those cuts which are sometimes inflicted.

A glance round Mr Molt's premises suggests that the proprietor follows other pursuits than that idyllic one of kitchen-gardening. On that side of his abode which is farthest from the road hang a couple of nets of a texture contemplated by the Thames Conservancy, and disapproved of in its Bye-laws. A couple of punt poles lean for support against the same side of the domicile. And eel traps, pails for bait, and

other paraphernalia of the fisherman, indicate the fact that Mr Molt does business in the river that winds broad and silvery beyond the green expanse of the common.

It would be wrong, however, to decide off-hand from an inspection of these implements that Mr Molt was by profession a fisherman. Mr Molt was a variously accomplished man—a gentleman of rare resources. His talents consequently sought many outlets.

He was a horse-coper ; he occasionally did a deal in pigs ; and he has been known to dispose of game without a license, which, I admit, is but a roundabout way of saying that he varied the monotony of life with a bit of poaching. Indeed it was during an affray with Lord Ashby's keepers that he received that wound in the tendon Achilles which imparted to him a distressing limp. This formidable defect had gained for him the soubriquet of 'Hoppy'—a nickname by which he was known at every fair in the

riparian parts of Surrey, Buckinghamshire, and Berks.

Chiefly, however, his reputable occupations were those of fisherman and philosopher. He was cunning in the ways of the wily barbel, was sudden death to the Jack, and was greatly versed in the awful mysteries of ground-baiting a swim. His claim to the title of philosopher was chiefly founded on the remarkable reticence which he retained in the presence of strangers—a safe and easy method of achieving greatness which might be honestly commended to philosophers in general.

On a certain Sunday morning, in the June of a certain dead and gone year, the door of Hoppy's house stood open. The rays of a summer sun—tempered by no cool winds from the river—beat down on the roof of the shanty, and blistered the brown paint on the planks. On the common the ragged ponies stood still, winking their hot eyes, and with their long and draggled tails

whisked at the persistent and insatiate flies. Two or three cows lay under the ineffectual shade of the solitary poplar. Lambs bleated plaintively in no mood for gambols. The river in the distance shone like burnished silver, and the few skiffs that had ventured abroad were drawn up under the welcome shadow of the willows. Across the stream, mellowed by distance, and sweetened by transit across the water, came the tinkling of the bell of a parish church, answered by the louder and more metallic clang of the peal of the rival establishment on this side the stream. In answer to the latter summons, inmates of scattered farm-houses passed along the road by Hoppy's dwelling-place — spruce maidens with red faces, shining from much soap, and greatly conscious of gay ribbons, purchased at the last fairing, and meretricious brooches from the pedlar's pack. Accompanying these damsels were sometimes ungainly louts, with broadcloth coats, and trousers which

fell into strange and unaccountable angles. Yesterday young Giles, clad in corduroy, with shirt flung open at the tanned throat, stood among his ricks or dung heaps bright and lithe and graceful as Antinous. To-day he sacrifices to the conventionalities, and proceeds painfully in unbecoming garb, a victim to the awful art of the village tailor. For fashion has her votaries in the lower orders. And poor Giles suffers as acutely from the agony of collars too liberally starched as does my lady from the cruel embrace of the corset or the pitiless pressure of a Parisian boot.

Hoppy, sitting by the open door of his home, pays no attention to the music of church bells, remote or contiguous. Nor does he hear the artless prattle of youths and maidens passing along the dusty road to listen to the discourse of the Vicar—drier even than the road. Whether Hoppy ever did enter a church is unknown; indeed much of the early life of the philosopher is shrouded

n mystery. He may have been carried to one for purposes of baptism, and godfathers and godmothers—who can tell?—may have fatuously undertaken the responsibilities imposed on them at the font. Later on he may have been married in a sacred edifice, hopefully accepting the proffered love, honour, and obedience of a wife long since dead. One thing alone is certain—if in the advancing winter of his life Hoppy worshipped his Maker at all, he did not do it publicly.

And now while the air is flooded with the vibrating music from the belfry, Hoppy is painfully spelling out such items of intelligence and such expressions of opinion as are contained in the favourite Sunday organ of republicanism. Advanced thinkers, possessed of fine rhetorical powers, thundered forth from the columns of this weekly broadsheet against the aristocracy and the bishops, and even the throne itself. These were the pulpites whose ministrations Hoppy attended on Sunday morning.

It must be confessed that he enjoyed their preaching immensely. The eloquent periods of 'Brutus,' who dealt with politics, and 'British Serf,' whose pen spitted the social evils of the day, were entirely to his taste. And when either 'Brutus' or 'Serf,' in a moment of intolerable political or social exasperation, gave vent to some exceptionally pungent diatribe, then Hoppy would put down the paper, give his thigh an emphatic slap, and exclaim with an expression of keen enjoyment, 'That's it! hit 'em hard, my lad! let 'em have it!' just as though 'Brutus' or 'Serf' were sitting there to receive his congratulations. On the classic race-courses of Windsor, Egham, or remoter Hampton, Hoppy was wont to howl similar encouragements to the horse that carried his money.

Not unkindly had Father Time dealt with Mr Molt; and although his closely shaven face was scarred and wrinkled, and his closely cut hair quite grey, he might easily

pass in broad day light for ten years less than his real age, which was sixty—if there be any truth in parish registers. His path through life had been thorny at times. It is little wonder that his bronzed countenance should show traces of a contact with the brambles. For the rest he was of the middle height, had a closely knit frame, and eyes small and keen. He affected corded breeches and brown gaiters, and wore an old velveteen coat, with pockets of enormous capacity at its base.

The internal arrangements of Mr Molt's tenement were simple. His table was fastened to the wall with hinges, so that it could be put up or let down at will. A narrow iron bedstead faced the door, and in the corner, at the head of the bed, peacefully reposed a double-barrel fowling piece. Two chairs, a cupboard, and a miniature stove, completed the furniture. The honest fisherman's efforts at mural decoration were not extensive or ambitious. They consisted for

the most part of likenesses of men, eminent from the Brutus and Serf point of view, cut from the illustrated papers and pasted to the walls.

Above the head of his little bedstead were ostentatiously displayed three blue documents of an official appearance, partly in print, but with blanks filled up in a clerkly and legal hand. They bore the small formal signature of Sir Penton Hook, chairman of the county bench, and were indeed summonses to appear before that august tribunal on three several occasions, for having neglected or refused to pay for dog and gun licenses. As a philosophical and practical republican, Mr Molt protested against all those vexatious imposts, levied by a government to the form of which he was opposed. These summonses were the silent witnesses of the fact that on at least three memorable occasions he had stood forward in the Session House itself, as the

unchartered advocate of the Rights of Man. Wellington was not more proud of his despatches than was Molt of those sinister invitations.

CHAPTER II

A MAN OF THE WORLD

Just as the church bells had ceased to ring on this certain Sunday, of a certain year, Mr Molt heard a click at the latch of his garden gate, followed by a great barking and struggling on the part of the dog fastened between the wheels of his house. The gate was opened, and presently he beheld, walking up the narrow cinder path, a young man. The young man was smoking a short clay pipe, the pungent odours from which mingled unpleasantly with the scent of

wild rose and honeysuckle wafted from the hedge rows. He was a young man, of shabby genteel appearance. And he was about five-and-twenty years of age. He was a good-looking young man, and he walked with an easy swagger which suggested that his own estimate of his own personal and mental worth, was not a mean one.

The young man was very dirty ; his boots were considerably down at heel ; and his clothes, which were of a rather 'sporting' cut and texture, exhibited symptoms of old age. His hat was slightly tilted over his forehead, which increased an expression of 'all-there-edness' which was natural to him. Although he would boast of good looks, his face was not one to inspire confidence in a stranger gifted with the most ordinary powers of observation. Had you seen the young man forcibly ejected from a public billiard-room, for an indulgence in practices not recognised by the Rules, you would experience no surprise. Nor would you valiantly rush

to his assistance were you to see him surrounded by an infuriate mob on Epsom's famous Downs — what time the cries of 'Welsher' rend the air. And yet there was something in the young man's face which suggested that perhaps his chances of doing right had not been considerable, and that under other circumstances he might have cut a different figure in society.

Hoppy came to the portal of his modest establishment, and shading his eyes with his left hand, took a full view of the stranger that had come within his gates. The stranger did not give him much time for doubt, but shouted out with frank familiarity,

'Well, old Jack-in-the-box—and how goes it?'

Then he sped up the five wooden steps and wrung Hoppy's hand with the utmost cordiality. At first all that Hoppy would bring himself to utter was :

'I'm blest.'

But thinking, probably, that this ejacula-

tion did not convey any great warmth of hospitality, he asked his visitor to step inside, and motioned him to one of the two seats that the apartment boasted. When his guest was seated, the owner of the mansion once more took silent stock of him, observing which the dusty young man smiled and said,

‘It is me, Hoppy, old man.’

To which Mr Molt, much lost in thought, could only repeat,

‘Well, I *am* blest!’

‘And I’m blessed thirsty. I walked most of the way from town.’

Recalled to a sense of his responsibilities as host, Hoppy took a tin can, descended the steps, and drew a quart of ale from the cask that reposed beneath his dwelling. Returning therewith he placed it before the seedy young man, who took a deep draught, smacked his lips, and returning the humble tankard, asked,

‘And how d’ye think I’m looking, Mr Molt? Pretty fit, eh?’

‘You ’aven’t growed, Jim. Nor yet your face ’aven’t haltered. Still you’re changed, Jim—wonderful changed since last I saw you.’

‘I should hope so, indeed,’ answered the young man, with some resentment in his tone, for Mr Hoppy had dwelt sorrowfully on the word changed, as though, in his opinion, the change were not for the better.

‘Why, when I left the infernal village yonder I was little better than a boy.’

‘A little worse nor most boys about here,’ interrupted Hoppy.

‘P’raps I was a bit wild,’ acquiesced the visitor, evidently accepting the suggestion as a not inconsiderable testimony to his merits. ‘That’s seven years ago. I was a great hulking lad then ; now I flatter myself I’m a man—and what’s more, a man of the world.’

Hoppy regarded the speaker attentively for a moment, as if anxious to ascertain the external characteristics of a man of the

world, and having apparently completed his survey, he gently murmured,

‘Ah!’

And waited for the young man to make further disclosures.

‘Take my word for it, Hoppy, London’s the only place where a young fellow can acquire tone. Pass us the beer, old boy.’

A patient student of social and political problems, Mr Molt lost no opportunity of adding to his stock of information. The word just used by his friend was new to him.

‘An’ wot is this year tone, Jim?’ he inquired.

Jim leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes as though in deep thought, and having grasped his definition, opened his eyes again, and answered with that superior air adopted by nursery governesses to very stupid children.

‘Tone, my dear Hoppy, is a sort of a kind of manner which men of the world get by mixing with other men of the world.’

‘In Lunnon?’ inquired Hoppy.

‘Yaas,’ replied Jim, with an affected drawl, and at the same time adjusting his soiled shirt cuff. ‘I should say the best tone in the world is picked up in London.’

Once more Hoppy surveyed curiously his somewhat soiled and dilapidated acquaintance; and once more he uttered, but in deeper and more solemn tones, the pregnant monosyllable—

‘Ah!’ Then rather tentatively than argumentatively, he said,

‘I was on’y in Lunnon onct in my life. That was at the Hold Bailey. Me an’ Richardson went up to prove a halibi for ole Dan’l Taylor’s son; which the halibi didn’t come hoff, an’ Dan’l’s boy was sent yonder. If that’s yer Lunnon tone, I don’t think much of it.’

Jim smiled in a pitying way. It would be clearly impossible to impress the value of tone upon a heathen so hopelessly dense as Hoppy. Probably the heathen understood

and resented Jim's contemptuous smile and continued silence, for he said presently,

‘Well, I don't suppose as it's tone has brought you down to Wapshot-on-Thames, Master Jimmy.’

‘True, O king!’ answered the other, losing none of his accustomed swagger notwithstanding the philosopher's covert sneer. ‘The man who came to Wapshot for that commodity would come on a fool's errand. I've come to make peace with the old man.’

‘Make peace with him! Wy, ye 'aven't quar'l'd, 'ave ye?’

‘To tell you the truth, Hoppy, it's not so much peace that's brought me down as it's pieces. I'm infernally hard hit and the governor refuses to part. It's not fatherly of him, upon my soul, Hoppy; most *un*-fatherly; it is really, now.’

Hoppy shrugged his shoulders and shook his head.

Jim, accepting these demonstrations as

being made in doubt or denial of his statement, said, with some warmth,

‘You don’t mean to say that Mark Westaway’s *not* my father?’

‘Wy, most certainly not. I don’t say nothin’ of the sort. But the law—*it* says it.’

‘I’m his son by the law of God,’ replied Jim, throwing his clay pipe at the stove, where it shattered into a hundred pieces.

‘Quite so, Jim. But not accordin’ to the law o’ man. An’ it strikes me, sort o’ forcible like, that the laws o’ man is most on ’em made a purpose to do away with the laws o’ God an’ natur.’

Saying which, Hoppy glanced with some honest pride at the blue summonses pasted on the wall. They were so many pieces of documentary evidence in support of his position. They were mute witnesses to the fact that he, Walter Molt, surnamed Hoppy, had stood forward as a saviour of society,

as a martyr to the eternal principle of Nature's laws as opposed to those of man.

'Besides,' added Hoppy, descending from the regions of speculative philosophy to those of every-day life. 'Besides assertin' of yourself an' bullyin' aint the way to get anything out of Mark—you take *my* word, young man.'

'But, damn it all,' exclaimed Jim, with a sudden access of tone, 'he's cut off my miserable pittance of a pound a week. I haven't had a sixpence for months from him.'

'Most like not, Jim ; most like not. The fact is, Mark aint the man he were. An' sixpences aint as plentiful with him now as suvverins was six months ago.'

'You don't mean to say he's lost the farm ! He's not bankrupt, Hoppy ?'

'No, he aint a bankrupter as I've 'ear tell on. But as to losing the farm—well, he 'ave and he 'avent.'

Jim tapped his foot impatiently on the

floor. This enigmatical method of telling a narrative irritated him.

‘Ye see, Jim,’ said the elder man, affecting not to notice the visitor’s symptoms of impatience, ‘the gen’l’mán as you call your father suffers a bit from your complaint. He ’as a won’erful lot of tone. Dresses hisself up in a green coat an’ brass buttons, an’ rides to ’ounds along o’ the squire an’ the parson wen the season comes on. Fond o’ gettin’ drunk at fairs too, and makin’ all sorts o’ stoopid bargains. In fact, Jim, Mark Westaway ’ave been goin’ to the devil for the last couple o’ year or more with as much tone as if he’d been a dook or a markis.’

‘Well?’

‘At last, Jim, the wust come to the wust. The creditors, they came down, an’ for the fust time in its fam’ly ’ist’ry, the bailiffs was put in at Vicarage Farm.’

‘You don’t mean to tell me that the old man’s sold up?’ inquired Jim, with an im-

petuosity not unnatural in one who, as will already have been surmised, had a slight personal interest in the narrative then being gradually developed.

‘Not so bad as that. But wen the wust did come to the wust, and the men in possession were smokin’ their beastly pipes all hover the premises, Sir Penton ‘Ook an’ the lawyers puts their ole ‘eads together, an’ advances the money to Mark’s daughters on conditions that the farm was assigned to them. Mark, he couldn’t ‘elp hissself. They ‘ad him in a werry tight place, you see. So arter some delay the farm *was* assigned to the gals; an’ Mark ain’t no more int’reast in it than you or me.’

‘Poor old chap!’ muttered Jim, with a sympathy which might either have been genuine or simulated: ‘how does he take it?’

‘Bad, Jim; I may say werry bad. He potters about the farm, calls on old cronies, spends a deal o’ time at the ‘Three Feathers,’

an' wen he wants a shillin' or two has to go to his own daughters an' ast for it.'

'Begad then, Hoppy, he'll have to go to his own daughters, and beg a bit for his own son ; for money I must have.'

To which, as was his custom when his thoughts were too great or too disagreeable for utterance, Hoppy merely answered,

'Ah !'

Having, in this manner, summed up the situation, it apparently occurred to Hoppy that his visitor, while obtaining information which had somewhat disturbed him, had volunteered little, if anything, concerning his own adventures during seven eventful years. So he inquired,

'An' wot 'ave you been up to, Master Jim—I mean besides gettin' 'old of that there tone?'

'Faith, my most excellent and entertaining Molt, I've been almost everything. I've been clerk to a loan office that didn't lend. I've touted for advertisements. I've can-

vassed the suburbs for subscribers to an illustrated Shakspeare, in weekly parts, at two shillings each. I have played leading characters at the Theatres Royal, Greenwich, and Richmond. I abandoned the drama for billiard-marking, and recently I have been earning a precarious livelihood by writing for the press.'

This last piece of information increased Hoppy's respect for his visitor. Why, for all he knew, his friend Jim might be an acquaintance of the redoubtable 'Brutus,' a colleague of the irreconcilable 'British Serf.'

'Do you raily write for the papers?' he asked, half-admiringly, half-incredulously,

'Such, my friend, is the humiliating fact.'

'Mayhap, then,' said Hoppy, laying his hand on the Sunday organ of advanced radicalism, 'you know some of them as writes for *this*?'

'No,' replied the journalist, airily. 'That's

scarcely my line. In fact I describe the morning gallops for the sporting papers.'

This confession did not seem to lessen Hoppy's opinion of his young friend. For though he loved politics much, he loved horse-racing more.

'But,' continued Jim, in a tone of surprise, 'when did *you* learn to read the newspaper? When I was last here you didn't know B from a bull's foot. You're a trifle old for a scholar, Hoppy.'

Was it a blush that suddenly swept over Hoppy's bronzed and battered countenance? Surely a man, who had graduated as horse-coper and poacher, and who, in his pursuit of those honest crafts, had called to his aid philosophy, would be incapable of so girlish a weakness. There was no time given to speculate on this matter, for before Mr Molt could answer the question, the lurcher fastened underneath the van tugged at his chain with great violence, and manifested unmistakeable signs of delight.

The men looked out of the open door, down the narrow cinder path. A simple arch, formed of long and sinuous willow branches, spanned the pathway at three yards distance from the van. It was covered with a modest creeper. And it now served to frame as charming a full-length portrait as could be seen in all Buckinghamshire on that Sunday morning.

A girl of seventeen, of slight symmetrical figure, was approaching the shanty. Her costume was almost Quakerish in its simplicity; a rose in her plain bonnet was her sole attempt at ornament. In the matter of gloves alone did she afford any evidence of female vanity. She was undoubtedly *bien ganté*. These matters are comparatively easy of description. Nor is it difficult to speak of her small hands, the delicate perfection of her feet, and the unstudied grace of her manner; but to describe her face or to determine wherein lay the secret charm of her beauty—that is another matter. One

might draw up an inventory of her features with the utmost particularity, and dwell enraptured on the fair skin, the straight forehead, the wavy brown hair, and the other properties which no doubt would be duly noted by the person appointed to take that sweet catalogue. But even then there is left no vivid impression of the general effect. Such beauty transcends the functions of pen and ink, and must be left to my brethren of the brush.

Such faces have before now served as models to painters versed in the portraiture of types of purity. Its owner might have sat for the daughter of a pilgrim father. I, who have often seen her and who know the story of her life from childhood, think it no blasphemy to say that she might have been depicted as an angel. Her eye it was that gave such changing expression to her face. Her soul spoke through it—that soul which harboured no thought or even knowledge of hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness.

Before she was aware that Mr Molt was entertaining a guest, this young lady had tripped up the steps and entered the single apartment of the van, which seemed transformed by her presence into a very abode of the fairies. The smile died out of her face when she saw the seedy young man from London. God has given some women an instinctive gift for discerning good and evil in the features of man. And in Jim's face this one read Evil, writ in large hand. His presence was immediately abhorrent to her. She waited for no introduction, but handing Mr Molt a volume containing illustrated articles of a miscellaneous but generally serious character, she wished him 'Good-morning' and tripped down the steps again, taking no more notice of Jim than if he possessed no separate existence. She did not even stop to say a kind word to the lurcher, who tugged madly at his fastening, and whined piteously for a kind word—a gentle pat of the hand. In a moment she

had passed through the gate and was gone.

Thereupon the Evil Presence, who was also a Conceited Presence, burst into a loud guffaw. Then rallying Molt, he exclaimed, 'That's your schoolmistress, I'll be bound. Oh! you selfish, sly old man!'

The language, and the tone of it, jarred on Hoppy's ear. He knitted his brows, adding to the furrows there, and bit his lip, replying, with some natural dignity,

'That's Miss Kate Gilliat. An' she's one o' them whose names aint to be talked light of—leastways, not when *I'm* about.'

'What? The little Methodist? Gad, what a beauty she's grown. She was only a kid when I left. Hoppy, you shall introduce me.'

Again Mr Molt knit his brows and bit his lip. He was standing over Jim, looking down at him. And he said, very slowly and impressively,

'Hark ye, Jim Gates, if I knew a man as

harm'd that there girl—or *thought* harm to her—I'd—I'd '—

'Well, what would you do, my gallant squire of dames?'

'I'd shoot him,' replied Hoppy, with the utmost deliberation.

'Don't be an ass, Hoppy,' said the young man, rising. 'I'm off to seek the governor. And when she calls again, don't forget to give my love to the little Methodist.'

Jim went down the steps, and Hoppy's eyes followed him along the pathway and out of the gate. Then he sat down, stretched his legs out before him, and thrust his hands deep into the cavernous pockets of his coat. He was lost in thoughts which, to judge from the expression of his face, were the very reverse of pleasant.

The Sunday newspaper, the ministrations of which had before Jim's entrance afforded him such unmixed satisfaction, lay neglected on the floor.

He must have sat in silence, and in that

position, for half-an-hour, when, raising his head, his eyes fell on the fowling-piece that stood in the corner of the room. His eyes gleamed ominously as he repeated, with grave emphasis, a determination at which he had arrived after due consideration—

‘If anyone was to ’urt a hair of her ’ead, an’ I knew of it, I’d shoot him!’

Then, after a pause, he gave an emphatic nod, as if to clench the matter, and added, by way of postscript—

‘I would, by God!’

CHAPTER III

THE LITTLE METHODIST

IMPATIENT readers may be disappointed to find that in Chapter Three our narrative still deals with the same certain Sunday of the same certain year described in preceding sections. At this part of the story the slight delay is unavoidable. Presently we will gallop apace. And even now you must understand that the hands of the clock have not been standing still. The sun has passed the meridian. Cotters are busy with their early dinner. Twittering spar-

rows have the dusty highway all to themselves. Moreover, I am about to introduce you to a habitation more architecturally sufficient than that in which we have been spending hours which would have been more profitably passed in the parish church—with the interior of which sacred edifice it had been my original intention to open.

Vicarage Farm — so-called because that which is now the farm-house was, in fact, the Vicarage some century-and-a-half ago—is close to the village of Wapshot. The farm-house is a firmly-built red-brick building of two stories, with a porch in the centre, and two prodigious bay windows standing on each side. The colour of the original bricks has been exquisitely toned down by that distinguished artist, Father Time, to whose slow and dainty manipulation (for do we not speak always of the finger of Time?) may be attributed those russet patches that, in varying shades of colour, beautify the red tiles of the roof. The farm-house stands well back

from the road, and the space in front is devoted to the culture of flowers, as it had been one hundred-and-fifty years ago, when the dead and gone vicar lived there.

Behind the farm-house you catch sight of long barns, also red-tiled, the black wood of the walls contrasting well with the subdued red of the sloping roof. Beyond the barns and between them is the yard, from which come cheerful sounds from byre and stable, mingling with the voices of farm hands, modulated to a Sunday tone, the rattle of pails on the round, greasy cobbles, and the occasional bark of the mastiff. Flanking the barns are ricks of hay and stacks of straw, half cut through. And away beyond the house and the yard and the barns stretch acres of meadow-land and pasture ; fields of yellow wheat and bearded barley ripening for the sickle. These generous spaces reach on till they abut on the margin of the Thames—from whence, looking across the stream, you catch sight of the wooded slope

that lead to that eminence of which Denham wrote—

My eye, descending from this hill, surveys
Where Thames among the wanton valleys strays.

Although the farm itself showed encouraging signs of peace and plenty, affairs in the farmhouse were less agreeable to contemplate. One of the poets of our childhood speaks regretfully of some golden isle where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile.

The various beauties and comforts of Vicarage Farm were greatly discounted by reason of the ignoble eccentricities of Mark Westaway, the parent of its present proprietors. Ever since his daughters had returned from church, that fine old sportsman had been making things lively for them. Indeed, when they came into the drawing-room, they found that he had placed his riding-boots on the table among their little albums and inkstands and presentation copies of the poets. He never trusted the cleaning of those boots to his

servants. They required careful painting ; and his daughters' favourite room — the apartment wherein they received company — was the spot which this morning he had chosen for the operation. It was by methods of this sort that Mark tried the temper of the girls who had saved him from ruin, and, as a safeguard against any future contingency involving bailiffs, had usurped his position on the farm.

One should of course hear both sides of a question ; nor should any man be condemned until his witnesses be heard. And I am bound to admit that in the village of Wapshot and through the adjacent county Mark Westaway was a most popular character. He was a hard-riding, hard-drinking, dare-devil fellow, with a gruff, hearty word for everybody. He was by many regarded as a typical specimen of the fine old English gentleman ; and his daughters were looked upon as exceedingly heartless in having checked him at the height of his rollicking

career. Indeed Mr Rymill, the Vet. who was acquainted with the writings of Shakspeare, and whose suit moreover had been spurned by the younger of the Misses Westaway, compared the ill-treated farmer to King Lear, and more than once gave it as his opinion in front of the public bar of the 'Three Feathers' that the ill-fated monarch in question was on the whole less deserving of pity than the late possessor of Vicarage Farm. It is true that the sympathetic souls who made these comments were not obliged to live with Mark from one end of the year to the other ; and it is probable also that the ways of fine old English gentlemen, though exceedingly picturesque and very suitable to that golden age in which they flourished, are somewhat out of harmony with the domestic routine of more modern times.

A servant had been called to remove 'the Master's' boots, his brushes, and his bottles of varnish ; and the old man himself stood with his back to the empty grate, regarding

his daughters with that expression of defiance which I have seen put on by a big but peccant schoolboy in the presence of his pedagogue. Serious as the matter undoubtedly was, it possessed an element of comedy which was quite irresistible.

Mark Westaway stood six feet and rode thirteen stone. He had a florid countenance, thin grey hair, and side whiskers closely cut. He was arrayed in a black swallow-tail coat, such as is now worn for evening dress ; underneath was a white vest ; round his neck was a scarf, blue with white spots, held together by a horse-shoe pin ; and from his fob gracefully depended a black silk band, with innumerable trinkets of gold and silver dangling therefrom. In fact Mr Westaway dressed his part to perfection, as they say upon the stage ; and might at any moment have sat for an artist in the character of the fine old English gentleman.

His daughters were pleasant, healthy, well-developed young women, possessing a re-

markable likeness to each other. Both had the same grey eyes, the same auburn hair, the same creamy complexion. Kate, the elder, was a shade taller than her younger sister Rose, and there was an expression of determination and firmness about her mouth which was wanting in the younger, and which promised but little success to any gentleman essaying to enact the rôle of the wicked father.

After the episode of the boots, silence reigned for a space, broken presently by Mr Westaway, who announced in a casual way and to nobody in particular, it being presumably a matter interesting to him alone :

‘I’ve sold the hay on the Trowlock meadow.’

The daughters interchanged glances. On these occasions Kate was invariably spokeswoman. Her answer to the challenge was short, sharp, and particularly to the point. She looked at the old gentleman straight in the face and replied,

‘So have I, father!’

‘Great heavens!’ cried this victim of unfilial children, ‘how dare you? What right?’——

But here he stopped short. There was a tacit understanding between father and daughters. Theoretically the farm was Mark’s, and in conversation the girls had no objection to its being described as such. It was an innocent fiction that pleased their father and did not for a moment deceive any of the neighbours. In practice, however, he knew that he must submit to the real owners, and in that knowledge he fumed and fretted. Still he thought it advisable not to prosecute such enquiries as might have been introduced by the question commencing ‘what right?’ and substituted a rebuke:

‘I tell you what it is, Katherine,’—he always called his eldest daughter Katherine when he wished to be particularly severe—‘I tell you what it is: the farm’s going to rack and ruin. You’ve no head for manage-

ment; and it wouldn't surprise me a bit if we all spent our last days in the workhouse.'

'We do our best, father,' said Rose, who was generally disposed to adopt a conciliatory tone during those somewhat frequent family disputes.

'Your best! Bah. And what's your best, I'd like to know! Why, you'll never get beyond churning butter or mixing hog-wash. What do you know about buying and selling—tell me that!'

The father looked quite fierce as he uttered these reproofs. To which Rose dutifully replied,

'Kate, you know, looks after the commercial part of the business, pa dear.'

'Yes; and pretty "look after" it'll be. Wait till the bankruptcy commissioners get hold of your books. They'll give you a "look after," I'll bet.'

Katherine replied, in her cool, composed way,

'Don't put yourself out, father. We will

manage to keep out of the court as long as we're not interfered with.'

'Interfered with!' exclaimed the worthy old fellow, with a fine show of indignation. 'Pon my soul, things are come to a nice pass, when a man can't talk in his own drawing-room, to his own children, about his own farm.'

Here he stamped on the ground, twirled the gewgaws depending from his fob, and enquired, in tones of outraged dignity,

'Hang it! Do you know who I *am*?'

'Alas, yes!' thought the girls to themselves. Audible response they made none. And the modern King Lear indulged in a series of snorts, indicative of contempt and indignation, and cursed the fate that had made him the victim of a pair of condemned, ungrateful daughters, and a parcel of doubly condemned, scheming lawyers. He made some cutting allusions to the fact that he had been robbed of his birthright by his own flesh and blood. And, indeed, he was

proceeding in a strain of great natural eloquency to dwell upon the story of his wrongs, when his younger daughter interrupted his oratory by the single expression,

‘Do keep quiet, father. Here’s Master Dick.’

The wronged and indignant parent ‘condemned’ Master Dick in the same forcible phraseology which he had used with regard to lawyers and daughters. He, however, abruptly quitted the house by the back way. Not that there was anything in the appearance of the young gentleman, whose approach had been announced, to account for the sudden retreat of a veteran sportsman like Farmer Westaway.

Coming toward the house, along the wide path, and between the two lines of standard roses, was a young fellow of nineteen or twenty. He was faultlessly attired in morning costume; having, indeed, attended service at the parish church. He was a self-possessed, modest, and exceedingly handsome English lad, who

had gone through the ordeal of public school and university education without turning out either a prig or a roué. His closely cut locks, and his tanned face, testified to athletic tastes, and there was an easy and unaffected gaiety in his manner, and a frank and cheery ring in his conversation, which many people have found irresistible.

It may be mentioned moreover, as a circumstance of still greater interest, that he was the only son of Sir Penton Hook, and the heir to a baronetcy and fifteen thousand a year. To give every credit to the ladies upon whom he was now about to make an afternoon visit, these circumstances had not tended to win this favour so much as his unfailing good-nature and the boyish candour of his manner.

He has entered the drawing-room now, has exchanged greetings with the sisters—whose typical hero and fine *young* English gentleman he is—and has made many enquiries concerning the crops and the live-stock

and the state of agricultural affairs generally. There is nothing particularly brilliant or witty in his questions or his comments ; yet as he rattles on, the very good humour of his conversational style becomes infectious, and the sisters laugh incessantly at what I must own are the merest commonplaces. Looking over the geraniums and calceolarias that blossom luxuriantly in the bay window, the younger daughter of King Lear—the monarch himself is by this time comfortably ensconced in his own particular corner at the ‘Three Feathers’—catches sight of another visitor coming along between the roses ; and the announcement of the fact causes an instant silence on the part of our ‘agreeable rattle.’ The fact of his own advent did not produce a greater effect on the honest farmer than did the announcement of this one on him.

There are philosophers who maintain that nothing in this world happens by chance ; they have eliminated the word accident from

their dictionaries ; and, indeed, the more I see of life the more I am inclined to agree with these believers in design. Particularly where women are concerned it will be found that many seeming coincidences are the result of much patient scheming ; that almost every so-called accident is an elaborate contrivance.

Thus Richard Hook is the son of the Westaways' landlord. What more natural than that he should drop in upon the worthy people in a friendly and informal way? Ruth Gilliat was the most valued and particular friend of the Westaways. There is therefore, I take it, nothing extraordinary in the fact that when next the mistresses of Vicarage Farm looked out across the red and yellow bloom in the window, they should descry also proceeding between two lines of roses, drawn up to attention, this friend and favourite. Nor do I think that Ruth's famous prototype wandering over the golden stubble presented a prettier picture.

The theory of mere coincidence would be

somewhat weakened on noting the behaviour of these young persons when they meet. When Ruth visited Hoppy no blush mantled to her cheek. But she blushes now. Why also, when she enters the drawing-room, does she affect to be unconscious of Richard's presence, only discovering it after she has exchanged compliments with the ladies of the house? Then indeed, with a hypocritical little start, and a surprised exclamation of 'Ah, Mr Hook, *you* here!' she admits the existence of the young gentleman.

These circumstances, I say, weaken the theory of coincidence ; but when it is recorded that the same comedy has been played on the same little stage for the last half-dozen Sundays, the theory of coincidence is shattered into atoms, and the farmer's daughters stand confessed as conspirators of the deepest dye — aids to a plot, the main incidents of which shall be none of their contriving.

Momentary only is the awkwardness of

the meeting. Mr Richard plunges once more into conversational commonplace, and keeps the ball of dialogue rolling until Ruth declares that she must go, and Richard expresses the utmost readiness to accompany her part of the way. She of course avers that she could not think of troubling Mr Hook. And he, equally of course, impetuously explains that a task so grateful is unaccompanied by any trouble whatsoever. So they take leave of the Westaways. And this is a scene from the little comedy played once a week by these promising young actors of what is called the natural school.

Just beyond Vicarage Farm and between it and the village, the road receives a tributary in the shape of a narrow lane which runs between high hedge-rows. Into this sequestered byway these young actors instinctively turn. Oh, the shameless hypocrisy of love! A moment ago it was, 'How do you do, Miss Gilliat?' 'Ah, Mr Hook, *you* here!' Now with none but the birds for

witnesses, behold his arm is round her supple waist, and he is saying in passionate accents,

‘Oh, Ruth, it seems ages since I saw you!’

‘And yet,’ she answers, unresentful of the pressure of his arm, ‘it’s only six days.’

‘Six days, dear! six centuries! Six centuries of doing nothing but thinking of you.’

‘Are thoughts of me so dull then?’ she questions, coyly.

‘It’s not that, you know,’ explains this ardent lover; ‘it’s the thinking of you and the longing to be with you—but, perhaps, you don’t understand the feeling?’

‘Don’t say that, Dick,’ she pleads. ‘Indeed, indeed I often long to see you—to listen to you.’

‘And yet,’ he proceeds—for every man in love must have a grievance—‘you seem so placid, so calm with it all.’

‘And what must I do, then? Would you have me cry? I sometimes feel inclined to do so. Or shall I mope all day? What

would my school-children do then, poor things, and my sick people? And what on earth would become of that dreadful Hoppy, the most tiresome of all my pupils?’

But Master Richard was not to be rallied. In love the superior animal always displays his selfishness, believing that he has a monopoly of the sweet suffering incident to courtship. The woman being by nature more conversant with the mysteries, even should she be conscious of a sense of wrong, has the grace to hide it. Sublimely egotistical, he continues his plaint :

‘It’s all very well for you, Ruth ; but I have no school-children, or sick old women, or illiterate old reprobates like Hoppy to look after.’

‘Poor Hoppy!’ she says in a softly musical voice ; it was as though an angel pleaded some merciful consideration for the faults of that adult student of the Primer. Then answering her lover’s objection :

‘But you have your books, and your boats,

and your horses. Besides, you have much charming society. In your case one should never feel dull.'

'I swear, Ruth, I care for no society but yours, and I get so little of it—only a few minutes at such long, long intervals; even on Sundays I am only permitted to see you *part* of the way home. Is it always to be only part of the way home?'

She was not, I take it, displeased at his evident earnestness, his boyish impatience. What woman would have been? Next it was she who gently rebuked and consoled.

'No, Dick, not *always* I am sure; but for a time we must submit. You know how good, how stern my father is. Sometimes I tremble when he reads the words, 'Honour thy father,' and see his calm cold eyes resting on me. I feel so guilty then, so deceitful. What *would* he say if he knew of our meetings, of our—our engagement!'

This was reassuring. The lady was absolutely undergoing some discomfort on his

account. She evidently suffered and made no sign. He ceased to be querulous. He became resigned somewhat.

‘Of course,’ he said, philosophically, ‘what must be must. My own Pater is the most formidable father in Europe. I daresay he would kick up exceeding rough if he heard about it—though Heaven knows you are worthy of a prince.’

They now approached the end of the lane. His arm had released her waist. They stood still, he holding her two hands in his, and looking down lovingly and protectingly on that placid face of hers.

‘We must learn to wait and hope,’ she said, her eyes downcast and a slight tremble in her voice.

‘May we not have to wait till a hope deferred makes the heart sick?’

Then, as if sorry to have given a needless pain, he added, more cheerfully,

‘But it *must* come right. And so long as we do see each other sometimes, and so

long as we do love each other,—and you *do* love me, Ruth, don't you ?'

Infinitely sweet and pathetic, and full of confidence, was the look she gave in reply ; her eyes lifted to his, and her lips trembling with a passion which was for the moment speechless. And as for him, he never finished his sentence, but stooped down and kissed her, and mumbled incoherent expressions of devotion.

There was silence for a space, broken by her.

'And here, Dick, our paths part. Good bye !' Again he kissed her unresisting lips, and she turned and flitted from him, never looking round, not even when she came to the end of the lane. But for full five minutes he stood gazing into space, and—after the manner of his kind—appropriating to himself a monopoly of the misery occasioned by such partings.

As he turned to retrace his steps all the linnets in the bushes mocked at his misery,

and even the hedge-sparrows chirped their contempt for a biped so easily flung into despair.

‘Behold,’ they cried, ‘the sun is high in heaven ; the air is full of summer heat ; no note of cuckoo is heard in the land ; there is corn in the ear and fruit in the orchard, and there are goodly worms in the garden. Why then art thou cast down, O foolish son of man ? And why art thou disquieted within thee ?’

They are great philosophers — are the birds.

But Dick heeded them not.

CHAPTER IV

BESIDE A BACKWATER

A THRUSH of goodly proportions — a last year's bird — was disporting himself on a lawn that with graceful and gradual slope extended to a backwater of the Thames. Every animal on God's earth possesses some human characteristic—a consideration which may or may not assist those who believe in the transmigration of souls. The leading characteristic of the thrush is conceit. He is not vain of his personal appearance, though his speckled plumage shows bravely enough

against the holly bush or on the parterre. Nor does he pride himself so greatly on his voice, though so much has been made of his music by the poets. Strange to say the vanity of the thrush is identical with that of the sportsman. No Cockney, after his periodical ride to hounds, displays a more irrepressible vain-glory. What legends of meets and runs and five-bar gates, and water-courses wide as Lethe will he not convey to familiars on the Stock Exchange whose sport is of another kind. Descendants of Walton, too, do they not all catch the first trout of the season? Are their baskets not every one swollen with barbel of eleven pounds in weight? In a word, are not all sportsmen liars in the enthusiasm of their vanity?

So with the silly thrush. He has, without any peril or even trouble, captured a worm. See how he holds the wriggling wretch in his bill, turning his head from side to side to ascertain whether or not he

is observed by his kind. The notice of a casual hedge-sparrow, the twittered approbation of an insignificant tit-lark, will fill his soul with a secret joy. He swells with satisfaction and darts ahead for a yard or so with a series of hops not unlike those popularised by Lord Dundreary. Then he stops again, hoping to attract further attention. He will even drop his crawling victim and pounce upon him again and again, stretch his neck and turn his head, expecting the applause compelled by prowess. Fatuous fool! either devour thy fat and filthy prize, and have done with it, or carry it home to the nest, to stay the stomachs of thy starvelings withal.

This foolish thrush was so intent on his precious prey that he was quite oblivious of the beauty of his surroundings. First of all he should have remarked the lawn itself, as it stretched from the terrace to the margin of the stream. A pile carpet of green from the manufactory of Madam

Nature herself, kept in order, it may be added, by the daily operations of a patent lawn mower drawn by a patient pony, and kept fresh by artificial showers from the garden hose at sundown. Banks of purple rhododendron rose from spacious flower beds, bordered with pansies, emulating, and indeed utterly distancing in variety, all the vaunted colours of the rainbow. He ought also to have noted the rustic bridge that spanned the backwater and led on to the ait beyond: a narrow ait upon which the slender withes grew, and at the edge of which—hiding the nakedness of the red loam—the foxglove flourished and the wild forget-me-not. On the surface of the backwater the white water lily, supported by its cool, expanding leaf of dark olive green, lay languishing in the sun; while beyond them all flowed the Thames itself, gliding, with imperceptible motion, to meet the tumbling weir, over which it reluctantly travels, with much noisy and frothy re-

monstrance. To catch a glimpse of this phenomenon the thrush, it may be added, should ascend and poise himself in mid air. As the bird has no aerial intentions just at present, we will leave him to his worm, and inspect the remainder of the property by ourselves.

An artificial creek divided the lawn from a meadow where grazed a number of contemplative Alderneys, the pride of their owner. And above the creek stood the boat-house, its tarred roof blistering in the sun—blisters being better there than on the varnished sides of skiff, and dingy, and canoe, that lay secure beneath. At the near side of the boat-house was a landing stage, and in front of the stage a steam launch known to the deities of the stream as the 'Ethel.' At the other side the lawn touched the plantation, from the unkempt and luxuriant brushwood of which it was separated by a wire fence, against which, during intervals of silence, adventurous

rabbits would rub their cool, black noses.

On a terrace above the lawn stood the house itself. A long building of two stories built of gray stone. Large bay windows, four in number, stood, two and two, at each side of a gabled porch, reached by a flight of six broad steps. White roses clambered up to the windows of the second storey, that lay a foot deep in the honest masonry, and a clinging ivy, with small and variegated leaf, ameliorated, for the artistic eye, the harshness of the general effect. Away to the left of the house, and standing back from it, the observer caught sight of a square brick tower, with a clock in it. This timepiece marked the whereabouts of the stables, from which, even at this distance, you may catch the deep baying of the mastiff and the rattle of the buckets on the round cobbles of the yard. T'other side the house are the conservatories, from which have gone forth from time to time to flower shows all over the

country, plants which have brought fame to the head-gardener and caused the walls of his potting house to be covered with tickets marked First or Second prize, for he has never known what it is to snatch that fearful consolation—a Third.

Down once more to where the Thames kisses the lawn and observe something until now overlooked by both yourself and the thrush. Under a hawthorn that bends above the stream is moored a punt, and stretched upon the cushions in its stem lies our young friend Dick, enjoying the shade and inhaling the odour of the overhanging leafage, for indeed the place which I have been so inadequately describing is none other than Riverdale, the property of Sir Penton Hook, magistrate and County magnate. To see Richard now, however, no one would believe him to be the inheritor of so many advantages. There is a dejected 'haviour in the visage, a general air of dis-

satisfaction in his manner, and he is humming to himself the Teutonic refrain—

‘ Be true, my love, be true,
This heart is only thine ! ’

Alas ! my friend, we have all of us—Teuton and Saxon alike—sung that refrain. And She—the only She—with half-averted eyes, and gently heaving bosom, has joined in it, till sometimes the tears have escaped from beneath her eyelids. Some of us have been lucky in our little duet, until at last we have had to change both song and melody for ‘Darby and Joan.’ Others, sad to relate, have been entirely deceived by the masterly style of the fair songstress, who may have selected us for considerations in which love had no place whatever. While we, vain and shortsighted, imagined that she was singing the words with the music, the One Woman of all the World was crooning to herself—

‘ I’m false, my love, I’m false,
This heart was *never* thine ! ’

I can conceive of no one so utterly bankrupt as he who wakes up to that awful shattering of illusions.

At this moment Dick, it must be confessed, looks as miserable as though he had already undergone the wretched experience, and only ceases his melancholy warbling when the sound of voices issues from the direction of the house, and a small procession, in which the red flash of sunshades, and the soft gleam of cream white dresses are agreeably conspicuous, traverses the lawn to a point where an awning of striped canvas throws a shadow over cunningly constructed garden chairs, deep and cushioned structures of wicker-work, in which the jaded occupant sits not, but reclines the rather, and if need be reposes.

Procession was a word too large to describe the group moving across the lawn toward the yielding embrace of the garden chairs. In reality it consisted of but four persons. These were Sir Penton Hook,

the Rev. Fitzpatrick O'Lympus, Lady Hook, and Miss Carrie Dunlop. If you wish to be accurate you may add to the procession a fifth figure—that namely of Bedford, the butler, a retainer not above this menial duty—following afar off with claret cup cunningly concocted—the borage nestling green with jealousy at the edge of the bowl, and the ice tinkling like fairy music against its sides. Of the personages comprised in this group it will be necessary for the proper understanding of this unvarnished tale to give some brief account.

Sir Penton Hook was the third baronet, the illustrious founder of the house having received the title from that pious monarch the Fourth George, in respect of services not altogether unconnected with advances and a Bank. The present holder of the title was a man under the middle height, with thin features, sunken cheeks, a frost-bitten complexion, a keen eye and an habitually severe expression. Like other little men,

he enjoyed the sense of power, and not only ruled his household, but domineered over even the county bench, of which aggregation of talent, intelligence, and legal acumen he was chairman. No evil doers in those parts ever thought of expressing an apprehension of being summoned before the Bench. They spoke of the ceremony as being 'brought up before Sir Penton'—a bucolic testimony to the baronet's force of character. In like manner the County Constabulary invariably addressed the whole bench as 'Sir Penton'—an official endorsement of the chairman's force of will.

Clearly it was not from his father that the young lover in the punt inherited either his physical endowments or his mental disposition. Dick was, in the apt parlance of the vulgar, 'his mother's son.' Lady Hook was one of the Egham-Hythes, a family the history of which has been part of the history of this country ever since William the Norman landed here. She

was a Court beauty when Sir Penton wooed and won her, and even now, in the early autumn of her years, she retained much of the charm of early womanhood, ripened, as is its nature and destiny. A certain unalienable hauteur was softened by the graciousness of her manner, and by a sad and wearied smile that at once touched and fascinated those who were brought into contact with her. What was the secret of that sad expression? She submitted in all things and without appeal to the opinion of her lord, who was invariably polite but inflexibly firm. The proud and commanding beauty had no will apart from that of her pinched and opinionated master. Perhaps she led a life apart. Some women do: a life in dreamland. And in secret moments she may have sighed idle sighs over an early romance, or wept still more idle tears over the memory of something dead—over the ineffectual picture of what might have been.

This, be it observed, is a mere conjecture of mine to account for the lady's sad expression, and, indirectly, for the romantic disposition of her only son.

Lady Hook's companion demands, for anything like successful portraiture, not a page of stilted letterpress—for how can one get life and colour out of an ink-pot, or indicate the joyous hey-day of life with a vile, stumpy pen?—but the brush of a Royal Academician. And, mark me, it is not to every Royal Academician I would entrust a commission so important. Observe Miss Carrie Dunlop as she stands now—the other members of the group having sought the ease of the cushions. The shapely point of her right boot has peeped from beneath the creamy skirt. Her head lightly poised on a faultless neck, larger perhaps than would be permitted by the æsthetic or consumptive school, is framed against the bright background of her sunshade. Over the heavily braided masses of her hair is

thrown a lace scarf. Her complexion, not ashamed of the nicely graduated flesh-tint of health; her eyes sparkling; her figure that of Juno adapted by Worth. Her voice is music; her laugh infectious—even Sir Penton thaws occasionally beneath the influence of its ring and ripple. Her expression is amiable always, and always changing. There is a refined audacity in her style. And yet there is no want of dignity in her manner. The hot, oppressive atmosphere is lightened by her presence. She is as a breath of fresh air in the desert. Shall I be accused of eccentricity if I add that the *soupçon* of an Irish accent—for I cannot find it in my heart to call it ‘brogue’—which characterised her pronunciation, endowed all she said with an irresistible, if unaccountable, piquancy. In a word, Miss Caroline Dunlop was the niece and adopted daughter of Lord Ballymacarret of the Irish Peerage, and niece also—owing to the marriage of Mr O’Lympus

into that noble family—of the Vicar of Wapshot. For the rest she was an exceptionally fine specimen of a certain type of Irish beauty, twenty years of age, gifted with excellent health and a fine flow of animal spirits; while her courage had often been proved in many a straight run to hounds over the big banks and deep ditches of Kildare, or eke in Galway, with its stone walls, and boulders, and bare bleak hills.

‘Uncle Fitz,’ as this young lady called the Vicar of Wapshot, was a clergyman of some forty-five years of age. A good, easy man, with a good, easy living, he enjoyed this world as he found it, and bore the cares of the sacerdotal office

‘—— lightly, like a flower.’

His wife had preceded him to another world where, when his time came, he hoped to enjoy himself as much as he had done in this. It will be inferred that his system of theology was simple. In politics he was a

Conservative of the most pronounced kind, and although his ancestors had in the old days fought against the English by the side of Desmond and Shan O'Neil, he would have shed the last drop of his blood in defence of the Queen, the Church, the State, and the Protestant Succession. Although he had graduated at two universities—having proceeded from Trinity College, Dublin, to Pembroke College in Oxford—he was not learned in either political or polemical argument. Indeed, he was accustomed to joke about the dual control over his education, repeating, with great gusto, Dean Swift's sarcasm concerning the calf that, having been suckled by two cows, grew to be in time a great calf. Fielding was wont to describe a good clergyman as being 'well worthy of the cloth he wore.' And O'L ympus was, I have no doubt, well worthy of *his*. It may be observed, however, in this connection, that his cloth, as far as his trousers were concerned, was of

the undecided mixture which is called Oxford grey; and that in his upper garments he discarded broadcloth and affected Melton. He was a tall, broad-shouldered son of the Church, with his florid face clean shaved; and above that face shone a crop of close-cut hair of bright, golden red—a colour which would do no discredit to a nimbus—an aureole.

Attracted by the voices, Richard the Guilty raises himself in the punt and jumps to the lawn, the sudden motion of his craft causing an undulation which rocks the lilies and makes them appear to bow one to another as in some fairy ceremony. And tiny young of roach or dace dart from the margin, sore afraid, and disappear beneath the dark green floating leaves. All signs of melancholy have fled from Dick's countenance. He saunters up to the group, handsome, careless, contented.

'Where on earth have you been all the afternoon?' enquires Lady Hook with all

the unnecessary and ill-requited anxiety of a mother.

‘Among the lilies,’ he replies vaguely, and bowing in the direction of Carrie. Indeed, only last night she had been singing to him a song with that title.

‘Lotos-eating?’ enquires the lady thus apparently addressed, and turning on him the battery of her eyes.

‘No ; not eating—only dreaming.’

Sir Penton moves his head sharply in his high collar, and says in that measured, metallic voice of his,

‘High time, sir, you had left off dreaming ; high time you did something.’

‘So it is,’ he answers lightly. ‘Carrie, I’ll take you to see the pigeons.’ It was ‘Carrie’ and ‘Dick’ with these young people. For ten years Carrie Dunlop had paid yearly visits to her saintly relative ; so that Dick and she had been children together. And indeed much of the frankness of childhood characterised their conversation now.

‘A gallant offer,’ says Carrie, pouting and tossing her head. ‘So you consider escorting me a labour?’

‘The labour we delight in physics pain,’ replies Dick, laying his hand on his heart, and bowing with the mock deference of an actor in Restoration comedy.

‘You have evidently been spending your morning with the poets,’ says Carrie, raising her skirt—a mute intimation that she is ready to walk.

‘They’re the only literature worth reading. I devour poetry,’ answers the enthusiast.

‘You must find some of it very indigestible,’ interpolates the Vicar.

‘Pooh!’ says the baronet, in his quick, unsympathetic way; ‘it’s an appetite soon spoiled by the garbage that it feeds on. I once indulged in such nonsense myself.’

At which Lady Hook sighs gently—the lightest suspiration, but with a note of pain in it. Carrie exchanges glances with Dick, who offers his arm, and their laughter is

borne back as they pass the gable of the house.

‘Time that fellow made choice of a profession,’ said Sir Penton presently.

‘Quite time,’ acquiesced the parson, swallowing a tumbler of claret cup, his eye fixed on the thick wood on the hill sloping beyond the farther margin of the Thames, and on the white sail of a skiff half-caught above the oziers of the intervening ait. Lady Hook looked reproachfully at his reverence, resenting his quick consent to her husband’s proposition; and being in her son’s absence his champion, she replied with much decision,

‘Richard has already chosen.’

‘Yes; the bar. To a lad of his stamp that is only an excuse for town-life—and—and all that, answered the baronet.’

Sir Penton’s real reason was of quite a different kind. A primitive and child-like innocence of English law was the one great, if not quite original, charm of the county bench, over which Sir Penton presided. It

by no means fell in with his notion of the fitness of things that a son of his should obtain that particular species of learning which might induce him to regard irreverently the magisterial dicta. He might writhe under the unenlightened insolence of the county press; he might read the rude rebuke of some misinformed Home Secretary: but it was by no means a part of his programme that his son should be put in a position to perform the degrading work of a critic.

‘He declares himself equally willing to enter the army,’ said the Vicar.

‘And *I*,’ replied his mother, again visiting upon his reverence a mute rebuke, ‘object to the army.’

His reverence, not unmindful of that glance of maternal displeasure, returned to his original suggestion.

‘I really don’t see why you shouldn’t make him a barrister?’

‘Stuff!’ said the baronet.

‘Of course. Stuff to begin with. But in time let us hope he would take silk.’

‘Pah!’ ejaculated Sir Penton, who hated humour of every kind, but chiefly that species of it which concerns itself with playing upon words. A pun irritated him worse than an autumnal wasp.

Over the broad and good-natured face of his reverence a smile played as he asked,

‘How about the Church, Sir Penton?’

‘Damn the Church,’ snapped that worthy. ‘That is—I beg’—

And here he stopped, for the chairman of the county bench could not bring himself to beg the pardon of any man living.

The smile on the florid countenance of his reverence broadened and deepened as he said,

‘You may curse the parson as much as you like, but you really mustn’t damn the Church.’

‘One thing I have made up my mind to,’ went on Sir Penton, oblivious of the church-

man's playful injunction, ' Dick shan't spend his time mooning about this place.'

Meanwhile the young hopeful who was the cause of the discussion was mooning down among the pigeons, and talking to a companion whose light-heartedness had long ago dissipated his melancholy. There were, indeed, pigeons that circled round a dovecot, anon settling on its sloping roof and basking in the sun. But there were others, cooped in wire covered houses, priceless birds of assured ugliness, Jacobins with coats of burnt sienna, and bonnetted bipeds whose feathers grew the wrong way, and in fact, every eccentricity in the way of pigeons that would entitle their owner to prizes at provincial or Continental shows. These agreeable works of nature, however, did not prove permanently attractive to the lady, and her cavalier, observing her flagging interest, turned and said,

' Let us go down to the river through the meadow.'

‘You are very fond of the river,’ said Miss Dunlop, in a tone which implied no great respect for a fondness of that description.

‘I love the Thames,’ answered Dick, simply.

‘Really?’

‘Yes; I was born by the Thames; I went to school by the Thames—at Eton; my University is on the Thames—at Oxford; and I believe half my inclination to be a barrister arises from the fact that I should have chambers near the Thames—in the Temple.

The lady shook her head.

‘I can’t sympathise with you a bit. Now, I was born in Dublin, and I never had the least fondness for the Liffey.’

‘I never heard of any poet singing the Liffey.’

‘And yet that stream has supplied our national bards with their nectar,’ answered the fair Hibernian.

‘Pray, explain your witticism,’ pleaded

the youth, reading *malice prepense* in those sparkling eyes of hers.

‘Well, you must know that a big brewer uses the waters of the Liffey to thicken his stout.’

‘For shame,’ exclaimed Dick in mock indignation; ‘will you compare the nectar of the gods with Dublin stout?’

‘It’s the nearest thing to it ever tasted by some of our poets—that and whisky. And allow me to tell you, Master Dick, that on those humble beverages have been written poems of love and patriotism which have stirred even me.’

There was absolutely a tremor in her voice, and the smile had died from her face.

‘Why, Carrie,’ exclaimed Dick, half in banter, but with a note of surprise in his tone, ‘I believe you’re a Fenian!’

She shook her head.

‘No, Dick, I’m no Fenian; but I admire genius, no matter how hopeless the cause in which it is enlisted; and I love and pity it

when it is without recognition—and often without dinner.’

‘Then,’ said Dick, with a mock obeisance, ‘you shall love and pity me. I will indite an ode to dynamite—before dinner.’

The shadow disappeared from her face. She smiled, and the subject was dismissed.

They had left the enclosure of Riverdale, and were now approaching the river by the footpath on the side of the meadow farthest from the house. Arrived at the margin of the stream they stood under the grateful shade of a great chestnut, full of white blossom. Its mighty bole was bent in a giant elbow over the water, and a swan was inviting her cygnets to pick up the fragments that floated beneath—remnants of a repast not long ago discussed by the occupants of a departed skiff. No ait here came between the observers and the broad bosom of

‘Silver streaming Temmes.’

In the distance on the farther side was the

red roof of a river-side inn, its doors and windows wide open as if itself athirst. About its portals clustered boating men in white flannels and jackets of many stripes, not altogether unpleasant patches of colour under the bright sun. Yokels in silk hats and broadcloth sat idly by the margin, expectant of Sukey or Sairey, late in fulfilment of their promised meeting, as is the happy custom of ladies, both of high and low degree. And between them and the observers on this margin the broad river glides, with almost imperceptible motion, between banks that are

‘paynted all with variable flowers.’

Voices on the stream itself. From behind the bend hidden by the curved bole of the chestnut glides a punt. There are three men in it. Hoppy stands on the treads, submerging and withdrawing his tremendous punt-pole, and moving his craft along in a straight, unerring line,

steering his vessel by means of the withdraw propeller. Though herein is a mystery, unknown save to those who have learned the delightful art of punting. Seated in the stern is a gentleman of red-face and white hair, sleeping apparently the sleep of the unjust. It is our friend Mark Westaway somnolent after his potations at the 'Three Feathers.' Beside him stands that selfish and down-at-heel man of the world Jim Gates, poisoning the air with a recently-acquired clay pipe, and holding a couple of fox-terriers by their slips.

If I may judge by the appearance of these useful quadrupeds, these three sportsmen are on this Sunday afternoon intent on adventure in pursuit of the vermin rat. And I may add, in a sort of parenthesis, that although there is no stream in all England over which more frequently wells the music from belfrys of churches innumerable, there is also no stream in England on which the Sabbath is so cheerfully broken—broken by

all sorts and conditions of people, from the simple Cockney of Clerkenwell, who, from the safe eminence of the bank, essays with bread, or worm, or gentle, to lure the wily perch, to the Lotties and Totties of the chorus, who, on board the steam launch of my lord or the Jew money-lender, shriek more shrilly than the whistle as they quaff champagne or devour *caviare*, which Tottie, nurtured on Arcadian liver and bacon, naively compares to a mixture of blacking and train-oil.

As the punt passes the chestnut—the broad leaves of the water-lilies gently disappearing under the light draught to re-appear refreshed—Jim Gates stares, with unabashed admiration at the tall, well-proportioned figure of the Irish beauty. Hoppy, though theoretically opposed to such society, touches his hat to young Hook, who nods back in recognition of the honest fisherman. Arrived at the tail of the ait, Hoppy, with a dexterous movement of the pole, heads into mid-stream

and makes for the other bank. Then and not till then Jim withdraws his eyes from Miss Dunlop who is apparently unconscious of his mute admiration.

‘A well-made filly that,’ he condescends to say to Hoppy. ‘Who the doose is she?’

‘Who *is* she? Why, Miss Dunlop, o’ course.’

‘I’m as wise as [ever, oh most reticent of radicals.’

‘Well,’ says Hoppy, attempting to be frank, ‘she’s parson’s niece; she’s daughter to a earl; an’ she’s goin’ to marry young ’ook.’

Jim removes the pipe from his mouth, emits a great cloud, and observes sarcastically,

‘That be blowed for a tale.’

‘Ah!’ answers Hoppy with equal sarcasm, ‘p’raps you knows best.’

‘I only know what I *do* know, my old friend and pitcher.’

‘Wot d’ye know, Sonny?’

‘Well, I know that I saw young Hook, as you call him, for a quarter-of-an-hour this morning in Priory Lane making love to the little Methodist.’

The iron of Hoppy’s pole struck viciously on the pebbles at the bottom.

‘You lie,’ he replied, derisively.

‘It’s true, upon my honour,’ answered Jim, who possibly imagined that the appeal to his honour gave his statement the value of an affidavit. *His honour!*

Hoppy put all his strength into the next push. The punt shot along with so sudden an access of speed, that Jim almost lost his balance. Hoppy frowned, knitted his brows, registered some oaths under his breath, and made certain muttered observations about swinging for some person, contingently on that person’s hurting a hair of the head of some third person. Old Westaway woke up, stared dreamily round, and incoherently remarked,

‘Eh? what? damitall!’ and then went off to sleep again.

The terriers barked and whined, and pulled against their collars. Hoppy remained thereafter silent; but there was determination in the tight closure of his mouth which boded ill for the rats.

CHAPTER V

AT THE SIGN OF THE 'THREE FEATHERS.'

THERE was at least one person in the world who accepted Jim Gates at about his own valuation ; who mistook his tinsel for pure gold ; who regarded him as an accomplished and fascinating denizen of the gay world of London. That simple young person was Polly, a bouncing, ruddy cheeked, sloe-eyed virgin, the daughter of honest Jo Parsons, mine host of the 'Three Feathers,' of whom and of which more anon.

No part of the village abutted on the

Thames. Nor indeed was a view of that noted stream obtainable from any house in it. Wapshot was a broad, irregular street, with the church at one end of it and the 'Three Feathers' at the other. ('Parsons at both ends' was a favourite and old crusted joke of mine host, invariably trotted out for the amusement and possible convulsion of the infrequent traveller.) A pathway led through meadows to the Thames, and at the end of the pathway was moored a ferryboat. A bell swinging from a sort of gallows and worked by a pendant rope called the gray-haired ferryman, who, for a single Obolus was willing to convey the happy villager to the other side.

Picturesque and varied in its unambitious architecture, there was nevertheless a solid, well-to-do air about Wapshot which was indisputable. A comfortable appearance characterised the warehouses of the few tradesmen — the little butcher's shop, the

long, low grocery, which was impressed into Her Majesty's service as a Post Office; the big red house of Rymill, the vet.—a gentleman who would be greatly incensed at the classification among tradesmen — with its attached farrier's yard. The owners of these establishments evidently did a business not merely with the village, but with the farms that helped the landscape for a couple of miles all round. Even the labourers' cottages had a reputable appearance. Each with its garden in front, its well-kept wooden fence, its draw-well and its luxurious growth of climbing rose or honeysuckle clinging to the walls and tumbling—a cataract of blossom—over the sloping roof of the trellis porch.

If, with your back to the ferry path, you look up the village street, the church is on your immediate right. It is a crumbling, red-tiled edifice, with Norman tower. A narrow fosse runs round the building, possibly to deter the ghosts of ancestors

who, under quaint epitaphs, repose in the graveyard awaiting the resurrection. Beyond the church, and half-hidden by it from the village, stands the vicarage, a modern structure of the many-gabled style just now in vogue. Still looking up the street, you may descry at the top of it on your left-hand side the inn of the excellent Mr Parsons. It stands back from the street, but in order that it may not pass unnoticed, its sign swings on a brave post planted out on the very edge of the foot-path. He who runs may read the device. A very tall man would have to stoop in entering beneath the cross-beam of the portal. Once inside, however, he may stand erect at the narrow ledge they call the bar; or he may stretch his weary limbs in the tap room, wherein at night there is a sederunt, at which are settled not only the affairs of the parish, but those of the nation at large.

Jim Gates must have approved of the

accommodation at the inn. Notwithstanding the allurements of town, he had already remained nearly a week at the 'Three Feathers,' his modest reckoning being discharged daily by Mr Westaway. Gallantry was Jim's favourite virtue; and he had already a hundred times informed Miss Polly that the prolongation of his stay was attributable solely to the influence of her bright eyes. With princely condescension he assured her that he preferred the cleanly seclusion of his bedroom there to the gilded luxury of his chambers in Jermyn Street, Piccadilly. For her part she saw nothing in his seedy coat, his frayed linen, his greatly ventilated boots, inconsistent with the position which he assumed as a man of fashion.

Leaning across the bar, this pinchbeck buck, this off-scouring of Fleet Street taverns, chatted confidentially to her of the great world, of the parks, the assemblies, the theatres, and even the music halls. He artfully professed to sigh when he thought of

one possessing her beauty, her wit, her unequalled figure, languishing in a country ale-house when she might have the leaders of society at her feet. Her cheeks flushed, and her big eyes sparkled like the diamonds of which he spoke, as she listened to the burthen of his tale. Ah! Polly, Polly, you are not the first of Eve's daughters upon whose vanity the vicious have counted.

And she had lovers, too—honest men, mark you, and men of substance. A coquette by nature, she liked to have these great enamoured swains dangling after her, now elated with fancied victory, now down-cast from a smart rebuff. Any one of them would have married her to-morrow. At these Jim sneered behind their backs. It was safer so. He mimicked their provincial ways, and ridiculed their bucolic pretensions. No old *roué* in all St James' knew better how to trick the imagination and pander to the pride of a foolish women. Before Jim had been a week at the 'Three Feathers,' Polly

had ceased even to flirt with her amorous suitors, and turned up her pretty nose at their compliments and their presents. Once poison the mind of a woman, and the rest is easy. If Eve's disposition is to be judged by that of her daughters, the devil must have found her a willing ally. And had the Prince of Darkness told her that his apartments were in Jermyn Street, I imagine that, notwithstanding the questionable shape in which he appeared to her in Paradise, she would have credited every syllable of his statement.

James Gates leans negligently at the bar, gazing with the easy audacity of a man of fashion into Polly's big eyes. Parsons is in the back of the premises giving the store-pigs their daily mash.

'You're thrown away in this infernal hole—upon my honour you are, Polly,' he says with the air of one who has passed his life in great cities.

'La! Mister Gates, I know you're laughin'

at me,' says she, in a tone which clearly implies that she will not be at all offended if he should go on laughing at her.

'Never was more serious in my life—really. There was Tottie Lalor—stage name of course—she was just your figure—only not so good. I wrote her crack song when she was at the 'Mogul:' Well that girl married young Gosling of the Guards—younger son of the Marquis of Anserdown. Saw her last week in the park smothered in di'monds—I give you my word—*smothered*.'

'I love di'monds,' said the girl simply.

'Of course you do—who does not?'

'And this lady—was she pretty?'

'I used to think so. I don't now.' And the soiled and seedy Lothario leered at her admiringly to give the requisite point to his subtle compliment. She blushed and simpered, and answered coquettishly:

'Get along with you—do!'

'You've heard of Lady Barleycorn?' he

inquired, dashing at random into the polite world.

‘Yes, and I saw her once. It was at Hegham Races. Pa’ad a refreshment tent there.’

‘And begad her ladyship would have been quite as much at home in that refreshment tent as sitting in a drag with her husband, the bart.’

‘Indeed?’ said Polly, much interested.

‘Well, when I first knew her she was in a swell restaurant in the city, drawing bitter ale for admiring stockbrokers. One of her admirers got her on in the chorus at the Oddity Theatre. She had a pretty place at Fulham—sealskins, suppers, cigarettes, and that sort of thing. Barleycorn, the brewer, got spoons on her, and married her. Stuck to the shop, you see—wouldn’t desert her beer.’

‘Did you know her?’ asked Polly, now fairly absorbed in this narrative, not to be found in Debrett’s ‘Baronetage.’

'Intimately' replied the smirched adventurer. 'In fact I would regard myself as a sort of brother-in-law of Sir John's, only so many other fellows claim the honour.'

This delicate and super-subtle hint was lost on the bucolic beauty. Her mind, however, was busy with the main argument. She commenced to apply the moral, and asked tentatively,

'Do you think Mr Gates'——

'Hang it all, Polly, don't "mister" me; call me Jim, or I shall be offended—on my word I shall.'

'Well then, Jim. Do you think if I was to go to London, I should do as well as those—those *other* ladies?'

'Think! my girl,' exclaimed this greasy gallant—this fribble out at elbows; 'I don't think at all—I'm sure.'

'And should I 'ave di'monds?'

'What d'ye think diamonds were made for, my dear, but to sparkle on a throat, and arms, and ears like yours?'

Polly closed her eyes as though to retain for a moment in day-dream the vision that Mr Gates had conjured up. She sighed, overcome by the ecstasy of the moment, and was only recalled to the sordid exigencies of the bar by the entrance of another customer.

‘Well, Polly, my gal, trying to keep yourself warm, eh?’

It was Mark Westaway’s loud, cheery voice that saluted her, and that further formulated a desire for a little rum. His manner of addressing Jim was a trifle less cordial. To him the fine old English gentleman merely said,

‘Mornin’, James. Take anything?’

Jim was in a good temper—was indeed affability itself, and declared himself ready to drink a brandy-and-soda if by so doing he would oblige Mr Westaway.

‘Gammon!’ replied Westaway, rather rudely. ‘I believe you’d drink with the devil if he was to ask you.’

‘I believe I would,’ said Jim, with evident

sincerity ; ' meanwhile, I have much pleasure in drinking with one of his most dutiful children : your health, sir. I think I had him there, Polly,' he added, winking at Miss Parsons, and tossing off a generous mouthful of the brandy.

' Bring your glass into the tap-room : I want to talk to you,' said the elder man, leading the way. The tap-room was the one large room of the inn. Here in the daytime casual labourers drank their beer and devoured 'thumb-bits' of thick bread and bacon. Here, at harvest-time, the farmers gave annual dinners to their hands. Here, on Saturday nights, was a harmonic meeting where songs of love and sport and valour, diversified by comic selections, were given with great effect. Here had been held those three awful coroner's inquests on bodies found on that side of the Thames, which had produced such a marked effect on the spirits of the villagers. A long, low room, with tables of battered oak, and old-fashioned

arm-chairs and forms, with many knots and hollows worn quite smooth by the friction of generations of corduroys. Westaway and Gates seated themselves facing each other, and Westaway opened the conversation.

‘Look ye here, James Gates, twenty-five pounds is a biggish sum, and I don’t see my way to raising it.’

‘I must have it,’ answered Jim, with the utmost politeness.

At this the ruddy face of Mark glowed ominously. He smote the table with his doubled fist.

“‘Must’ is a funny word, Mr Gates. ‘Must’ is a *dam* funny word. D’ye hear?’

‘I did not mean any threat, Guv’nor,’ replied Jim; ‘I used the word to indicate the greatness of my necessity.’

‘Well, and what is your necessity?’

‘Look at me! Don’t you think a new suit of togs would give me a more agreeable appearance?’

'You are summat of a scarecrow, certainly. A fiver will remedy all that.'

'Then I owe money at my rooms.'

He did not repeat the legend of apartments in Jermyn Street to this fine old sportsman. Indeed, he had written to him from his address in a tumble-down thoroughfare at the back of Clare Market.

'If your rooms were idiots enough to give you credit, you can go on owing them money. I shan't pay your rooms. Anything else?'

'There are my debts of honour,' answered Jim, with a sort of bastard dignity in his tone. To his intense annoyance, however, the old gentleman burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter, punctuated with such expressions as 'Well I never!' 'What next!' and the like. When he had recovered his breath he exclaimed,

'Debts of honour—to Jeremy Diddler! Debts of honour—to Doll Tearsheet! Bah! don't make me laugh.'

‘I was afraid, sir, that I had even caused you to choke. But perhaps it will be easier for you to know that I do want the money than to understand the purposes for which I want it.’

‘That’s most likely,’ acquiesced Westaway. ‘And supposing then that I refuse to give you a penny.’

‘You won’t do that.’

‘And why?’

Old men are like young women in this: that you may generally work upon the vanity of both. Jim was perfectly well aware that Westaway had not a farthing of his own; that the farm had been assigned; and that his interest in it had ceased. By betraying an utter ignorance of these circumstances he looked to gain the worthy gentleman’s confidence and suggest to him some means of raising the necessary supplies. He answered that imperative ‘Why’ in this manner :

‘Because, sir, you are rich and I am poor.

Because you are generous and have found me grateful. And because—you will pardon me, sir, I am sure—you must know that my misfortunes are not attributable to my want of ability, I flatter myself that you must recognise in me inherited gifts which under happier auspices might have led me to fortune.'

Somewhat mollified by the direct compliment concerning wealth and the artfully insinuated one about transmitted genius, Mark replied with less acerbity.

'The farm, James, ain't what it was. My expenses are great, and my girls are, I regret to say, extravagant. You'd hardly believe me, but at this present moment I haven't got twenty-five pounds standing to my credit at the bank.'

Jim could easily believe him. Indeed, Jim was perfectly well aware that Mark Westaway had not had five-and-twenty farthings to his credit at the bank for

many a day. Only he did not think it advisable to say so.

‘But,’ suggested James, with studied artlessness, ‘if *you’re* in want of ready money why don’t you sell out some surplus stock, and in that way convenience yourself and oblige me at the same time.’

Mark shook his head.

‘There’s not a shilling’s worth of surplus stock on Vicarage Farm.’

‘Then sell some that’s *not* surplus,’ said Jim, who had a notion that the only virtue of property consisted in the fact that it was convertible into money. ‘Pigs for instance.’

Mark shook his head.

‘Or cows?’

He negatived that suggestion also.

‘How about the bay mare I saw you on yesterday. You don’t want a mount till the hunting commences.’

‘The mare is Kate’s,’ said the old man, with an angry expression at the mention of his daughter’s name.

'Yes, but it's yours by right. You gave it to her.'

Jim had evidently set the old sportsman on a new line of thought. He was cogitating deeply. Jim knew better than to hurry him. Always give your fish plenty of play.

'Well, well,' observed Mark, presently, 'I'll see what can be done. You shall have something to go on with. And then you must clear out, don't you know, and stick to London. It's a great place for young men of genius, is London.'

'And when shall I hear from you?' asked this dutiful, but persistent young man.

'Can't say; p'r'aps in a day or two. I must see my banker at Windsor and my lawyer. There's a dam' lot of trouble in raising money on what's a man's own.'

'The Gov'nor's banker's name is Walker,' said Jim to himself, 'so is his lawyer's.'

The fine old English gentleman rose from his chair. Jim politely followed his example.

‘You’ll be sure to hear from me. Good-bye.’ And, nodding to the man of fashion, he went out into the sunlight, muttering something to himself, his brow clouded, his expression dejected. During the last five minutes the moral man had made a lower descent.

Jim, whom bitter experience had made a physiognomist, had noted these signs with satisfaction. He stood at the door and watched the tall figure of his guardian—as he euphuistically termed him—until he was out of sight. And then he stood there to watch a fairer vision. Ruth Gilliat, in a plain blue dress and white garden hat, was walking up the village street. She carried a basket of roses in her hand, and was accompanied by Mr Molt, who limped by her side, proud as an emperor, wrinkled as a crab-apple, faithful as a watch-dog. Neither looked in the direction of Jim as they passed the ‘Three Feathers,’ though Hoppy was quite conscious of the Londoner’s presence.

Jim's eyes followed the slight figure and gracefully poised head of the girl.

'By Jove, what an exquisite creature that little Methodist is! Looks pure as a Madonna, too. Who'd have suspected her of hugging young Hookey in a public thoroughfare?'

As he turned into the house and sauntered up to the bar, Miss Polly, in a tone of jealousy which was far from displeasing to Master Jim, declared with a very becoming pout,

'I'm sure I can't see what you men admire in that Miss Gilliat.'

'*I* admire her, Polly! And *you* to the fore. Am I blind or an idiot?'

'You're not *blind*: for I see you watch her go right up the village.'

'Ah! that was mere vulgar curiosity—a feeling, sweet one, not peculiar to our sex.'

'I think she's an ojou's frump. There!' said Polly with much bitterness.

‘And I think what you think. And I think Hoppy’s an odious frump too. There!’

Miss Parsons tossed her head as one not yet quite assured of her admirer’s sincerity.

‘They’d make a pretty pair at the altar wouldn’t they, Polly dear?’

‘I don’t like you a bit,’ said Polly, with a smile which meant capitulation. She had also retreated to the back of the bar placing a respectful distance between Jim and herself.

‘Polly!’ he said.

‘Yes.’

‘Is your father still engaged at the styes throwing husks to the swine? Or has he followed the brilliant example of the prodigal and joined them at their afternoon meal?’

‘Pa’s out in the yard, if that’s what you mean.’

‘In that case, Polly, come here.’

Polly approached the bar.

‘Whisper, Polly.’

Polly leaned her head over the narrow ledge till her face was within easy distance of Mr Gates, and Jim saluted her rosy cheek with a chaste but resounding smack. The salute was largely charged with the onions the man of the world had eaten with his breakfast and the pungent tobacco he had afterwards smoked. But with that sweet contact her jealousy disappeared as transparent river mists disappear before the summer sun.

CHAPTER VI

A PROMISING PUPIL

‘AND now, Hoppy,’ said Ruth, as she leaned over Mr Molt’s chair, ‘you have read that chapter so very nicely that really you must go on with the next.’

Her tone was sweet and inviting, but her words did not convey the sort of encouragement that Mr Molt appreciated. He was not a man to whom the admonition ‘Search the Scriptures’ came home. The ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ he liked well enough, and the newspaper he preferred above all

other classes of English literature. Having read part of one chapter in the Bible, he did not regard it as in any shape a reward for his diligence to be condemned to read another. He rubbed his hand over his wrinkled forehead, and looked up at his fair instructress with an expression half-comic and half-pathetic, and asked, as though begging a reprieve,

‘*Another* chapter did ye say, Miss Ruth?’

‘Yes, Hoppy, and why not? Is it so *very* hard?’

‘Well, ye see, miss, it’s not so hard to read, but it’s mortal hard t’onderstand; it’s a bit above me, like,’ he answered simply.

‘Ah, it’s above most of us, Hoppy—above the best and most learned people. To have a proper understanding of it all, you must pray for faith.’

A brilliant idea here struck Mr Molt.

‘Hadn’t I better wait till I get faith afore I read the next chapter? It seems a’most like throwin’ it away on me without.’

His artfulness was unavailing; his fair instructress was inexorable.

‘The faith may come while you are reading.’

After casting one more beseeching but unavailing look at Ruth, Mr Molt leant his head over the generous print of the big Testament and commenced to read. He read in the unpunctuated monotone of a schoolboy. Nor should I describe his elocution as unpunctuated; its chief and characteristic fault was an excess of punctuation. At the end of every syllable he planted a full stop. But his teacher noted his progress, and with patient endeavour kept him to the work. His attempts to postpone the task or substitute another for it having proved futile, he drew a deep, preliminary sigh, and commenced :

‘In. Those. Days. Came. John. The. Bap. Tist’——

‘Baptist,’ interposed Ruth, supplying a coupling for syllables so needlessly divorced.

‘John. The. Baptist,’ continued Hoppy, accepting with meekness the correction, ‘Preaching. In. The. Wild. Er. Ness. Of’
‘Wilderness *not* wild-er-ness,’ said Ruth.

Mr Molt looked up from the Book. The pupil had been admonished to ask the meaning of such words as had not yet found place in his limited vocabulary. So he inquired,

‘Wot’s a wilderness, miss?’ with the innocent expectancy of an infant groping feebly after wider views.

‘A wilderness, Hoppy, is a great, bleak, uninhabited place, with nothing growing on it much bigger than a shrub.’

‘Summat like the Town Moor, mebbe?’

‘Yes—only much bigger. Like a whole lot of Town Moors all joined together.’

Here the pupil scratched his head, and caused the wrinkles on his brown forehead to multiply and deepen. It was evident to the teacher that he had suddenly happened on some doubt or difficulty. She waited for him to reveal the cause of his anxiety.

‘ And oninhabited, I think ye said ? ’

‘ Yes. ’

Mr Molt shook his head and smiled the supercilious smile of incipient scepticism.

‘ Why do you smile, Mr Molt, and shake your head ? ’ inquired Miss Gilliat, who divined that some triumphant argument against the Gospel was slowly forming itself in her pupil’s mind.

‘ Well, d’ye see, if this here wilderness was oninhabited, wot was the good of John preaching ? He hadn’t no one to hear ’im. ’

‘ When you have read a little farther, ’ replied Ruth, with a tempered severity, ‘ you will find that people living in the region round about went into the wilderness to hear him. ’

‘ Ah, ’ said Mr Molt, with the air of a logician who, if convinced, is convinced against his will. When an ignorant man has by unconscious processes of logic slowly arrived at a conclusion, he is seldom obliged to those who, by the application of a higher

test, shatter his theories to pieces. And the satisfactory way in which Ruth lifted the Baptist off the horns of the dilemma on which Mr Molt had placed him did not increase that gentleman's respect for the saint. He even experienced a sense of delicious gratification when he subsequently ascertained that the Baptist's raiment was of a poor and elementary kind, and that he fed upon locusts and wild honey. Indeed, when he came to the description of the diet and had its meaning explained, he said, with a twinkle of the eye,

‘Poor fare to preach on that, miss. I lay a sovereign Mr O’Lympus has somethin’ more stimmilatin’ afore *he* gits in the pulpit.’

This was clearly a collateral issue in the discussion of which the teacher did not consider it advisable to join; and Hoppy was fain to proceed with his weary drone.

We will leave these two engaged in painfully and let us hope profitably searching the Scriptures, for there is another person in the room whose acquaintance it is essential to

make. Nor will it be inconvenient here to give some description of the room itself, and of the house of which it formed a part. It is a small apartment situated at the back of the house, and looks through French windows—now thrown generously open—into a large square garden surrounded by a high brick wall. The wall had been built before brick-makers had sold themselves to the Prince of Darkness, and by builders who took a certain pride in the solidity of their work. Years and weather have not damaged its fair proportions—the edges of the bricks are indeed rounded, touched gently by the finger of Time; and though some accident had here or there inflicted an ugly scar, the mark was speedily effaced by a kindly growth of lichen. Against the end wall—that upon which the mid-day sun directs his most quickening rays—are fastened the spreading branches of plum and peach. The garden cannot vie for ‘trimness’ with many suburban pleasaunces that I have seen; there was an air of cultured

wildness about it ; those who tended it sought rather to assist nature than to pare her down and measure her out and generally harass her with compass and foot-rule and spirit-level ; and as if in gratitude for this immunity, the garden yielded plenty. Its apples were noted for miles round, and its kitchen garden seemed inexhaustible. The garden path that led from the French window right down to the wall of plums and peaches was guarded by two rows of hollyhock, standing high as giants in the summer air, and at their bases nestled alternate pansy and forget-me-not.

The little room in which Mr Molt is making his initial excursions into the wide domain of theology is Mr Gilliat's study. One side of the room is completely filled by an oaken bookcase replete with works of a theological and devotional kind—books varying in size from the ponderous volumes of Clarke's 'Commentary' down to the convenient octavo called Butler's 'Analogy :'

or to Baxter's 'Saints' Rest' in modest duodecimo. The furniture of the room is plain, good, sufficient. Its artistic decorations are few and unpretending. On the mantelpiece stand two busts; they are those of Wesley and Whitfield. Above the mantelpiece hangs a framed engraving; it represents John Wesley preaching on his father's tomb. On the opposite wall hangs the most pretentious work of art in the room; it is a portrait in oils—the portrait of a lady. Ruth, standing over the much-enduring Hoppy, is stationed just beneath this picture. Her eyes and her hair are those of the lady in the frame; but though there is a resemblance in certain details, the general difference is quite as remarkable. The living type is spiritual, breathing an air of purity and endowed with an expression of rare refinement. The picture represents a woman of ripe and voluptuous charms, with an expression of gay audacity by no means devoid of its special fascination.

At the open window sits a man of about fifty years of age. His eyes now rest on the pages of the little Greek Testament in his hand, and again seek relief in the patches of bright colour in the garden, or follow with languid interest the birds making havoc in his favourite cherry tree. He is a tall man, with distinctly modelled features, and thin gray hair. His hands are as fair as a woman's. He is dressed simply in black. There is an air of distinction about him which is quite indisputable—a quiet dignity of that kind which cannot be assumed, but which must be born with a man. The expression of the face is grave and thoughtful. I would call it sad even. But the firm lines of the mouth speak a determination equal to the repression of such emotions. He gave one the notion of a man whose spirit had received some bitter wound, the effects of which he must carry with him to the grave. Among the Puritan fathers there were, I have no doubt, men bearing an outward

resemblance to Ruth's parent. Even to that sweet girl he seldom unbends. He has set his affections on things above. All earthly loves he regards as secondary and worldly things. Deep in his nature is fixed a love unutterable for his only child. He is niggardly in all expression of it. But she is quick to read the heart, and knows that beneath that cold, stern exterior, there is untold wealth of love for her. The very fewness of his exhibitions of affection render their occurrence more precious. She treasures the memory of his approving smiles. And when he passes his thin white hand over her fair head she trembles with pleasure, though the next moment, glancing towards the painting on the wall, a dark frown may gather across his brow—a frown followed by a sigh.

The house in which the Gilliats lived was the last in the village. It was a heavy redbrick building, and stood flush with the roadway. Not an inch of front garden stood between

it and the inquisitive passers-by. Years ago, for reasons impossible to fathom, it had been called 'the Priory,' and the 'Priory' it had remained through successive tenancies, though its present occupant had no particular fancy for a name which had the double disadvantage of being at once meaningless in its particular application and Papistical in its general interpretation. Under the eaves of the house was an old sun-dial with the inscription, 'TEMPUS EDAX RERUM.' Beyond this fact there was nothing in the bald and uncompromising fore front of the edifice to distinguish it from hundreds of other examples of Georgian architecture. And it may be admitted in extenuation of the practices of an exploded school of architects, that habitations showing an exterior ugliness often boast of interior comfort not always achieved by the builders of our own more advanced and civilised epoch.

Twelve years before the opening of this story the Priory had been to let. A doctor

had been its previous occupant; but the stubborn health of the inhabitants of the village afforded him no scope for experiment, and consequently no prospect of remuneration. After the physician left, the old house remained tenantless for some time. Wapshot is somewhat out of the world; and the Priory appeared for years on the books of riparian and even metropolitan estate agents, wherein it was variously described 'a charming residence,' 'a desirable family residence,' and 'a commanding house, situated close to the banks of the Thames.' For two years these allurements failed to attract migratory mankind; then a tall gentleman of serious aspect, provided with an auctioneer's card, came and viewed the premises. In a day or two subsequently workmen were engaged in painting and repairing. The bill was taken down from the window, and all Wapshot knew that the Priory had been let. It is extraordinary what a sensation such an event as the letting of an old house will occasion. I

know Wapshot well. I was there when the news arrived of the taking of Sebastopol—indeed, I myself conveyed the intelligence from Waterloo station, where I had purchased a paper; and I am prepared to affirm that the simple villagers were not by any means so much interested in that historic episode as in the calving of Mrs Morris's cow, which occurred on the very same day.

When the house had ceased to echo with the operations of the workmen, and the newly painted rooms were reported dry, the furniture arrived in two large vans, and after the goods came the tenants. These consisted of the tall gentleman who had previously inspected the house, and a little girl of about six, with a peculiarly sweet and pensive expression, wide, wondering eyes, and a complexion surpassingly fair. Accompanying them was a servant of brusque and bustling manner, who set herself with great determination to reduce the confusion that had been deposited by the vans, and to render

the place—to use her own expression—‘Fit for a Christian to live in.’ Upon seeing Martha—for such was the name of this incomparable woman—the villagers were filled with a great hope of hearing all about the Gilliats. From the men who brought the furniture down they had indeed ascertained that the furniture had come from a house in Highgate, but beyond that their information extended not. Martha was more reticent than the furniture men, and turned a deaf ear to all questions addressed to her by the unduly inquisitive. A curiosity which is not fed must soon perish of inanition. So in the absence of food for gossip, Wapshot looked about for other provender, and the Gilliats gradually became a part of the village, exciting neither comment nor inquiry. Before Mr Gilliat had been many months settled in his new home, his influence began to be felt. He set out, it is true, on a firm commercial basis. The tradesmen all spoke well of him, because, unlike many of the local

gentlemen, he purchased his goods in Wapshot, the custom with others being to have their groceries and the like in quantities from Windsor or even London. These mundane considerations are of more importance than romancists and visionaries would have us imagine; and, for my own part, I would not augur great things for that Evangelist who commenced his mission and did not stand well with his tradespeople. When it is known that a man has a decent balance at his banker's, it is amazing what weight that circumstance will give to the evangel which he is commissioned to teach.

For John Gilliat was an evangelist. He did not immediately swoop down on the devoted village, preaching some new thing. Gradually, and with all the artfulness of these Jesuits whom his soul hated, he brought his intellectual and moral forces in array against the enemy of mankind. Someone was old and feeble, fearing the final step, and yearning for companionship during the

journey through the Valley of the Shadow : here he would gain admittance by administering certain bodily comforts to the departing child of man. Then he read portions of the Word (he had a remarkably sweet voice, with a recurring note of sadness in its cadences), and uttered encouraging comments thereon. Or, perhaps, some farm hand had been smitten down by accident : at this bedside also would the master of the Priory appear, with cooling fruits in their season or cunningly prepared draughts for the parched throat, and solemn reminders that in the midst of life we are in death. I do not wish to insinuate that Mr O'Lympus was unmindful of his flock. He would drop in with his cheery Hibernian manner, making light of the affliction, and even sending his servant with something from his cellar. But the parishioners felt that these visits were perfunctory. Mr Gilliat never offered consolation at a bedside without making the sick man feel assured of the genuineness of his sympathy. In the

course of that visit books were frequently lent to such patients as could read them; and from this circumstance sprang two ideas which Mr Gilliat, with characteristic determination, put into practice. A large room occupied one side of the house: he had a door constructed for this room, affording a separate entrance from the village. This he converted into a reading-room; and, further, he here offered to give reading lessons to all such adult persons as happened to suffer from a thirst for knowledge. Mr O'Lympus was, as we know, an easy-going man; and as Mr Gilliat regularly attended church, he regarded these good works with anything but disfavour. When, however, to the lending library and the school was added a week-evening exhortation, the wrath of Sir Penton Hook was aroused, and with some petulance he endeavoured to stimulate the vicar into the suppression of a man whom he described as a 'red-hot radical, a proselytiser, and an infernal, interloping Dissenter.'

Meanwhile, the object of this outburst of magisterial wrath went calmly on his way. The heart's-ease succeeded the primrose in the garden, the brown bare fields followed the waving gold of the corn. Then the snow came and covered all traces of vegetable life. In a word, season followed season, and year followed year; and little Ruth, of the sweet expression and the kindly eyes, sprang up, and changed, as the years changed, till from a little wondering child, she developed into the straight symmetrical figure we know her to be. Into all her father's schemes she entered. And, indeed, how should she not? It was he who educated her, moulding, as he fondly thought, the perfection of the mind to fit the perfection of the body. Unfortunately for this father's calculations, Ruth was all this time being educated by a school-mistress. Unconsciously, but with infallible certainty, Dame Nature was giving her reading lessons out of a mighty big book, and setting her sums which were to help

hereafter in the solution of the problem of life. Poor Ruth ! that was a bitter moment for thee when thou didst first discover—thy own heart being the tell-tale—that Nature commanded one thing while thy father's system of moral ethics taught another.

The one recreation which Mr Gilllat permitted to himself was an occasional day's fishing. In this way he became acquainted with Mr Molt during the early months of his residence in Wapshot. And from that time Hoppy acted as fisherman and occasional gardener to the owner of the Priory. For a long time he had held out against all offers to teach him the mysteries of reading. Indeed, it was not until Ruth was of an age to undertake his instruction herself that he consented. His devotion to that young lady was the one heroic sentiment of his life. That rugged, and, if it must be admitted, somewhat disreputable old man, became transformed in her presence. She was the link that bound him to a better life. The

fair stimulus of a sluggish ambition. And while we have been describing the settlement of the Gilliat household in the village of Wapshot - on - Thames, Hoppy, under the pleased and patient guidance of his mistress, has arrived, after many stumblings and dubitations, at the end of the chapter, and arises from the task with a great sigh of relief, and the expression of a man who has sacrificed himself in the cause of a religion with which he has but an imperfect sympathy. And now an incident occurred which is not altogether unworthy of narrative.

That is by no means an un instructive legend which tells us of the good fairy bestowing gifts upon the sons of men. It is to be feared, however, that the recipients of these precious presents do not always make the best use of them. To one, mayhap, she gives a flower, out of which he straightway distils a deadly poison, giving his brother to drink thereof. To another she confides hollow reeds from the river, the which he

converts into a pipe, and repairing to the woods plays loud false notes till the birds drop with terror from their branches. Or to another she presents a diamond, glowing and sparkling in the sunlight, which the yokel gazes at for a space, and then flings into the nearest duck pond, where it sinks through the green film on the surface, and becomes embedded among unheard of slimy things in the muddy bottom. Now I like to think of Ruth as a Good Fairy. And here you see she was imparting to this dense but devoted mortal a precious gift. We have already seen that he used his possession for the acquirement of arguments in support of republicanism, communism, and othersupposed inalienable rights of man. But the good fairy little imagined that in his explorations after truth he would wander beyond the four corners of his Sunday newspaper. Vain is the simple faith of innocence. Hoppy dives into the capacious pocket of his velveteen coat—he has risen from the chair, and was

supposed to be about to take his leave—and produces from those mysterious depths a pamphlet in a brown paper cover, wonderfully dog's-eared, and smelling consumedly of tobacco. Placing this literary treasure in Ruth's hands, he asks—shame-faced and conscious of error—

‘ Please, miss, d’ye think there’s any reason in this here book ? ’

Mr Gilliat, thinking that Hoppy was about to take his departure, has risen. He takes the pamphlet from his daughter, and reads in a tone of considerable alarm and displeasure,

“ Some Mistakes of Moses ! ”

‘ Ah,’ says Hoppy, affirmatively.

As Mr Gilliat turns page after page reading rapidly, his lips are pressed tightly, the cloud darkens on his brow, and Mr Molt, standing before him, assumes the demure and nervous attitude of a prisoner awaiting sentence. At last he has perused enough to

convince him of the general tenor of the work.

‘Ruth,’ he says, with a calm that is evidently forced, ‘get me a lucifer.’

Mr Gilliat takes the tongs from the empty grate and fixes the brochure firmly in their grasp ; then he applies a lighting match, and steps out into the gravel walk with the bundle of blazing blasphemy. It flares for a while, slowly consumes, and at last drops to the earth a black, crisp residue. Mr Gilliat crushes the ashes with his heel—were he crushing the head of the serpent, he could not have displayed more energy—then he turns, and with flashing eye demands of Hoppy,

‘Where did you get that book?’

‘No offence, sir, I ’ope ; but Mister Jim Gates, he giv it to me.’

‘Then Jim Gates is usurping the position of his master, the devil. He is a tempter : avoid him : he means harm to you ; and if he gives you any more of his pernicious trash,

bring it here. Better *it* should burn than that it should cause the eternal burning of some human soul.'

Abashed, subdued, disconcerted, Hoppy took an uneasy leave of his patrons, backed awkwardly out of the room, and felt unspeakably relieved on finding himself in the comparative security of the village street. Passing the entrance to the 'Three Feathers' he saw the Tempter leaning against the doorpost smoking. He forgot Mr Gilliat's warning to avoid that child of the Evil One. Moreover, he was thirsty. He did *not* forget, however, over a pint of ale, to inform Jim Gates of Mr Gilliat's candid opinion of him. Indeed, in repeating the opinion, Mr Molt was guilty of many embellishments and exaggerations. He also described, with some native humour, the immolation of Colonel Ingersol's published strictures on Moses. No very amiable expression appeared on Jim's face during the progress of this narrative.

‘Did the Little Methodist hear his dam farrago?’

Hoppy assented. Jim muttered something, shrugged his shoulders, and changed the subject.

Meanwhile, Ruth has sat down to the piano, and is singing to her own accompaniment a quaint old hymn to a quaint old melody. Her music, thus attuned, has always a soothing effect on her father. Her sweet voice floods the room, floating out over the blossoms of the rose and the hollyhock. Yet her mind is neither with the words nor the melody. She hears the music of the distant river. She stands on the bank. A skiff is moored among the rushes. An arm is round her pliant waist. Eloquent eyes look down at her. A voice that, to her, is the most precious on earth, whispers love. Her head falls on his shoulder, as she promises to be his forever and forever.

CHAPTER VII

TWO EPISTLES

FOR a youth in an advanced stage of that malady which men call love, it must be confessed that Dick Hook possessed a very pretty appetite. At breakfast, particularly, he plays an excellent knife and fork. For example, a dish of gudgeon netted that very morning in a neighbouring tributary and served piping hot, is a noble opening to the morning meal. Grilled ham and poached eggs—the latter deposited but an hour ago in the nest—are a fitting sequel. And that

disposed of, a man at the threshold of life may trifle for some moments with a Strasbourg paté, selfishly extracting all the truffles ; then thinking haply of his digestion, he may finish up with a thick slice of bread and butter piled an inch high, with thy superior marmalade, Dundee ! This, assisted in its progress by a couple of cups of coffee, was precisely the breakfast of which, with much heartiness, the heir of the Hooks had partaken a fortnight after the events chronicled in the last chapter. Nor do I think the repast at all an excessive one to a young Hercules who spends half his time in the open, and who is contented with what he calls ‘three square meals a day.’ As to the appetite being any guage of love, that is a different matter. I do not see why it should. With persons who suffer both in heart and digestion, a certain sympathy between the two may occasion an antipathy to food ; but to a perfectly healthy English lad, full of spirits and fond of exercise, I don’t believe

the indulgence in the tender passion will cause him to regard with aversion a tender steak.

Sir Penton, indeed, had to be careful. His doctor had told him so. Instead of breakfast he devours the *Times*, waiting for the arrival of the carriage which is to take him to the Petty Sessions. As for Lady Hook, she never had much of an appetite; but apparently finds sustenance in gazing with maternal fondness at her only boy, who chatters away between the mouthfuls with the utmost vivacity and good-humour. Two letters left by hand at the lodge are brought in. They are for Master Richard, who takes them from the salver, and with characteristic impetuosity tears them open, reading as follows—

No. I.

‘ THE VICARAGE, TUESDAY.

‘ DEAR MR HOOK,

‘ There will be a fair at Wrayton to-morrow. Uncle has to attend

a visitation of the Bishop—which, under the circumstances, *I* call a visitation of Providence—and so cannot take me. Can you not arrange to take dear Lady Hook and myself? I love fairs. I always regret that Donnybrook was done away with before I was born.

‘Sincerely yours,

‘CARRIE DUNLOP.’

No. II.

‘VICARAGE FARM

‘TUESDAY MORNING.

‘DEAR MASTER RICHARD,

‘We are in great trouble. The bay mare was stolen last night, and, we are afraid, it’s *pa*. A *certain person* has been in the village for some weeks, and is *always with pa*, and that person has had *new clothes*, which, of course, he cannot afford. The mare was safe in the paddock at *nine* last night. We do not wish to take *any steps* that would injure poor Father and

disgrace us unless we are *driven* to it. Could you see pa and *reason* with him ; or, if not, could you see *us* and advise us what to do ? Please do not mention this to Sir Penton *at present*. He would want us to take *extreme measures* to which we are averse until *everything* else has been tried.

‘ Your Obedient Servant,
‘ KATE WESTAWAY.’

Richard thrust the letters into the pocket of his boating-jacket and bit his lip. His mother, upon whom no action of his was thrown away, said, in her gentle way,

‘ Your correspondence seems to have displeased you, Dick. Nothing the matter, I hope.’

‘ I’ve had a letter from Miss Dunlop,’ explained that arch-hypocrite.

‘ That should cause you no displeasure,’ suggested his mother.

‘ It *does* though,’ he replied, with a lament-

able want of gallantry. ‘She wants me to take her to Wrayton fair to-morrow—with *you*, of course, mother.’

Sir Penton Hook put down the *Times*, and inquired, with some irritation of tone,

‘And why not, sir? why not, I say?’

‘Well,’ answered Dick, vaguely, ‘I don’t think Wrayton Fair is quite the place for ladies.’

‘Nonsense,’ said the baronet decisively; ‘it’s the place above all other places for the ladies—if the ladies express a wish to go. And hark ye, Dick,’ he continued, in his dictatorial tones, ‘you know my wishes regarding Miss Dunlop and yourself. You know your mother’s wishes. There must be no more shilly-shallying. You must propose to Miss Dunlop—to Carrie.’

“‘I’m ower young to marry yet.’” answered Dick, uneasily.

‘No one wants you to marry on the instant, but you can become engaged. The

alliance is one which will meet the approval of both families.'

'Do people, then, marry only for the approval of families, and without any regard to their own feelings?'

'Certainly,' replied Sir Penton, as if the matter did not admit of a moment's consideration. 'Besides, in your case that question cannot arise. Miss Dunlop is worthy of any man's love; and mark my words, young fellow, if you don't use some despatch, she will be snapped up by a fortunate rival.'

How ardently Dick prayed in his heart for the appearance of that favoured individual.

'As to not going to the fair,' continued the Roman father, 'that's all stuff and nonsense. Lady Hook, I desire that you will write to Miss Dunlop at once, asking her to accompany you.' He stopped, and appeared to cogitate. It was rarely that this gentleman condescended to suggest arrangements for the comfort of others. He was, however,

apparently engaged in such considerations at present, for he subsequently turned to his son, and said, 'The Justice Room is in the Crown Hotel. There's a balcony outside the window that looks right into the square. Take the ladies to the Justice Room.'

'Very good, sir,' answered Dick, though, I regret to say, in no very conciliatory tone.

Sir Penton was suffering from an excess of consideration for the well-being of others. He added :

'And you'd better order some lunch for the ladies ; the wine is good at the Crown. And see if you can't behave as if you were a man of the world, and not a great lout of a schoolboy, begad.'

Sir Penton's famous roans were now pawing on the gravel outside. The worthy magistrate rose, bowed ceremoniously to his wife, and with his pompous little strut moved out of the breakfast room. Heaven help the hapless rogues and vagabonds, the unkempt ravishers of linnets' nests, the draggle

tailed gatherers of unclaimed sticks, arraigned to-day before this worthy justice of the peace. For Sir Penton's sentences are nicely graduated by the condition of his temper; and to-day the mild opposition of his son has occasioned in his breast that state of the elements which usually precedes a storm.

As the carriage is heard crunching along the drive, Lady Hook indulges in a gentle sigh of relief, and Dick breaks into melody. This exercise is interrupted by his mother, who says tentatively,

‘You had *another* letter, Dick, had you not?’

‘Yes, mother,’ replied Dick, affording in his answer a very excellent example of that figure of speech which the lawyers call *suppressio veri*; ‘only a note about a bay mare; but I can do without any more horses at present.’

‘Indeed you can,’ acquiesced his mother, who was perfectly satisfied by the evident

candour of her son, and who probably knew nothing whatever about the *suppressio veri*.

Yet this young fellow loved his mother after his own fashion. I suppose we all deceive our mothers, both while we seek shelter under the protecting wing, and afterwards when we commence flying about the world on our own pinions. It is evident that Dick is deceiving his parents not only in matters of small import, but in things of great domestic moment. Still, I am not sorry that when he rose to leave the table he approached his mother, placed his hand lightly on her shoulder, kissed her cheek, and said tenderly,

‘Dear mother!’

And she trembles with pleasure under his touch, and a veil of moisture fills her eyes as she listens to his words. He may be deceiving that confiding woman; but it was no Judas kiss he gave her, and his affection had no alloy in it.

Having performed his filial duty, he went out on to the lawn and lit a cigar, the per-

fume of that weed mingling not unpleasantly with the scent of the hawthorn. Perhaps it was the best thing he could do. Smoke, they say, is an excellent aid to reflection.

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CHAPTER VIII

BLACK CHERRY FAIR

I AM like Miss Dunlop. I love a fair. But particularly do I affect those which are holden in the towns and villages scattered about the valley of the Thames. I love the swarthy Nomads who all through the Summer-time move along the dusty roads in lumbering caravans, carrying their shows from place to place for the recreation of riparian man. True children of Bohemia—laborious disciples of art in its crudity ! What is the owner of the movable stage but

Thespis come again ? And the round-about keepers and owners of strange machines to test the muscles—they are managers of the circus, patrons of the arena.

I have followed these gipsy caterers and have seen them pitch their greasy encampments in a score of Thames-side towns. Now they have swarmed in the reeking market-place of Brentford—their chubby children stumbling over the uneven cobbles of that unhappy square. In old-fashioned Kingston I have seen the Mayor himself—without, of course, his furs and purple cloak and chain of office—openly patronise their humble booths. Under the very castle walls of Royal Windsor their naphtha flares at times, their blatant barrel organs the while grinding out the National Anthem. In the broad and cheerful High Street of Staines their rows of dirty canvas look picturesque enough in the brightness of a July sun. Chertsey is to me more interesting as the scene of a somewhat

melancholy fair than as the death-place of Cowley or for its small association with Charles James Fox. As far as remote Witney—famous through Europe for its blankets and its beer—have I followed these swarthy children of the East and seen their gay or dingy caravans disposed in rows like streets on the ample column. What Thames regatta is not enlivened by a contingent from their main body? And who would care for Hampton Races but for the prospect of a shindy in the tents of Shem?

There be onion fairs, and there be apple fairs. That of Wrayton was the Black Cherry Fair—so-called because black cherries were not sold at it—nor indeed was any fruit at all disposed of within its borders. From the balcony of the Crown the party from Riverdale looked down on the lively scene below. Miss Dunlop, arrayed in a walking-dress cunningly contrived to display her figure to the greatest advantage, seemed flushed with pleasure; the dress was of blue

serge, trimmed with dark red braid. She wore a straw hat of the sailor shape, ornamented with poppies—suggestive of waving barley rather than of waving billows. By her side was seated Lady Hook in a state of placid enjoyment. Behind the ladies stood Dick looking frank, handsome, audacious. Many eyes were cast up shyly at that group; and in all Wrayton there was on that day, I am bound to say, no fairer sight—though Wrayton was *en fête* and the streets filled with the local youth and beauty.

Full in view of the balcony of the Crown is the village pump. Three gipsy children very fat, very brown, inexpressibly dirty, cling to the handle endeavouring unsuccessfully to move it so that crystal streams may trickle in the desert. At these, some of the village children gaze with open and ill bred curiosity. But when one of the little heathens staring with his big black eyes approaches the small villagers and craves assistance, the

eldest of them—a girl of six—clutches her little brother to her bosom and disdainfully marches off with him. They are great respecters of caste in Wrayton, and the Jews there will have no dealings with the Samaritans.

In the street there are dazzling colour and confusion of sound. Barrel organs bray, cymbals clash, an awful orchestra proclaims deadly discord in front of the waxworks. By a hundred instruments is Jenny adjured to 'Wait till the clouds roll by.' The head grows dizzy as one watches the wooden horses of the roundabouts—replete as that of Troy—whirled round by steam to the demoniacal shriek of the whistle. Bang go the frequent guns in the shooting galleries, and the sticks fly briskly at the elusive cocoa nuts to the yelling accompaniment of Gipsy John. The crowd great in cheap finery and gay ribbons and panting with pleasure pushes eagerly over the sidewalks or over the space between the caravans and tents. Sweethearts

do their fairing, and those who are not sweet-hearts hope to become so before the shadows of the long evening begin to gather. The swing doors of the taverns move on the ready hinges. Good humour prevails everywhere. And above all is the blue sky with a white cloud-continent on the horizon with steep islands here and there, the boulders of which are as the driven snow, illuminated by the great sun himself shining splendidly on the just and on the unjust.

There is not room in the main streets for all the waggon of the showmen. The fair has consequently overflowed into bye streets—surging up like an irresistible flood to the very windows of honest citizens whose houses are close to the pathways. These householders are probably the only persons in Wrayton who curse Black Cherry Fair, and wish the gipsy invaders back in the land of plagues. Carrie watches the varied scene with evident amusement, observes with great interest the giddy gyrations of the huge

rotating machinery with its rows of horses is captivated by the spectacle of the girls clinging to the necks of their flying steeds and shrieking half with fright and half with the wild pleasure of the unaccustomed motion. Some sympathy too must have stirred the depths of her nature. For having observed their swift and circuitous flight through the ambient air, she observes to Dick :

‘It must make them very ill.’

‘Not so ill as *that*,’ replies Dick pointing to the pathway beneath.

There a pretty girl, toddler of some five summers’ experience was engaged in greedily devouring the ginger-bread effigy of a human creature.

‘She seems to relish it,’ says Carrie.

‘You see she eats him gilt and all,’ exclaims Dick, with affected alarm.

‘The little cannibal,’ says Carrie.

‘And what she can’t eat’ adds Dick, ‘she paints her face with. A good economy.’

‘Horrid child !’ says Carrie, observing that

the terrible infant was indeed smearing its chubby cheeks with the wet brown composition upon which she was engaged.

‘She commences early with the awful privilege of her sex,’ says Dick, mysteriously.

‘In painting her cheeks, do you mean?’ asks Carrie, indignantly, turning towards him that matchless face—that brilliant complexion owing no indebtedness to rouge-pot or powder puff.

‘I don’t mean that,’ says he.

‘Then explain, sir,’ says she, with a defiant smile that like all she did appeared specially to become her.

‘I mean that she has commenced her career as a devourer of men,’ explains Dick.

‘Very excellent and satirical, Master Dick,’ says she, ‘but why not complete the comparison?’

‘As how?’

‘When we devour men we swallow them guilt and all—like the child you know.’

‘I’m quite sure it must be very unwhole-

some,' added Lady Hook joining in the conversation. That excellent creature was not apt at reading parables and her comment it will be seen dealt with the gingerbread and not with the fancy to which it had given rise.

'What a handsome man! and see, Dick, he's touching his hat to you.'

Thus, Miss Dunlop. A few yards up the street was drawn a van somewhat more pretentious than the others. It had panels picked out in green and gold; gay curtains hung inside its miniature windows and a resplendent brass knocker was affixed to its door. It was indeed the identical van which the Cooper family had acquired when they disposed of its ricketty predecessor to Mr Molt.

Miss Dunlop had an eye for the picturesque. It is not astonishing therefore that her attention should have been arrested by the figure that lightly descended from the gaudy vehicle. It was that of a man of

about forty-five with a native bronze intensified by much exposure to the sun. His features were perfect in their regularity ; his eyes bright and black, and his teeth white and even. With the exception of two bits of side whisker arranged after the manner affected by grooms, his face was cleanly shaved. He wore a red waistcoat with brass buttons down the front. His knee-breeches would have done credit to the most dapper dandy going across country, and his gaiters were fastened with buttons of mother-of-pearl. His cap had been] quaintly devised out of the skin of a large hedgehog. As he stood in the village street surrounded by many evidences of civilisation he afforded an illustration of the physical advantages to be derived from a nomadic existence.

‘Who is he?’ inquired Miss Dunlop, observing that Dick had not returned the salute of the Nomad.

‘His name is Cooper, but he is more

generally known as "Gipsy John,"' replied the other.

'And *what* is he?'

'Well, that's hard to say. To my father and his venerable colleagues on the County Bench he is known as a thief and a poacher. To the public at large he is a sort of people's caterer who travels from fair to fair with Aunt Sallies and merry-go-rounds, and absurd machines supposed to test the strength of your lungs or your biceps.'

'Quite a character,' suggested Miss Dunlop.

'Quite a *bad* character,' said Dick, by way of amendment.

'Dick is right,' added Lady Hook, who was ever delighted to endorse the sentiments of her boy. 'Sir Penton has often spoken of him to me. Why, my dear, it's hardly credible, but the last time that man was brought up before the bench, Sir Penton sentenced him to six months' hard labour; and when the magistrate's clerk looked in a

book and found that by some mistake in the law the Bench couldn't punish him at all, the man made use of most insulting language and actually called Sir Penton and the other gentlemen a lot of old noodles.'

To judge by Miss Dunlop's smile one might imagine that she rather sympathised with the recalcitrant gipsy, who, unconscious of the gentle interest which he had excited, was gazing contemplatively down the crowded street. Presently a tall old man in highly-varnished riding boots joined him. The old man's hat was slightly tilted on one side; he had a habit of striking his leg with his riding crop; his tones were loud and cheery, and with his left hand he trifled with the gew-gaws that depended from his fob. It was indeed Mark Westaway intent, no doubt, on the honest enjoyment of that fine old English institution—a country fair. The farmer and the gipsy exchanged greetings, and walking away together, turned down a bye-way and were lost to view.

‘ Will you excuse me for five minutes, Miss Dunlop? Mother, have I your permission?’ said Dick, stepping from the balcony into the room upon which it abutted.

The younger lady bowed her acquiescence; but the elder inquired, with inconvenient inquisitiveness—

‘ Where are you going, Dick?’

‘ I’m going to—a—to order lunch,’ a happy inspiration had it not evoked the maternal objection.

‘ Why, my dear boy, you ordered lunch as we came up.’

‘ Well, the fact is, said Dick with a sudden burst of confidence, ‘ I’ve changed my mind about the bay mare I spoke to you of. I’m going to see a man about that bay mare. If I don’t go at once, I may miss him.’

He lifted his hat, and in a instant was gone. No doubt there *was* a bay mare in the question, and why Dick should have made such a mystery about it, who shall say? His lady mother, however, was fully satisfied

with his explanation. But Miss Dunlop watched him as he gained the roadway, saw him shape his course among the booths and swings and ginger-bread stalls; and finally observed him take the same narrow thoroughfare down which Westaway and the gipsy had disappeared; then she inquired dreamily of Lady Hook,

‘I wonder whether Gipsy John sells bay mares?’

The suggestion appeared to alarm Lady Hook considerably. She answered,

‘Oh, my dear, don’t think of such a thing. I’m sure Dick would never buy anything from such a person. We should never be able to keep it. The gipsies will follow it about and steal it away from *any* place. Besides you can’t imagine how exceedingly angry it would make Sir Penton?’

Carrie elevated her eyebrows, and Lady Hook encouraged into reminiscence by the mention of her husband’s name, proceeded:

‘I remember how very angry he was with

me when we lived in town. I bought a little dog in Portland Place. I feel sure the man was a gipsy. The poor little creature was always getting lost, and when we advertised in the papers he was always being found with some awful people in the East End, and every time we had to pay more money to get him back, till at last it had cost me nearly a hundred pounds. Then Sir Penton sent a detective down to the next person who answered an advertisement, but it was found that the poor little thing had died before the officer arrived. Perhaps it was better; for if he had lived I daresay he would have cost me quite a thousand pounds by this time. I was very fond of Fido; but a thousand pounds would be a great deal of money to spend over such a very little dog.'

Miss Dunlop acquiesced and Lady Hook added softly,

'And in the case of a horse, of course, the gipsies would be much more exorbitant.'

The musical prattle of Lady Hook is lost in the noisy chorus of the fair, the mad clashing of cymbals, the monotonous boom of the big drum, the stentorian cries of 'Walk up, walk up,' the deafening and discordant music of the hurdy-gurdies, the roar of conversation, the shrieks of happy children, the wail of a neglected singer of lugubrious ballads, the laughter of lovers, the whine of a decrepit beggar.

CHAPTER IX

‘VANITY OF VANITIES SAITH THE PREACHER’

It is wonderful how far a poor five-pound note can be made to go in transforming the human animal. For such a sum a man may equip himself from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head, if he knows where to go with his money. There are dear markets and cheap ones. Jim Gates, it may be inferred, had acquired by experience the squalid economy of the slop-shop, and for less than a five-pound note had obtained a most successful ‘rig out’ from a dealer in ready-made

articles of attire, with a branch emporium in the slums of Windsor.

To what expedients 'the guv'nor' had resorted in order to obtain this advance, Jim neither knew nor cared. He was interested chiefly in the result. At a ridiculously small outlay he could now cut a respectable, not to say dashing, figure in the world. The suit of tweed, the pattern being a generous and assertive check, could not be considered dear at two guineas, while the cover-coat was a marvel of cheapness at half-a-guinea; another ten-and-sixpence procured him a pair of boots which were to all appearances framed with a view to marvellous endurance, while a white hat—slightly soiled—and on that account offered at the reduced price of seven shillings, completed the agreeable picture.

These investments left him a clear balance of thirty shillings, a portion of which he devoted to the purchase of a red necktie, a pocket-handkerchief, with artistically variegated border, a gilt locket for Polly at the

‘Feathers,’ and a cigar-holder for himself on which a carved Aphrodite was discerned in the very act of rising from the foam. Altogether Jim looked quite the gentleman, and as he swaggered among the booths at Wrayton many maidens looked coyly into his face and envied the bright-cheek’d, black-eyed girl who hung upon his arm. For Polly, by parental permission released for the day, accompanied him; and the locket that rose and fell on her heaving bosom, was the locket which he had given her, and, I dare say, its jealous spring secured from observation a sample of his richly perfumed hair.

Miss Parsons had decked herself in all her finery. Her richly trimmed dolman descended to her very heels. Heavy ornaments depended from her ears. Her hat was large—even aggressive in its proportions—and was decked with flowers of the garden and feathers of the bird. Her sunshade had been purchased in emulation of those she had seen issuing from Riverdale. Bangles rattled musically

over her six-button gloves. She laughed incessantly as they passed among the booths, at Jim's sly satirical allusions : laughing even when she had the most imperfect apprehensions of the real meaning of his *mots*.

Though Jim's tone of easy banter was depreciatory of Wrayton Fair and of all that therein was exhibited, he appeared to enter with great gusto into the fun of the thing. Sometimes he shot ; and sometimes he shied the deceptive stick, earning a guerdon of nuts, the which with many pleasantries he poured into Polly's pocket. He had a cheery word for the swarthy caterers ; chaffed the pretty gipsy girls at the mouths of those funnels which they call shooting galleries, and behaved himself generally with a freedom and affability which endeared him to the merry show-folk. And Polly hearing, blushed with pride and pleasure, nay, sometimes blushed with an incipient shame, for truth to tell his jokes were occasionally more full flavoured

than those which passed current in front of her father's bar.

But was he not handsome and condescending and clever? Had he not the air of a prince? And why should the prince have selected her as the object of his polite attentions? She absolutely trembled with pleasure when she heard the more than astute showman address him as ‘my noble capting.’ And when a dark eyed but dirty sybil,

‘Clothed in rags and wrinkles,’

produced a pack of cards and openly called him ‘my lord Dook,’ she instinctively stopped short while the sybil craved permission to read the destiny of his grace as well as of the noble lady who stood blushing and smiling by his side. And indeed for a single silver shilling the brown crone with the furrowed face read such a future as dazzled Polly; dazzled and delighted her. Because in the picture that the sybil disclosed—lifting it is true but the very corner

of that curtain which shuts out the Hereafter—she had described a fair young man sharing unheard of affluence with a dark young woman—the man admired and constant ; the woman devoted, and covered with silks and diamonds. As they left the soothsayer Jim laughed and said,

‘ I suppose, Poll, you believe all she said, don’t you ? ’

Polly looked up at him surprised—nay, pained.

‘ Of course I do,’ she answered. ‘ It’s too beautiful not to be true. Don’t *you* believe it ? ’

‘ Devil a bit,’ said the man of the world, bluntly.

She was hurt. She was puzzled.

‘ But you told me yourself that I should go to London and ’ave di’monds.’

‘ Yes, yes,’ he replied carelessly, ‘ that’s sure to come. I don’t mean that ; I meant all the rot about the fair man marrying the dark woman.’

Polly stood still; she dropped his arm. His figure had become indistinct, and a filmy curtain had shut out all the fun of the fair; for two great irrepressible tears sprang to her eyes, and balancing themselves for a moment under the lids, coursed down her red cheeks. All she could utter was :

‘ Oh, Jim ! ’

But there was an infinity of pain and pleading and reproach in the tone. Jim was a man of sentiment, and easily touched by feminine demonstrations of this kind. So he said, in kindlier tones, and stooping down toward her,

‘ There, there, Polly ! don’t do *that*. I was only chaffing. You know I’m awful spoons on you. Come on : I’ll treat you to a couple of stalls at the theatre.’

And—fond faith of woman !—she dried her eyes, and smilingly wondered that even for a passing moment she should have doubted a love so gracious and so good.

To the theatre by all means, though it is

only a barn with bare boards for stalls and the dust of the street for flooring, and inopportune holes in the canvas that admitted rays of sunlight showing ghastly athwart the odorous effulgence of the naphtha lamps. Even in such a temple shall not the children of Thespis enact such stories of love and valour and death as shall divert the doubting heart? A couple of humble testers procured admission for Jim and his fair companion to the reserved seats, whereon they settled themselves—two in an audience of fifty—to witness the grave unfolding of the plot of ‘One o’Clock; or, the Wood Demon.’

The ‘Wood Demon’ is a gloomy melodrama of the good old kind, and is the work of Monk Lewis, a proficient in what may be called the charnel-house department of the British drama. Polly was greatly entertained and awed by the strange development of the plot. She nestled closely to her admirer’s side; and when a situation more

than usually thrilling was presented, she squeezed the arm to which she clung in a tremor of emotion half pleasure and half fright.

Jim did not take this sympathetic view of melodrama in a booth. He laughed at the ghastly passages, and shouted encouragements to the low comedian in the funny scenes; and once when a victim was killed (several are despatched during the progress of the drama), he cried ‘encore’ in such a manner as to scandalise the audience and occasion feelings of resentment in the gentle breasts of the mummers.

There is one passage in this remarkable work wherein the villain is locked in a bedroom, and his enemies becoming aware of his whereabouts, proceed to capture him. He is fairly trapped. Never was man’s doom more imminent. His room is high in the edifice. To precipitate himself into the courtyard below were sudden death. The knocking at the door becomes furious. In

another second those without will have battered that oak partition in. The portal absolutely shakes beneath their eager crowbars. Most persons would imagine that at this point the door gives way, the aggressors rush in, a fierce hand-to-hand fight occurs, and the caged man eventually succumbs to superior numbers.

Ah ! little do those who rush to such a conclusion understand the quality of Monk Lewis's genius—the inexhaustible resources of his ingenuity. For, just as those outside vainly imagine that this victim is secure, he remembers a stage direction in the prompt-book in these remarkable words : ‘ *Villain jumps upon bed, pulls a string, and bed descends with him beneath the floor.*’ Can you not imagine the baffled faces of the pursuers as they enter and find the quarry gone ? But a moment ago they heard him rushing about the room, and listened to his thundered imprecations. They never once thought of the descending bedstead ; but those who

essayed to kidnap a villain of Monk Lewis had to get up very early in the morning.

‘And what did my Polly think of it all?’ asked Jim, as on the fall of the curtain they reached the outer air.

Satisfaction and gratitude were in her accent as she replied,

‘Oh, it was lovely! and I was so frightened.’

‘Ah, wait till you see the London theatres, my dear!’ said this Mephistopheles in a tweed suit. He dabbled in poetry, did Jim, and quoted the lines from ‘Locksley Hall’ about getting underneath the light he looked at—‘in among the crowds of men.’ Here by the winding Thames; there by old Euphrates, when the world was young, the same story is acted—the story of the woman tempted by the devil. Nowadays, owing to some principle of compensation, the woman after the fall usually adopts the *rôle* of temptress in turn, avenging—but let me not anticipate Polly’s fate. Up to the present she has not

fallen. Let us regard her as innocent while we may.

The quick eyes of Miss Dunlop had not failed to notice the inharmonious presence of the cheap buck as he swaggered past the hotel with his gaudily attired sweetheart in tow. Directing Lady Hook's attention to the apparition, she said,

'That little touch of 'Arry blurs all the picture. It is a smudge. It is like a false note in a symphony.'

Jim Gates, it may be inferred, was unaware of the impression produced by his personal appearance, for he stared hard at the occupants of the balcony with the utmost sangfroid and in undisguised admiration. Then he proceeded on his way until he and the object of his doubtful attentions stood before two rival booths. Having discussed the question as to whether the blue horse or the fat woman would be the more stimulating spectacle, they decided in favour of the latter

and turning into her stuffy pavilion, were once more lost to view.

Standing back somewhat from the roadway and on that side of the road opposite the Crown Hotel stood the Town Hall—an ancient and crumbling edifice, with a small statue of Queen Elizabeth standing on a projection on its fore-front. Occasional concerts were held within its gloomy precincts. On the ground floor were a reading-room and library. The former was chiefly patronised by the curate—a young gentleman of a literary turn—who went there to read the *Athenæum*. But nobody seemed to patronise the library which contained only dull and forbidding literature in mouldy bindings. On the side of the hall opposite the door leading to the library was that conducting to the office of the Registrar of the County Court—a dread official.

A flight of four granite steps led from the pathway to the entrance of the historic edifice, and on the topmost step of that

granite flight a man now appeared whose proceedings produced somewhat a similar effect to that in earlier days occasioned by St Paul when he preached to those of Ephesus a new doctrine. The man was tall. He removed his hat: his hair was thin and gray. There was a sad grave expression in his face, and when he spoke his voice was found to be exquisitely modulated. The spectacle of a tall man dressed in broadcloth, standing bare-headed on the steps of the Town Hall and turning the pages of a book with red edges, would at any time be calculated to arrest the attention of the curious. During fair time a person minded to make the experiment would be pretty sure to arrest the attention of a score or more. Mr Gilliat looked round on the little circle of surprised and probably amused faces, and read from his book the verse of a well-known paraphrase—

Blest is the man who shuns the place
Where sinners love to meet,
Who fears to tread their wicked ways,
And hates the scoffers' seat.

This stanza he sang through in a sweet baritone voice and to a slow melancholy measure. No one joined in the exercise. Indeed some ribald boys at the outskirts of the group uttered ironical cries of ‘ Ally-lew-jah,’ and even requested the preacher to join them in the national pastime of ‘ three shies a penny ’ at a neighbouring encampment. In the little crowd, however, there was a sprinkling of visitors from Wapshot who, while not sympathising with the eccentricities of the preacher respected the sincerity of the man. By these the untimely demonstrations of rebellious youth were suppressed. Though I believe that the softness of his tones, the sadness of his expression and the earnestness of his manner would in the end have borne down all juvenile opposition.

Having finished the singing of the verse the preacher proceeded—

‘ My friends, I propose addressing to you a few simple words—words of warning,

words of admonition, and words of comfort. And I will take my text from a book written by the wisest human being who ever lived. In the second chapter of Ecclesiastes and at the second verse are these words: "I said in my heart, go to, now I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and behold this also is vanity."'

Then followed the discourse. It was direct in aim, simple in style, and relieved with illustrations aptly chosen and dramatically told. His theme you can of course imagine. The pleasures of the fair were wicked, frivolous, demoralising. For idle moments spent there men must give an account to their Maker. His earnestness was quite genuine, his eloquence altogether unstudied.

Do I think that, all things considered, Mr Gilliat had chosen a suitable scene for his ministrations? Possibly I do not. I have aforetime observed that I love fairs, and I see no sin at all in them. Mr Gilliat's

appearance came under the description given by Miss Dunlop of that of Jim Gates. It was out of drawing. It was a false note in the symphony. All around is the Babel of the fair—the music, the shouts, the laughter—and here is the preacher, with sad, earnest face, crying aloud that all is Vanity. Hoppy, standing uneasily on the extreme edge of the congregation, evidently shares my opinion. He regarded the exhibition with anything but equanimity. He knew what pain the report of it would give to one dear heart. And he writhed under the reflection, and fidgetted and knit his brows, and I verily believe offered up a silent prayer that heaven would bring the discourse to a speedy end.

That silent petition was answered, but after a fashion not contemplated by the suppliant.

Satisfied with an inspection of the expansive and too solid charms of the fat woman, Gates and his companion once more emerged

into the bright sunlight. To a *blasé* man of the world this round of country excitements offered little distraction; but the girl was still eager for diversion. While in these opposite moods, they caught sight of the crowd in front of the Town Hall. Bare-headed Mr Gilliat holding forth to an assembly of yokels was something decidedly novel, and seemed to promise to the accomplished Mr Gates some opportunity for that cheerful badinage of which he was a master. So he and the volatile Polly took up their places on the outskirts of the crowd in time to hear the preacher's opinion of fairs in general.

Jim was smoking a rank cigar; but, hearing these things, he withdrew the noxious weed from his mouth, and remarked in a voice audible to those in his immediate vicinity,

‘If he don’t like fairs, why don’t he stay away?’

This argument appealed powerfully to a

yokel in the immediate vicinity; and the bumpkin plucked up courage to say,

‘’Ear, ’ear! that’s what I say, mawster.’

‘What does he want,’ went on Jim, warming to his work, ‘interfering with the innocent amusements of the people?’

‘Right you are, mawster. Brayvo! Them’s my sediments to a T.’

Then Jim, turning to Polly, requested her to remain for a moment where she was then standing, while he went off, followed by her jealous eyes. She saw him enter the shop of a provision dealer, and in a couple of minutes saw him come out again, his right hand in his pocket, and a sinister smile on his face. Thus he sauntered up to the expectant Polly, and silently took his place by her side.

‘Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; vanity of vanities—all is vanity:’ thus Mr Gilliat concluding an eloquent period.

At that moment a well-directed egg shot from the part of the crowd where Jim Gates stood. It struck the preacher on the fore-

head and shivered there. The effect on the congregation was not that anticipated by the man who directed the missile; for as the yellow stream, with white rafts of broken shell on its surface, trickled down the grave, pale face of the preacher, dripping on to his coat, a loud murmur of resentment broke forth, and heads were turned round to see, if possible, by whom the dastard shot was fired.

In very much less time, however, than this takes to relate, and before the congregation could form a suspicion, Dick Hook, who had arrived just before the incident, rushed up to the redoubtable Jim, and doubling his fist, struck that man of fashion such a heavy and well-directed blow in the middle of the face that what pugilists pleasantly call 'the claret' welled forth plentifully, and Jim fell on the back of his head on to the pavement, the impact causing a perceptible thud. Polly flung herself on the prostrate body of her hero with all the abandon of a tragedy queen.

The congregation murmured applause, and Dick glared at the fallen foe.

The fallen foe was presently assisted to his legs by the devoted Polly. He drew his handkerchief across his swollen and bloody visage, and without attempting to return the blow—for which indeed Mr Hook was waiting—spluttered out to his assailant,

‘You shall pay dearly for this.’

‘When you like and where you like,’ replied Dick, panting with suppressed indignation. Apparently, however, that place and time did not harmonise with Jim’s view of the fitness of things, for replacing his hat, which had fallen off in the encounter, he offered his arm to Polly, and strode off with a pitiful affectation of dignity. It is pleasant for the honour of bucolic humanity to be in a position to add that he was followed by the hisses of the crowd. When the congregation turned once more toward the Town Hall, the denouncer of vanity had disappeared. Indeed Hoppy had at once rushed to his

assistance, carrying him *vi et armis* from the place ; and at the moment when he was first missed by his hearers, Mr Molt was successfully engaged in removing from the preacher's clothes all traces of the recent disaster.

The ladies on the balcony of the Crown had witnessed the little tragi-comedy as if from a private box—a circumstance which only dawned upon Dick in its full force when he repaired to the hotel. When he had washed his knuckles and was proceeding upstairs, it occurred to him that his conduct would be difficult of satisfactory explanation. A brawl in a public place could hardly be justified to a lady of his mother's disposition—a lady who was, moreover, the wife of a justice of the peace. Dick, however, had a sympathetic advocate in court. Lady Hook would have taken a very serious view of the case—indeed when Dick came into the room she was trembling with suspense and anxiety—but that Miss Dunlop had declared that Dick was perfectly right ; that the man who

threw the egg deserved his punishment ; and much more to the same effect. Half-converted by these specious arguments, Lady Hook did not attempt to upbraid, but expressed great uneasiness as to the condition of Dick’s knuckles, which she feared he might have hurt severely, and begged and prayed that he would depart instantly and take the advice of the nearest chemist.

Dick laughed down his mother’s apprehensions ; and Miss Dunlop changed the direction of the conversation by asking whether the young gentleman had succeeded in purchasing the bay mare. Dick evidently liked this channel of conversation as little as the former. He, however, condescended to inform the fair querist that the bay mare in question had been purchased for Vicarage Farm, and that consequently he could not have it.

Lady Hook, who was observant and reflective in the minor concerns of life, hereupon remarked,

‘ Then the Miss Westaways will have *two* bay

mares. I cannot for the life of me see what they want with *two*. And they've been so *recently* in difficulties! I'm sure Sir Penton will be greatly displeased when he hears of it.'

'Then, mother, dear, you mustn't *let* him hear of it—that's all.'

But the Miss Westaways were not to have two bay mares. That which Dick had repurchased from Gipsy John was their own abducted animal. The gipsy had bought it from the shameless Mark for five-and-twenty pounds. And for that sum, under threats of exposure and prosecution, Dick recovered it. So that after all it was he who really had paid for the brilliant plumage in which Jim Gates had appeared at the fair. Nay, the very egg which had been the occasion of so much disturbance was purchased with money indirectly supplied by Dick.

The advent of lunch interrupted the further flow of philosophic reflection. The hunger of the mind is often stayed by the satisfaction of some grosser appetite.

CHAPTER X

UNCLE AND NIECE

‘UNCLE FITZ, do you remember taking me to see my first pantomime?’

Carrie Dunlop was the speaker. She had been moving about the vicarage study, adjusting the flowers in the vases, but she stood still to ask the question. In her left hand she carried an open letter.

‘Of course I do,’ answered the vicar; ‘but what absurd association of ideas has put pantomime into your head on this hot summer day?’

‘I’ll tell you,’ she answered, dropping into a chair opposite her uncle, and affecting the mysterious air of a soothsayer.

‘I’m all attention,’ said Mr O’L ympus, laying down the *Field*, through which he had presumably been searching for some stray crumbs of theology.

‘Do you remember who was with us on that ever memorable occasion?’ persisted the girl.

‘I do. Lord Ballymacarret.’

‘That is so. What an invaluable memory you have got, uncle, dear.’

‘And what an unconscionable tease you are, Miss Carrie,’ answered the vicar, glancing somewhat longingly at the abandoned *Field*.

‘And don’t you remember,’ went on Carrie, unheeding the rebuke and the appeal, ‘that he insisted on our leaving the theatre before the performance was over—to avoid the crush, he said?’

‘Yes—that is to say, I believe so.’

‘And don’t you remember how utterly miserable and inconsolable I was; how I hated Lord Ballymacarret for it; and how my chagrin at not witnessing the end of the spectacle destroyed all the pleasure I had felt in the beginning?’

‘I do remember something of the sort,’ replied his reverence, smiling in spite of himself at the impetuosity of his wilful niece.

‘Well, uncle, just the same angry feeling has possessed me to-day since I received his lordship’s letter demanding my presence in town.’

‘But, my dear Caroline, you were a mere child then. Besides, your guardian is not now taking you away from a pantomime.’

‘No. Worse than that. He’s taking me away from a drama just as the serious interest is about to commence.’

‘Really, my dear, I’m the worst hand in the world at spelling out enigmas. Tell me your meaning in plain English.’

Carrie shrugged her shoulders, rose from her chair, and answered,

‘How *can* I, uncle, dear? I am myself so *very* Irish, you know, according to most eminent Saxon authorities.’

Then suffering from a momentary compunction for having given even a passing pain to so kind and excellent a relative, she kissed the vicar on the forehead, and went into the garden, humming softly,

‘Ah! believe me, if all those endearing young charms.’

His reverence, who was equally puzzled and amused by these occasional moods of his niece, watched her disappear beyond the lilac bushes; and once more regaining possession of his favourite sporting paper, proceeded to investigate the topics which interested him most.

His respite was a short one. Carrie reappeared as mischievous and mysterious as ever. Her uncle had forgotten the vague allusion to an interrupted drama in following

the account of a pike that had reached proportions rather greater than those of a leviathan. She drew a footstool close to him, and seating herself thereon, asked with, what appeared to the divine, strange irrelevancy,

‘Is not Miss Gilliat a very pretty girl?’

‘To my idea, very. But surely you have seen her at church?’

‘Possibly. And is she not very good?’

This was a point on which the vicar could always speak enthusiastically. He replied briefly,

‘She is of the material of which saints are made.’

Carrie shook her head.

‘I don’t believe saints are made out of material at all.’

‘Perhaps you do not believe in saints at all?’

‘Perhaps not. I certainly have my doubts about female saints. Now, Mr Gilliat’s appearance at Wrayton fair suggested that

about *him* there might be something saintly—his proceedings were so eccentric, he himself so enthusiastic, so careless of consequences.'

The vicar knit his brow at this allusion.

'I must say that I wish Mr Gilliat would refrain from such exercises in public.'

'He means well, does he not?' inquired the girl, meekly.

'I daresay he does. Half the mischief in the world is brought about by your well-meaning people. Unqualified men preaching publicly bring ridicule on the very cause in which they believe.'

'I see. You regard this evangelist just as a professional actor would look on an amateur.'

'You do me less than justice,' answered his reverence, with as near an approach to severity as he could assume. 'I do not so much object to the man or his doctrines, or even his method, which I am told is very

effective; I object to the places he selects for the delivery of his exhortations.'

'But surely,' replied Carrie, 'those poor actors who cannot secure great engagements may be permitted to appear in barns?'

'Caroline, you are incorrigible,' replied the parson.

'At all events, he appeared to have some very sympathetic auditors when I saw him a week ago on the Town Hall steps at Wrayton. Richard Hook's gallantry in defending the street-preacher was indisputable.'

'It was very injudicious,' answered O'Lympus, 'but it was, I admit, very natural, and I can't altogether blame him. A most cowardly assault had been committed on an elderly man.'

'You think then,' added Carrie, looking up into her uncle's face, 'that Dick attacked the Cockney out of respect for the orator?'

'I do—most certainly.'

'Then I do *not*.'

one has a personal interest in seeing them sustain their several *rôles*. The play is commonplace enough. One does not see exactly at present whether it will end in tragedy or in comedy.'

For one so habitually gay, Carrie had evinced a very serious tone. Her relative, unaccustomed to the grave mood, endeavoured to restore equanimity by observing,

'Let's hope it will be neither tragedy nor comedy, but a good old-fashioned farce, such as I used to see at the Haymarket in Buckstone's days.'

'Sir Penton Hook will not treat the matter as a farce when he hears of it; and the man who preached the vanity of a poor country fair is not likely to overlook deceit in his only daughter.'

'But, my dear child, you are begging the whole question. You are assuming as facts what may be mere fancies.'

In a moment the serious mood was abandoned. She rose from her place at her

uncle's feet, burst into one of her gay laughs, and exclaimed,

‘Of course I am. And even supposing I were right in my assumption, what interest can the play have for *me*?’ Then after a pause, ‘Do you think, uncle, there would be anything wrong in my calling on Miss Gilliat before I leave?’

‘I don’t think there would be anything wrong. At the same time, I cannot see anything to be gained by it.’

‘I have no wish to gain anything by it; it is only one of my fancies. I may have a fancy to see her, to inquire about her school, to contribute a trifle to her poor people, to discuss theology with her father. May I go?’

‘With all the pleasure in life!’

‘You have described her as a saint: is she *very* formidable?’

‘She is perfectly well-bred.’

‘And not a dowdy? Those whom they call saints are often dowdies.’

‘ You will find her dressed quietly but in excellent taste.’

‘ That decides me ; I shall call upon her to-morrow. This afternoon it is Riverdale and tennis. I wonder whether Miss Gilliat would consider tennis sinful.’

And with this quite unnecessary speculation she quitted the room.

Now that he was alone, the Rev. Mr O’Lympus, strange to say, had lost all interest in the abnormally developed pike. To a Vicar having the care of every soul in the parish of Wapshot-on-Thames these revelations were disturbing. The good, easy man was quite unconscious of these underhand doings ; and if indeed the sage surmises of Carrie were well founded, he was treading above the active principle of a veritable volcano.

Did his conscience, I wonder, upbraid him at that moment ? Did he consider that Wapshot was unlikely to suffer from any over-zeal on his part ? Did it occur to him

that the guns and the hunting crops that appeared in his study as prominently placed as his elegantly-bound volumes of 'The Fathers' were, in fact, more constantly used? Or, on the other hand, was it any business of his to post himself in the private engagements of his parishioners?

Such moments are not frequent with men of the O'Lympus stamp, but when they do come, they occasion greater doubt and difficulty than would be the case with men either infinitely better or infinitely worse than his reverence.

CHAPTER XI

A THAMES LOCK

WHEN a gentleman in the advanced Autumn of his years is suddenly cut off from his lawful avocations, he will generally—unless, indeed, he be a person of considerable intellect and possessing more than the ordinary strength of will—lapse into a lounging, loafing sort of existence. He will also inevitably develop a vein of bitter misanthropy.

Mark Westaway, with a large leisure, with enormous spare tracts of time at his disposal, devoted much of every day in

visiting the surrounding country; and though an undercurrent of complaint ran through his conversation, he was, on the whole, pleased to find that his altered circumstances had not greatly lessened his hold upon public affection. It gratified the old reprobate to discover that his popularity was not sustained by a frothy foundation of proffered pots of beer, or built upon occasional largesse of sixpences. He had the satisfaction of feeling that he was loved and respected for his own sake, and his feeling is surely an enviable one: many an honest and God-fearing man being unable to boast as much.

Since the episode of the abstracted and restored mare, he had spent less time than ever on the farm. When he did appear about the yard or the paddocks, it was generally at the fall of the evening shadows and in company with slouching men of evil visage, to whom he essayed to show the stock. But during these visits he had an uncomfortable feeling that he was being closely watched.

The relations, indeed, between himself and his daughters had become strained to the extreme limit of tension ; and he felt uneasy in their presence.

Among other objects of interest which Mark occasionally visited, was Wapshot Lock, a structure which lay about a mile below the village. The children of the Lock-keeper adored him. He brought them apples, taken from the trees in his daughter's orchard, and huge lumps of cake, abstracted from his daughter's cupboard. Besides, he was full of cheerful and characteristic anecdote of the fox, and the hare, and the rabbit. When in a more than usually effusive mood, he would enter the pleasant lock-house, take them on his knee, galloping them over imaginary hedges and ditches, to the tune of

‘ Ride a cock horse,
To Banbury Cross.’

The lock-keeper himself—a bronzed and

pock-marked man—looked up to him and thought harshly of these ungrateful children of his who were ruining his farm and bringing his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

Nor does one blame Mr Westaway for repairing, during the Summer morn, to the Lock-side. I have, myself, during the violence of the Summer solstice found infinite relief in gazing down into the dark and dripping interior of a lock, when the water is out. There is something very refreshing to the tired eye in the green and slippery walls ; and waves of cool air seem to be wafted upwards, lifting themselves gently over the worm-eaten and water-worn timbers at the top. A pleasant soothing music is the trickle of water through the crevices of the upper gates. I know not whether considerations of this kind affected Mark Westaway ; but at the very time when the conversation recorded in the last chapter was taking place, he stood by the side of Wapshot Lock, gazing meditatively into its cool and silent depths.

His meditations—if meditations they were—were interrupted by the approach of Mr Walter Molt, limping painfully over the patch of grass that ran along the side of the structure.

‘Good arternoon, Mister Westaway,’ said Hoppy.

Mark probably *had* been engaged in meditation. The misanthropic fit was evidently in full possession of him, for having acknowledged the civility of Mr Molt, he added, without any seeming bearing on anything under consideration.

‘It’s a beastly world, Molt!’

‘It ain’t the world as is beastly, it’s them as lives in it,’ answered the philosopher, paraphrasing a reply which has, by current consent, become the stereotyped answer to similar observations. He added this by way of question, ‘Jim ’as gone back, I ’ear?’

‘Yes, thank God!’ replied the other.

‘Amen!’ said Hoppy, forgetting for the moment his doctrinal difficulties, and uttering

the response quite devoutly. Then he added as being explanatory of this unexpected evidence of an awakened conscience, 'He's a bad 'un, is Jim.'

'I'd have you to know,' retorted Mark, wrathfully, rattling the seals at his fob and becoming very red above his high white collar, 'I'd have you to know that I won't have a friend of mine insulted by any man living; and Jim Gates *is* a friend of mine!'

'So I've been told,' acquiesced Hoppy, with a perceptible sneer.

'A *great* friend of mine,' growing more red and adding more emphasis.

'In fact, quite a intimate friend,' agreed Hoppy. 'Well, I wish you joy o' your friend.'

'And pray, what have you to say against him?' asked Mark, cooling under the influence of his companion's equanimity.

'Nuthin', except as I shouldn't care to own a intimate friend as 'ud take a blow an' not 'it back.'

Westaway smiled. After all, why should he quarrel with a social and intellectual inferior? He answered airily,

‘If you mean the wretched squabble at Wrayton Fair, I say Jim acted with great discretion, and like a gentleman, begad.’

‘Ah! that’s as *you* think.’

‘And what do you think, pray?’

‘I think he hacted like a sneak and a coward.’

‘Sir!’

‘Don’t “sir” me, Mister Westaway. P’raps I ain’t got much o’ wot Jim calls “tone,” but I ain’t agoin’ to be bullied by the best man breathin’.’

Mark became calm again. His opponent was insolent; but he was also imperturbable. Still, he could not leave the subject confessedly defeated, so he volunteered for the edification of Hoppy this intelligence,

‘Besides, Jim may have other ways of avenging himself on the young jackanapes that insulted him.’

Hoppy was all attention now. He sat down on the beam that served as a protection at the top of the sloping bank that stretched from the edge of the lock. Westaway, greatly condescending, took a seat beside him and said,

‘There’s more than one score to be settled between me and the Riverdale folk.’

‘Ah?’ remarked Mr Molt, interrogatively, with face firm set, and a mind impartially open to interesting disclosures.

‘And there’s more ways than one of settling a score.’

‘Besides payin’ of it?’ inquired Hoppy, reminiscent of the tavern and athirst for knowledge.

Unmindful of the interruption, Mark proceeded with his favourite story—the story of his wrongs.

‘The first score is with Sir Penton himself. You know how he interfered with the farm. You know how he has brought me and it to

ruin. For what can two girls know about managing it?’

‘Wot, indeed?’ asked the sympathetic Hoppy.

‘My next score is with the son. He struck my’——

‘An intimate friend of yours,’ suggested Hoppy to the farmer, who had paused as though in doubt.

Mark acquiesced and proceeded,

‘And now, what d’ye think the young demon’s done—a demon to whom I have extended my hospitality and friendship?’

‘Dunno. Give it up,’ said Mr Molt.

‘I’m blest if he hasn’t insinuated that it was I who took the bay mare off the farm. And what’s worse, the girls believe him. Did you ever hear the like?’

‘Never!’ said Molt, with an air of thorough conviction. ‘O’ course you wouldn’t do sich a thing.’

‘Even if I *had* removed it,’ continued the fine old English gentleman, much encouraged

by the evident sincerity of Mr Molt's sympathy—

‘As you say. Even if you ’ad.’

‘There’d be no harm in it,’ said Westaway, ‘because, after all, it’s my own. I gave it to them.’

‘W’y, o’ course. Anyone can see that. It’s wot “Brutus” and the “Serf” calls the irresistible force o’ logic.’

‘But you trust Jim to pay off my old scores and his own, too.’

Hoppy’s face grew darker as he asked,

‘Ah! that’s w’y he’s gone to Lunnon, mayhap?’

‘As you say—mayhap.’

‘An’ may I ast,’ inquired Hoppy, looking quite dangerous now, ‘may I ast does this yer revenge include anyone besides old ’Ook an’ his son?’

‘You may ask, Mr Molt, and I may refuse to answer.’

Hoppy rises. His lips are tightly closed, his hands clenched, and the furrows working

on his forehead, old signals of distress thrown out by Hoppy when labouring in a sea of doubt. The relations of the two men are changed. It is now Molt's turn to become excited, and Westaway affects the coolness of the fragrant cucumber.

'Look ye 'ear, Mark Westaway, there's one as I shall see no 'urt nor 'arm done to. That one I warned Jim Gates about. I warned 'im, an' I warn you.'

Mr Westaway rose from the horizontal beam smooth from contact with both silks and corduroys innumerable, and said in his best hunting-field manner,

'Your language is threatening, Molt, very threatening. Indeed I'm not sure that it's not actionable. But who is the mysterious person about whom you wish to warn me?'

Hoppy was baffled. The billows of doubt and difficulty rose higher. There was a great sea on. He wallowed in the trough of it. Should he disclose the surmise? or should

he keep silence and watch? He adopted the latter course.

‘Never mind who,’ he answered. ‘But you just tell Jim that my heyas is on him, an’ if he means ’arm where no ’arm is meant, my ’ands ’ull be on his throat.’

‘’Pon my soul, Molt,’ answered Westaway, whose mood became more serene as his companion’s grew more violent, ‘your language is quite revolting, and’——

At this juncture the shriek of a steam whistle was heard, coming from up-stream, and presently from behind the bend where grew the corpulent pollard willows, flanked by a row of poplars, came a steam tug with an empty barge in tow. The lock-keeper draws the paddles and the waters from the upper reach surge through roaring and hissing like a small Niagara. The water in the lock creeps inch by inch up the green slimy sides of the basin till level with the stream above.

‘It’s the “Sea King,”’ says Hoppy, not

unwilling to divert the conversation into more agreeable channels, 'an' I'm goin' to Kingston in 'er.'

Mark made no reply to this overture; but, whistling the first bar of 'D'ye ken John Peel,' turned on his heel and went in the direction of the lock-keeper's shanty.

And indeed, the tug thus busily engaged on the upper reaches, bore the strange nomenclature suggesting the illimitable main. I have seen not only 'Sea Kings,' but 'Ocean Queens,' proceeding bumping and grumbling along up river channels, where one had not always a certainty of three feet of water. On the other hand, have I not traversed the proud ocean in the 'Water Lily' and the 'King Fisher?' In this matter of nomenclature, as in everything else, Shakspeare was right. There is absolutely nothing in a name.

Meanwhile, Hoppy, on the 'Sea King,' has sunk beneath the ledge of the lock, with the water emptying itself into the reach

below. And Mark Westaway is in the house of the lock-keeper with a rosy-cheek'd, curly-headed boy on each knee. He is relating to them, in his inimitable way, the story of a wicked old man with a limp, who lives in a wooden house on wheels, and who makes a precarious livelihood by stealing naughty boys and girls and selling them to the Fiend.

And listening to the narrative of the old man eloquent, the children hid their curly heads on his waistcoat, gazed at him with wondering blue eyes, and hated Hoppy with all the ardour of juvenile innocence.

CHAPTER XII

LOVE'S YOUNG AWAKENING

A LARGE apron of Holland linen descended from Ruth's shoulders to the very skirt of her dress, taken in at the taper waist by a cunning contrivance in the shape of a belt. In front of the apron was a capacious pocket, in which were stowed a pair of scissors, a ball of twine, and other garden necessities. On her hands were coarse gauntlets of wash-leather, looking wonderfully clumsy and out of place on those delicate fingers of hers. She was engaged in tending her rose trees,

lopping off the dead leaves and imperfect buds, fastening to its supporting standard a wilful and straggling bough.

Close by, Hoppy stooped patiently over the parched earth, turning it deftly up with a garden fork, and extracting the frequent weed. He had gone through the ordeal of the reading lesson an hour ago. Happily, he had now left John the Baptist for good, and for all he cared, still wandering about the wilderness of Judæa, and feeding on locusts. He had grappled with the Sermon on the Mount, and had come to the very logical conclusion that if the system of moral ethics therein set forth was right, then 'Brutus' and the 'Serf' were undoubtedly wrong. Up to the present, however, he was inclined to agree with 'Brutus' and the 'Serf' as being more in accord with his own unsophisticated view of things.

Everything is such a puzzle to his poor mind, feebly fluttering about the outer crust of things theological. Only to-day his dim

vision of religious mysteries had been the occasion of another difficulty with the owner of the Priory. When in Kingston the day before, he had purchased a highly-coloured picture of the Madonna and Child. It was a cheap German print, in blue, and red, and yellow, the former colours for costume, complexion, and accessories, whilst the yellow indicating the gold on an altar, was continued in the nimbus of the Holy Infant. This triumph of art he had presented to Miss Ruth, hoping, thereby, to make some amends for his introduction on a former occasion of an inhibited specimen of transatlantic agnosticism. The print had, however, aroused Mr Gilliat's resentment almost as much as had the devoted Ingersol's 'Mistakes of Moses.' He did not, it is true, immolate the picture; but he folded it up and locked it away in a desk, denouncing it, the while, as an idolatrous and papistical thing.

These distinctions were too subtle for Hoppy. He was sorely puzzled by them:

altogether lost in the intricate mazes of the theologians. A man, however, may be a philosopher without being a theologian, and Mr Molt's philosophy taught him to avoid the question altogether until he received some unexpected light on it. So, in his conversation with Miss Gilliat, in the pauses of his work, he skilfully contrived to confine himself to things mundane. He talked agreeably of Kingston and its market; he described the pigs shrieking in the pens, the pleasant humours of the drovers, the excellence of the ordinary at the 'Wheatsheaf.' The birds kept up an agreeable chorus the while, a robin following Ruth about, tame as a winter bird, turning his head on one side, as if to view her critically, and uttering at times an approving 'tweet.'

Kingston put Hoppy in mind of the river, and thoughts of the river suggested an observation which had once or twice been on his mind to make.

'It's a long time since ye've been out on

the water, Miss Ruth,' he said, without looking up.

Ruth started and blushed. Did Hoppy suspect anything? It was by no means so long as Hoppy imagined since she had been on the river. Why should there be shame and a consciousness of guilt, she thought, about a love so unselfish, so beautiful, as hers? She regained her composure, and answered,

'It's so hot on the river, Hoppy.'

Hoppy ridiculed the idea.

'In the cool o' the evenin' it's lovely, Miss. Say the word an' I'll row you and the master anywheres.'

'I know you would, Hoppy, and when next I go you shall take me.'

'Do, Miss, *do*. All'us proud an' 'appy to pull you, Miss, *as* you know.'

Further discussion of this point was cut short by a resounding series of raps, caused by a vigorous assault on the knocker of the street door, an assault such as that patient

implement had rarely sustained even in the days of its early magnificence. The very birds were startled by the battery, unaccustomed as they were to disturbance in that peaceful enclosure.

Anon Martha, the bondwoman, came into the garden in profuse perspiration. Her sleeves were rolled up above her dimpled elbows, and a deposit of flour on her ample nose suggested to the observant mind the possible manufacture of dumplings. In a state of evident excitement she handed a card to her mistress.

'It's the young lady from the Vicarage, Miss.'

'Miss Dunlop! and to see *me*?'

'Yes, 'm. I ast her if it were for master, which she ses, "No," she ses, "*Miss Gilliat*," she ses. So I show her in the drorin' room.'

Ruth drew off her gauntlets and handed them to Martha. She retained the garden apron, however, somehow conscious, I imagine, that that article of attire was, by no means,

unbecoming. She was very pale now. Rumour had given her Richard to this proud woman for a lover; but Ruth knew Rumour to be, in this instance, as in many others, an arrant liar. Had she come here to upbraid her—to condemn her? That knock of hers at the door was an ominous and formidable rattle. At all events she would avoid going through her father's study. She entered the house by the side door, and went straight to the drawing-room ere her courage could altogether forsake her.

No contrast could, in its way, be more effective than that afforded by the two women who now stood opposite each other. The one slight spirituelle, simply dressed, and with a face pale from suppressed anxiety. The other of Imperial contour, flushed with health and attired for conquest. The awkwardness was all on one side, for, the preliminary obeisance being made, Miss Dunlop held out her hand and said in her frank unconstrained manner,

‘Excuse my unceremonious way of calling, but I am going away, and I wished to make your acquaintance.’

This was direct and apparently ingenuous. Ruth could only say how proud she was of the honour, and request her visitor to be seated. But what did all this portend? This woman of the world was her rival, and therefore her enemy. Oh! for one word of advice—of suggestion, even. It must be admitted that, for an enemy, Miss Dunlop had the pleasantest way imaginable.

‘We’ll be friends in a minute,’ said the fair visitor, in her impulsive manner; ‘I’ve a wonderful faculty in that way. I’m Irish, you know. That frightens you, Miss Gilliat. Now confess it does.’

‘No indeed,’ stammered Ruth. ‘I’ve heard that *all* the Irish are not bad;’ and as Miss Dunlop laughed, she felt confused, and knew that she had expressed herself ambiguously. But her visitor overlooked the slip and proceeded.

‘I’ve heard uncle Fitz speak so nicely of your library for the villagers that I quite longed to see it; and if I might, I should like to give you some books.’

‘Father and I would be very grateful. I think our people must have read the collection through.’

‘I’m afraid I could not undertake the responsibility of buying them for you. I only like Whyte-Melville and Lever, and books with horses in them. But if your father would select them for me, I hope you will permit me to add five pounds’ worth of literature to your library.’

‘You are very kind,’ answered Ruth; ‘but perhaps you had better speak to father about it.’

‘Of course I will, dear. Where is he? I will go to him this minute,’ agreed Miss Dunlop, with characteristic impetuosity.

‘He is in his study. Will you come with me?’

Could this woman be playing a part?

That was the question which Ruth's Self asked her Other Self, and Other Self replying, answered straightway 'No.' Yet Miss Dunlop was constantly in Dick's society; and to know Dick and not to love him—that surely were impossible. So, at all events, argued Ruth.

Ruth was surprised at the change of manner effected by Miss Dunlop when she was presented to her father. She was a different woman. Her gaiety departed. She addressed Mr Gilliat with a nice mingling of sympathy and homage. She grew eloquent on the theme of village missions; upbraided the Established Church for its inertness; put one or two questions on differences of theology, which the evangelist proceeded to elucidate on the instant—in fact, Miss Dunlop was a consummate actress, and had in a quarter-of-an-hour succeeded in establishing herself in the regard of Mr Gilliat as a very superior young person with a decidedly religious bias.

At the end of quarter-of-an-hour, and after she had deposited her subscription to the library ('You are our first subscriber,' said Mr Gilliat sadly, as he laid the crisp note on the table), she looked into the garden and said, as one subject to a sudden inspiration,

'What immense hollyhocks! Will you show them to me, Miss Gilliat?'

So they passed together out of the study and down between the rows of hollyhocks, with their great furry leaves and tawdry drooping blossoms. They passed Hoppy labouring among the weeds. To the philosopher the vision opened up fresh fields for speculation, new subject matter for doubt-driven cogitation. They passed on to that broad walk at the end of the garden on which the sun shone till the late afternoon. And they passed out of sight, hidden from the house by a wall of laurels. Then Carrie said,

'I'm sorry I'm going to leave so soon; but I'm a babe in the wood, and the wicked uncle demands me—but what do you think

of me?' she added, with confusing directness.

'I like you very much,' answered Ruth, simply and indeed sincerely.

'And I think you're a darling, and I'd like to kiss you. There! Are we friends?'

Ruth stood still and extended her hand. The gesture was natural and graceful. She said nothing. Miss Dunlop went on.

'I want to be a very, very great friend to you. And first, Ruth—I may call you Ruth, may I not?—let me tell you that I know your secret.'

The poor girl looked round in abject terror, lest even the birds in her father's garden should catch a whisper; and with face paler than ever she gazed in mute appeal towards the face of her tormentor.

'You think, Ruth, that I am your rival in the affections of Dick?' Ruth nodded a sorrowful assent.

'Then be relieved. I am not. I never can be.'

At this Ruth brightened up. Then the shadow came over her face as she remembered how irresistible were her Dick's fascinations, and she said softly,

‘ Were you never in love ? ’

‘ Oh, several times ; but never seriously ! ’

Levity in dealing with a matter so sacred jarred on Ruth's ear ; but she forgot her resentment when the strange visitor added,

‘ Mind I am Dick's friend, and I am yours. When you come to town, call on me at Lord Ballymacarret's house in Berkeley Square. I shall always be at home to you. ’

She patted the girl's cheek as she spoke ; and both quitted the shelter of the laurels and took the central path, chattering as though they had been friends for years, to the increased surprise of Hoppy, who now limped up to them with a heap of freshly gathered strawberries, piled on a cool cabbage leaf. Receiving their thanks, he limped back, and proceeded with the monotonous task of dislodging the weeds.

Walter Molt had no monopoly of surprise. It was a day of surprises also to Martha, the bondwoman, engaged in the awful mystery of kneading and rolling the dough for her incomparable dumplings. A second knock, louder and more prolonged than that which announced the advent of Miss Dunlop, summoned her from her kitchen, and in a minute after she was conducting Sir Penton Hook to her master's study.

The two girls in the garden saw that entrance.

'It's Sir Penton come to see your father,' said Carrie, quietly; and as she felt Ruth clutch at her skirts, and saw her turn ill and faint, she added, in sisterly tones, 'I'm glad I'm with you. I shall not leave you yet a while. Let us walk back to the laurels.' Tottering and almost insensible, Ruth mechanically did as she was told.

Meanwhile Mr Gilliat had risen to receive his visitor, who said, in his hard, measured

tones, as though addressing a depredator of turnip fields at the Petty Sessions,

‘ Mr Gilliat, I believe ? ’

Mr Gilliat bowed assent.

‘ I am Sir Penton Hook. ’

‘ Pray be seated, Sir Penton, ’ said Mr Gilliat, with dignity.

‘ I prefer to remain standing. My business is unpleasant. ’

‘ I know of no unpleasantness which admits of discourtesy, ’ answered the evangelist gravely.

Sir Penton was taken aback. This dangerous demagogue, this dog of a dissenter, was evidently possessed of a nicer sense of the minor morals than the baronet ; but the knowledge irritated the magistrate ; and when Mr Gilliat continued,

‘ I trust, sir, that you will proceed to open your unpleasant business as pleasantly as is possible, ’ the other replied, with bitter and brutal abruptness,

‘ My business is, sir, to accuse you of

inveigling my son into an engagement with your daughter.

‘ You l——! May God forgive me! What was I about to say?’ and Mr Gilliat sank into his chair. He passed his hand over his forehead. He knew not which was worse to bear—the pain of the unexpected, unfounded accusation, or the shame of having been betrayed into a momentary display of anger. Regaining his composure, he rose and said, in a voice which had become strangely altered in a few seconds,

‘ You have forgotten, sir, that you are under my roof, and your forgetfulness almost betrayed me into an expression which I should always have regretted. You have made a statement which I know to be utterly without foundation. Will you honour me with the name of your informant, or the proofs, without which I am sure a gentleman holding your position would not act.’

Sir Penton threw a letter on the table.

‘There, sir, is my proof. Read it, and explain it if you can.’

With face pale as ashes and lips livid the poor man sat down to peruse the letter. It spoke of meetings in certain lanes, of excursions on unfrequented backwaters, of assignations at Vicarage Farm; and described the whole courtship as a deep and diabolical plot, planned and superintended by the hypocritical father of a designing minx. Mr Gilliat looked for the signature. It bore none. The letter was signed, ‘A Friend of the Family’—though which family was meant the ingenuous writer did not more particularly indicate. As Mr Gilliat saw this defect in the document, an air of sickly triumph overspread his face.

‘It is an anonymous letter,’ he answered, with something of his former dignity. ‘I refuse to credit it. My daughter is in the garden; I will call her. *You*, sir, shall ask her.’

‘Pray spare yourself the trouble,’ replied

the baronet, with a perceptible sneer, 'as my son has already confessed to the general accuracy of the statements contained in this document,' saying which the pompous little magnate regained the letter and returned it to his note-case.

But the tortured father appeared to hear him not. He went to the open window. He staggered as he walked, and grasped the casement for support. He called loudly, and in a voice which he himself failed to recognise,

'Ruth, Ruth! Come here, my child!'

And Ruth hearing, trembled in every limb. The girl by her side took her hand in her own and said,

'I will go with you. I'm not afraid of fifty Sir Pentons!'

'But my poor father!' sobbed Ruth—'I have deceived him. He will never forgive me.'

'Nonsense!' answered Carrie, reassuringly. And, truth to tell, that young lady was sur-

prised to find so everyday an occurrence as a love affair assume a phase so tragic. Sir Penton's objection she could account for; but that Mr Gilliat should appear to have an inherent antipathy to love itself was somewhat beyond her.

Together, hand in hand, they entered the study. Sir Penton was the first to speak.

‘*You* here, Miss Dunlop!’

‘As you see, Sir Penton. Your tone implies your right to revise my visiting list.’

On two occasions that morning had the baronet's ‘form’ been adversely criticised. He did not admit the justice of Mr Gilliat's comments, but to the lady he bowed, and awkwardly uttered the unaccustomed words,

‘I beg your pardon.’

‘Ruth,’ said her father, in a voice out of which all the soft music had died, ‘Sir Penton here accuses you of meeting his son clandestinely—of being in love with him. Tell him, my dear, tell him it is not true!’

He spoke in an agony. The moment of

suspense was a protracted period of miserable hoping against hope. His daughter burst into tears, hid her face in Carrie's bosom, and faltered through the blindness of her misery,

'It is true.'

The broken-hearted man passed his hand over his forehead and moaned,

'God pity me! What shall I do?'

'Do, sir? Do as I have done with my offspring—threaten to disinherit her and turn her adrift, unless she consents to abandon this folly!'

The frank brutality of Sir Penton recalled the other for a moment. Mr Gilliat seemed to increase in stature as with a commanding gesture he pointed to the door and said, in a loud voice,

'Respect the roof you are under, sir. And leave here this instant—or—Heaven pardon me—I—I'——

Here he stretched out both arms as if feeling for something. He tottered and

sank back into his chair—his head leaning over the top of it—in an unconsciousness that was like unto death. Sir Penton bowed to the ladies with great ceremoniousness, and strode with mincing pomposity out of the room.

Carrie rushed up to the unconscious man, and loosened his tie and undid his shirt collar, saying the while,

‘Quick, Ruth, bring water and send the servant here! Tell the gardener to run for my uncle and a doctor! Quick, dear, quick!’

Hoppy, now in a state of excitement very unusual to him, reasoned with himself as he ran on his errand, and as the result of his cogitation delivered himself thus to the ambient air,

‘Shouldn’t wonder if that varmint Gates warn’t at the bottom of this yere go. Shouldn’t think that there Sermon on the Mount was meant to point at such as him. Dam if I do!’

CHAPTER XIII

SUCH SWEET SORROW

THE period following the scene at the Priory was a memorable time for the gossips of Wapshot. I question if there ever had been such a time for them since the murder of Mrs Wicks by the Reading pedlar, and that, as all the world knows, happened so long ago as 1825. Fortunately there are no newspapers in Wapshot. Had there been, it is probable that certain editors would have been immured in dungeons for disseminating, in the undefiled English of the penny-a-liner, items of current gossip.

There was no fogleman—no recognised leader of society—in Wapshot, but public opinion regulated itself; and after the evangelist's seizure it was decided by an overwhelming majority of the inhabitants that Miss Gilliat was a designing hussy and a minx. It is true that Ruth had never done aught but kindness to her detractors. By certain human codes, however, an austere virtue rises superior even to charity. The turpitude of the poor girl was traced to the fact that she was intimate with Mark Westaway's daughters; and as those abandoned young women notoriously ill-treated a kind, good, and indulgent father, little could be hoped from one who came directly under their influence.

A small and intelligent minority, it is true, declined to take so gloomy a view of the poor girl's case. Miss Dunlop's sudden interest in the young lady, her constant visits to the Priory, and her open patronage of Ruth, were commented upon as being cir-

cumstances distinctly in her favour. 'A lady as is niece to a lord,' said the post-mistress, 'is not likely to take up with bad uns.' And this deliverance, whether impelled by kindness, or by that fine middle-class belief in the aristocracy which is the proudest birthright of the Briton, was adopted by one or two.

Meanwhile the subject of all this conflicting testimony was happily unconscious of it. Her thoughts were occupied with other and more serious things. Strangely inadequate as the cause of his seizure may seem to a world cheerfully inclined to accept events as they fall out, the discovery of his daughter's deceit had an alarming effect on Mr Gilliat. For some days he lay in a sort of stupor, taking no notice of passing circumstances, and moaning with a pain that was not physical but mental. One idea was fixed and was given expression to during intervals of relief—he refused to see his daughter.

This was her bitterest pain—her most

intolerable punishment. But there were others. The stern and unsympathetic Sir Penton had communicated his views on the situation to Dick. That young gentleman was to take up his residence in London at once. In a noble outburst of magnanimity, the Roman father had informed his offspring that he might go to the bar or to the devil, as he felt disposed. One thing only he insisted on. He must give up all thought of an alliance with the daughter of a radical ranter. Should he prove recalcitrant, he would be cut off with a shilling. Dick sulked and said nothing; but prepared for the departure, which was at hand. Lady Hook wept much in private; and prayed at intervals for her headstrong and romantic boy.

It grieved poor Ruth also, to think that her latest friend was soon to leave her. Then, indeed, her trouble would commence in earnest. She must listen to her father's solemn reproaches; or, harder still to endure,

put up with his contemptuous silence; or, hardest ordeal of all, listen while he prayed and besought her to give up all thoughts of a lover who was of the world worldly—who belonged to the gay, frivolous, and godless throng that skipped lightly along the broad road that leadeth to destruction.

With praiseworthy effort she continued her classes; but the pupils seemed somehow to fall off; and every evening, at the appointed hour, she attended the library, but the applicants for literary sustenance were few and far between. Ostracism was as much a social engine in Wapshot as in communities of greater consideration.

It was to those who had themselves suffered, that, at this juncture, Ruth looked for succour and consolation. At Vicarage Farm she was received with open arms. Kate Westaway and her sister poured the oil and wine of sympathy into her wounded spirit. And, perhaps, no salve that could have been applied to the bruised

mind would have been more efficacious than news of Dick. And intelligence of that giddy youth was constantly and mysteriously deposited at the farm house. Kindly souls, excellent hypocrites, admirable workers of evil that good may come, other scribes may adversely criticise your interference. I find you creatures quite commendable and pray heaven to send me such friends in troops. On the day before that appointed for Dick's departure, Kate whispered into Ruth's ear a message which caused her heart to palpitate and the blood to rush to her pale cheeks. And if you cannot guess me what that message was, then, my friend, you were never in love, and can have but a slight interest in this poor chronicle.

Any list professing to give the names of those who extended their sympathy to Ruth would be singularly incomplete if it omitted that of Hoppy. He hung about the premises like their guardian angel, and was

prepared to do anything and go anywhere in proof of his devotion. When all the lights were extinguished in the Priory save that in 'the master's' room, he adjourned to the 'Three Feathers,' where he maintained the cause of the Gilliats against all comers. Indeed, on one occasion when Mark Westaway, who by right of precedent ruffled it, as the popular idol, became more than usually sarcastic in his allusions to Ruth, Hoppy so far forgot himself as to make a blow at the fine old English gentleman, whereupon the rash fisherman and philosopher was seized by Parsons and five of his customers and hurled out into the night, howling horrid blasphemies at both landlord and customers.

The day had been hot, and the evening shadows were reinforced by mists that obscured the moon and through which stars of the greater magnitude twinkled feebly. Half-a-mile below Wapshot Lock there used to be a narrow and shallow backwater run-

ning inland and then out to the Thames again in the shape of a horse-shoe. In summers of exceptional heat—the summer heat being nobly seconded in its efforts by the water companies, who abstracted millions of gallons of Thames water daily, and by the Thames Conservators, who accorded the consent of their silence—this and other backwaters ran dry. This particular horse-shoe at the date of my chapter was innocent of moisture—had indeed ceased to be a backwater at all, and had become for the time a green lane of old England.

The pebbles at its bottom were encased in mud, which, under the genial influence of the sun, had become as hard and dry as a pavement of granite. In the uncertain light the strange growths of bramble and water flags and withes had an almost ghastly effect. They seemed to move without the aid of any wind.

This deserted place was the lovers' last

tryst. To this melancholy spot had Kate's whisper directed Ruth.

Dick was first. The man usually is on such occasions. His punt was drawn up on the dry and shelving mud deposit. His collie reposed peacefully astern. He paced uneasily up and down the channel, from which in happier and more aqueous seasons the water-lily sprang, and across which the minnow skimmed in swift battalions. To ardent young fellows minutes so spent are, I am told, as hours.

At length the collie in the punt rouses himself and gives a short, sharp bark of welcome. There is the twitter of a disturbed bird, the rustle of a dress. A gray form emerges from the narrow path through the oziers. His arms are round her. Her head is on his shoulder, and she is weeping bitterly, with that mixture of pain and pleasure which is one of the medicines of love.

Ah, sweet embrace! Ah, happy lovers! It is neither a good theology, I tell you, nor

a wise philosophy that forbids you. Not yours the sin, my children, not yours.

Indelible are the impressions of that scene as left on Dick's memory. Its most trivial details haunt him for months. Below the outlet of the backwater was moored a houseboat. Yellow lights from its windows strayed athwart the mist in widening lanes. There was a piano on board, and a woman was singing. Her voice, loud and shrill, was softened by the water and the heavy air, and sounded only intense and wailing. She was singing Tosti's 'Goodbye.' Words were caught by the lovers as the voice rose with a wave of melody, and words were lost as the wave subsided or as it spent itself on an intervening bank of ghostly mist. 'Shadows arising betwixt you and me' fell ominously on their listening ears; and as the singer's voice rose into a thrilling wail that made itself heard through the thick, still atmosphere, her words sent a feeling of dismay into Ruth's

heart. Those words were—‘Good-bye forever! good-bye, good-bye!’

At this refrain, painfully prolonged by the fair artiste, the very dog whined piteously, and an aspect of increased melancholy seemed to fall upon the unhappy landscape. In swift curves the bats darted from shadow into shadow. Dank odours began to arise from the whispering water-flags. On the other side of the stream a cloud, white and gray, and rolling like a fog-bank, crept stealthily across the river. This phenomenon seemed to arouse Ruth. The dreariness of the scene, the passionate hopelessness of the refrain, had unnerved her. She whispered through her sobs,

‘Shadows arising, shadows arising.’

Dick soothed her in his protecting way.

‘Don’t cry, darling. It’s only a song, don’t you know. I dare say it was all right for the fellow that wrote it. But it’s got nothing to do with us, has it?’

She was not to be so easily comforted.

‘Oh! Dick, I feel so wicked.’

‘And, oh! Ruth, I feel so happy,’ replied that unabashed young man.

‘My poor father,’ she pleaded with fresh sobs.

‘Think of mine!’ urged Dick, suddenly awakening to the duty he owed to his progenitor.

‘How can you be so gay, so careless, so seemingly contented, now that we are going to part?’

‘Because, my dear, I’m coming back one of these fine days.’

As he spoke, he caressed the pale cheek that was not sheltering itself on his shoulder.

She shook her head.

‘It is so hard to bear. There are so many griefs all at once. I suppose it is a punishment. I suppose it must be wicked to love you.’

‘Nonsense!’ replied Dick, who took a more cheery view of the situation ‘It can’t be wicked to love one another.’

He had an idea that he was eluding the

argument by an apt quotation from the greatest of all Authorities. Her own knowledge of exegetical criticism was superior to his. She could only shake her head once more ; but she was smiling through the tears that hung beneath her lashes.

‘ Besides, Ruth, I’m not going to Central Africa. It’s only an hour from town to here. I shall see you often.’

‘ Not often, Dick,’ she replied, sadly.

‘ Then you’re to write me every week, and there will be a letter from me every Sunday morning at Westaway’s, under cover to that dear dissembler, Kate. God bless our little post-mistresses, say I. Their virtues should atone for the manifold wickedness of their disreputable sire.’

‘ Even in this,’ went on Ruth, doubtfully, ‘ I am practising deceit. I have caused my father pain—illness—and yet I am not afraid to continue for—for ’——

‘ For my sake ?’

‘ For *your* sake,’ she answered, in a voice

that had at length acquired firmness, and gazing into his eyes with an expression of admiration, confidence, and affection.

Under the impression that his logic was faultless and convincing, Dick was in the habit of launching the most transparent sophistries with an air of simple conviction. The kiss with which he acknowledged the expression of Ruth's devotion was to her much more assuring than the reasoning with which he triumphantly followed it.

'You really mustn't say, Ruth, that we are in the wrong,' he said, with a grave and almost professorial air. 'We are driven to these clandestine meetings. Don't you see, dear, the fault's not ours; it's our fathers.'

She did not attempt to expose the weak place in the armour of his logic. She lifted her head from its resting-place, and asked, in a voice in which there was seemingly no emotion more passionate than the pleading of a child,

‘Dick, tell me once more that you love me!’

‘Forever and forever!’ he replied, catching her to his breast, and covering her unre-sisting face with kisses.

The white mist from the other bank, moving silently and stealthily, touched their faces. The girl shuddered at the contact. Releasing herself, she said with an effort,

‘We must say “Good-bye.”’

It was said; and before he could detain her, she had fled like a startled fawn through the oziers, hurrying as though her life depended on her fleetness. But she was to hear her lover’s voice once more. He pushed his punt through thick white mist, and hailed the lock-keeper in a voice that roused the echoes for half-a-mile around.

‘Lock! Lock!! LOCK!!!’

This summons, in powerful crescendo, was the last sound of his voice which she was destined to hear for many weary months.

For an exiled and despairing lover, Dick evinced a wonderfully cheerful manner. On the following day, his mother insisted on accompanying him to the train, impressing on him the necessity for taking care of himself, which must always be considered urgent. And at the station he found Mr O'Lympus and Carrie also in attendance to see him off.

John, the large footman, laden with rugs—it was eighty-something in the shade—had been repulsed from the carriage window, with his well-meant impedimenta, and was now engaged, under the direction of Lady Hook, in rifling Smith's stall of its most precious pictorial treasures. 'We must divert his mind, poor fellow,' said the good natured matron. So Dick's compartment is heaped with periodical literature.

The warning bell sounded. O'Lympus shook hands with his young parishoner, with characteristic heartiness. In Carrie's pressure he felt a mute sympathy, and in his return of

the pressure, there was an acknowledgment, not profuse, but sufficient.

‘We will meet soon in town?’ she said.

‘As soon as you arrive there,’ he answered, with effusion.

He then turned to embrace his mother, who really seemed inclined to make almost as much of a scene as had the distracted Ruth on the previous evening. Which, taking into consideration that the fond mother had made up her mind to go to town within a fortnight, for the ostensible purpose of consulting her physician, was a palpable waste of maternal emotion. The whistle sounded, the door was banged, and the train slid out of the station.

Dick lit a cigar, and selecting *Punch* from the heap of periodicals, became intensely interested in the statuesque deportment of Du Maurier’s figures, the finished fancies of Sambourne, the happy caricatures of Furniss, the magical facility of Keene, and the classic grace of Tenniel.

At this same moment Ruth was in her own room weeping : weeping and praying.

When at last the train arrived at the London terminus, Dick, glancing out of the carriage window, espied a raffish-looking man in a suit of check tweed and a white hat. The raffish man was evidently on the look-out for somebody. When Dick jumped on to the platform, he saw who the somebody was—saw Polly Parsons alight from a third-class compartment, with a band-box in one hand and a leather reticule in the other. She was met by the swaggering buck, who kissed her, and placing her in a four-wheeler, got in beside her.

She had not got in at Wapshot, nor did he notice her change at the junction. She had joined from a station farther up the line. After all, what did it matter to Dick? Yet when his luggage had been placed on the top of the hansom, and he had given the driver the address of his hotel in Albemarle Street,

he could not help saying to himself, with a certain degree of sympathy,

‘Poor Polly ! it *is* a pity—and by such an awful cad too !’

END OF VOL. I.





