TRAVELS ROUND OUR VILLAGE

A BERKSHIRE BOOK BY
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TO THE MEMORY OF LORD WANTAGE
WHO SINCE THIS BOOK WAS BEGUN
HAS PASSED AWAY, AND TO LADY
WANTAGE IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE
OF THEIR LONG CONTINUED KINDNESS
F. G. H.

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I am indebted to the proprietors of "The Spectator" "The Cornhill Magazine" and "Country Life" for their courtesy in allowing me to embody in my book various articles of mine which have appeared in their pages

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Chapter I

IT is good in these days of bustle and strife, to drift for a while into some quiet backwater—such as may yet be found in rural England—which the tide of progress stirs but just enough to avert stagnation; where old-world customs and archaic forms of speech still linger and where men go about their daily tasks in a spirit of serene leisureliness, therein copying Nature who never hurries. Of such a sequestered corner, its humours, its homely comedies and simple pathos would I write. The village appears

not in Bradshaw—although indeed the Great Western line touches its extreme boundary, so that labourers working in the lower fields need no watch, but time their hours by certain trains, saying, "Ther' goos Tankey, in five minutes us can knock off." Neither is it found within the Postal

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Guide, despite the fact that it now can boast something more for the convenience of rustic scribes than the hole in a barn into which aforetime they dropped their epistolary efforts. It occasionally happened that this contained besides the legitimate contents, a live crayfish or some other equally interesting Natural History specimen; and when this was the case, the language wherewith the cheery old postman who announced his departure each evening by a blast on his horn, expressed his opinion of the rising generation, was apt to be more forcible than polite.

Our village lies between two roads of ancient fame known on the map as Portway and Ickleton Street, but locally as the "Turnpike" and the "Ridgeway". These, crossing the Thames at Moulsford and Goring, run westward through the royal county into Wiltshire, and are separated from each other by a tract varying in width from one to four miles. The Ridgeway, on the crest of the hill, follows the windings of a range of low chalk downs and remains what it ever was—a broad grassy track seamed with ruts and "gullet-holes." Hedged about with the divinity which should, but too often does not enclose such relics of the past, it is maintained inviolate by immemorial right, for it was "the pathway of the tribes" across Britain. Along it doubtless marched the legions of the iron race that beneath their eagles' pinions carried law, and roads

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which bid fair to rival time. Along it hastened the sturdy Wessex men—fighters then as now—to repel the invading Danes, and in these later days it has rung hollow to the tramp of infantry, to the whirlwind charge of lancer and hussar gathered there in bloodless mimicry of war. For the most part, however, this venerable way is deserted save for an occasional shepherd or a solitary farmlabourer returning home from work. Silent and lonely, it pursues its course over height and into hollow: now stretching away in a generous curve sharply defined by a bank on either side, now scarcely to be distinguished from the surrounding turf. At intervals are earthworks that guard it and

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barrows that keep watch. Round one of the latter, familiarly called the "Knob," not a few curious legends have Gathered. Some distance below the old road there runs, also from east to west, a military ditch and vallum, and the story goes that the devil, having a fancy to turn ploughman, cleft this mighty furrow along the hillside. When he arrived opposite the spot where the barrow now stands, his ploughshare became clogged; he halted to clean it, and the soil which he scraped off he tossed over the Ridgeway in a heap to be known henceforth as the Knob. There is a lavishness about this proceeding which can only be properly appreciated by those who have seen the mound and the Devil's Dyke. The tale was told to me by a native of the district who had heard it when a boy, from the older labourers working on his father's farm. Local opinion however, differed on the subject. While some people believed the Knob was due to His Satanic Majesty's industry, others possessing more education, maintained it was a genuine tumulus raised above the body of Cwichelm, king of the West Saxons; and yet a third party claimed that it was composed of the bodies of this king's soldiers, slain hereabouts in some great battle. So prevalent was this last belief that the owner of the land, who was a thrifty soul, cut into the mound and drew off several hundred loads of soil under the impression that it contained valuable fertilising qualities. The informant to whom I am indebted for the above traditions,

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well remembers seeing the farm carts coming and going on their foolish errand, and the sensation created in the neighbourhood by this wanton destruction of the barrow. Its poor remains can still be viewed—a monument no longer of a dead chieftain or his forgotten host, but of man's credulity and ignorance. When I first knew the Knob, it was surmounted by an enormous scaffold of firpoles—now fallen into decay—which I fondly believed had been erected in honour of the Wessex leader. It was really the work of the Ordnance Department, having been built for triangulation purposes, and the knowledge of this fact, that I learnt later, destroyed much of the mystery with which I had invested the spot. The idea of buried treasure is fascinating to adults and children alike, and though I believe nothing of interest was found when the mound was opened, the possibility remained that Saxon gold lay hidden beneath the turf.

From the northern slope of the downs, below the Ridgeway, the eye ranges over a wide and smiling expanse that stretches from where the Chiltern heights hem in the valley of

the Thames, to where the view melts into the distant western sky. Here and there familiar landmarks recall memories of the past. To the north-east can be seen the ancient hill of Sinodun whose base the river washes; across the Vale of the White Horse is "the fir-topped Hurst of Cumnor," immortalized by Scott, beloved of Matthew Arnold, where the

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scholar-gipsy wanders still. Further to the west Faringdon Knoll, crowned also by a clump of ragged wind-tossed firs, rises like an island out of the plain, above the little town where Berkshire Alfred laid down the sceptre and the sword. To the south, above Uffington, the curving rampart of the downs culminates, in the great mass of White Horse Hill, the site of a remarkably perfect earthwork, and the subject of legends innumerable.

Indeed the whole district I have indicated, is connected by countless links with bygone ages. There is not an epoch in our history of well nigh two thousand years, from the days when British kings drove their chariots along the hills, to recent times when the same hills grew ruddy in the glare of beacon-fires that celebrated the jubilee of a British Queen ruling an Empire vast beyond the greatest Roman's greatest dream, there is not an epoch, I repeat, which has not left its mark on the tract commanded by my vision, as I sit on the turfed slope overlooking the Vale. And this breadth of centuries accords well with the breadth of landscape and sky, with the spaciousness and freedom of the downs. Cavillers complain that the foreground of the view is bare, which cannot be denied; for except along the streams and in and around the villages, trees are few and are gathered for the most part into scattered spinneys. But in my opinion the wide sweeps of arable land, with their constant variety of changing crops, possess an attraction

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infinitely superior to that of meadows and hedgerows which restrict one's prospect of earth and heaven to the limits of a field. Hedges stifle me; a grass country I find the perfection of dullness. Even the sky there is not the same as that which canopies the down-land—this, by a subtle quality of clearness, reminding me continually of Italy.

From the Devil's Dyke the ground drops somewhat steeply to the foot of the range whence it rolls away in lessening billows and ridges, until the last outpost of the hills is reached. Along the upland which parts the broad Vale from a narrower valley runs the

Portway or Turnpike—the other ancient road mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Unlike its fellow, it is much frequented; what was once the Caesar's is now the King's highway and a principal thoroughfare between London and the West. The villages with few exceptions, lie off its course, nestling in hollows nearer the hills; and their snug farms, clustering orchards and sheltered meadows strike the traveller who quits the main road to explore by-paths, with a pleasant sense of surprise and lend additional charm and variety to the scenery. Our village touches the highway only to fly from it again, as if in an access of shyness. Its fifty odd houses, antique thatched cottages some modern brick buildings others, that boast every up-to-date inconvenience, including a varied assortment

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of draughts, straggle down like a ridiculous file of ducks towards the stream which under the title of "Town Brook," plays no mean part in the life of the community and deserves more particular notice. It rises under the downs near a hamlet and starts on its course a mile or so above the village. Time was when it sang as it gushed from the depths where it silently grew into being: when it sped on its way a thread of light shot with melody, carolling for very joy to find itself in "the sweet light" that Dante loved, after its imprisonment below. But that was ere man's destroying hand had laid bare its springs and widened its narrow bed. Today it wells slowly from the scarped terrace, with earnest deliberation, as if conscious that it is no longer an irresponsible streamlet, but that it has duties to perform, a place to fill in the world so terribly full already.

Poor little brook! Watercresses smother its bright dimples; formal banks where primroses disdain to grow, curb its ripples and guide its erstwhile wayward course. The water spreads itself thinly over the mud flat which responds with an evil quiver of its surface, if but a stick be thrust into it. The country people tell how, not so many years ago, two riders—one a lady—in attempting to ford the stream at this point, were almost sucked under by its treacherous embrace. "We wur mekin' hay in the field up yonder athert the bruk, when we yeard a girt hollerin' as corned simly from unner our

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fit. They two on their 'arses wur a-flounderin' in the mud, an' the moor 'um wriggled, the deeper 'um sinked—you med as well try to stan' on water as on that shuckettin' stuff. Aye, an better; the one dwun't drag 'ee down like t'other do. We fot ropes and straw an'

pulled 'um out, but lark, they wur just about smuddered wi' mud as you could scarce tell man from beast! They wur town-bred folks an' couldn't be expected to knaw the ways o' brukses an' sich, pooer things."

Hampered by dykes and cresses, the stream pursues its sluggish course until, rebelling at the indignities to which it has been subjected, it breaks away from the dead level of mere utility, and gathering its strength for a leap, plunges, a miniature cascade, into the wooded fissure that like a green ribbon cleaves the open fields.

In the pool below the fall, securely hidden from the gaze of passers-by, I and my brothers and sisters used often to paddle on hot summer days, there being a sufficient depth of water to give the proceeding a touch of excitement that was yet unattended by danger. Near the head of the glen stood an ancient mill, with overshot wheel that hung in its well unhidden by penthouse or roof. Thither a former generation of children had come to stand spellbound watching the resistless sweep of the great floats that brought forth thunder and lightning withal from the seething depths below, flinging the white spray far and wide and bedewing

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with pearls the mosses and ferns that grew in the chinks of the wall. No wains piled high with the fat of the land, now roll heavily down the steep lane and disgorge swollen sacks to feed the gaping vats. The corn laws, the cheap loaf "which came as a gift to us poor folks," killed the mill in the valley. Its business declined; chains became rusty; doors and windows fell out and the roof fell in; the stream was diverted by a side cut, and the great oaken wheel hung rotting on its pin. It was then that we children knew and loved the deserted building and with our "make believe," set the machinery in motion once more. We crept along the crazy wooden shoot, poured ourselves instead of water over the floats and clambered at will about the idle wheel, the giant making sport for us whom in the days of his strength he would have crushed. We hauled one another up like sacks of grain to the loft and slid down the chains through the various stages, to arrive fine white flour at the bottom. Happy childhood that can work such miracles!

The millstones were carried off to adorn the garden of a neighbouring cottage which has also gone the way of all things. A young couple began life there with a modest outfit of a bed and a saucepan; and since it is cheaper to steal than to buy, and money was

needed for more important things than fuel—"A man must ha' his glass o' beer," as the husband explained, "an' he be none the worse for a

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jolly good drunk now an' agen"—the pair set to work with axes upon the wood of the mill which—shall I confess it?—supplied the wherewithal for boiling our kettle also, when we picnicked, as we frequently did, in the glen.

It would not have mattered much if the destroyers had confined their attentions to the disused building; but when this supply was exhausted, they attacked their own dwelling. "'Tis sa comfer'ble an' handy-like" they said, "not to ha' to step outside for firin'," and straightway up would come a bit of the stairs or a part of the bedroom floor, until the ascent of the former was fraught with peril, the circuit of the latter a journey strewn with pitfalls.

I was once sent to carry the woman some comforts on the occasion of a domestic event, and I remember wondering what would happen if the week-old infant by some unlucky chance fell out of bed. Would it remain in the bedroom or would it descend, as despite my wary walk I half feared I should do, through one of the numerous holes in the floor to the kitchen below? The cottage becoming at length untenable by reason of this stripping process, the inhabitants removed themselves and their household gods—now somewhat increased in bulk—to another abode, declaring with righteous indignation, that, (they 'udn't bide no longer in sich a wore-out ole place, as lan'lerd did ought to be ashummed to ax rent fur. But ther', he'd niver

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sa much as stuck his head inside the dooer all these 'ears—what did he knaw about 'un? Why nothen', "a-coorse!" A circumstance which, everything considered, ought to have been a matter of congratulation to the tenants. The only traces of mill and cottage still remaining, are two mounds of bricks overgrown with grass and brambles, that in no whit detract from the beauty of the glen through which the brook, rejoicing to be rid of its trammels, dances for a mile or so. Here it rushes over pebbles with much small busy fuss and fret at the obstacles that for an instant check its flow; there it curls smoothly round a bend, heaping a sandy marge beneath the further bank. It coquets with the trees that come down to drink, gliding from them to return in a long loop again and lave their roots with tiny waves. It murmurs unknown things to the silver birches and tremulous

aspens that stoop to its bright glancings and whisper soft answers back. It calls to the birds in the white fastnesses of the wild cherry and the swaying tops of the elms, till they join their notes to its song.

Where the banks rise steep and crumbling and clothed with tangled thickets, many wild creatures find a home—the weasel, the stoat, the badger and the fox. Many ring-snakes too are found, that "never run away because they know they are harmless"; and now and then an adder that will never stay to face mankind, because "it knows it is guilty"—thus the country folks on natural history. In the

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brook's still pools lurk mountain trout waiting to be tickled; over its shining surface hang "the wandering nation of a summer's day." High above the water is a grassy path, the favourite haunt of rustic lovers. When Chloe triumphant, is seen with her bashful swain "a-walkin' round the bruk of a Sunday arternoon," every one is aware that sooner or later the young couple will be "called" in church wedding follows, and the glen beholds them no more; but other wooers come: the stream of life flows on side by side with the stream of death. Each year the brook sees those mounds of stillness in the churchyard growing thicker and as it steals by, its careless gaiety is changed to sober quietude. Deeper, fuller, it runs, hurrying onward to find the river that will bear it to the sea.

It flows now through green meadows where willows keep pensive watch; past orchards in which

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spring's warm breath renews the snows of winter, until it reaches the confines of the village and is elevated to the dignity of "Town Brook."

In olden times a second mill stood here and though its every vestige has long since disappeared, the memory still survives in the name by which the cluster of cottages on the bank is known. "The Millway" is an offshoot from the main village street and was the abode of a little colony of aged folk before death and household "stuffings" removed them elsewhere. There dwelt a "widowman" who "did for himself," a "widow-woman," and two married couples. Every day the ancient dames—bent, crippled with rheumatism, and what they called "the triatic"—would creep down through their gardens where bees were busy among the gillyflowers, to the stone step against which

the water was gently lapping. Buckets would be dipped, lifted with infinite difficulty, half-filled, to land and carried home, a labour necessitating several halts on the way, although the distance was not great.

Sarah Toomer who with her husband, lived in the cottage nearest the stream, made a practice of feeding the trout during the summer months, for which she was liberally rewarded by the farmer whose visitors from London reaped the benefit of her forethought when they rented the fishing on the opposite bank.

The Toomers' neighbour was not without a

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certain claim to distinction: she felt that she possessed an almost proprietary right in the brook, being intimately connected with water.

“My son, 'ee knaw,” she would explain with pardonable pride, “a lives up at Barrow: 'tis a ter'ble girt way off, an' folks sez as you've got to crass the water to get to't. I cassn't say myself, fur I've niver bin ther'; but that's as 'tis. My son drives an engine; not one o' them as runs on rails an' screeches fit to mammer arrabody. His'n be what you calls a drudge—summat as clanes out the sea, luk 'ee. I reckon that 'ull be a longish job, so ther' ben't much fear o' him bein' short o' work yet awhiles. Dear, dear, who'd ha' thought as iver the sea could ha' bin claned out? but ther's no tellin' what folks wun't be up to nowadays!”

This old lady was chained to her fireside by the complaint so common among working women—namely, “a bad leg” and that of the most virulent type. If it were poor Hannah's cross, it was at the same time her pride and glory. Nothing afforded her greater pleasure than to exhibit to a luckless visitor the ghastly spectacle of her “pooer dear 'ounded limb,” and she derived a singular satisfaction from the thought that “it 'ud be despert hard to find a wusser leg nor mine.” It would indeed have been difficult to have imagined such an one. Notwithstanding the constant pain she suffered, she was ever cheerful and when I visited her, would

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tell me much of the good old times when her father earned five shillings a week and her mother made “tea” from burnt crusts, so that a blackened loaf was a welcome sight.

In those days the neighbouring little market-town was full of French prisoners of war and Hannah would describe how, when she was a child, working with her parents in the

harvest-field that skirted the Turnpike, she used to see these unfortunates walking along the road as far as a certain milestone. “An' when they got to he, they allus had to turn back, 'cause that wur as fur as they wur allowed to go. They simmed quiet sort o' people by what I could year: about the same as we to look at, though 'um did come from t'other country, acrass the water. But folks is folks all the world over—much of a muchness, I reckon, -when you gets inside ‘um, so to spake.”

Of the French as soldiers, she had but a poor opinion and in support thereof would quote her uncle who had served under the Duke of Wellington. “I sez to 'un one day, 'Well, uncle,' I sez, 'what do 'ee think o' them French as you had to fight? was you afeard on 'um any?' 'Afeard!' sez he, scornful-like, 'why, us thought no moor on a Frenchee nor if he'd bin nought but a cabbage!' Think o' that,” old Hannah would add in awestruck tone. The great event of her later years was the flood

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which afforded an inexhaustible topic of conversation, though it only affected her to the extent of compelling her to take refuge upstairs. With the Toomers it became a more serious affair, as I will proceed to show.

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Chapter II

THE Duck House was a little low mud-built cottage, some two hundred years old, consisting of a kitchen, a bedroom raised one step above the former and a tiny cupboard dignified by the style and title of “pant'ny.” The hut owed its name to its proximity to the brook, and to the fact that during a more than usually rainy season it was apt to be flooded. On these occasions the water would come lappering over the stones of the court, and without so much as “by your leave” would make its way into the kitchen, where it rioted at will, to the exceeding inconvenience of the legitimate inmates.

These unseemly intrusions however, were few and far between. In the sweet spring-time, when the door commanded a vista of the snowy orchards already alluded to, of nodding daffodils, and pink willow buds bursting into green, the cottage was a not undesirable residence; while in summer when the sun beat remorselessly on the white road outside, and flowers in unshaded gardens

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drooped on their stems and faded for thirst, the Duck House, where the rustle of trees mingled with the ripple of slipping water, was a very paradise of dim coolness.

Old Shadrach and Sarah, whose home it had been for the last forty years, were of opinion that no cottage in the village could compare with it. Beneath its thatched roof they had begun married life; and sons had been born to them there, who were stalwart men now and had long since made for themselves new homes across the sea. In the squatter's hut, to which the old people clung with the affection conceived of association, they aspired to end their days—a modest ambition, the sole survivor of those with which they had set out on life's journey together. The hope of recent years was the acquisition of the Duck House. To this end they had scraped and toiled, denying themselves all save the barest necessaries, working early and late to add a shilling here, a sixpence there, until at length the requisite sum was almost complete.

When things went awry, and the master's temper was more than usually "'ock'erd"; when Shadrach's rheumatism was troublesome, or Sarah felt "that low an' queer"; when in short the aged couple were sensible of the need of a mental stimulant, the door would be locked, the blind closely drawn, and the stocking brought forth from its hiding place. Its contents would be poured into Sarah's lap, and

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the two would count up their hoard—nearly ten pounds in solid money. Half-crowns, shillings, sixpences, threepenny-bits, piles of pennies—each one meaning a pipe foregone on Shadrach's part—coins of every description were represented, from the lowly farthing to the rare sovereign gleaming among baser metal.

"Lawk-a-mussy-me!" exclaimed the old man one evening, as he sat watching his wife's fingers lose themselves in the mass, "I dwunno, Sally, howsumdiver I shall bring myself to part wi' 't: 'twull be like tearin' the heart out o' my body. Dear, dear, wot a pity as a thing cassn't be boughten wi'out bein' paid fur!"

"That's as true a word as iver you said in your life. I shall miss the brass sore, an' 'twull be ter'ble unked when there be nothen to screw an' scruple fur. We've got but two days moor to look at he an' count 'un ower, now that he o'ny wants eighteenpence of the ten pound. If you gi'es ma that a-Friday when you tek's your wages, it can all be paid to Muster Huggins a-Saturday, which 'till save we this wik's rent, seein' as how he couldn't

ha' the meanness to ax we fur that, when we ha' just paid 'un sich a comenjous lot down!"

"Aye, aye," returned the other, adding regretfully, "'Pon my sowl I'd as lief get rid o' the 'en as the money; I 'udn't miss she sa much."

"But I should; an' I'd let 'ee knaw that 'tis my 'en, an' not to be got rid on, or guv' away fur brass.

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She be a livin' cratur', an' this year be o'ny filthy lucre, as parson sez; though why a calls it ' filthy ' I dwunno, 'cause most on it be clane anuff. But that's neether year nor ther'. My 'en, wot lays sa reg'lar ben't a-gwine to be"

"Ther' be no call fur 'ee to snap my yead off; narra one wasn't thinkin' o' interferin' wi' she."

"No, they'd best not," was Sarah's significant reply, which her husband received in respectful silence.

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The subject of this dispute had been presented as a chicken to the old woman. It had now developed into "a strutty little hen," and repaid its mistress's care by a conscientious discharge of its duty in the matter of eggs. Sarah's affection for her solitary chick gave the neighbours at first much food for merriment.

"It med be a chile by the way she trates 'un—talks to 'un she do, by the hour togither, fur all the worruld a-sif 'twur a Chrish'n."

"Tell ee what," remarked the old woman, happening by chance to overhear the above observations, "she be a deal better Chrish'n nor many what calls theirselves sich. You niver years she a-janglin' and a-jarlin', sneerin' at other folkses like some as I could name. She bides a-twhum an' does her dooty in that state o' life in which it ha' pleased God to call she, as the catanchissm sez. You niver sees she a-gossipin' at the earner, an' lettin' out the fire as did ought to be cookin' her 'usban's dinner!" which last Parthian shaft struck home and effectually silenced fault-finders.

On the morning of the fateful day—for such indeed it proved to be—that was to see the copingstone placed on the labour of years, Shadrach went forth to work as usual. He was employed in "bird-starving" on a strip of land some distance from the village and

contiguous to the highway. It was a dull chilly occupation, this walking round a field to occasionally fire a rusty gun at invisible rooks, and

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it must be confessed that he devoted a disproportionate amount of attention to that part of his beat which bordered on the road, where there was a possibility of exchanging the "time o' day" with passing travellers. He was a simple-minded, sociable individual, and was quite ready for the sake of a chat, to offer a share of his frugal lunch to a tramp who accosted him, as he sat on the bank skirting the Turnpike.

"Have 'ee got a copper fur a chap as ha'n't tasted a mossel o' food to-day gaffer?"

Shadrach replied in all sincerity that he had not "a brass farden'" about him.

"I might ha' knowed that by the look on you," said the tramp, and he also took a seat on the bank. "How fur's the nearest public, an' wot kind o' lan'lerd kips it—one as 'ud give a drink to a poor feller who's dyin' o' thirst?"

"Ah, that be wusser nor hunger," remarked the old man sympathetically. "I'd ha' gin' 'ee a penny an' welcome, but my ole ooman kips ma raythe shart"

"Gar-on," was the tramp's impolite rejoinder. "I've heard that tale afore."

"D'ee think I'd tell 'ee a lie? As sure as I sets year I gi'es she ivery penny I yarns, an what's left ower from rent an' fire an vittles, she puts in the stockin' under the mattress."

"You've got a stockin' wi' mebbe a couple o' pounds in't?"

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"Couple! We've ten pound, shart by eighteenpence which as how I manes to put in to-night from my wages. That be God's truth!"

The other whistled and turned away his head to hide the greedy light in his eyes. "Wi' all that sight o' money you wun't sper' a ha'p'ny to a chap as ha'n't tasted a mossel o' food these two days—'tis 'ard, crool 'ard!"

Shadrach's heart melted within him. "Year, tek' my nunchin'," he said; "or if thee've a mindt to goo into yon village, I meks no doubt but what my missus 'ull gi'e 'ee a drap o' tay an' a crust o' bread."

"I'd walk twice as fur to get summat to eat. What's your name, an' whereabouts do you live?"

"We lives in the Duck House close alongside the water; arra-one 'ull tell 'ee wher' to find 'un."

"Thank 'ee gaffer, thank 'ee kindly; may God blesh you!" and the tramp swung oft towards the village at an astonishing pace considering his state of starvation.

It is a trite saying that virtue is its own reward; but unless virtue be tempered with discretion, the reward is sometimes difficult of discernment and is apt to wear upon occasion a rather dubious aspect. Shadrach experienced, no doubt, a fine glow of benevolence towards the man he had helped; this feeling however, had spent itself before the day was done, and was succeeded by other sensations of a different and more lasting character.

When the old fellow returned from work that

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evening, his wife informed him that she had "bin a'most frowtened to death by a girt travellin' man as come an' axed fur food: said some 'un had telled 'un that the lady wot lived in the Duck House niver turned arra-one from her door wi'out a mossel o' bread. Wher a got that lie I dwunno, but I wur fust to gi'e 'un summat, 'cause he med ha' took all as he fancied, an' wi' them ten pound lyin' betwixt the mattress and the bed-boord, I 'udn't ha' aggreevated 'un not fur wotiver."

An idea flashed into Shadrach's mind—an idea so horrible that for a moment his head swam, and he clutched at the table to save himself from falling.

"A didn't steal nothen', I s'pwose?" he asked in a voice he scarce recognized as his own.

Happily Sarah failed to observe his emotion, being engaged in preparing supper.

"No, a went off as quiet as a lamb, bless 'ee. He found the 'en right away up the road, an' come back to tell ma on't—you can think as I cut an' run arter she when I yeard that. 'Twur a comacal thing she should ha' strayed sa fur; I niver knawed she do 't afoor."

Shadrach breathed again. "Now then, missus," he said when the meal was ended and his pipe well alight, "fetch out the brass, an' we 'ull gi'e 'un a last count ower—year be the eighteenpence."

Sarah disappeared for a few seconds into the bedroom, to return with a vast knitted stocking tied round the top by a piece of string.

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"Sims wunnerful heavy," she remarked.

"An' I dwun't sim to year the chinkle-chankle," added her husband.

It was opened, and the contents were poured into her lap, but as they came to light a cry of wrath and anguish broke from the pair.

“The money! Wher' be the money? Oh, Lor' if it be stole!”

They turned the stocking inside out; they rushed to the bed and searched it from end to end, shaking the pillows and blankets and pounding the mattress in vain. They turned the house topsy-turvy, leaving no cranny unexplored, but the hard truth was not to be shirked, that the savings of years were gone and that a number of pebbles had been substituted in their place.

“'Tis that tramp as stealed it,” moaned Sarah, rocking herself backwards and forwards; “to think that a drap o' tea an' a crust o' bread should ha' cost ma sa dear! oh my, oh my!”

Shadrach said nothing, but he thought a great deal.

“I kin see't plain anuff now,” continued the old woman; “the 'en was peckin' about in the court when he come to the door; he just picked she up an' card she away, a-purpose to bamboodgel ma up the road.”

“Did you goo off an' leave 'un year?” inquired her husband.

“I thought he wur comin' along behindt ma—no,

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I wun't tell 'ee a lie. I just niver thought o' nothen 'cept the 'en. D'reckly my back was turned he must ha' slipped in an' teken the money.”

“I wunners if Hannah sin 'un pass her window,” mused Shadrach.

“Lard love 'ee, he 'udn't be that soft: he'd creep round the side o' the house an' acrass the fields—I reemembers now, thinkin' 'twur comacal I didn't meet 'un as I come back.”

“No doubt but what that be how he done't,” acquiesced the other, who seemed too crushed to make any moan.

“What I'd like to find out is this: how did a knaw as the brass wur ther'? I ha'n't breathed it to a livin' sowl. Ha' you, Shadrach Toomer?”

The suddenness of the question deprived him for a moment of speech: when, after a pause, he found his voice, he affirmed in accents of the deepest solemnity that never had the word money passed his lips.

Perhaps he did protest too much; perhaps his uneasy conscience betrayed itself in look or bearing. Certain it is that his wife glanced suspiciously at him once or twice before she deigned to accept his denial. He spoke no more that evening. Fetching his large Bible from its place on the bureau, he read diligently a certain chapter near the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, and sighed at frequent intervals. The following day he was heard to remark that "that ther' 'en had best be keerful she

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dwun't happen to find herself unner my fit," and that he would "fetch the perlice to the very next tramp as comes along baggin'." With the exception of these two observations, he maintained a melancholy silence on the subject of the theft, but the neighbours, who were not in the secret, noticed that he "broke a smart deal" that autumn; and they wondered what had occurred to change him, that he, who only last summer was "'sa peart, now hockled about like any old Methusalum."

Evening after evening the aged pair sat one each side of the fire, Sarah expatiating on their trouble, for the poor old soul missed the money with an aching sense of loss, Shadrach endeavouring by a sedulous study of the Bible, to close his ears to her complaints. For a while she bore with this inattention. One night however, her patience gave way.

It was November, and the domestic atmosphere within was scarcely less gloomy than that without. Rain had been falling since dawn and at noon Shadrach had come home wet to the skin, complaining of rheumatic pains in "the spine of his back."

When, after supper, he fixed his glasses on his nose and opened the Book as usual, Sarah's irritation could no longer be subdued.

"Lark, what a lively un you are to live wi', to be sure! Set ther', 'ee 'ull, an' groan fit to bust your weskit, but niver a word do 'ee spake, bad nor good.

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Rade summat out o' the Bible, cassn't 'ee? It wun't do we no harm, an' 'ull help to pass the time along."

He obeyed, choosing as his subject the history of the Flood, to which the dreary splash of the rain on the casement and the rush of the swollen stream added a touch of realism.

"'Tis a wunner as Noah wurn't druv' silly wi' all they beastes," he said as he closed the Book. "I found a dozen cows anuff when I wur fogger, but two o' ivery mortial kind—

lions an' tigers an' bears. Well, I dwunno how fower men got through the work o' feedin' on 'um once a day, let alone cleaning out their places an' beddin' 'um down."

"I wishes as the Lard could ha' sin His way to drowndin' a few o' they naesty creepin' things: we 'udn't ha' missed them stingy waspes, an' we could ha' done wi'out blackbeetles, an' a few moor o' the same sort. Lor', what a time Noah an' his fam'bly must ha' had, wi' all them swarmin', as you med say, in his house! 'Twur better nor bein' drownded, an' that's the best praise you can gie't."

"I reckon us 'ull knaw summat about a flood presen'ly, if the bruk kips on a-risin'," said Shadrach.

The loss of the money was for the moment forgotten in this fresh anxiety. His first thought next morning was of the stream; as soon as he was dressed he dragged himself with difficulty to the

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door—his rheumatism being now acute—and peered through the grey dawn at the rushing yellow torrent a few yards from him.

"Still risin', an' the rain comin' down fit to cut a haystack a-two," he murmured.

The morning dragged slowly away. When Sarah had finished her household tasks, she sat fondly watching her hen as with gentle cluck-clucks, it pecked up the crumbs about the kitchen. Ere long the old woman's head drooped, and following her husband's example, she sank into a doze. They both were awakened by a loud cackle, indicating extraordinary agitation on the part of their pet. "What a fuss about a hegg," said the mistress drowsily, and was composing herself for a second nap when Shadrach perceived the real cause of the commotion.

"Look alive missus! the water's runnin' unner the sill an' her nest be soppin' wet; she must lay her hegg by the fire."

Sarah seized a broom, and opening the door, tried to brush out the intrusive element thereby making matters worse, for now that the barrier was removed, the water rushed in like a miniature torrent. "What be we to do?" she cried in despair, "as fasts as I hucks 'un out, he runs in agen!"

"Us must shut to the dooer an' bide till 'un sinks," was his reply.

This, however, the water did not appear to have

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the least intention of doing. Gradually the pool in the middle of the floor spread until it reached the fire which, after a brief struggle, it vanquished amid spluttering and hissing.

"An' narra tater cooked fur dinner!" sobbed the old woman as she and her husband retreated to the upper end of the kitchen. Their stay here was brief; again they were forced to retire, and they finally took up their position on the bed, from which they could hear the relentless foe surging round their household goods, washing against the "sofy" of which Sarah was so proud, straining at the dresser adorned with the best tea-set and the pictures of the two absent sons, curling about the Windsor chairs that shone until you could almost see your face in them.

Presently there came a blast of cold air, and Shadrach, looking from the inner room, saw that the weight of water had burst open the outer door, and that the flood in the kitchen was rising by leaps and bounds. Many thoughts were working in his mind as he sat through the afternoon, which was long and yet cruelly short, till evening stole down while the stream creeping over the step mounted ever higher and higher.

"Missus," began Shadrach when the last ray of light had faded, and they crouched side by side in the chill darkness, "I cassn't get out o' this, along o' my pooer back; but ther yen't no call fur you to be drownded. It dwun't sim a-sif arra-one be comin'

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to help we, so you had best try an' scamble through the water afoor 'tis too late."

"Wher' you bides, I bides: we've lived ower farty 'ear tergither, an' I ben't a-gwine to lave 'ee now. I've bin errible wi' 'ee lately, Shade, but 'twur along o' that money, an' I axes your pardon, seein' as how you took it sa uncommon sweet."

Shadrach's hand sought hers: "Sally, ole ooman, promise as you'll furgimma fur what I be gwine to tell 'ee, an' that you wun't niver cast it up agin ma, if sa be as we gits through this year."

The pledge was given, and he proceeded to relate his encounter with the tramp: how, in the fullness of his pride, he had boasted of his wealth, even to describing where it was hidden; and had lied to his wife, allowing her to take upon herself the sole blame.

Sarah remained long silent. When she spoke it was to say—"Pooer Shade, you meant no harm; but I be glad it wurn't the 'en arter all. Do 'ee knaw wher' she be?"

"No, I ha'n't sin she sence we come in year: I yeard a kind of a squawk a while back, an' it simmed a-sif she flod some'ers, o'ny I couldn't tell 'ee wher'."

Again silence, broken this time by Shadrach: “Missis, you be a good ooman—I niver knawed how good till now—but I'd feel moor comfer'blelike in my mindt, if you'd upset ma a bit ower that tramp job. It dwun't sim nat'ral fur 'ee to tek it sa quiet.”

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“Not now, Shade; I couldn't upset 'ee now, when mebbe afoor many minutes is passed, we two 'ull be drowndin' like rats in a hole. Money dwun't sim o' much account when you looks at it wi' death stan'in' at your elber. Oh, to think as we should be cast away”—she broke into a wail—“cast away to die in our strength, wi' our senses about us, to die *alive*, as you med say, on the bed wher' the li'le 'uns wur barned!”

“I didn't think we should ha' bin furgot by iverybody,” responded Shadrach plaintively.

The words had not left his lips, before a sickly yellow gleam shone on the water; a man's voice cried: “Hello! wher' be?” and a few seconds later a young labourer, lantern in hand, splashed his way to the bedside.

“Ben't much too soon, simly,” was his laconic remark, as he held the light above his head and surveyed the scene: “us had to see to the pigs and the fowls (lots of 'um be drownded), or we should ha' bin year afoor. Now then, which on you be comin' fust?”

The two old people were carried through the house and up the court to the lane, where a farm cart was in readiness to convey them to a neighbour's house on higher ground. For down here in the hollow, there was water everywhere; the road was invisible, and the course of the stream was apparent only by the willows which just managed to hold their disconsolate heads above the waste.

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Sarah's distress was acute at leaving without her hen, and the following morning she repaired betimes to the Duck-House. The flood had fallen considerably during the night, but there was still more water in the kitchen than was agreeable. And what a scene of desolation the whole of the interior presented! The floor and the furniture were “smuddered” in mud, as she plaintively said; the “sofy” was a sponge; the best table-cloth a dripping rag; worst of all, the children's “picturs” were ruinated—“it was anuff to gin arra-one a turn as 'ud last 'un the rest o' your life.” At one sight, however, Sarah's heart leaped up, her troubles grew small: on the mantel-board, serene and placid, sat the hen, and when with a welcoming cry she alighted on her mistress's shoulder, a shining white egg was revealed to view upon the shelf.

During the next few days the owner of the Duck-House declared his intention of pulling the old place down, it being no longer fit for habitation. What caused him to change his mind people never rightly knew: the fact remained, that when the water had subsided, the old folks returned to their nest, and lived there in great peace and comfort until their death some years later. The gossips exhausted themselves in surmises as to how the means for this state of things were supplied, and having turned Shadrach's and Sarah's affairs inside out, they came to the conclusion (which happened to be the correct one) that the two sons in Australia had sent their

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parents a considerable sum of money. The investigators were helped to this explanation by the knowledge—elicited through diligent enquiry at the post-office—that a day or two after "the girt flood, a queerish-lookin' letter from furrin parts" had been delivered at Sarah's door. It was further whispered that Shade had "boughten the cottage ter'ble cheeup," for he was heard more than once to remark that "what you thinks a misfartin' yen't allus one; an' though the flood ruinated a smart deal o' the furnitoor an' mildee'd the mattress, it sp'iled the ole 'ouse fur arra-one 'cept we; an' it larned ma what a good missus I'd got." Which last observation, unmarried men said, was plainly absurd, because if he had not had time during forty years to discover what Sarah was, it was certain that sitting together an hour or two on a soppy bedstead would not teach him. The married men however, maintained a discreet silence: they knew that not even after forty years of wedded life would anyone, save a fool, presume to assert that he had fathomed the mysteries of one female mind.

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Chapter III

BELOW the Millway the brook expands into a shallow pond, which is the village watering place. Swallows wheel and swoop over it during the daytime, kingfishers come for breakfast in the first hours before the world is astir, and nightingales sing divinely amid the scented darkness when every one is fast asleep save those who own the hearing ear. Here mild-eyed cows are led to drink, and horses that have been known to twitch the halter from youthful hands and stampede among the children, scattering them like a flock of doves.

Close by is the bridge, which, at the time of the flood, fulfilled its duties so inadequately, that the water rose above the narrow arches, poured

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over the parapet and formed a lake of respectable dimensions. In fact, people passed the remark that there was no knowing where the brook would not have arrived—at the church on the one side and the Turnpike on the other without doubt, if both roads had not happened to be so difficult of ascent that its headlong career received a check, and it was obliged perforce to retreat by the way it came. Which circumstance, folks, who lived on the two hills, said was "a merciful providence," though even these favoured individuals began to get nervous at the incessant rain, and shaking their heads muttered—"It did say in Bible as ther' 'udn't niver be another flood, but that wur a long whiled agoo an'" they evidently harboured a fear lest the promise might have "lapsed."

The children returning from school who had to be ferried across the bridge—strange irony!—thought the whole thing very amusing. It did not however, strike the men living on the Millway in this light, when, after having waded through water waist-high to reach their front door, they found that the fire had gone out which should have cooked the dinner, and that the wife with the smaller children had fled from the swamp below to the upper rooms, whence hungry appeals were transmitted through the windows to the outside world.

It must not be supposed that the brook is in the habit of overflowing thus, or that it often places

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the bridge in the ridiculous and humiliating situation of complete submersion. Once only, within the memory of man, has it played this trick, which it performed in order, doubtless, that the structure should not be unduly exalted. Having demonstrated its ability to "be even" with the latter, the stream has been since content to flow in its appointed channel.

During recent years the roadway over the arches has been widened and a footpath added; the bridge in consequence has become a safer haunt for the children who before, ran no small risk of being crushed against the parapet, if caught in the narrow strait by a loaded farm wagon. May Day morning sees them meet here while yet the dew lies fresh upon the grass, and breaking into small parties, they parade the village, with garlands of

cowslips, bluebells, and gillyflowers, or a doll enshrined amid a bower of greenery and blossoms.

As early as seven o'clock they may be heard outside the houses, carolling with fresh young voices the primitive ditty below, the words of which were given to me by a singer—

"Good morning, young ladies and gentlemen:
I wish you happy May.
I am come to show our garland,
Because 'tis first of May,
Happy May!
Joyful May!
Winter's gone and passed away.

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Hail, all hail the merry month of May!
We'll hasten to the woods away,
Among the flowers so sweet and gay,
Away to hail,
Away to hail,
To hail the merry month of May!"

Their maying over, the children cheerfully return, at the sound of the school bell, to the prosaic round of every-day life, the pennies they have collected burning holes in their pockets until dinner-time brings an opportunity for spending. On the bridge the little girls dance when wandering minstrels come our way and proclaim—in accents that recall the Emerald Isle—their readiness to play for the sum of one penny, "any chune the ladies" may desire—waltz, polka, schottische, or redowa. Such an invitation is not to be resisted. The requisite amount is subscribed! Babies, almost as big in some cases as their nurses, are placed on the ground along with the basket of bread which the baker's youthful daughter is carrying, and the linen basket under the charge of the washerwoman's equally immature offspring, and the children, choosing partners, twirl round and round in couples, their coloured pinafores flying in the breeze, a look of sweet gravity, of intense though subdued enjoyment, on their chubby faces.

Over the parapet of the bridge hang the younger boys and angle for stray fish with a bent pin and a length of twine. Their perseverance is crowned, as a rule, with small success, for trout that may be

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caught by tickling, eschew the blandishments of a worm that does not pretend to conceal the hook upon which it writhes. The greatest piscatorial achievement was the capture of a veteran crayfish that had long defied the children. Let them describe the exploit in their own graceful and suggestive language.

“Ther' usted to be two on 'um, a li'le crawfish

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an' a girt 'un as bid in a hole anighst the bridge. We tried a smart few times to catch ‘um, but 'um wur too cunnin' an' 'udn't quilt the worm. One on us tried to scroop 'un up in his hat, but they 'udn't be scrope, so we fot a close-prop an' hucked out the girt 'un—the li'le 'un he flod away under the arch, wher' us ha'n't sin 'un sence.”

This was a year or so ago, but I have no doubt the children are still endeavouring to secure that nimble crustacean, if they have not already done so.

A party of East-End boys, who were spending their holidays in the village, once dared to profane Town Brook by bathing in the two-foot depth of water near the bridge—to bathe, not merely to paddle, which is allowable. They were impelled to the rash deed by a faint reminiscence of a solitary visit to the seaside, so they subsequently confessed. It happened that a matron of some consequence in the place, and of the approved British type, saw them thus disporting themselves, to the indignant horror of the rustic population, and finding remonstrance vain, she despatched a messenger in hot haste for the policeman. At sight of the familiar blue uniform the urchins, who possessed the true Londoner's reverence for the majesty of the law, “flod away,” like the little crayfish under the arch, leaving their clothes piled in the road. One boy, with admirable presence of mind, snatched up his hat before he vanished, and a quaint sight he presented as he dived, thus lightly clad, beneath the

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bridge. The affair resolved itself into a duel of patience between the two parties, in which the lads, I am happy to say, were ultimately victorious, their draughty shelter notwithstanding.

At the parting of the main street from the Millway is "the Idle Corner" that every village possesses, where a knot of women with and without babies in their arms are to be seen at any hour of the day, where marbles are played against a convenient wall, where men and youths congregate when work is done, to talk to the girls and to indulge in horseplay among themselves.

Near "Idle Corner" meetings religious and political are held. The former attract the more numerous audience; not only do they offer a particularly easy, informal method of discharging certain religious duties, but the drums and tambourines of the Salvation Army add a pleasing military flavour to the proceedings—a mild excitement tinctured with mirth that is wanting in the unaccompanied eloquence of the candidate for parliamentary honours.

The most impassioned appeal to the electors, the most convincing argument, fails to elicit a spark of sympathetic interest in their placid, bovine countenances. The orator brings his speech to a close amid profound silence, and shakes off the dust of the village under the depressing conviction that his words have spent themselves on the empty air. It is more than probable, however, that when polling

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day comes, the voters, despite their unpromising attitude, will rally in a body to his support. "Ah, bless 'ee, that chap can just about spout," they remark, when discussing the matter; "'twur a purty spake as he gin we 'tother day: sims a-sif he knawed all about what us wants, an' if sa be as we has to send a chap to Parleement, us med as well send one who can spake up fur we."

The motives which influence these sons of the soil in the exercise of their political privileges are exceedingly simple.

"All on us works fur he, luk 'ee, an' seein' he gies we our bread as you med say, 'tis o'ny fair us should gin he our voteses." Or again: "Them blue 'uns—Conservatives they calls theirselves—they done torrable well by we; gin we free schooldin' fur the childern, and County Councils, an' sich-like. 'Tothers ha'n't gin much as I can mek out, 'cept 'tis the voteses, an' they be that cheeup nowadays, they ben't o' no vally wotiver!"

The patriarchs of the village regretfully recall the days when the possession of the franchise marked a man out as in some subtle manner superior to his fellows: at election times the fortunate individual was a person of importance to be flattered and cajoled by

the agents of the respective candidates; on the fateful day itself it was seldom that he went unrefreshed. “But lor' bless 'ee, 'tis all changed now: a man's vote dwun't bring 'un in sa much as a glass o' beer: ten't worth the trouble o' puttin'

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your mark if you ben't to get a bit o' beef an' a drap o' summat warm an' comfer'ble.”

The whole subject of law-making and laws is wrapped in impenetrable mystery; the people have a vague notion that the latter are evolved somehow through the agency of “they Parleement chaps—lawyers I s'pwose 'um calls theirselves as they meks laws,” but of the process they are profoundly ignorant. The Government is credited with powers little short of miraculous; it has but to speak the word and prices will rise or fall, old-age pensions become an established fact, work be provided for every man. It was of course owing to the supineness of this omnipotent but sluggish machine that the price of bread went up to such a scandalous height during the Hispano-American war.

“A purty Government we've got!” quoth one irate matron; “a purty Government, to let bread be sa dear! wotiver it be about I'd like to knaw, mekin' we pay sevenpence a loaf when we sows 'un an' reaps 'un an' gathers 'un. Ther's plenty o' earn round year fur we, an' ther' did ought to be a law agin tekin' it away to the towns. The folks ther' should look arter theirselves, and not steal our food as we be fust to work sa hard to get. No earn ought to be selled out o' the place wrier' a grows.”

It might be supposed that among a peasantry so simple and so selfish the old election cry of “Three

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acres and a cow” would have met with approval. This, however, was not the case.

“Who could live on three acres, 'spec'ly if they happened to be a-top of the downs wher' nothen wun't grow?” And “wher' 'ud you get beastes anuff fur iveryboddy to ha' one?”

“Who 'ud pay we our wages, if sa be as all the land wur tuk away from the farmers? We couldn't live wi'out our bit o' money, ee knaw.” These were some of the questions with which the labourers proved the political Solomon who dangled the scheme before their eyes.

“'Tis a comacal notia',” they said, when discussing the matter among themselves, “a wunnerful comacal notia' yennit? But 'twudn't do fur we. He needn't come axin' we fur our voteses, if that's what he be gwine to be arter, when a gets into Parleement.”

Probably this warning was conveyed to the candidate; certain it is that no further mention was heard in the village of "Three acres and a cow."

Since those times elections of one kind or another have become so usual under the Local Government Act, that they are nothing accounted of nowadays. Thus far have they fallen from their former high estate.

The first Parish Council entirely eclipsed its Parliamentary rival in importance and excitement; the new toy was to be the Government on a smaller scale—omnipotent, but within a restricted area. The village would be lighted with street-lamps;

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allotments would be without limit, and the rent a mere song; good paths would be made everywhere; every one would become prosperous and happy, and all at the ratepayers' expense, the last being naturally the crowning beauty of the scheme in the eyes of those not included under that category. The village was placarded with bills, "Vote for So-and-so," and a prodigious amount of talk, both public and private, ensued.

The election was hotly contested, the Moderates securing a victory chiefly through the indiscreet zeal of one Progressive candidate. This misguided individual held out as a bribe to the voters the promise of a village bath, which proposal evoked a storm of ridicule and abuse.

"Baeth, indeed! Wher's he gwine to mek his baeth, then? In Town Bruk? An' I'd like to knaw how we be to water the 'arses and wash the caerts, if sa be as the water be all taken fur a baeth. Do he think as we be that dirty then, as we reequires a baeth? Us 'ull baeth him, an' purty quick too!"

One old dame tremulously inquired whether "folks 'ud be forced to go in the water whether 'um liked it or no; fur I've never had a baeth all my life long, an' if I takes one now, I'm mortial afeared it med be the death of ma." She was assured with malice prepense, by an opposer of the scheme, that undoubtedly every one would be compelled to make use of the promised boon, and that a parish councillor would be in attendance to

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enforce immersion. I may add that a village bath has not figured again on an election programme. Indeed, notwithstanding its vigorous birth, the Council is gradually dwindling down to a *quantité négligeable*, except as regards the management of

allotments. Even of these the people are tiring, and they are being thrown back to a large extent on the committee's hands.

As the Parish Council has declined, its big brother of the county has risen in favour, though at first it was looked at askance. One enfranchised widow who supported herself and a young family by field labour at tenpence a day, stoutly declared that she was "not a-gwine to walk a mile to the vote, not to oblige noboddy. She would go if she wur tuk in a carriage," an' "tuk" she was, vastly enjoying the novel sensation of riding behind a pair of fine horses.

There was little excitement at the poll, for the people did not understand the significance of the new machine, and were doubtful as to the benefits it would confer. Its cooking and nursing lectures have not in truth been appreciated as they deserve, and its lessons on practical butter-making have produced small result, the wives and daughters of the small farmers preferring in most cases to cling to their antiquated methods. The continuation schools which it aids, are generally well attended; but for the steam-roller, which it first propelled on its ponderous way among the villages, is reserved the

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highest praise. That is a definite and very tangible proof of the County Council's powers.

The central authority is well enough, and does its best for the poor according to its lights. The Workmen's Compensation Act is "some good on to they as has accidenks; but 'tis wunnerful few we gets year luk'ee, follerin' the plough-tail or leadin' the teams." The Vaccination Conscience Clause? "I dwun't say nothen agin he fur they as has consciences; I ha' n't got aim myself. My childern's all bin done, same as they've all bin chris'ened an confirmated; it never gave 'um no hurt as I could see, an' ther' dwun't sim no call to change wi' this last babby." The efforts of a thoughtful majority are thus lightly dismissed; not so, however, the County Council's steam-roller. It excited a chorus of admiration long and loud. "To think as we should have that girt thing in this poor little place; it do sound cheerful-like to year he a-puffin' up-an' down-strit. An' dwun't he mek the roads bea-u-tiful ? Sa quick, too! 'Tis a sight better'n them stwuns a-kickin' about all through the winter. No moor shuckettin' fur we in carriers' caerts. Well, well, times be wunnerful changed sence I wur young, an' I can tell 'ee this, that they

ben't no wusser now'n what 'um was then. Ther' sims to be allus summat a-fresh." Yes, even under our little bridge new water runs.

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Chapter IV

I HAVE already said that certain modern erections of brick deface the village. Its picturesque thatched cottages are fast disappearing. Some are dropping into decay because landlords refuse to spend money in repairing the ancient tenements, others are being pulled down bodily to make way for the aforesaid latter-day abominations, that with their slate roofs which the sun smites remorselessly during summer, and their walls through which the wind seems to blow, are as unsatisfactory to inhabit as to look at.

There is no need, however, to describe these products of civilization: they may be seen by the hundred in the artisan quarter of our larger cities—each house its neighbour's twin, flush with the street and devoid of anything beyond bare utility. Those in the country possess this advantage over their urban brethren, that to the former are attached gardens—generally of a fair size—which redeem them from the meanness and squalor characteristic of the latter.

Much may be done with climbing plants, and the

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red building strikes a not unpleasant note of warm colour amid the landscape, when time and creepers have mellowed its crude tint. Bare walls are odious to the average rustic; should nothing else be available wherewith to cover them, he will dig in a neighbouring thicket a puny root of wild honeysuckle which, planted beside his cottage door, speedily becomes "a girt, buzzlin' thing," under its changed conditions of life.

Ivy for this purpose is not popular, owing to its supposed propensity to harbour "erriwigs and other naesty craewlin' insects"; but vines, clematis Jackmani, Virginia creeper and roses of the cheaper kind, such as the white and crimson rambler, are much sought after. Choicer varieties, like the Gloire de Dijon or Maréchal Niel, are for the fortunate few who can afford luxuries.

The greater part of the garden is devoted to vegetables; the flower border is usually under the care of the wife who not infrequently is compelled to fight a tough battle for the preservation of her rights, the little strip of ground being a kind of Naboth's vineyard, which the head of the family would fain annex.

“My 'usban' 'ud like to pull up all my plants,” said a house mother when we were discussing the subject. “Oh, he 'ud soon have 'um out by the roots, an' his carrots an' taters in their place, if I didn't kip a sharp eye on him. ' What good be your flowers?' sez he. "Us cassn't eat they.' I

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tells 'un they be good to look at: that our eyes did ought to be used as well as our mouths, an' that we didn't ought to be allus thinkin' o' eatin'.”

This woman was an enthusiast. She went on to declare with evident sincerity, that she could gaze at her flowers the livelong day if she had not work to do.

“They be sa wunnerful, an' ther' is sa much in ‘um when you comes to study ‘um. As for hurtin' or breakin' a flower, well there, I couldn't do it; 'twud sim downright cruel!”

There is a genuine though often dumb and inarticulate love of nature among our people, which is perhaps more evident in the women than in the men. I was showing a village mother some photographs of Alpine scenery when the exclamation broke from her: “Oh, how I should love to see them beautiful mountains! It do sim hard, as I shan't never have the chance.”

This love of nature finds expression in the care the cottagers bestow on their flowers. Each plant in the little area is individually known and tended and I heard one woman give utterance to a really remarkable sentiment.

“Some folks worship gold'” said she; “I worships flowers. If arra-one wants to please me, they needn't give me money, fur I'd a deal sooner have a flower if 'tis o'ny a little 'un.”

In truth plants or cuttings are highly appreciated. The wife of a small farmer showed me not long ago

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a fine fuchsia hanging from a basket in the window of the “back room” where she had been compelled to hide its beauties. At one time it dwelt in the publicity of the kitchen, but so many neighbours had begged for slips, that it bade fair to be given away altogether. Its career had been somewhat eventful, for when in its full vigour, the proud parent of no fewer than forty-six blossoms, an intrusive heifer that was roaming the

green outside, put her head through the window, and ate the plant to the root. It recovered from this untoward accident however, and lived to supply half the village with small fuchsias. I may add that the heifer so relished the dainty, she desired others, and in search thereof, marched through the house to the garden beyond, where she browsed upon cauliflowers and dahlias until she was discovered and driven ignominiously forth.

I am sorry to have to record that many old and formerly favourite flowers have vanished from village gardens of to-day. The vicissitudes of fashion in floriculture remind me of those primitive weather-gauges which in my childhood used to adorn every cottage interior. They were made of grey crusted cardboard, and shaped to represent a Gothic porch, from which emerged when the sun shone, a female figure in bonnet and shawl; the gentleman with old-world chivalry that would, I fear, be little appreciated in these days of athletic women, reserving the bad weather for his own walks abroad. Thus

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when annuals were “in” at the Hall, they were “out” in the village, and cottagers grew such flowers as Sweet-William, London-pride, Aaron's rod, and the like. Now that all self-respecting upper-class gardens boast a herbaceous border, their humble friends flaunt in the gay colours of begonias, nasturtiums, China-asters and stocks. Lilac, sweet lavender which is never out of date, gillyflowers and tall white Madonna lilies still shed their fragrance through the village; though these are but lightly esteemed compared with annuals and tubers.

It is wonderful how many varieties an ingenious gardener will contrive to cram without undue crowding, into one small plot. I counted in a patch of ground less than four yards square, no fewer than twenty-eight different kinds of plants, the majority being annuals which the penny packets of seed with their bright wrappers, have done so much to popularize. Among the few “old-fashioned” blossoms I noticed monkshood, called by rustics dove flower, because “when the cap is pulled back, you can see Noah's dove as brought un the leaf”—an amusing variant of the name Venus's-chariot-drawn-by-doves, by which we children knew it.

Southernwood was there, which “with brandy,” as my informant added significantly, is the gipsies' chief medicine. And because the good wife feared the limited space below would check the free development of her two begonias, she raised them on

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roughly carved blocks of wood, where they flowered to their hearts' content. The whole was surrounded by a neat elder fence, which a mouse could have jumped, and was a source of great pride to the owner.

The poor are not niggardly with their blossoms. For such festivals as a harvest-thanksgiving, a wedding, or still more, a funeral, they will raid their beds with ungrudging hand. The only exception to this rule that I can recall, was in the case of an old man who by some means or other into which it were well, perhaps, not to inquire, had become possessed of a number of fine dahlia tubers that in due season made a blaze of colour round his tumbledown dwelling. Though he owed his few comforts entirely to the kindness of friends, he would not part with a single blossom to church or benefactor save for a "consideration."

Fashions may change and the flowers we love disappear from the village; but those in the fields remain ever the same, returning year by year to greet us with their sweet familiar faces. We cannot boast in our cold chalk soil the luxuriance of more southern counties. The few hedges we show, do not veil themselves behind a wealth of ferns, foxglove and honeysuckle, yet in their way they are beautiful; when the hawthorn is in bloom they lie like scattered snowdrifts against the green earth, and beneath June's sky they blush with the delicate pink of the wild rose. Such modest flowers as the

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starry celandine abound, and the blue geranium or Meadow Cranesbill, the leaves of which in autumn are so richly tinted. The white geranium is found, though this is rarer than the other; nor are there wanting cowslips that, mixed with ordinary tea, impart to it a pleasant springlike fragrance, and moon-daisies, the pure petals of which love-lorn maidens strip from the golden centre one by one, to learn the quality of their swains' regard. In the woods flourish orchises and bluebells. I have seen the ground carpeted with the latter, so that as you looked away down the vista between the nut bushes, you scarce knew which were bluer—the blue distance beneath the spreading mantle of fresh green, or that far above, overhead. "Pale primroses that die unmarried," ere yet the sun in his full strength may kiss them, and "violets dim, but sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes," repeat their beauties in the mirror of the brook whither, as soon as the first buds unclose, the children come a-primrosing on Sunday afternoons. Woe to the poor

blossoms at such times; they are torn from their roots and left too often to fade on the path. If borne in triumph to some cottage home, they arrive there all drooping from contact with hot little hands, whose owner's idea of preserving her treasures is to “car' 'um squeedged very tight, so's I shan't drop ‘um.”

Our dazzling merciless high-roads which scorn to seek the shade that humbler lanes affect, are not without a touch of beauty: bright blue chicory,

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yellow bedstraw and purple knapweed brave the dust and glare to gladden passing travellers. It is, however, in the cornfields that the flowers of the chalk soil are seen in their full glory. Poppies that tinge the wheat blood-red as though it were flushed by the setting sun, delicate convolvulus, corn-flowers that reflect the sky, corn-marigolds each one a miniature sun in itself, corn-cockles in their robe of royal purple, rest-harrow—suggestive name—that blossoms at the edges of the field where the harrow stays perforce—these and others too numerous to mention, Nature shakes with lavish profusion from her overflowing lap.

The downs possess a flora of their own: many tiny blossoms nestle in the turf or spring in the shallow soil where this is turned by the plough. The small wild pansy and eyebright, wild thyme—bee haunted, milkwort blue and pink, lady's slipper, harebells whose faint music only fairies hear, scarlet pimpernel—the poor man's weatherglass, that closes up when rain is near, and a species of forget-me-not so modest and minute it scarcely can be seen, are some of the usual—I cannot call them common—flowers with which the slopes are decked. Others more rare are viper's bugloss—found in deserted chalk-pits, and the pasque-flower—a purple anemone which blooms, as its name implies, about Easter-time. In a narrow valley just below the hills the white moth-mullein (*Verbascum blattaria*) has been found; also wild

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larkspur, growing among corn; though it is doubtful whether the former survived a visit to the spot of some school children enjoying their annual picnic. When village orchards are white with blossom, the crab-apple showers its pink and snowy petals in the lanes, and later, its golden fruit which lies ungathered on the ground; and traveller's joy that when age overtakes it is appropriately known as old-man's-beard, drapes the bushes and hangs in long festoons from the trees.

But I must stay my pen, for I could ramble on ad infinitum about wild flowers that are so much more lovable in their hardy independence and spontaneous unaided beauty than the pampered nurslings of the garden which Nature sometimes has difficulty in recognizing as her children.

The following are a few wild fruit and flower recipes which are used in the village.

Dandelion Wine.—To make 9 gallons of wine.—Boil 27 quarts of pips in 9 gallons of water for an hour. Strain and boil again with 3½ lb. of best Demerara sugar, 1 oz. of hops, ½ lb. of brown ginger, and sufficient orange and lemon peel to taste. Slice 18 Seville oranges and 12 lemons, and put to them 3½ lb. of sugar as above. Pour over them the boiling liquid: when blood-warm add a little brewer's yeast. Strain again before putting into the barrel. The wine should be allowed to work three or four days before being bunged tight. Bottle in six months.

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I am assured on authority far higher than my own that the above is really excellent, as well as very wholesome, and that it resembles a sharp liqueur. When the dandelions are in blossom the children go forth in little crowds to gather them; and as the pips or heads are small and many are required, housewives willingly reward industrious pickers. Later in the year they strip the elder bushes for their purple fruit, from which also a good home-made wine is brewed. It is a specific against colds, and when heated and spiced is a pleasant winter nightcap. One farmer of my acquaintance has it made every season, to administer doses thereof to any of his men whom he thinks may require it, the patients infinitely preferring “maister's medicine” to the doctor's “stuff.”

Elder Wine.—To every gallon of water a peck of berries. To every gallon of juice 3 lb. of sugar, ½ oz. of ground ginger, 6 cloves and 1 lb. of raisins. A quarter of a pint of brandy to every gallon of wine and 3 or 4 tablespoonfuls of brewer's yeast to every 9 gallons of wine.

Pour boiling water on the berries and let them stand covered for twenty-four hours. Then strain the whole through a bag or sieve, breaking the berries to extract the juice. Measure the liquid and to every gallon allow the above proportion of sugar. Boil the juice with the sugar and the other ingredients (ginger, cloves and raisins) for one hour, skimming the whole time. Let it stand until lukewarm,

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then pour it into a clean, dry cask with the proportion of yeast as above. Let it ferment for a fortnight; add the brandy, bung up the cask and let the wine remain thus six months before bottling.

During autumn the blackthorn, which in early spring powders the hedgerows with its flowers, displays a profusion of small round berries and these, though harsh and bitter alone, are capable in company of good results, if employed with discretion. They impart a fine flavour to the otherwise insipid blackberry, while upon the merits of sloe gin it the village.

Sloe Gin.—One gallon of raw gin, half a gallon of sloes, 2 oz. of bitter almonds, and 2 lb. of white sugar. Pour the gin on the other ingredients and shake up every day for six weeks. Strain and bottle.

Another recipe says—To every gallon of sloes add the same quantity of good gin and 1 lb. of white sugar—or more or less, according as the liqueur is desired sweet or not. Crush the fruit in a jar; take out and crack the stones, replacing them in the jar; add the sugar and pour over it the gin. Cork or cover the jar tightly and stand for a month, when strain and bottle.

The following is an improvement upon the ordinary blackberry jelly.

To every 4 lb. of blackberries add 1½ of sloes. Bruise the fruit, cracking the sloe-stones. Boil all for a quarter of an hour and strain the juice. To

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every pint add I lb. of preserving sugar. Boil fast with this until the liquid jellies.

It may not be generally known that marmalade can be made from rose-berries by the following method.

Hip Marmalade.—To every pound of hips allow half a pint of water: boil until the fruit is tender, then pass the pulp through a sieve, which will keep back the seeds. To each pound of pulp add I lb. of preserving sugar and boil until it jellies.

Mountain-Ash Jelly.—The berries must be gathered when quite ripe and untouched by frost. Strip them from their stems, place in a pan and cover with water. Let them soak two days, then put them into a preserving pan with as much of the water in which they have soaked as you think desirable, according to the quantity of jelly required. Boil and

skim until the fruit is soft. Strain the liquid through a sieve, crushing the berries with a jampot that the pulp but not the seeds may pass. To a pint of liquid add I lb. of preserving sugar and boil fast for nearly an hour, or until it jellies, skimming constantly. Pour into pots and next day cover down.

This is not a dessert dish, but a delicious substitute for currant jelly, to be eaten with venison, hare or roast mutton. The flavour is somewhat sharp, unlike the insipidity of the other, to which it is as a rule preferred when it has been once tasted.

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Chapter V

WHEN parson 'gins the Bible, 'tis time to sow the beans"—thus runs the ancient proverb. The first chapter of Genesis is read, as every one is aware, on Septuagesima Sunday—when the first faint whisper of spring breathes throughout the land—since at that season God creates the earth and the heavens each year anew. Lengthening evenings see village fathers, employers and employed, busy in garden or allotment, planting, sowing, dibbling. A paternal Government has not yet brought in a Bill for the protection of mankind against wild birds. It is to be hoped that the measure will not be long delayed; otherwise, in this part of the world at least, the poor gardener will run some danger of extinction. As it is, his labour too often profits only his feathered foes. Rooks dig up and devour his seed potatoes; jays (jar-pies the natives call them in reference to their harsh note and their pied plumage) feed on his peas and beans; bullfinches strip the fruit trees of their buds, and if perchance a few escape and reach maturity in the shape of apple, plum or pear, these

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do but provide dessert for blackbirds and thrushes. Even the cuckoo is not exempt from such luxurious tastes. One of these birds took up its residence last summer in a garden I know, pitching its tent beneath the gooseberry bushes. There it remained,

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regaling itself upon the fruit and flying out with a shriek if any one approached the spot, until the food supply was exhausted, when it migrated to another less forward clump of bushes and repeated the process.

If there be nothing else they fancy, the gluttons will attack a certain small stonecrop which makes a pretty edging to some flower-beds in the same garden. I have counted on

a summer afternoon when the sun has left that part of the lawn, as many as twenty thieves engaged in their nefarious occupation of tearing off and carrying away pieces of the unlucky plant.

Such conduct is apt to chill one's enthusiasm tor birds, except when they are pouring forth a flood of melody: then all misdemeanours are forgotten. Unhappily they do not sing the whole year through, and, like boys, they are sure to be in mischief when they are quiet!

Besides the vegetables already mentioned, our people grow a few roots and a vast amount of "greens," but their staple crop consists of potatoes. It is a pretty sight during autumn to see a father digging the winter store, while his children in blue, red and pink cotton pinafores, that lend welcome touches of colour to the dun landscape, swarm round him, sorting, picking and cleaning the tubers before depositing them in the wheelbarrow. When this is full, the inevitable infant is placed on the top of the pile and trundled home in triumph by "our daddy."

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The people have little to learn in the way of plain practical gardening, sufficient for their modest requirements. The County Council, actuated by the most praiseworthy motives, sent down a lecturer to deliver a series of addresses on the subject, but this attention, like others, was coldly received. "What do a think as he be gwine to larn we then?" said the rustics. "Ha'n't us bin doin' our bits o' gardens purty nigh all our lives? I reckon 'tis we as could larn he summat, moor like." Possibly the lecturer also held that opinion, for after delivering two of his courses to a room where a couple of listeners broke the monotonous emptiness, he departed in search of more promising pastures.

One of the village gardens I fain would describe in greater detail, since to it the epithet "old-fashioned," which in this connection is a term of praise, may with some justice be applied. It belongs to the Red House which gained its title in its youth. A century of wear and weather has toned the bricks until they look almost colourless by contrast with the rich crimson flowers of the pyrus japonica that is trained beneath the lower windows. The upper portion of the walls is covered by a vine, among the yellowing leaves of which hang, during autumn, tight bunches of small purple grapes that supply the wherewithal for grape wine. At one side of the narrow railed-in space separating the front door from the street, stands an old pear tree, loaded every season with fruit which,

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owing to its "iron" quality, escapes the hands of boy-marauders. The little plot itself reflects all the tints of the rainbow save in the depth of winter. The first buds to pierce the brown earth and brighten its dull surface, are such tender blossoms as the snowdrop, hepatica and winter aconite. To these succeed crocuses, hyacinths, tulips, the scale of colour mounting ever higher as the season advances, until it culminates in a blaze of scarlet, blue and yellow that to be fully appreciated should flame against grey venerable walls, or light up the dark sweep of some cedar-studded lawn.

It was not however, on this conventional strip, with its begonias and lobelias, that I wished to linger, but on the square garden behind the house. It slopes to the brook near the bridge and is shut in on two sides by high mud walls half hidden beneath masses of ivy. Along the stream—bordered just there by willows—is a broad band of turf flanked by nut bushes that shelter each a rustic seat, and sparkling in spring with clumps of daffodils, "tossing their heads in sprightly dance."

I often wonder why these flowers thrill not poet and painter alone, but plain individuals like myself, with such a keen and intimate delight. Is the magic to be found in their colour—the very essence of sunshine—or in their suggestion of spring fragrance, for scent they hardly can be said to possess? In truth their charm is too subtle to bear analyzing and consists, I think, as much in the impressions they

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convey to the inward eye as in aught tangible. To me they bring visions of a thousand things: of bright though broken sunlight; of a windy sky across whose April blue race fleecy clouds like white horses across the sea; of skipping lambs and

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young green corn; of bowing tree-tops whose buds are beginning to show purple; of the first feathery shoots of the larches and the earliest primrose—things of life and hope—all. The daffodils in the Red-house garden can be seen by everyone passing on the bridge; and when the sun is shining through their golden petals and burnishing the surface of the water, when it is brightening the pink willow-buds and revealing unsuspected tints in the mossy trunks of the apple trees beyond the brook, that little strip of grass is a joy, the remembrance of which abides throughout the year, until the changing months make it once again something more than a memory.

From poetry to prose is too often but a step; beyond the daffodil green lies the vegetable garden where things useful if prosaic flourish. Here cherries in due season ripen, and currants red, white and black may be gathered by the bushel; raspberries with their reckless ostentation, tempt fruit-lovers from the path of rectitude, and plums crave only to be picked. But though, as is but fitting, utility prevails over ornament, the latter is not wholly wanting. The cabbages and onions hide modestly behind a screen of dahlias; sweet-peas "on tiptoe for a flight," mask their humble culinary cousins, while tall hollyhocks, and sunflowers that bumble-bees love, by their presence at the edge of the turnip-bed seem to lend that indistinguished vegetable some of their own stateliness. The garden is

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intersected at right angles by straight grass paths: one of these leads from the house door that commands a vista of the orchard framed between two quaint clipped yews, down to the stream. This was spanned by a single plank when old Thomas Dench, familiarly called Tommy, lived at the Red House. He was a well-known character in the village, and though he quitted it some years ago, he is by no means forgotten. Tommy and his wife kept a little shop and "a few chicken," not to mention a small farm, and these, with other speculations, engaged their attention so fully that they had none to bestow on horticulture. It is to its occupiers of to-day that the garden at the Red House owes its pleasantness and plenty. Nor is the toil expended on it unprofitable from a pecuniary point of view; the products find a ready sale in the neighbouring townlets, and if any fruit be left on her hands, the mistress converts it into jam or homemade wine of which she sometimes brews as many as eight varieties in the year. Rhubarb wine made by a certain ancient recipe is said to equal champagne! I decline all responsibility for this statement; those of my readers who are so minded may test its accuracy by carrying out the directions given below which have come down from the eighteenth century and see the light of print now for the first time. The following Orange Brandy I can recommend from my own knowledge.

Orange Brandy.—Four quarts of the best pale

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brandy, 2½ lb. of fine white sugar, the juice of 12 Seville oranges, the rinds of 10, 1 quart of milk.

Put the brandy into a large jar or open vessel with a cover; add the juice and rind of the oranges, then the sugar. Heat the milk, and pour it boiling over the other ingredients in the pan. Let the liquid remain 6 or 8 days, stirring thoroughly each day. Strain into bottles and cork well.

Rhubarb Wine.—To every gallon of cold water put 4 lb. of rhubarb bruised on a clean board, with a clean mallet over a tub or large pan. Let the fruit and the water stand 12 days, stirring daily. Strain the liquid, and add 3½ lb. of sugar to every gallon of juice. Scald with 2 quarts of juice ¼ lb. of cream of tartar; let it stand until cold, then pour it and the other liquid into the cask. Stir daily for a fortnight, and when it has ceased working put in the bung. This wine should be made in August or September; early in February the bung should be removed in order to colour and fine the liquid as follows: To 18 gallons of wine add ½ oz. of fluid cochineal and 1 oz. of isinglass. Replace the bung in the cask, and it should be fit to bottle in March. The corks must be wired with copper wire and the bottles laid down.

I think that little touch about the corks suggests hopeful possibilities.

Black Currant Wine.—This has written against it on the recipe, "Very fine." To every 3 quarts of juice allow the same amount of water unboiled,

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and to every 3 quarts of the liquid add 3 lb. of very pure moist sugar. Put all into a cask, reserving a little for rilling up. Place the cask in a warm, dry room and the liquid will ferment of itself. Skim off the refuse when fermentation ceases, and fill up with the reserved liquid. When it has ceased working, pour in 3 quarts of brandy to 40 quarts of wine. Bung it close for nine months, then bottle it and strain the thick part through a jelly bag until it be clear, when it also can be bottled. Keep it ten or twelve months before drinking.

Besides being highly esteemed as beverages, the home-made wines are used for various culinary purposes, such as mixing puddings; with them delicious preserves of pears and apples can also be made. The hard winter pears of which I have spoken are excellent prepared by the following method.

Preserved Baking Pears.—Peel, halve, and weigh the pears. Put them into a jar with 1 oz. of candied citron and lemon peel sliced, 12 cloves, and a little mixed spice to every pound of fruit. Cover them with any kind of home-made wine—plum, dandelion, or

cowslip would be good. If no wine be obtainable, sweet cider may be used. The jar should be an earthenware, fireproof one. When the pears are covered with the liquid, place the jar in a bain-marie, or in the oven, and stew gently until the fruit is done. Strain off the juice and

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boil this with I lb. of lump sugar to every pound of pears—original weight. Pour the syrup over the pears and cover down with a bladder. They will keep through the winter.

The words "cowslip wine" seem to bring with them a breath of the country and the fragrant fields. When these flowers were in bloom, we children used to be very busy and important, gathering the blossoms, pulling the pips and drying them in the sun. They were subsequently stored in tins and produced—sometimes, it must be confessed, in a melancholy state of green mould—on special occasions such as a dolls' tea-party. We drank the sad liquid, innocent of flavour or colour save its own, with serene enjoyment, seeming to find it "milk of paradise" which, looking back, I think it must have been. The only beverage that in later years has afforded me equal satisfaction, was tea in an Alpine hut after a long day's scramble.

The dolls' tea-party stage passed; we still gathered cowslips, but for wine which we made from the following simple recipe.

Cowslip Wine.—Nine pints of water, 2 lb. of sugar. Boil and skim well, pour it hot upon 1 quart of picked cowslips; next day strain it and put to it two spoonfuls of yeast. Let it stand in an earthen pan a fortnight to work, covered close, and stirred three times a day for the first three days. Then drain it into bottles and stop it tight. It will keep for a year.

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Chapter VI

I HAVE said that before the present garden-loving tenants came to the Red House it was occupied by an elderly couple, Dench by name. Tommy was a cripple, having lost his leg by an accident in his youth, since when he had walked with crutches; very strong these latterly required to be, for he had gathered bulk with years and would have made two ordinary-sized men.

When Tommy laughed, which was often, his fat sides and pendulous chin shook to an alarming extent, and his eyes vanished from sight amid the folds of his ample cheeks. He was a past master in the art of "chopping," otherwise dealing, and while unrivalled

at extracting the maximum of work from those about him, put in the minimum himself. His chief occupation consisted in driving over his farm in the spring-cart; when not engaged in this or the aforesaid dealing, he was generally to be found, if the weather were fine, standing at his back door propped on his crutches and piously thanking a kind Providence for the mercies vouchsafed him in his old age.

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These expressions of gratitude were not echoed by Betsy his wife, who certainly had some ground for complaint. “Thee dwun't sim to reemember as I wants a bit o' rest now an' agen an' some joyment,” was her plaintive cry as she bustled backwards and forwards, incessantly busied between household duties, the care of the shop and the fowls referred to elsewhere. “What hever thee'll do, Thomas, when I be took, and thee has nothen but what thee can scrabble about arter, is more'n I can say.”

“Thee needn'st to fret thyself about ma; ther' be as good fish in the sea as ever corned out on't,” he would reply; “an' if the Lard wills to take thee afore me, 'tis more'n like I could get ma another missus, or, failin' that, my sister as is a widder 'ud come an' look arter ma.”

Betsy had an effective retort to speeches of this description. “Aye, thee med get 'ee another missus, but not one who'd put up wi' your grizzlin's and growlin's like I do; nor one who'd work early an' late, marnin', noon and night and hand 'ee over the brass as sweet as honey—never ax 'ee fur a penny, I don't, to put in the bank!”

This was Betsy's great grievance; she longed with her whole soul for an account, however small, in the Post Office Savings Bank. For years she had kept this end in view and striven her utmost to attain it; but Tommy, who scented money as a camel scents water, rigorously exacted every penny

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of her earnings from every source, and hitherto she had been unable to lay by so much as a shilling in her own name.

“What's thine's mine,” quoted the old man, who carefully forbore to reverse the axiom, struggle as Betsy might against the injustice. Matters went on thus between husband and wife, until at length one summer they reached such an acute stage that the former began to feel uneasy. Did Betsy really intend to revolt? If so, he would disarm her beforehand by taking her into his confidence.

"Thee've got a wunnerful good headpiece o' thine, missus," he began; "I wull say that fur 'ee. Wi' all thy faults—an', lor' bless 'ee, they be a many!—thee be uncommon sharp at choppin' an' dealin'; what do 'ee think o' my buyin' another 'arse an' trap?"

But Betsy was not to be mollified with this palpable morsel of flattery. "Thee've got one 'arse; a'ready; I don't see no call to buy another," she replied acidly.

"Well, 'ee knaws, 'tis like this. I've a-yeard as some Lunnon people be comin' clown to the farm next wik fur change o' hair, or summat sich, an' townsfolk allus likes drivin' over the country—'tis a change to go rattlin' along a good road wher' you meets next to nothen, arter them nasty strits o' their'n; 'um sez they be sa chockful o' wagins an' caerts that you cassn't drive no pace. Thinks I—"Spose these folks hires my noo trap a smart

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few times, then when they be gone, mebbe I can sell he to parson," and Thomas winked significantly.

"Wher's the money comin' from to pay fur'n? Tell ma that, Thomas, if thee can," was Betsy's uncompromising demand.

He was equal to the occasion however: "Thee dwun't knaw everythink, missus. Fur more'n a twel'month I've scrope an' scrope; 'twur on'y last wik as I got anuff. I selled some straw to parson ah, I allus likes dealin' wi' parson: he's a gen'elman, he is, an' dwun't knaw the price o' nothink."

"Thee bist a lang-yedded chap an' no mistake!" exclaimed his wife with extorted admiration. "Bother that shop!" as a knock was heard at the front door which opened on the street.

"'Twas Hilder Ann for a penn'orth o' tea an' would I please to lend her mother a pin: 'tis on'y yesterday—no, I be tellin' a lie, 'twas the day afore—that she borrowed a couple and she hasn't returned 'um yet. But ther', some folks is that dishonest ther's no trustin' 'um wi' anythink!" and Mrs. Dench returned to her work of peeling the potatoes for dinner, in an access of virtuous indignation.

"As I wur a-sayin'," continued Tommy, "Muster Bartemer ha' got a trap he wants to sell—a wagglenet, or summat o' that, he calls it. But Muster Bartemer allus astes top price fur his things—he do. I dwun't mane any harm by the man, but I do wish as God A'mighty 'ud pick 'un up an' drop 'un down

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in a spiky place: mebbe then he 'udn't fancy hisself quite sa much."

Despite the unfavourable opinion he entertained of Muster Bartemer, Tommy sounded him as to the lowest price he would take for the coveted articles, and after an incredible amount of haggling and chaffering, a bargain was struck by which the latter became the possessor of a "wagglenet what shucked about awful," as Betsy grimly remarked, and a gaunt quadruped called a horse, distinguished rather for speed than points.

Meanwhile, the visitors from London had arrived. Tommy lost no time in sending to inform them that if they wanted a trap, he would be happy to accommodate them, "An' tell urn," he added, "that we shan't quar'l about the price, fur I leaves that to their honour."

Mrs. Dench was in her garden the following morning when she heard strange voices on the bridge and a ripple of girlish laughter that sounded like music across the water. A few minutes later there was a knock at the front door and two people, a young man and a maiden, stepped inside from the hot sunshine without.

The latter was dressed in white from the crown of her dainty sailor hat to the tip of her small shoe: her eyes were dark, and on each clear pale cheek was a pink flush, for all the world as if a petal from a La France rose had fallen there by accident and liking its soft resting place, had made up its mind to

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remain. Her companion was tall and straight, with close-cropped hair and a certain quick masterful way about him, except when he spoke to the young lady: then, as Betsy noticed, his voice "was that saft, aim 'ud think he was talkin' to a babby."

"I believe you have a carriage that you let out on hire," he began in a lordly fashion.

"Please, sir, you'd best speak to the master. Thomas, here's quality come about that wagglenet. Please to step this way, sir; my 'usban's a cripple and goes hoppety-like," and Mrs. Dench, punctuating her speech with curtseys for commas, preceded the visitors through the house to find the old man at the back door, propped on his crutches as usual. After a short palaver as to the charge

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for the use of the vehicle, the horse was put into the shafts by the united efforts of Tommy, his wife, and a small boy who was kept to do odd jobs; the gentleman helped

his pretty companion to the box seat, mounted up beside her and drove away towards the farm with a flourish of his whip that excited the admiration of all beholders.

A quarter of an hour later the cripple hopped into the shop where his wife was engaged in counting out a halfpennyworth of marbles to a microscopic child. “Betsy, Betsy!” cried he, while his fat cheeks quivered with excitement, “ther' be six on um!”

“Cassn't 'ee hold your jaw a minnit?” she retorted, continuing her occupation. “Now,” as the child departed, “what do 'ee want wi' ma?”

“Ther' be six on 'um in the wagglenet—them two a-sweetheartin' on the box an' fower behindt—an I on'y axed 'um five shillin'!”

“Thee bist an ole fool,” was her unfeeling reply: “he said a didn't mind what a paid. Thee med ha' axed 'un double an' he'd ha' paid it wi'out grizzlin'.”

“I'll have it out of 'un somehow, blest if I wun't!” murmured Tommy who for the rest of the day was consumed with unavailing regret.

During the next few weeks the wagonette was in constant requisition and things went entirely to Mr. Dench's satisfaction. True, his prices, which appeared to be on an upward sliding scale, did not

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in all probability give the same to his customers; but there was ever some good reason why the last journey was rather more expensive than its predecessor. The road was bad or the hills were steep or the horse had just been out and could only be spared as a favour. It is possible that the visitors began to suspect old Tommy was not as simple as he looked, for when the gentleman came round as usual one day with his pretty companion, he declared his intention of hiring the carriage by the hour. “What will your charge be?” he asked.

“Plase to wait sir, till we've got 'un up,” panted Betsy who was assisting the boy to hoist Tommy into the cart.

“By the hour, did 'ee say?” repeated the old man when the dangerous ascent had been; accomplished; “lemme see,” and he pondered a while in silence. “I mos'n gen'ly lets 'un out by distance, so to spake,” said he, after an elaborate mental calculation, “but to obbligate you as you've had 'un a good few times, I'll mek an expection an' let you have it fur three shillin' an hour.”

"Very good, we'll fetch it at three o'clock," and the two took their departure, returning to the farm by the path along the stream where are many shady nooks among the trees and soft mossy banks inviting dalliance, and where the ripple of the water over the stones is plainly to be heard—by an ear attuned—singing "I love you, sweet, I love you!"

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That night old Tommy's mind was troubled, and his sleep went from him. Never had he been worsted in a bargain before, and to think that a mere "Lunnon chap" had proved the better man, was gall and wormwood to his soul.

When the visitor arrived the following morning to pay for the carriage, he was received with plaintive, even tearful reproaches.

"You had the trap fur an hour—that's three shillin'—ther' wur six on you, an' you druv to Cateswick, fur some 'un telled ma as sin you ther. Cateswick be fower mile ther' an fower mile back—that be eight mile. Six on you! Eight mile! Three shillin'! Why, ten't a penny a mile apiece! Oh, 'tis crool work, crool work! Th' old oomans as goes to markut all scrunched up in a common caert pays moor nor that. To think o' you Lunnon folk a-comin' down year, a-ridin' in *my* wagglenet, a-drivin' my 'arse that cost ma sich a comenjous lot o' money, an' on'y payin' sixpence apiece fur eight mile! It meks I sweat it do; it meks I trimble to think on't," and two large tears rolled slowly down his fat cheeks.

The end of the matter was that a compromise was effected whereby fixed prices were substituted for a sliding scale, and ere the interview terminated, Tommy's round face was beaming like an amiable full moon.

"The young gen'elman sez as they be all a-gwine away purty soon," he remarked to his wife;

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"they've just about joyed theirselves down year; an' he tells ma it's more'n like he'll bring the young lady agen next summer an' have some more drives, but I dwunno if I shall be able to 'blige 'um then."

"I reckon them two's a-thinkin' o' gettin' wed," struck in Betsy who, womanlike, scented a ;romance; "an' he med go furder an' fare wuss, fur she's a swate purty cratur. Lor' bless me, dwun't he jest dote on her! Well, well, that's what 'tis to be young. Thee med a fuss o' me onst, Thomas."

"Ah, but thee wur never much to look at, Betsy; nob'dy could say as I wed thee fur thy looks, my gal. I be gwine to church a-Sunday; 'tis a 'mazin long time sence I went—nigh on fower 'ears—an' I manes to 'tend reglar fur a spell."

Mrs. Dench turned and regarded her husband with genuine concern. "Thee doesn't feel theeself bad no'ers, dost Thomas, that thee talks o' gwine to church?"

"No, lor love 'ee! I be as well as iver in my life. 'Tis this way, luk'ee. Parson wants to buy an 'arse an' trap; I wants to sell our'n, so we med as well have a deal together. I allus likes sellin' to parson, an' it meks a man feel comfer'ble-like to go to church now an' agen, 'specially if you've arrathing to sell to parson." Thereafter was witnessed the edifying sight of Tommy hopping down to church each Sunday evening, and stopping in the churchyard after service to exchange greetings with the parson's wife, to

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whom he confided that "the sarmint hit ma hard, an' just about med ma shuckit and trimble."

It will be remembered that Tommy's garden was connected by a narrow plank with the orchard across the stream. The old man who frequently went over to feast his eyes upon the spectacle of the gaunt quadruped feeding under the fruit trees, was on the frail bridge one morning, when either his crutches slipped, or he became giddy—he was never quite clear how the mishap occurred—and he fell prone on his face in the water below. Owing to his lameness he was unable to move, and the mud that filled his mouth, prevented his calling for help. Happily, however, "Odd-jobs" had heard the splash and quickly raised the cry that "Maister be a-layin' on his stummick in the bruk a-drowndin'."

Within a few minutes six or seven women and a couple of men appeared on the scene, and after much heaving, struggling and hauling, they succeeded in conveying him to land, "drippin' like an old yow," as one of the rescuers remarked.

(I did not happen to see the sight myself, but an eyewitness described it to me as inexpressibly funny.) Poor Tommy was wheeled in a barrow to the house; the women removed his wet garments, Betsy being too much upset to be of any assistance, and he was put to bed to recover from the shock and the immersion.

"Ah, that did mek I feel bad," he said, when

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sufficiently restored to recount his sensations. “I wur frowtened an' no mistake. Thinks I, I be drownded an' stuffocated fur sure, 'cause, luk'ee, I couldn't move me hand nor fut. But the Lard wur marciful and presarved ma—'twas a mussy as I'd ha' bin to church lately!”

“'Tis all along o' that dratted arse,” quoth Betsy wrathfully; “thee didn't never go acrass to look at 'tother 'un. A noo broom swapes clane; but when it's a scrub ther's a job. Thee'll ha' the brantitus fur thy pains; mark my words.”

She proved a true prophet. Tommy was laid up for some weeks with his old enemy bronchitis, and during that time Betsy resolved upon a deed of derring-do at which she has not ceased to wonder. She determined at last to revolt once and for all, and accordingly she not only refused to hand over her earnings intact to her lord and master, but further took upon herself to make away with the obnoxious horse and carriage, the purchase of which she had never approved. She did not intend, however, to sell it to the parson who had been assiduous in his attentions to her husband during the latter's illness.

“I ben't a-gwine to ax he to buy 'un,” she said to herself, “parson have anuff to do wi' his brass wi'out wastin' it upon a rattle-trap an' a bag o' bwuns. I wur barned an' bred up in church, though ten't much I goes there now. Them Methody folks at Cateswick wants summat to get about the

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country in, so ‘um sez, an’ their money be as good as arra-one's, I reckon.”

Therefore Betsy, who was a churchwoman in her peculiar way, disposed of the “wagglenet” and the horse on her own responsibility to the Methody folks. What she received for them is shrouded in mystery to this day. She handed over the sum of twenty-one pounds to her husband, with the remark that he “med think hisself lucky his venter hadn't turned out no wuss, fur he'd made a matter o' twen'y shillin' on the deal, besides the hire to the Lunnon folk.” Beyond this she vouchsafed no further information, and Tommy's most strenuous efforts failed to elicit the actual amount she had obtained. This reticence, coupled with the fact which he shortly after discovered, that she had opened an account in the Savings Bank, aroused the darkest suspicions within his breast, and it is remarked by his intimates that among numerous bargains this is the only one on the subject of which he maintains a dignified reserve.

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Chapter VII

THE farmhouse which opens its hospitable doors to occasional “Lunnon folk,” has hitherto escaped modern improvements and remains an unpretentious thatched and gabled dwelling, encompassed by garden, yard and orchard. The bedrooms are small, with low ceilings and sloping floors, so that lighter movable articles roll down hill until brought up by the wainscot; but no one would carp at such trifling inconveniences who had made the acquaintance of that downy white nest, the bed, and had inhaled the sweet air that blows in through the open window. During summer roses come tapping at the casement to rouse the drowsy sleeper, and through all the slow-revolving months there floats up from the

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yard a chorus of country sounds—the “bellocking” of calves, the insistent voices of the ducks as they waddle in a long file to the orchard pond, the cock's shrill morning call and the soft notes of the pigeons in their cote among the trees.

Downstairs, the best parlour, with its hard sofa and many crocheted antimacassars, is less attractive than the flagged kitchen which is the largest as well as the brightest room the house contains. In the good old days when the relations between employers and employed were semi-patriarchal, the kitchen was the common dining-hall. The carter boys sat at the foot of the table, above them the men and the maids, while at the head presided the master and mistress, the arrangement being doubtless, a survival of feudal times, with the tall salt-cellar that divided gentle from simple. To-day all is changed: the farmer and his wife sit in empty state at the great table, while the men dine not so well at home.

The kitchen windows are filled with plants that are watered daily from the teapot, and between them peep the earliest sunbeams, flashing back from polished covers and dancing on the china with which the dresser is loaded. Where space permits, a gay almanac adorns the walls or an oleograph which needs no printed legend to denote from whence it hails. The high mantelpiece is flanked on one side by a portrait of Queen Victoria, on the other by a crude presentment of the great German

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Chancellor in his most iron mood. A bird of passage from Teutonic lands was staying in the village a few years ago; happening to call at the farm she perceived this picture and with an exclamation of rapturous surprise, she launched herself upon it. “Ach, you haf then here our great Bismarck ? I could not think that in a so little village you know him! But it is wunderschön!”

Her enthusiasm appeared to interest Mrs. Pinmarsh who danced at the likeness with more respect than she had hitherto displayed towards it: “So you know the gentleman, Miss? Well now, if that isn't strange. I wanted something to set against the Queen yonder, so I bought this off a man who come round, thinking it would do as well as anything else. My master sez he was a great person in his own country—France, I believe it was, but I don't rightly know, for I've not much time to read newspapers. But lor', don't he look a reg'lar old grim, whoever he is!”

The explanation failed to chill Fraulein's ardour, and she doubtless informed a credulous Fatherland on her return thither, that admiration for Bismarck obtains among the humbler ranks of society in England to the extent of hanging his portrait alongside that of the late Queen.

Mrs. Pinmarsh in truth, has not much leisure for reading of any description. Her life is a round of unceasing occupation, broken at rare intervals by a shopping excursion to the neighbouring

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town or by still rarer visits to her married children. Politics proper she leaves to her husband, hers being those of the farmyard and the hearth. The sex of the Jersey cow's expected calf is a question beside which that of the Far East fades into insignificance; her “indemnity” has to do with fowls and foxes and the secretary of the local hunt. She derives her pocket money from the profits on poultry and dairy produce, and if any disaster occur in these departments, her income suffers accordingly.

So lucrative a branch of home industry as butter-making the mistress undertakes herself: the churning alone she delegates to “the girl,” but maintaining a strict supervision, lest the latter should “jump” or “gallop” the cream in order to expedite matters. Sometimes, during very hot weather, it is seized with what Mrs. Pinmarsh styles “an ock'erd turn,” and steadily refuses to change its condition. The cattle man, employed about the yard to look after the animals or the “fogger,” as we call him in our part of the world, has then

to be summoned to aid in coercing the defiant fluid, and the weary “chump-chump” of the churn may be heard the livelong day. When at last a few knobs of butter appear floating on the vasty gulf, they are certain to be white, rank, uneatable. An up-to-date neighbour who had attended the County Council's dairy classes, once ventured to suggest that such waste of time,

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labour and patience might be avoided by carefully regulating the cream's temperature. The hint, however, did not accord with Mrs. Pinmarsh's domestic philosophy. She had made butter a good many years, seeing she was a farmer's daughter before she was a farmer's wife: the cream always had been contrary in hot weather, and of course it always would be. This talk about temperature was just one of the newfangled ideas of which there were too many knocking about nowadays. As if you could change the nature of cream by putting a thermometer into it!

Though Mrs. Pinmarsh's dairy may be open to criticism, her management of poultry is above reproach, and the boldest spirit would pause before offering unsolicited advice on this subject. Her chickens are the earliest in the market, her ducks are renowned for their size and their tenderness in eating, her fowls lay throughout the severest winter. The secret of their obligingness in this last respect she attributes to the fact that they are fed daily during cold weather with hot food, and in addition, are given a small quantity of raw meat two or three times a day, since she holds that “it pays to treat them generously.” By way of response to the consideration shown them, Mrs. Pinmarsh's fowls plainly model themselves upon their mistress's pattern. Like her they are placid, methodical, industrious, doing their duty not by fits and starts, but punctually

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and with regularity. Staid matrons they are, among whom such vagaries as roosting out at night and stealing of nests is not so much as thought of. They are, in short, totally unlike the fowls with which I had to do, and though less interesting, are probably more satisfactory from a business point of view

When the multifarious duties of the day are over and the last customer has been served with milk; when the eggs have been collected, the chickens and the young ducks safely housed for the night, the farmer's wife brings out an ample work basket and darns her husband's long blue worsted stockings or mends his shirts while

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he sits in his Windsor armchair by the fire, smoking the pipe of silence and of peace. From time to time she lets fall an observation of domestic interest to which he returns a monosyllabic reply; she propounds a question anent the state of the crops, when he rouses himself and for a few minutes becomes almost loquacious. One evening during the six is distinguished from the rest by special characteristics. Not only is it pay night, but that also on which the weekly journal arrives—the sole glimpse the couple enjoy of the great world beyond their own immediate ken. Mrs. Pinmarsh's needle flies yet more swiftly as "the master" in a laboured monotone, reads aloud for her benefit the chief items of interest. These would formerly have included little beyond a local police-case or a sensational murder, but such topics have been pushed into the background by the South African War which has stirred the hearts of our people as nothing else for many years has done. The causes that led to the conflict are shrouded from the villagers in impenetrable mystery. Even Farmer Pinmarsh has but vague ideas on the subject. He had heard that "they Boers had got hold of something which belongs by right to us—a pit full o' gold, some people said, and as they wouldn't give it up we were bound to fight 'um, whether we liked it or no." Though believing the enemy to be "good sort o' folks in the main—farmers like myself," he has nothing but reprobation

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for their stubbornness, which quality is, of course, a monopoly of the British race and highly unbecoming in any other.

"They be sa dogged—sa wunnerful dogged!" he will say with a mixture of anger and pity towards the men who were so shortsighted as to defy his country. Of the final issue of the struggle, even in our darkest hours, he never entertained a doubt.

"We've never been beat yet by what I can mek' out," he remarked to me, "an' 'tisn't likely we mean to start that sort o' game now. You'll see as they Boers 'ull like us all the better when we've smashed 'um, same as a dog that 'ull allus come back to the one who beats it."

Being no less old fashioned than his wife, the farmer strongly condemns free trade which he holds is ruining England and draining her of money to enrich aliens.

"Why," he asks, "cannot the foreigner keep his nasty food in his own country? We should do a deal better without it over here. If folks would be content with wholesome

home-grown stuff they wouldn't get half the bad diseases they do. Look at this influenzy: 'tis all brought over in the foreign food. You don't know what you are eating nowadays, and farming is just being throttled by everything coming in free! The wonder is enough fools can be found to take the land, seeing every year we've more difficulty in making a living out of it."

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Notwithstanding these vaticinations, Farmer Pinmarsh, with others as shrewd and industrious as himself, continues to lay by a trifle, and to lack meanwhile none of the necessaries and few of the comforts of life. Nevertheless it is true that large fortunes can no longer be made by farming, and the last thirty years which have brought the labourer prosperity, his master has found lean. With them have departed much of the proverbial farmhouse abundance; this is seen now only on special occasions—at Christmas or Whitsuntide, when scattered families unite beneath the paternal roof. Then indeed, the board groans under the weight of good cheer; the turkey or fowls reserved to that purpose when the remainder were sold, will be sacrificed; cakes and pies will overflow from the farm oven to the village bakehouse, and one of the mighty hams, weighing 40 lb. and upwards, will be unslung from its hook and boiled—in the copper because the house contains no vessel large enough to hold it. Very excellent eating these hams are, rivalling if not excelling those of Yorkshire justly famed. In fact, the best I have ever tasted was cured by the following recipe—

Curing Hams.—When the weather permits, hang the ham three days; mix 1 oz. of saltpetre, ¼ lb. of bay salt, the same quantity of common salt and of coarse sugar, with two quarts of strong beer. Boil them all together and turn immediately

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upon the ham. If the latter be so large that the pickle seems inadequate, double the quantity of beer. Turn the ham in the pickle twice a day for three weeks, I oz. of black pepper and the same amount of allspice in fine powder added to the above will give it still more flavour. Cover the ham, when wiped, with bran and smoke from three to four weeks as you approve. The latter period will make it harder and give it more the flavour of Westphalian hams. These ingredients are only sufficient for one ham; if two are to be cured, double the quantities. If smoked by a strong fire, the ham should be sewn in coarse wrappering.

Mrs. Pinmarsh possesses some curious ancient recipes (of which she allowed me to copy a few) that have been handed down in her family for several generations. That given below—in modern terms for the convenience of my readers—she knows to be at least two hundred years old. It came to her from her great-aunt who died at the advanced age of ninety-three, and the latter in her turn received it from her grandmother.

Christmas Pudding.—2 lb. of raisins, stoned, 2 lb. of currants, 2 lb. of suet, 1½ lb. of flour, ½ lb. of bread crumbs, 2¾ lb. of sugar, ¼ lb. of chopped candied peel, 8 eggs, and 1 quart of milk. Mix all the ingredients together and let them stand during the night in order to swell the bread. Then if too stiff, add a little more milk. Turn in a glass of

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brandy and boil for four hours, and one hour before sending to the table.

In making the above it should be remembered, as the farmer's wife pointed out to me, that in old days a pudding of this description would probably be boiled in a cloth and would therefore require a shorter period than one boiled in a mould. She allows at least eight hours, being well aware, good housekeeper as she is, that a plum-pudding's excellence depends scarcely less on the manner and time of its cooking, than on the material of which it is made. This fact was amusingly demonstrated at the Diamond Jubilee. We celebrated it by a gala day in which a public dinner played an important part according to the orthodox English fashion. The puddings were entrusted to the various better-class housewives of the village, who were each supplied with an equal amount of raw material. When the manufactured articles were marshalled ready for the table, it was seen that they ranged in colour from light fawn to a rich brown that was almost black. There was no urgent demand for the pale uninviting-looking dumplings, and the chagrined makers broke forth into indignant remonstrances, declaring that the original ingredients of the others must have been largely supplemented to have produced such different results. They could with difficulty be persuaded that these were solely due to more lengthened periods of boiling.

Not every one is aware that a wine said to be

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excellent, resembling Frontiniac, can be made from elder-flowers. My recipe does not boast the antiquity of that for Christmas pudding, being only a hundred and twenty years old.

Elder-Flower Wine.—Boil 6 lb. of white sugar and 3 lb. of raisins of the sun, chopped, in 3 gallons of water for one hour. Take half a peck of the flowers of elder, just fading: put them into the liquor when it is cold. The following day put in the juice of two large lemons and two tablespoonfuls of good yeast: let it stand covered for two days, strain off and tun in a clean cask: put the bung in lightly for a fortnight, then to every gallon of liquor add one pint of Rhenish. Stop the cask tightly and let the wine stand six months.

Yet another ancient recipe is that for yam, or, if preferred, banana pudding.

Yam Pudding.—Boil 2 lb. of yams until they are tender, and rub them quite smooth. Beat up the yolks of 8 and the whites of 4 eggs, with ½ pint of cream and ½ lb. of creamed butter. Add ½ lb. of sugar, a wineglass of sack, a wineglass of brandy, some grated nutmeg. Mix all well together and steam for one hour or bake in a dish.

The following for stuffed loin of mutton was given to me by an elderly lady whose grandmother had made use of it, so that it probably dates back to the middle of the eighteenth century.

Take a loin of mutton, have it boned and the skin removed, rub it with a gill of red wine, a tablespoonful

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of moist sugar, the same quantity of salt, a teaspoonful of black pepper, and a tablespoonful of mixed spice. Lay it open in a pan and pour over it a gill of red wine and a gill of vinegar. Let the mutton remain in the pickle two days. Prepare a in

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forcemeat of thyme, marjoram, sweet basil and the rind of half a lemon—all chopped very fine—2 oz. of beef suet or fat bacon chopped up, and ¼ lb. of bread crumbs; season with pepper and salt; mix all the forcemeat together with the yolk of an egg. Spread the seasoning over the inside of the loin of mutton, roll this up tightly, and sew it together with a needle and whitey-brown thread. Place it in a stewpan, turn in the pickle, add a little Worcestershire sauce, some browning and sufficient plain stock to enable the liquor to cover the meat: put in two onions stuck with cloves, some celery seed in a muslin bag, a stick of cinnamon and a tablespoonful of mushroom catsup. Stew gently

for three hours. Lift the meat on to a dish, strain the gravy through a sieve into a jar and let it remain until the fat can be all skimmed off. Then put back the gravy into the pan; add a teacupful of red wine, thicken with flour, put in the meat, make all hot, and serve with red-currant jelly.

I should recommend any one who tries the above to use Burgundy for the red wine and arrowroot instead of flour to thicken the gravy. A few raspings may be grated over the meat before it is sent to table. Mountain-ash instead of red-currant jelly is very good with this dish.

Those who like something richer than rolled loin of mutton can try an old French recipe for a dish called farce of veal.

Take 2 lb. of lean veal, 2 anchovies, and the

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yolks of 2 hard-boiled eggs; 6 pickled or fresh mushrooms; 1 2 oysters; some sweet herbs and lemon peel, both chopped; 1 teaspoonful of mixed spice. Mix the ingredients—except the veal—well together with the yolks of two raw eggs. Take a veal caul and lay on it some very thin slices of fat bacon: on these place the veal, and above that the forcemeat. Roll all up in the caul, skewer, and bake for one hour. Cut in slices and serve with good brown gravy and garnished with lemon.

Years ago, ere the sons and daughters left their father's roof for homes of their own, and when agriculture was more lucrative than at present, the Pinmarshes' farm was the scene of many jovial gatherings. There were hay parties and harvest-homes, cherry teas and Whitsuntide feasts, while at Christmas high revel was held. The lasses and lads from neighbouring; farms were bidden, and arrived amid the darkness of the winter evening, the former resplendent in best bib and tucker, the latter awkwardly conscious of Sunday clothes, with hair and faces shining from recent ablutions. A solemn stiffness befitting the little-used apartment pervaded the company when it assembled in the best parlour. The men clung bashfully together near the fireplace, exchanging remarks upon the weather, the state of the crops, the prospects of the lambing season, in voices rendered husky by damp and shyness; the girls, demure and self possessed, sat in a semicircle round the room conversing with decorous

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primness on equally absorbing topics of a domestic nature. The announcement that supper was ready, caused a visible thaw. Henceforth the business of the evening would be conducted on well-defined lines; each guest knew what would be expected of him or her, the first duty being the consumption of as large a part as possible of the viands prepared. The meal, overpowering in its abundance to one whose appetite had not been previously sharpened by country air and exercise, was spread in the kitchen, which was decorated with holly and evergreens. Above the centre of the table depended a large bunch of mistletoe, and this by pointing many a jest and furnishing the theme for divers sly allusions, served as an effective aid to conversation. Supper banished shyness, loosened the most unready tongue, and set laughter free until the blackbeamed ceiling rang again. But it was when the feast was ended, and the table was pushed into one corner, that the real fun began.

In those days healthy young men and maidens left cards to their elders; such energetic pastimes as country dances, blind man's buff and hunt the slipper accorded better with their simple active life. Their mirth though noisy was innocent, and if a kiss or two were snatched beneath the mistletoe during the hurly-burly, the offence as a rule was speedily condoned by the insulted damsel, who accepted the reasonableness of her swain's argument that it would be "nothen but a waste fur

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Farmer Pinmarsh to hang up that fine bough if no use weren't made on it."

Two ceremonies interrupted the games, and gave the players time to restore exhausted nature. The first was the appearance of a flaming bowl of snapdragon which elicited shrieks from the girls, and provoked the lads to deeds of daring in the struggle for the largest number of raisins, these being subsequently offered on Cupid's altar by each youth to his own bright particular star. The second interruption was the arrival of the Mummers—King George, the Doctor, white horse, and all—of whom a poor remnant still survives in the village. They regularly received a previous hint from the farmer that they would be welcomed on these occasions, and as regularly expressed their regret at intruding when "Maister had got comp'ny," which little piece of politeness was considered an essential part of the programme. The party broke up in the small hours of the morning, and departed to their various homes, after partaking of hot punch brewed by Mr. Pinmarsh as he sat in his armchair watching the young folks.

He seldom brews punch nowadays: save when a neighbour drops in, there is no one but himself to enjoy it, and it is dull work, he says, drinking alone. He finds the house quiet compared to what it formerly was; he wishes "the children could ha' bid always young," and when his wife meets these remarks by the question of where he thinks "the

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world 'ud be, if you could have your way," he replies with a twinkle "I reckon 'twould still be where 'tis, on'y mebbe ther' 'udn't be sa many folks in't. Leastways, 'twould be the poorer by your grandchildren, as you thinks sa much on."

To Mrs. Pinmarsh's hay-parties only children were invited. The chief feature of the entertainment was a syllabub which she prepared herself from one of her old recipes. After tea and games among the hay, the little visitors were seated in a half-circle, and each was supplied with a saucer and a spoon. Every eye would then be turned in the direction of the yard, whence ere long Mrs. Pinmarsh would be seen coming towards the field, bearing a large china bowl, and various other impedimenta. Behind her solemnly marched the fogger leading the "best" cow—the one, that is, which gave the richest milk. The procession halted on the chord of the half-circle, and the rite commenced amid profound silence. Into the bowl was turned a bottle of home-brewed ale, deemed by the careful hostess more suited to youthful consumers than red or white wine. Then came sugar, white and sparkling, and as fine as sifting could make it; nutmeg followed, grated while the guests looked on, and now there remained but to add the crowning glory. While the fogger—quite needlessly—held the quiet animal, that gazed about her mildly with a wondering eye, Mrs. Pinmarsh drew the sweet warm milk, until it frothed high

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in the bowl. The syllabub was ladled into saucers thrust forth by impatient hands, and, the ceremony ended, the cow was led back to the yard to resume her ordinary routine until hay time came round again. A favourite present-day form of summer entertainment is a cherry tea, the order of which is as follows: A number of friends and neighbours are bidden—the old proverb holding good at such times—and are conducted to a cherry orchard, where they are invited to gather and consume as much of the fruit as seems advisable to each individual. They subsequently repair to the farmhouse for tea, which

proceeding, in view of the afternoon's occupation, seems to partake of the character of a work of supererogation.

This part of the county is famed for its cherries, and grows them to a large extent. Formerly, the fruit was gathered by the occupier of the orchard, and sold to small dealers, who came in their carts from Newbury, Hungerford, Marlborough, and other distant towns, and if the villager were early astir on these occasions, he could purchase cherries—the choicest of them—at twopence per pound. Now however the orchards are sold en bloc, and the wholesale customer engages his own men to gather and pack the fruit.

When the berries are ripening, the sound of guns is heard from sunrise to sunset.

"It is like living in a besieged place," a new comer remarked; men or boys being stationed in

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every orchard to fire at the birds, who otherwise would leave little fruit to come to the hammer.

The following cherry story, if not true, is at least *ben trovato*. Mr. A, a man of substance in the neighbourhood, and the owner of several orchards, conceived a fancy many years since to visit Paris. Thither accordingly he journeyed, and seeing one day during his perambulations some fine cherries exposed for sale in a shop window, he went in and inquired the price. They were a franc a pound—a sum the farmer thought excessive. "But they are English," explained the proprietor. This aroused Mr. A's curiosity, and he asked from what part of England they came. "From a place called Berkshire," was the reply. Further investigation showed that they were the product of the village where he lived, probably from one of his own orchards. The story does not say whether he bought them back at more than three times the amount for which he sold them!

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Chapter VIII

NOT long ago I met in one of my walks a village matron who, after exchanging with me the usual greetings, and the inevitable remarks on the iniquities of the weather, launched into an animated description of a sad loss her small poultry establishment had recently sustained.

"Yes, I kips a few fowl," said she—"they be sich good comp'ny wi' their crowin' an' chucklin', let alone the eggs comin' handy to save the bacon. Larst 'ear I hatched out five beautiful chicken as ever you sin, an' I bred 'um up fine till a wik agoo. But one marnin' our Pete, as he led in bed, yeard a terr'ble clutterin' and row among the fowl, so up a gets an' out a goes to see what 'twur about. We'd noticed a greyhound a-brivettin' round the place the wik afoor; he hadn't simmed to touch nothink then, but if you believe me, the marnin' as Pete went out ther' wur that dog! He'd hucked one o' the chicken right out o' the coob an' yutted 'un full an' wholly, all save two or three o' his tail feathers—sich a strutty little torn he wur! He fot another an' finished he, an' a wur just comin' back fur a third when Pete caught 'un an' larned 'un summat.

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I reckon he wun't get mouchin' round our place agen in a hurry! I'd put up a boord in front o' the coob to shun dogs and foxes an' sich, but he'd manage to scamble it away; an' the chicken that wur left, wur that frowtened they flod away right on to the roof o' their house. They've simmed afeard to goo inside sence, fur fowls be cur'ous craturs, and knows moor'n arra-one 'ud think." I could fully indorse my garrulous old friend's statement that fowls were "cur'ous craturs." When my sister Jennie and I were schoolgirls we had charge of the poultry, and if the vagaries of our hens caused us infinite trouble, at least they afforded us plenty of amusement. Their independence and obstinacy were phenomenal: seldom would they condescend to lay in the boxes we provided, choosing rather some remote and inaccessible spot behind a pile of faggots, or buried deep in a clump of ivy.

To stalk them to these stolen nests became an exciting pastime that demanded skill and caution, since if the enemy once caught sight of us, our game was lost; and many of our play hours we employed thus on sunny spring and summer afternoons. Often our labour was in vain, the hen we selected being bent upon anything rather than laying; but the hope of finding treasure-trove in the shape of a dozen or fourteen eggs, spurred us on to further efforts. One fowl, I remember, would persist in making her way upstairs to a bedroom—an easy thing to do in summer when the house

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doors were left open—and depositing her egg on the bed, or on the dressing-table where she was one day discovered, preening her feathers before the looking glass.

Equally fastidious were our unruly fowls about the choice of a place wherein to sit. One broody hen remained for more than twenty-four hours doggedly standing over the eggs because they were not located to her fancy, and she adopted this method of expressing her determination to resist coercion. When two hens conceived a liking for the same nest, a fierce contest for the sole right of possession would ensue, resulting in the utter destruction of the eggs. Sometimes, however, these quarrelsome birds would sink private differences in the cause that appealed to their highest instincts, as when a couple of broody matrons sat amicably side by side on the one setting of eggs and by their joint exertions succeeded in hatching out a healthy brood. Another time five—crowded into one small nest—were endeavouring, with more zeal than wisdom, to kindle the vital spark in a china nest-egg.

A barndoor fowl shows to best advantage when she is engrossed by the cares and anxieties of a family. There are few prettier or more touching sights than that of a hen gathering her little ones about her at bedtime and settling down for the night. The tiny sleepy creatures tuck themselves away beneath her ample wings, until the wonder

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grows how she can find room for so many. Presently a fluffy head emerges from her feathers, and a chick, looking round with its bright eyes, bids the world a last good night before retiring; or another infant, more adventurous, scales laboriously its mother's vast bulk, until it achieves a proud position on the summit. There it cuddles, but not for long; sleep overtakes it, and it slips to the ground. Undaunted it mounts again to meet a similar fate, and learning wisdom by experience, it seeks a humbler yet securer resting place among its brothers and sisters. Gradually the little ones' contented thrills subside; the hen's low happy duckings die away, and the peaceful family nestle closer together as they fall into silence and slumber.

Ducks in quite their early stage are even more delightful, I think, than chickens. Their beady black eyes, their droll wise air, their little busy bills for ever dibbling among the grass or in any available pool of water, no matter how dirty this be, render them quaintly attractive. Later, when their yellow down gives place to half-grown feathers, they have a ragged disreputable appearance, very different from their full-fledged sleek whiteness.

A shallow pond shaded by a row of horse chestnuts, lies near the centre of the Pinmarshes' orchard, and when the ducklings are sufficiently advanced in age and strength, their coop is moved from the fowlyard to the field, and they are formally introduced to their native element. There they dive and swim

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almost within sight of their foster-mother, who, stretching her neck as far as possible between the bars of her cage, maintains throughout the day an incessant cackle of expostulation and entreaty, of reproach at their desertion, which fails to produce the slightest effect. The callous youngsters love the pond, and are in no humour to quit its weedy joys until evening and feeding time recall them. Then, but not before, they waddle solemnly home again—a string of old heads on young shoulders—glad to accept the solicitude they once despised, and to seek warmth and safety beneath the hen's sheltering wings.

The orchard is a pleasant place: late winter sees

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the ground in the corner beneath the hedge, yellow with aconites that gleam like stars among the grass. Spring, the enchantress, covers it with a dome of snow through which the sunshine falls, dappling the turf with spots of intense light. Among the fruit trees graze a few calves or a stray sheep, for the flocks are folded on outlying arable lands, and the cows feed in the low pastures of the vale. The latter are driven down each morning, returning to the homestead at night to be milked by the master who puts on a long white linen coat called a cowgown, to protect his clothes from defilement when busied in the yard among the livestock. The air of the milking shed is heavy with the fragrant breath of the cows, as they stand in their stalls patiently waiting to be disburdened of their load, and turning gentle questioning eyes on the farmer who passes to and fro—a ghostly figure in the dim light. Since he took to milking he tells me that he has ceased to suffer from chilled or chapped hands, and he displays them with some pride, claiming that despite his other rough work they are as smooth as “the missus's.”

When his grandchildren whom he goes nearer spoiling than does his wife, are staying at the farm, they are allowed to suck up the warm milk through a clean straw from the frothing pails, and upon occasion to try their skill at milking. It is not often they succeed in extracting more than a few drops, and the farmer laughs and strokes the

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cows, declaring that they know a strange hand, and that no one can get through the job as quickly as himself—not even the foop-er who feeds them.

Adjoining the cowhouses are well-littered sties where fattening hogs, by which the great hams are supplied, lead a brief existence of sybaritic ease. They are seldom seen in public, preferring the luxurious seclusion of the inner sty, whence their small feet and inadequate legs can with difficulty support their unwieldy carcases the short journey to and from the feeding troughs.

A striking contrast to these serene mountains of flesh is the lean-flanked sow next door. Round her swarm her numerous progeny that now launch themselves with clamorous demands upon their resigned and blinking mother, now disperse over the sty, grunting, squealing, quarreling and poking their impudent little black snouts into every nook and cranny. Nature commits a fatal error in denying them the gift of perpetual youth. Hard fate, from a little pig to become a big one! Not only to lose day by day something of the infantine grace given at birth, but to develop ugliness and vice out of all proportion to that grace! To embody in short everything that is least desirable in character and appearance!

There is an utter lack of dignity about these animals that makes them at times irresistibly comic. During one of my solitary walks I came across a number of piglets in a remote strawyard, that had

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evidently never seen a woman before. My appearance drove them almost crazy with alarm. They stampeded wildly about the yard, seeking some way of escape, and squeaking to the full power of their lungs. Finally, unable to sustain longer the fearsome sight, they buried their heads in the straw, leaving their hindquarters to view, agitated by convulsive tremors. I afterwards paid them a second visit, hoping to produce a similar sensation; by this time, however, their fear of woman had somewhat abated, and they indulged in none of their former delightful antics. Their yard was overrun by rats that, unlike the pigs, emerged from their shelters and went about their business quite regardless of my presence, two engaging in an obstinate fight which left one of the combatants torn and bleeding. Sad havoc had they wrought in the adjacent stacks, which were riddled with large holes, the thatch being literally ploughed up. Yet the men say

rats are less mischievous than mice, for the latter, not content with merely satisfying their hunger, waste and destroy the grain that they cannot eat. A week or two after my visit to the solitary strawyard a rat hunt was organized in which 1 20 were killed. “'Twur just about a fine bit o' fun,” quoth one of the sportsmen. “Us wur sheenin' up ther an' saw the rats a-cuttin' about the place same a-sif he belonged to they; so us got some wire-nettin', fixed 'un round the ricks, druv 'um all up into a earner, and went in among 'um wi' sticks.

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Us killed 'um right an' left.” The proceeding seemed to me to smack of coldblooded massacre, but I suppose vermin are considered outside the pale of fair play.

“The 'oomans didn't much like it,” he continued, “'cause faymales, luk'ee, be allus frowtened at mice an' sichlike, but we men just about joyed ourselves, an' seeing maister 'lowed we a penny a-piece fur every one as we killed, us didn't do sa bad that arternoon.”

Some farmers, with shortsighted economy, refuse to pay a trifling premium for the destruction of these mischievous creatures; when this is the case the labourers' zeal is apt to slacken. “Let 'un goo, he be on'y a water rat,” they will say (in allusion not to the animal's species, but the fact that its death will help them to nothing stronger than water!) when they see one about the premises of a niggardly employer. Battues like that described, occur, as a rule, when the rats' strongholds are in course of demolition to feed the thrashing machine, the farm hands gladly availing themselves of the opportunity for legitimate, not to say profitable sport, afforded by the intervals of dinner and “nunchin,” or “doobit.” Lest the two last terms cause the uninitiated some perplexity, I may explain that they are the local names by which are known the bite and sup taken during the short rest between six o'clock breakfast and noonday dinner, and again in the course of the afternoon.

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“Sheening,” though a thirsty employment, is not unpopular. It is a variation of the ordinary farm routine; it means increased pay always, extra beer sometimes; and besides the excitement of mice and rat hunts, it offers exceptional facilities for the interchange of gossip. Both sexes are represented, and as the workpeople are occupied within a small area, items of local interest, scraps of scandal, opinions on men and manners can

be shouted across from the diminishing wheat rick to its rising straw companion, and up from the engine to the box, while the work goes merrily forward to the machine's droning song.

What a pleasant sound is that song! Heard on a still autumn day when the sunshine is sleeping on the hills, and the trees have doffed their green robes for russet garb or golden, it tunes its note to the pensive landscape and floats in melancholy cadence over the deserted fields—stripped to supply the burden of the music. In the sweet springtide, when the world is wakening to new life, it seems to hum more cheerily and to echo the promise given when time was young, that while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, summer and winter shall not fail.

Thrashing by hand, though for some years out of date, is now coming into fashion again: so at least I was told as I stood watching two of Farmer Pinmarsh's men wielding their flails opposite each other, on the boarded space between the doors

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of the "tithe barn." They stayed their rhythmic swing to explain that "a smart few maisters has bee-uns flailed nowadays, 'cause if they be put through the machine the straw gets that bruk about, it ben't o' much use on fur the ship." They begged me politely, to try my skill with the flail, assuring me that it was "easy anuff to do when onst arra-one wur usted to 't." I declined the offer, being mindful of an evil reputation this agricultural instrument enjoys for flying round and dealine the amateur thrasher a shrewd and unexpected crack upon the head. The barn in which the two men were working was that wherein the parson used formerly to store his tithe (hence its name) when this was paid in kind. There is a story current in the village that a certain woman—the mother of nine—heard of the rector's claim to a tenth part of the livestock, and on the arrival of her next infant she promptly had it conveyed to the parsonage as her contribution to his income! Seeing however that she refused to tithe aught more profitable than her own children, the baby was returned. In another case the clergyman actually did adopt the tenth child of a parishioner, and brought up and educated the boy at his own expense.

The “tithe barn” is a noble building, long and lofty, having two sets of double doors that project like a porch, and a high-pitched timbered roof. These great barns are a feature of the district, and were built for the storage of the corn which is grown

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about here so largely. The majority are made of tarred or painted planks overlapping one another, and are provided with wide entrances capable of admitting a loaded wagon or the box of a thrashing machine. Opposite these doors are others giving access to the farmyard, and between them is a stretch of boarded floor—the rest of the barn being paved with bricks—where thrashing by flail, winnowing and chaff cutting are carried on. The two last employments are particularly distasteful to the men. Winnowing necessitates a draught and is regarded as an infallible recipe for the acquisition of colds, “the rheumatiz,” “brantitus,” and other kindred evils. Chaff cutting, though not attended by this disadvantage, is laborious work, involving a heavy strain on certain muscles. Despite the fact that it often means higher pay, good wives begin to feel aggrieved and to talk of the injury to their husbands' health if the latter are kept at it longer than three months running, and soldier sons write home from abroad—as I have read—to say: “I was very glad to hear that father don't go to chaff cutting now, for it is very hard work and tirding, and I shold be very glad if I was 'im.”

When any local or national festivity takes place a barn is swept, its usual contents are thrust out of sight, and the walls and wooden pillars supporting the roof are decorated with evergreens. At Whitsuntide, during the feast a rustic dance is held here, at which young and old foot it on the boarded

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floor. The music is supplied by native talent, and consists of a dulcimer, a concertina, and a flute or violin whose quaint tinkle-tankle adds to the archaic character of the proceeding. Youth and age at such times appear to reverse their parts, for while the passing generation plunges recklessly “down the middle and up again,” amid racy comment and jovial laughter, the children trip through the barn dance with a gravity that matches their grace, and young men and maidens perform the redowa together wearing an air of solemnity which would become a funeral. A certain rigorous etiquette prevails at these functions: it would be considered the height of impropriety for a girl to take her partner's arm, but the latter would be deemed singularly lacking in gallantry if he

relinquished his clasp of her waist during a pause in the dance A stranger from another sphere of life, having strayed into a gathering like that I am describing, transgressed this code of manners, and to his amazement found his conduct regarded as a deliberate insult and his arm indignantly refused by outraged modesty.

In some villages it is the custom to bring the feast week to a close by a second dance on the last evening: this, in local phraseology, is styled “pinning up” the feast, and the process attracts many visitors from the surrounding villages. I have been often told that Mary or Em'ly Jane is gone to “pin up the feast” at such and such a place; and much

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perplexed I was at first by this mysterious expression.

For a harvest supper, tables are set down the length of the barn and all the hands on the farm, together with their wives, are invited. The repast, in which beef and mutton, bread and cheese and beer, figure on an ample scale, is of course the main feature of the entertainment; when this important and lengthy business has been discussed, the lighter items on the programme follow. Pipes are lighted, glasses replenished, speeches and songs are delivered. I say “delivered” advisedly in connection with the latter, which are, for the most part, ancient ditties, scarce fit for repetition here, treating of the follies and sorrows of too-confiding village maidens. They number from ten to a dozen verses, supplemented by a chorus in which the women join unabashed, and are trolled forth by the singer with a seriousness of demeanour suggestive of anything rather than mirth.

Harvest-homes unhappily have almost gone out of fashion, many farmers preferring to give their men an extra half-crown in lieu of a supper. The people regret the change and say that “us poor folks helps to gather in the earn, an' it 'ud sim moor like joyin' overt all together if the guvnor 'ud sit down wi' us an' have a jolly evening like 'um usted to do.”

It cannot be doubted that these social gatherings help to promote good relations between master and

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man, if only by the gratification they afford the latter, who regards them as a recognition of the share he has borne in sowing, reaping, and garnering the fruits of the earth.

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Chapter IX

THE majority of the older farm buildings are roofed with thatch, which is always picturesque, both when it shines in the freshness of new straw, and when age has adorned its dulled surface with cushions of bright green or goldenbrown moss. Though building byelaws intervene, and this form of covering for houses and mud walls be forbidden, the art of thatching will survive while its services are required by hay and wheat ricks. The thatcher, as a skilled labourer, one moreover who must needs employ a woman or boy to aid him in his work, is a person of some importance among our little community. Nor was his consequence abated by a visit he lately paid to a neighbouring county which, unable presumably to supply its own needs in this respect, was obliged to have recourse to the Berkshire village or suffer leaking roofs. Giles was absent a few weeks from his native air; on his return he declared that he had just about "joyed hisself," but that he did not think "much o' them parts down yonder, and

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that he 'udn't ha' bid ther' altergither not fur whativer."

He lives almost opposite the Pinmarshes' farm, in one of two cottages which stand back from the street and are separated from each other by a low privet hedge. A brother and sister named Hatton occupied at one time the companion house; indeed, the brother lives there still, but under circumstances rather different from those of former days. It was during the spring preceding the last Jubilee year, that an event occurred to change the current of his life, till then so tranquil. Several months elapsed ere his sister learnt the nature of the disturbing element, but that something was wrong with Levi, his restlessness, his preoccupied manner and above all, the extraordinary falling off in his appetite, plainly showed. This last symptom gave Leah serious ground for anxiety. "Picks his food a do, like a sick hen—him that were allus sa spry wi' his knife an' fork an' ate up his vittels sa sweet," said she, when discussing the matter with the thatcher over the hedge already mentioned.

"Mebbe he've got a touch o' this year naesty infooenzy as be about: he did ought to see the doctor an' goo on the club fur a spell," counselled the latter, which well meant advice was the last Levi intended to follow. He was quite aware of the hopelessness of his malady; he knew the very day and hour when first it laid its grip upon him, and had he at this time been capable of merriment,

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he would have laughed in his sleeve at the notion that doctor's stuff would avail in a case like his.

The trouble arose through an umbrella—thus are momentous results ofttimes the work of insignificant factors. Not that this could, strictly speaking, be called insignificant, either as regarded size or hue, its capacity for shelter being vast, its tint a wondrous shade of peacock-blue, produced by the united efforts of sun and rain upon the original colour. The umbrella, owing to the persistence with which Leah thrust its company upon him whenever there happened to be a cloud in the sky, was one of the burdens of Levi's life; the other was his sister's inability to realize the fact that he had left boyhood some distance behind. Leah who was many years his senior, had brought him up from birth, and still "did" for him; he was now five and twenty, but she treated him as if he were five, scolding him, exacting implicit obedience, fussing over his health in season and out, until the bond of awe and affection which held him to her, was strained almost to snapping. Had she confined her attentions to the privacy of their own hearth, he would have found them less irksome. When it came, however, to her leaving the dinner to cook itself one showery Sunday morning, in order that she might pursue him into church with great-coat and umbrella, thus exposing him to the ridicule of the congregation and herself to the wrath of the parson for disturbing the service, such solicitude

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was more than masculine flesh and blood could bear. The affair caused a distinct coolness between brother and sister. Levi even ventured to show signs of revolt, and though Leah fondly believed she had extinguished the feeble spark, it smouldered within to gather fresh force and break out later.

April was full young and uncertain, spoilt child that she was, whether to smile or sulk, when Levi one morning sat eating his "nunchin'" on the raised chalk path which ran like a white ribbon athwart the brown upland. A fragrant steam—"the smell of a field that the Lord hath blessed"—arose from the newly turned earth. Over wide fallow and green stretches of corn, a wind with a memory of March in its crispness, was blowing, ruffling thickened buds and rioting among great fleecy clouds which raced like flying snowdrifts across the pure azure, and cast swift shadows on the distant slopes of the downs. Here and there, fitful gleams of sunlight quickened the woods from purple to gold, and

stealing between the tree-trunks, kissed the shy flowers which were beginning to peep from the leaves shaken over them last autumn by friendly boughs. All things, from the ringdove cooing among the ragged firs of the parson's garden, to the primrose beside the brook, spoke of youth and hope, of love and life; and over Levi also, spring cast her magic spell. A vague discontent with his present uncoloured existence, a craving after he knew not what, stirred within him as he gazed at the long

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straight furrows which the plough had cleft under his hand.

“All on 'um alike; no moor diff'rence betwixt to-day an 'issterday than ther' be betwixt the last furrow I druv an' the one I be gwine to drive,” he muttered; “an' termorrow, I s'pwose, 'ull be just the same.”

Alas for his prognostications! when next he sat eating his lunch on the bank, the world wore a wholly changed aspect. I have already spoken of the path across the fields; it led from the village to Cateswick, and though it was shorter by nearly a mile than the Turnpike, the latter, where mothers hung round with parcels and small children, ran a chance of securing a lift in wagon or cart, was the more popular route. When, on this particular morning, a strange voice accosted Levi, it was sufficient of an event to cause him to drop his clasp-knife in surprise.

“Bags your pardon, miss, but what did 'ee say?” he inquired, recovering his knife, but losing his wits as he found himself confronted by a girl in a fresh cotton frock, with a coquettish knot of pink ribbon at her throat.

“Is this the way to Cateswick?” she repeated.

Levi stared hard at her before replying. She was undoubtedly pretty, and there was a saucy glint in her eye which reminded him of the young green corn when it is playing in the sunshine with the breeze.

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“Oo, aye,” he answered at length, “you can get to Cateswick by this year road, but 'tis a fairish twisty 'un, an' easy to lose.”

“How far is it?”

“It med be three mile or it med be a bit furder.”

“Three miles! I shall never walk so far. See, it's going to rain, too.”

"That's like anuff," he agreed, casting a weatherwise look at a black cloud which was hurrying towards them from the south-west.

"Oh, dear, it's beginning already!" cried she, as a swollen drop fell on her hand. "I must go to the town to fetch my aunt's medicine, and I shall be wet through in this thin frock. What shall I do?"

"Bide under my umbereller till the shower 's past," suggested Levi with a flash of inspiration, as he unfurled the hated object which Leah had tied to his basket that morning. The girl glanced doubtfully from the snug shelter beneath the bank to the overcast sky, but a quick patter of rain decided her to accept his offer together with a corner of his overcoat which he had spread for a cushion.

"You'll be drowned there; come under the umbrella," she said, as he seated himself bashfully at a distance, and he obeyed, uncertain whether pleasure or embarrassment were his predominant sensation.

For some moments the two sat side by side in silence, warm and dry, while the patient plough horses stood with drooping heads and depressed ears, facing the shower. Then,

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"I reckon you be a stranger in these year parts?" hazarded Levi, curiosity conquering shyness.

"Yes, I've never been here afore."

"An' wher med you be staying, miss, if I med mek' sa bold?"

"With my aunt, yonder"; she nodded her head in the direction of the village.

"What did 'ee say as your aunt wur called?"

She peeped roguishly at him, but answered in demure tones, "I don't remember that I mentioned her name."

"Oh!" He shrank into silence again, wondering why her mischievous eyes affected him so strangely.

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It was now her turn to investigate. "I suppose you live yonder?" she asked.

"Aye, I've bid ther' ever sence I wur' barned: no doubt but what I shall die ther' when my time comes, pl'ase God."

"Was your wife born there, too?"

This innocent question reduced the young-man to a state of pitiable confusion.

"I ha'n't got narra missus," he stammered.

"P'raps you don't care for such silly things as girls?"

"I've never thought much about 'um; Leah be the on'y ooman as I've had much to do wi'," he replied in all simplicity.

His sister's name led to fresh interrogatories on the part of the winsome stranger, and before the shower ceased and the sun shone once more, she had gleaned all the details of his family history—how his mother had died at his birth within a few weeks of her husband; how Leah had toiled and scraped to support herself and the child, as well as to provide him with a little "schoolin'"; how her temper was "a bit werryin' now an' agen, but I must put up wi't, 'ee knaw, seein' what she ha' done fur ma."

"We've all on us to put up with something," remarked the girl with an air of profound philosophy, as she rose to continue her walk. "Thank you kindly for the shelter, Mr. Hatton, an' I wish you good day."

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"The weather looks wunnerful catchy; ther' 'ull be moor rain by'n-bye. You'd best tek the umbereller wi' you," he said, clutching at an excuse to renew the acquaintanceship, for he was quite sure of his feelings by this time.

"If you can spare it, I shall be much obliged. I shan't be gone long, an' seein' you'll be at work till nearly three o'clock, I reckon you'll be here when I come back this way. Good-bye," and she tripped along the path, while he returned to his plough, marvelling in his simple soul how one short hour ago he could have found the world so dull. He whistled while he drove his furrows—not quite so straight and even as before—and when the rain which he had predicted, drove in his face, he only laughed and blessed the blue umbrella.

This lightsome mood, however, was but of short duration; it gave place to anxious perplexity when three o'clock brought no sign of his new friend. Reluctantly he tore himself from the fields, stabled his horses, and sought his home where dinner, cooked by Leah's careful hands, awaited him. During the remainder of the day he waited with eagerness, not free from trepidation, for a knock on the door, for a voice which he desired above all things to hear again; but he listened to no purpose, and it was little sleep he obtained that night. The loss of the blue umbrella also weighed on his mind: or

to be more accurate, the explanation of its loss. How could he confess to Leah that he had lent a possession

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by which she set such store, to a stranger—a girl of whose very name he was ignorant? And he cursed the blue umbrella which had placed him in this predicament.

Of course the next morning was wet; that was only to be expected. “Things allus do go contrary,” he muttered, adding aloud, “Never mind the umbereller, Leah; I'll fetch he and tie 'un to the baskut.”

She was not to be put off in this manner. “What did 'ee do wi' 'un 'issterday?” she inquired, “ten't in the earner wher' a mos'n gen'ly stands.”

“Dang the umbereller!” he cried, driven to bay, and resolved to carry the matter with a high hand. “I lost 'un, if you be sa set on knawin'. He be *lost*, that's wher' a be.”

“Lost! I'll lose you if sa be as you dwun't find un agen!”

“'Tis your fault; I didn't want the darned thing, but you 'ud mek ma tek 'un, an' how be I to see who goos along the path when half the time my back be turned? 'Tis all your doin', so you needn't to grizzle at ma, fur I wun't stan' it no longer,” and he marched out of the house, leaving his sister confounded by this unexpected turning of the docile worm. It was after the incident just narrated, that Levi began to exhibit the symptoms already described.

“I can't think what ails the bwoy,” said Leah, when pouring out her troubles to the thatcher

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across the hedge, “he ha'n't never bin the same sence the day the umbereller wur lost. You dwun't think as he be frettin' overt, do 'ee?”

The other, thus appealed to, rubbed his head reflectively. “It med be the hinfooenzy, as I telled 'ee afoor; or it med be—I dwun't goo fur to say as 'tis—but it med be as he be a-pinin' arter a young ooman. I've bin a married man meself, and I knows the feelin'”

“Goo alang wi' 'ee! Our Leve's never thinked sich a thought. You 'ull be sayin' as I'm pinin' arter a young man next.”

“Mebbe you be, an' mebbe you ben't,” was his cautious rejoinder, “but if he teks a missus, you 'ull be fur turnin' out, I reckon?”

"Never!" she cried, "never! Wher' he bides, I bide. I'd like to see the ooman as 'ud get me out o' my house."

"Mebbe a man 'ud do that job easier," quoth the thatcher, with a wink of unutterable meaning which she was at a loss to fathom.

A week passed, bringing Levi neither news of his missing property nor relief from his uneasy feelings. He was jogging homeward from the fields one day, seated sideways on one of his horses, when he heard his name called, and slipping to the ground he saw a trim figure, weighted with a large umbrella, running towards him.

"I saw you pass the house," panted the girl. "I'm very sorry, but I lost my way that day, an' I

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got wet, so that I've had a to stop indoors ever since with a cold; thank you for lendin' me" She faltered and paused as she met the young man's ardent gaze.

"I've looked everywheres for you, but I niver thought o' you stayin' in yon lone house."

"Did you think I had run oft with this?" she asked, laughing up into his face with the saucy look which stirred his pulses and made him catch his breath.

"That old rubbish! Bless 'ee, I niver gin nothink a thought 'cept you. So you're bidin' wi' Susan Prewett?"

"Yes, she is my aunt; she has been ill, an' I came to nurse her. I must go back now; please take your umbrella."

"No, you must kip he, 'cause, look 'ee, I telled my sister he wur lost, an' 'twud be a deal better fur me if 'twurn't never found agen. Will 'ee tek 'un home, miss, just to pleasure ma?"

The pleading in his voice was hard to resist, seconded as it was by the eloquence of his eyes. "I shall feel a thief if I keep it," said she, "but I will consider the matter over, an', if you like to step up some evenin', Mr. Hatton, I'll let you know what I think about it."

"You med tell ma your name," and he caught at her hand as she turned to leave him; "you med tell ma your name, so that I shall knaw what to call you to myself."

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"Mary—Polly—Flowers," she cried, speeding up the lane towards her aunt's house, while Levi started to catch his team that were making a bee line across country for their stables.

The first visit to the lone cottage was followed by a second and a third, until the young man and the maiden lost count of them. All through the "magic of May," and June's golden evenings, they paced the soft lanes together, jealously guarding their secret from the world without, and, it must be confessed, from Leah in particular.

Between hay-time and harvest, however, an untoward incident occurred, and again the blue umbrella was the disturbing agent. It happened that Giles was employed in thatching some hay ricks not far from Susan Prewett's house, and there being no other water available in which to soak his sprays, he appeared one day at her open kitchen door to ask if he might supply himself from her well. While he stood waiting for some one to answer his knock, his eye was caught by a familiar object, which, it being well within his reach, he examined at close quarters to make certain that it was no counterfeit. The same evening he informed Leah of the whereabouts of her missing treasure. The latter's indignation and surprise knew no bounds, although to be sure she always did say "that folks as kep' theirselves to theirselves, an' lived in lone cottages, mos'n gen'ly had a good reason fur so doin'."

Early the following morning she too paid Susan

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Prewett a visit, with the result of which she regaled Levi during his dinner. So absorbed was she by her story, that she failed to note the anger gathering in his eyes. The stony silence he maintained, his abrupt manner of quitting the house when he had finished his meal, above all his prolonged absence that evening, shook her self-complacency and instilled a disquieting doubt that there might possibly be some truth in the version Polly Flowers and her aunt had given of the affair.

For the first time in her life Leah found herself dreading her brother's return; for the first time since she had taken him, a tiny infant, from her dying mother's arms, she shrank before his gaze, as he paused on his way upstairs to give expression to some of the bitterness which consumed him.

"'Tis to be hoped as you're satisfite wi' your work," he said; "I've walked wi' Polly these three months, an' we was both on us as happy as two birds on one bough, but you've come betwixt us, an' she can't have no moor to doin' wi' me, she sez."

"Why didn't 'ee tell ma you'd gin she the umbereller, an' that you wur keepin' comp'ny together?"

"'Cause, God furgie ma, I wur afeared on 'ee, Leah; but you couldn't ha' done moor mishtiff if I'd a-telled 'ee everythink at the first, than you ha' done to-day."

The quiet words, the tone in which they were uttered, indicating a trouble too deep for recrimination,

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moved the hearer as the most passionate reproaches would have failed to do. Womanlike, she cast about for a victim on whom to vent the anger she felt against herself, and bethinking her of the thatcher's share in the business, she selected him as being near at hand and eminently suitable.

Not wishing either to afford entertainment to the neighbours, or a chance of retreat indoors to her adversary, she declined to engage him across the hedge, but called him into her own kitchen, where she had him at an advantage. Now, Giles, being a "widow man," had acquired some experience of what he termed "faymale huming natur'," and he was of opinion that if you only allowed "an ooman to blow her steam off long anuff, she 'ull get rid on't in time, an' what's left on her 'ull be as harmless as a truss o' straw." He applied his theory with excellent results on the present occasion, and sat serenely smoking his pipe while Leah "upset" him, removing it from time to time in order to ask whether she had "done yet."

"Sims to me," he began, when at length she ceased rather through lack of breath than of words—"sims to me as you med a mess on't altergether. Why couldn't 'ee ha' gone quiet an' civil to Susan who be a decent sort o' ooman, an' said you'd yeard she'd found your umbereller what wur lost? You wurn't obbligated to believe her story till you'd axed Levee if 'twur true, an' what's moor, you wurn't *obbligated* to call she an'

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Polly liars an' thieves. But ther, you faymales be sich chattermags!"

Leah's heart sank lower than before. Even the thatcher condemned her.

"What be I to do?" she sobbed. "Levee wun't spake to ma, an' goos to public every night o' his life. It 'ull break my heart, it 'ull, if that bwoy teks to drink."

"Aye, an' all along o' you," put in the other remorselessly.

"Oh! whativer can I do? He looks that mis'rubble I can't a-be'r to see un!"

"Goo to the gal an' say 'twur all a mistek, an' as how you'd tek it very kind o' she to kip comp'ny agen wi' Levee," suggested her adviser, watching through his half-closed lids the effect of this bitter pill.

"Niver! niver!" she cried. "I ben't agwine down on my knees to a chit like she."

"No, you'll let Levee goo to the devil instead," returned Giles dryly as he took his leave.

Despite the thatcher's apparent failure, his counsel stuck fast by Leah. For several months love and pride wrestled together within her bosom, but the sight of her nursling sinking daily deeper in the mire of evil habits stung her to action. Armed with the fateful umbrella, she sallied forth one tempestuous November day—for her decision once made, neither wind nor rain would stop her carrying it out as soon as possible—and was blown

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up the lane to the lone cottage which stood a mile or more from the village. Great was Susan Prewett's surprise to behold her visitor.

"Come in, come in, you must be through wet," she exclaimed, forgetting past insults, perhaps even guessing at the nature of the errand which had brought Levi's sister there in such weather.

Leah's carefully prepared speech died on her lips when she found herself thus welcomed, relieved of her soaked outer garments, and placed in the armchair near the fire with a cup of hot tea on the table beside her. She could only stammer between her tears fragments of sorrow and regret, which were more effective than a formal apology.

"My niece went home before harvest," said Susan in answer to the other's humble request; "she was too unhappy to bide in these parts any longer. I'll write an' give her your message, but it must be for her to decide, an' if I was you, I wouldn't mention it to your brother till you knows her mind. She's dearly fond o' him, but young girls ha' got their pride, an' sometimes that proves stronger nor their love."

"Tell her I'll try to be a kind sister to her an' not werry her as I've a-werried Levee," was Leah's parting remark as she stepped into the darkness of the autumn evening. On emerging from the shelter afforded by Susan's garden, the full force of the blast smote her and sent her staggering

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against the bank. She struggled on a few yards, only to be met by a second gust that buffeted her hither and thither, and after several futile attempts to wrench the umbrella from her hands, turned it, by way of revenge, inside out. The rain which smote her face like whipcord, the raging storm, the loneliness and gloom filled Leah's brave soul with dismay.

“Oh, lark! oh, lark! howiver shall I get home?” she cried; and out of the darkness came the answer in the thatcher's well known accents.

“Catch howldt o' me, I'll look arter 'ee.”

No sound could have been sweeter at that moment to her ears.

“Wher' be?” she asked, groping for him.

“Year, close to 'ee. So th' old umbereller's blowed wrong side out, be 'un? That's soon put right, luk 'ee; an' now you an' me can walk under 'un as snug as two bees in one flower.”

“How did 'ee know 'twur me?” inquired Leah, presently.

“Cause I sin 'ee come out o' the cottage. Thinks I, 'She 'ull never stand agenst this wind,' so I just bid a minute to wait fur 'ee.”

“Thank 'ee kindly, thatcher,” said the middleaged spinster, who was enjoying a novel sensation in being thus cared for.

“Aye, I sin 'ee come out o' the cottage, an' I wurn't a mossel surprised. I allus knawed as you'd a rale good heart under your werryin'

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tongue.” To which curious piece of anatomical information she vouchsafed no reply save to cling a trifle closer to the stalwart arm that supported her.

“Now, dwun't 'ee furget,” continued Giles, “that when they young folkses gets wed, ther 'ull be a place nex' dooer ready fur you, my dear, if sa be as you keers to tek 'un.”

Leah's self-abasement was not in vain. Levi

coming home moody and sullen to dinner one afternoon a week later, found his little sweetheart sitting by the fire, while his sister, her eyes blinded by tears, bent over the wash-tub in the “backplace.”

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Chapter X

THE village church lies beyond the Pinmarsh's house, in a green hollow set about with the chestnuts, elms and beeches of the parson's meadow, and bounded by the brook. The little grey fane, with its red-tiled chancel, leaded nave, and short square tower stands on the site of a wooden Saxon chapel, which bequeathed to its successor two ancient benches worn smooth by generations of worshippers, and still in use. The kernel of the present edifice to which the various stages of church architecture, from Norman to Perpendicular, contributed their share, was built "of stone," as the document sets forth in dog Latin, by a knight named William, who having performed this pious work quarrelled with the chaplain about the order of the services in quite present-day fashion. Then, as now, the dispute was referred to the Bishop of the diocese who settled it doubtless to the best of his ability; whether to the priest's or to the warrior's satisfaction history does not relate—probably to that of neither!

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Since its final completion the structure seems to have enjoyed a tranquil career, untouched by fire, tempest, or aught ruder than the sacrilegious hands of some misguided Parliamentarians, who struck off

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the crosses with which the roof of nave and chancel terminated.

It is a humble little sanctuary, but its small beams of charity have gone forth beyond the seas, to help to lighten some of earth's dark places. The Parish accounts, kept since the year 1603 with minute detail, show many such entries as the following: "Given to the French Protestants, three pounds and seven shillings" — a considerable sum in those days to be raised by such a small village.

"Given to y^{e} Poor Protestants forced from the Principality of Orange the 24th of April, 1704, £1-12-5." Again, "Given by the Parish for the relief of y^{e} Protestants in Great Poland, £1-3-11." One entry is of grim significance: "Collected in the Parish of — in the County of Berks for the Redemption of English Christians taken by the Turks." A long list of donations follows, ranging from ten shillings to fourpence—this last contributed by "Widow Kimber and her son"—and amounting to the sum total of £2-5-2."

A second collection was made for the "Captives in Turkey," who, with the Protestants abroad, seem to have peculiarly touched the hearts of the dwellers in our remote English village.

In October, 1666, "thirty-three shillings was collected for the relief of those Persons who have bin grt sufforers by the late sad Fire within the City of London," the gift being duly acknowledged by the "Lord Major" (!), whose duties appear,

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even in those days to have included the raising of Funds. It will be observed that the parish accountant's spelling and grammar are somewhat original.

Twelve years later the village, in compliance with a brief, sent their humble offering of 15*s*. 6*d*. to help swell the stream of charity by means of which the new "Cathedral Church of St. Paul, London," was raised from its predecessor's ashes, this item being one among many similar grants to churches needing pecuniary aid. Some of the collections, like the last, were under briefs; others, however, were purely voluntary, the villagers giving "graciously," as they themselves would call it, out of their poverty. Although in material things, their descendants have made progress since the days when the cry of the captives went up to heaven, along the path of charity they have, I fear, advanced but little.

Time which brings in its train such changes as Parish Councils, steam-rollers, and other kindred boons, while sparing the fabric of the church, has worked its will upon the interior. Square pews where "a body med sleep comfer'ble wi'out all the par'sh knawin' on't," have been swept away to make room for more public and less sleep-inducing seats; whitewashed walls have been coloured, ceilings removed, and various other modest ornaments and improvements introduced.

Some of these caused at first grave doubts in the minds of the people: the reredos, erected to conceal a

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strip of bare wall beneath the east window and sufficiently devoid of artistic merit to have satisfied the most rigorous Protestant, was particularly obnoxious; the characters Alpha and Omega, together with the unobtrusive cross with which it was adorned, being regarded as Popish symbols that had no part nor place in "our religion." The substitution of a heating apparatus for stoves with long black chimneys that soared upward to the

roof, was also viewed unfavourably, owing to the predilection pipes are known to entertain for bursting at ill-considered moments. On one occasion they seemed likely to vindicate this view of their character. It was during a severe frost, and the pipes, not having been completely emptied before the cold came on, still contained a small quantity of water. This froze, so that when the warm water began to circulate, the ice gave way with loud cracks like pistol shots, and a fearful joy was to be seen depicted on the faces of the prophets of evil. They "knawed how 'twud be all along, bless 'ee; a-coorse them pipes 'ull bust—pipeses allus do—an' they 'ull blow up theirselves, an' the church, an' iverybody in't." They only wished that they had "bid away from sarvist" that morning, it being a cruel fate which compels one to share the ills one had predicted for others.

The danger passed, and not having recurred, the parish is now of opinion that "'eatin' that ther' church be the best thing parson have a-done to

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it sence a come year"—an odd sounding sentiment enough.

The innovation that aroused the deepest disapproval was the institution of a harvest festival, which was "'anuft to mek th' ole parson turn in his grave, 'um wur. What do us want wi' a festival, then? Han't us allus had the harvest afoor, wi'out sich foolishniss as a thanksgivin'?" Dressing up the church with flowers and corn forsooth!

"Us ha' got nothen to say agen a bit o' holly stuck in the pews at Chris'mas time; that be on'y nat'ral an' seasonable-like; but this year be a-turnin' the place into a whee-ut field an' a garden, full an' wholly." Yet such is the inconsistency of man, that in these latter days the once reprobated service is the favourite of the year, the sole occasion when farm-hands are not ashamed to come in their working garb; when malcontents lay aside their differences, and appear within the walls of the sacred edifice. Fruit, flowers and vegetables are freely given by the people, and much interest is taken in the decorations, where ingenuity sometimes outstrips beauty. I remember seeing in a village church the model of a wheat rick; it was made of corn, was thatched and surrounded by a miniature railing which was completed with a tiny swing-gate. The whole excited intense admiration, not unmingled with envy, in the breasts of visitors from other parishes that could not boast a similar work of art among their harvest adornments.

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Modern services in country as in town are shorter and more numerous than formerly. To such an extent does the desire for “liveliness” prevail in these days of amusement, that the musical portion of the service, once a plant of modest growth, has now expanded until, as a rustic observed, “in a good few places 'um sings the psalms, an' the lessons, an' the prayers, an' most everythink, 'ceptin' 'tis the sarmint; mebbe afoor long, they 'ull sing he, too” Unhappily in too many cases singing is synonymous with noise rather than with music; this however adds to instead of detracting from the pleasure of assisting in its creation. The harmonium has been replaced by an organ, the playing of which is keenly criticized by the congregation. “He do mek 'un sound out strong an loud; us can year he right up strit,” is high commendation; but “he just about punishes that ther' orgin, an' chucks his 'ands about!” is infinitely higher. An indifferent performer is dismissed with the scathing criticism that “he plays all a-one-sided,” while mere mediocrity is “nothen to mek a fuss about.”

As may be expected, the sermon comes in for a shrewd amount of attention from these village critics. Length is not so important as matter and delivery: these again fade into insignificance before the vital question of whether the discourse be written or extempore.

“I can't a-be'r they sarmints as be read,” remarked an old village dame to me; “they ben't niver worth

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listenin' to, an' you med jest as well stan' a schoolbwoy up in pulpit to rade un clane out of a book.”

The “thunder and lightning” style is not disliked as an occasional dose of spiritual stimulant, provocative of “shuckettins and trimbles,” as old Tommy Dench expressed it, and of heart searchings too slight in character to prove inconvenient; but for ordinary seasons a simple homily is preferred, “plain so's a chile can understand 'un, an' we old folks has narra mossel o' trouble to foller'n.” The extempore sermon however, must be both lucid and connected, or it will draw down on the preacher more ridicule than a written discourse.

“Whativer wur he a-drivin' at then?” the people will say, when discussing the subject among themselves, “whativer wur he a-drivin' at, dost knaw, thee?”

"Bless 'ee no, an' 'tis my belief as that be moor'n he could tell hisself; a didn't sim to knaw wher' a wur gwine, nor wher' a come from. 'Twur all anyhow, an' text niver come in at all by what I could mek out. Call that a sarmint! I calls 'un a kind of wanderin' chatter, that what I does."

Occasionally, the homily happens to touch a tender spot, and to arouse some resentment within the breasts of the auditors.

"I cassn't reemember wher' a tuk his text from, nor how a car'd 'un along," said a village mother; "but about the middle a telled we as our childern

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wur like unto a tower o' bricks as be builded all the wik an' Sundays at the schoolds. Then on the Saturday when they bides a-twhum two or three o' the bricks gets pulled out, down fells the tower, an' has to be started a-fresh a-Monday marnin'. That's as much as you med say, that the good things what they be larned in school be swep' out on 'um by their mothers an' fathers on the Saturday, which be the m'anin' o' pulling out the bricks. Rum kind o' sarmint I calls that, to say as we be doin' our own childern hurt!"

Autres temps, autres moeurs: with the oldfashioned service the Sunday that matched it, is passing away; working in the allotments which have passed from the clergyman's hands into those of the Parish Council, and visiting or receiving friends occupy a great part of the day, and leave small leisure for sacred things. The church which used to be full is now half empty, the bond of outward observance sitting loosely on the present generation, particularly after marriage. Among the working farmers there are some, I fear, like Tommy Dench, who attend with praiseworthy assiduity if any pecuniary profit can be made thereby; otherwise they are too often conspicuous by their absence.

Many of the labourers, taking their cue from their employers, come when there is nothing more exciting to do; others say they "cassn't think as it meks a lot o' diff'rence wher' arra-one sez their prayers an' rades their Bible—you can do 't a-twhum

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just as well as in church, by what I can see."

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It is no uncommon thing for an absentee to take credit to himself for abstaining entirely from divine service. "Well, if I dwun't goo to church, nairn cassn't say as I goos to chapel!"

To this class belong those who perform their religious duties by proxy, as in the case of a father who, though he never by any chance enters a place of worship from year's end to year's end, insists on his children being present at both services. Dire are the thrashings he administers to a son convicted of playing truant: “I knaws how childern did ought to be brought up, an' though I ben't much of a hand at church-goin' myself, I'll see as they has plenty. I holds by church, I does, an' wun't have 'um carryin' on wi' any o' they fancy reeligions.”

This last was an allusion to the Salvation Army, which during a year or two maintained a footing in the village, and as already related, held open-air meetings on the bridge. These for the reasons described, enjoyed great popularity, and those in the “barrack-hall” scarcely less at first. Gradually however, as the novelty wore off, the congregations fell away, and the people returned either to their former careless ways, or to the church's fold where, as a cynically-minded individual observed, “twurn't all take an' no give.” The efforts of the Salvation Army were not, however, entirely thrown away. In one instance certainly I believe they wrought lasting good, and by a strange irony the only genuine convert,

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who has stood the test of time, is a son of the man mentioned above—the opponent of all “fancy reeligions.” He reluctantly owns that “whether 'tis through the Salvationers or not, I cassn't say, but Jim be wunnerful changed sence a took up wi' they—niver a sarcy word do he gie me nor his mother now.”

Side by side with the neglect of Divine worship there exists in the minds of the people an almost superstitious belief in the efficacy of regular attendance as a means of salvation. “Wher' do I expec' to goo when I dies?” exclaimed a rustic with indignant surprise when questioned as to his future hopes by an over-curious friend; “wher' do I expec' to goo? why to heaven a-coorse: I've niver done nothink as you med call wicked, an' I 'tends church reg'lar!” The speaker was no hypocrite: it was but another case of honest belief that “All these things have I kept from my youth up,” and he who first uttered those words was, we are told, loved by our Lord.

Yet another reason for attendance given by the people, is, that though it may tarry long, yet in the end the evil day must come when the Church will claim all that is left of her sons and daughters. “Ah, I tells 'un he did ought to go now, fur he'll be fust to go,

whether a likes it or not, when he be car'd ther',” is a remark I have often heard made by wives of their husbands who neglect this duty, and—“We must all come to 't at last, 'ee knaw,” is

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a certainty that weighs heavily when the dulled conscience succeeds in making itself heard.

Baptism is regarded as a kind of moral prophylactic—a ceremony which no self-respecting parent will allow his child to miss; not only does it ensure Christian burial, but it safeguards the little one against the consequences of all the sins it may commit before confirmation—the one being regarded almost, if not quite, as important as the other.

One night in the darkness of mid-winter, a big, awkward plough-boy stole up to the vicarage and asked to see the parson. With many blushes and much twisting of his rough fingers, he shamefacedly explained that he wished to be baptized, his mother had “never had it done, an' 'tother young chaps meks game o' I, an' calls arter ma down-strit as narra bell wun't goo fur ma when I dies.” The thought had evidently troubled him beyond bearing, for it needed no small amount of courage thus to interview the parson and to brave the ridicule of his companions at being “chris'ened same a-sif a wur a babby.”

After due preparation, his request was granted, and he went through the ceremony with a stolidity which afforded no clue to his real feelings. Poor Emmanuel, or Manny, as he was called in the village! There was even then something of the hero hidden beneath his rough exterior. I will tell presently another fragment of his story, and how

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he came to be a soldier of the Queen a year or two after his baptism and confirmation.

The people hold a strange theory in connection with the last-named rite. A little child was heard making use of improper language; the mother, on being expostulated with, replied: “What do it matter if a do swe'r now an' agen, pooer little cratur? Ther' bent no sin belonging to sich as he, bless 'ee. His godfeythers an' godmothers has to tek all that upon 'um till the chile be confirmated, then he'll ha' to be'r 't hisself. Childern cassn't do nothen wrong, bless 'ee, afoor they be confirmated, an' if they was to die, they 'ud goo to heaven d'reckly minnit.”

One wonders that sponsors can be found willing to accept the responsibility of bearing another's shortcomings in addition to their own! It might also with reason be supposed that parents and children entertaining such a belief would regard confirmation as a ceremony to be avoided: this, however, is not the case.

For a candidate to be rejected on account of ignorance or bad behaviour is considered almost a misfortune, certainly a disgrace. I remember seeing the mother of a large family, eight of whom were sons, busy at the wash-tub with a Prayerbook propped on the window-ledge before her; while her carter-boys ate their dinner she was teaching them the catechism, because as she said, "Parson telled 'um they didn't knaw their sacreements;

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an' I didn't want my sons iggerant o' what they did ought to knaw."

It is a singular circumstance, and one which cannot but cause some questioning of heart to more sophisticated natures, that though so many of the people lead practically godless lives when in full health and strength, old age, as it creeps upon them, seems to bring with it a simple childlike piety which enables them to face death unmoved, and, what is a deeper test of faith, to bear suffering—sometimes sharp and prolonged—in unmurmuring patience. It is not long since an old woman remarked, "'Tis the Lord's afflictionment, an' though the pain be hard to put up wi' now an agen" (she had a mortal disease) "I prays to Him when it sims a'most too bad, an' it passes off; fur He niver sends we moor'n we can be'r, if we looks to Him to help we."

These sons of the soil, smirched with vice as they too often are, yet seem to preserve something of the child's heart beneath their crust of worldliness, and it is owing to this I think, that in old age, when their passions drop away, they move half-unconsciously forward towards the Light, drawn gently with the cords of love by Him Who is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

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Chapter XI

FROM the graveyard where mounds cluster thick, the road to the village leads upward, as the church's road should ever do, so that even from the font the babe begins to climb the hill of life, while the aged find it an easy journey to those quiet graves. Every Sunday morning when the bells were ding-donging to the tree-tops, two old men used to

come out of their garden gate, totter down the path, and pass in through the large door. They lived at the head of Church Lane in a cottage which some squatter long ago squeezed in between the highroad and the bank. The thatched roof leaked, the mud walls threatened to collapse, but the occupants said it would last their time, and, crazy hut though it were, it was at least a home, which the House," that nightmare of the aged poor, is not. Jimmy the elder of the twain, was a simple soul with a child's heart in the body of a giant; his once powerful frame was bowed and shrunken, long years of toil had bent his back until his head rested upon his breast. With his rugged face and silver hair he was a picturesque figure in his

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white smock-frock, over which fell a beard scarcely less white. He seldom spoke, and was seldom spoken to, for he was stone-deaf, a fact that troubled him less than it did his house-mate. "Pooer ole man," the latter would remark plaintively, "if he could o'ny year hisself trumpettin' about the place in they girt boots o' his'n! It goes clane through my yead, it do; but ther', ten't a mossel o' use tellin he on't!"

"Willum" was not infrequently plaintive. There

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was something at once pathetic and grotesque about his appearance; his clothes had an obviously clerical cut, suggesting the idea that they had seen service in a higher sphere before they came into his possession; his lank, melancholy visage was seamed with wrinkles innumerable, and adorned by a shaggy black beard that age could not bleach. He was wont to indulge in significant winks of his shrewd little eyes and portentous noddings of the head; when he so far forgot himself as to smile, he quickly resumed his habitual gloom, covering his momentary levity with a series of tremendous sighs, calculated to affect the listener's heart to the extent of at least a shilling.

There was, however, some excuse for his sadness. His story, though by no means an uncommon one, held all the elements of tragedy. Told to me in his own homely speech, as we sat side by side on the bank amid the May sunshine, while the birds were singing in every greening tree, it served to sharpen the contrast between what the world was meant to be for man, and what it is. "I wur barned in that ther' house yonder," he began, "an' ther' I've lived a matter o' seventy-eight 'ears, 'ceptin' when I went to Henley on a job. Things wur wunnerful comacal when I wur young, bless 'ee: there wur no free

schoolin' in them days, an' not a girt lot on us could rade, let alone write. 'Twurn't sa long arter the war, an' livin' wur ter'ble dear; sugar wur as much as sevenpence the poun',

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an' salt half a crownd a gallon, an' bread a shillin' or eightpence—ah, us lived hard then! I've a-yeard my father tell as how he wur draewed fur to goo an' fight, but he paid a substitoot to fight fur'n. They all come back as went from this village; nairn on 'um wurn't killed."

"When I wur near about twen'y-two I got married—that's fifty-six 'ear agoo; an' you med see the little stool in the kitchen as I made my missus to put her fit upon a-foor our Jarge wur barned—I shan't niver part wi' he. We o'ny had the one chile, so seein' I wur a shepherd an' yarned twelve shillin' a wik an' summat at Michaelmast we got along quite comfer'ble-like. Jarge he got wed when a wur nineteen, then ther' wur o'ny me an' my ole ooman."

"It med be ten 'ear agoo as I wur fust took bad, but I'd got my club an I usted to goo on that fur a spell when I couldn't work. 'Twurn't long a-foor I had to gie up shepherdin' altogether, an' fur six months I had eight shillin' a-wik club pay; 'tother six the 'lowance from the parish that be two shillin' an' two loaves 'ee knaw. My missus 'ud yarn a bit moor by workin' in the field, but she wurn't strong, an' it wore she out, it did. She got one o' them cancers in her inside as no doctor cassn't cure, an' I wur fust to bury she down ther' in the churchyard. Ah, she suffered ter'ble, did my pooer old Kitty! But she be at rest now—she had her trouble in this life. I did

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what I could fur she, an' when she wur a-dying I axed her, 'Be you happy, Kitty? be you a-gwine to heaven?' 'Iss,' she sez, an' shucked her yead an' smiled, so I knawed 'twur all right.

"I lived on in the old house, but 'twur that dull! Many a time I've cried o' nights to think she'd a-left ma; I niver thought as Kitty 'ud ha' bin tuk a-foor me! She'd bin dead some nine months when I went in one day to pay my club as I'd belonged to fur six an' farty 'ear. When I got to the office the man as teks the money he sez to ma, ' We've made a noo rule, an' if sa be as you wants to bide in this 'ear club, you'll ha' to pay three pun' down an' then you can bide in 't as long as you lives.' I began to shuck an' trimble, fur

wher' was I to git sich a comenjous lot o' money? So I ups to parson an' telled 'un about it; he gin ma summat, an' he wrote ma out a paper as I went round the village wi', a-gatherin.' One way an' another I scambled it up an' guv it to the club man, but lar' bless 'ee, 'twurn't a mossel o' use, fur sez he, ' You can kip your money; we made another rule a few days since, as nairn can't bide in this year club arter sich an age, an' you be wover 't, I reckon.' A turned ma from the dooer, an' back I come all 'mazed an' 'founded, wi' the tears a-runnin' down my cheeks an' scarce walk home I could. I wur that out o' the way, seein' I'd looked to the club to purvide fur ma when I wur past work! Since then, 'stead o' five shillin' a-wik I've had but two, an' two loaves

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—that's the 'lowance 'ee knaws. They hucked three or fower o' us ole chaps out o' club at the same time, so as he shouldn't bust, which he wur nigh doin'. Ah, 'twur a blow fur we, a crool blow."

"Willum" shook his head sadly, and, glancing at his silent companion, continued, "Jimmy year wur well-to-do, as you med say once: he had a cottage of his own an' a vote fur Parleement—ther' wurn't many on us as had voteses in them days. But he niver put into narra club, didn't Jimmy, an' when he got past work like me, they 'udn't low 'un nothen from Boord along o' his house. So a went an' selled 'un to Musters Parks, the baker, who didn't gie 'un no money fur't, o'ny tea an' sugar an' sichlike fur three months or thereabouts. When that come to an end they wur fust to 'low 'un from the parish, an' he has two shillin's same as me. We live together, 'cause it meks one rent an' one fire 'stead o' two; when coal an' rent be paid ther' yen't a lot left—ah, no, wunnerful little, wunnerful little. We mos'n gen'ly has a bit o' bread an' lard an' a drap o' tea, but not much moor, and arra-one gets tired o' allus the same. The money wun't stretch to clothes nohow—I just has what folks gin ma, an' he has his smock; 'tis a good 'un too, fur it cost ten shillin', an' he've a-wore 't these twenty 'ear. Ther' yen't another in the place, an' the childern calls 'un an hud-me-dud fur wearin' on't, but he dwun't mind 'cause the slop kips 'un warm, an' he cassn't year needier."

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"Willum" paused, and leant his trembling, toil-worn hands upon his stick. The sun was setting behind the western woods; clear against the amber sky stood out the venerable tower—"'mid change unchanging"—where the clock was chiming the hour. As the

notes floated upward through the stillness the old man roused himself: "'Tis a'most time we wur a-bed. I likes to year the clock, it soundes sa cheerful, 'specially o' nights. Whativer should us do wi'out church? I minds some six or seven 'ear agoo ther' wur a talk o' they Parleement chaps doin' away wi't. Parson had a girt paper sent to 'un fur ivery one to put ther names as didn't hold wi' upsettin' 'un, so I goes to parson an' sez I: 1 Plase sir, I've a-yeard as you ha' got what 'um calls a 'tition agin they lawyer folk as wants to tek away church from we pooer people. I'd like to set my mark to't, fur 'twud be an unkèd job if sa be as us had got no church. Who 'ud chris'en we, who 'ud marry we, an' who 'ud *bury* we? That be what us must all come to ee knaws."

Ay, and to some the road to that quiet green hollow is not so easy after all.

The emphasis laid by old William on burial was quite in accordance with the feeling of his class. The thoughts of the poor run much on this subject; the idea of a pauper funeral is peculiarly abhorrent to them, and the sacrifices they will make to avoid this degradation, as they deem it, are almost incredible.

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In one instance a village mother insured each of her five children at birth against the possible expenses of burial; by the time the eldest had reached the age of seventeen, the payments had extended over a period of sixty-one years, reckoning the respective ages as successive instead of concurrent. The woman herself died of consumption after a lingering illness, but the thought that she held a policy on her own life seemed to rob death of half its bitterness. Though wasted to a shadow and racked by an incessant cough, a momentary gleam would lighten her sunken eyes as, unconscious of the terrible irony of her words, she would gasp out, "When I dies I shall have six pounds to bury me!"

Another case which came under my notice was that of a labourer who, owing to a defective hand, never earned more than twelve shillings a week even in haytime and harvest, and in winter his wages were as low as nine shillings. Out of this small income he contrived to maintain a regular payment on insurance policies, in addition to that on sick clubs for himself and his wife. "'Tis showin' reespect towards them as belongs to we, to lay by fur our funerals," they say.

Old William's Kitty was the most pathetic instance I know. Before he was "hucked out" of the benefit club his sole means of existence during one half of the year was, as he said, the parish allowance. It being impossible that he and

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his wife could keep body and soul together on this pittance, she applied for outdoor relief also. Her request was refused, because in the opinion of those appointed to safeguard the interests not of the ratepayers but of the poor, she was still able to work. Kitty was a dwarf, deformed, and even then the victim of the terrible disease from which she died—in justice to the Guardians it should be said that they were probably ignorant of this last circumstance; yet day after day she dragged herself to the fields while she had strength to crawl, earning from sevenpence to ninepence a day by tying barley under the harvest sun. It was a pitiable spectacle! Out of her miserable wages she religiously set aside the payments which she had begun in more prosperous times for her funeral expenses. She died a pauper, after terrible suffering; she was buried decently, at her own cost, with money earned by the sweat of her brow, and at the last amid sharp bodily anguish.

Similar instances of this passion for insurance could be multiplied by the score; and, to the credit of the agricultural classes be it said, it is rarely that their children reap any evil from the system as is sometimes the case among an urban population. Of late, however, since the idea of old-age pensions has been promulgated, the peasant has bethought him that it would be more to his advantage to pay in for an annuity when he reaches a certain age, than for a lump sum at death.

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His remarks on the subject display a mingling of simplicity and shrewd common sense. He is of opinion that "this year 'surance job as we ha bin

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on wi' sa long, dwun't do we a mossel o' good, 'cause we has to be dead, luk'ee, a-foor us can touch a penny. 'Tis right anuff fur our friends an' them as has to bury we; but 'ten't no odds to we—a man cassn't see his own fun'ral, bless 'ee!"

One individual, who for many years has patronized the insurance company, has come, late in the day, to the conclusion that he has been rather wasting his money, "fur all on us be bound to be buried; the bodies 'udn't be let to lie about over the ground—

leastways, I niver knawed aim as did yet. An' when you comes to think on't, there dwun't sim much call to be worrittin' about our coffins when 'tis all us can do to live com'ferble. 'Twud be a deal moor sens'ble-like if Government 'ud tek our bits o' payment an' gie we summat besides the par'sh 'lowance when us got past work. I should ha' thought as Parleement" (the omnipotent machine!) "could ha' managed that bit of a job easy anuff; 'ten't sa ter'ble scrumped fur money that it couldn't put a few pounds to our savings. We dwun't mind doin' our part, 'ee knaw."

This last statement I believe to be true. The people would be only too willing to lay by a provision for old age if the way were made plain. I trust that the prospect of old-age pensions, which has dangled so long before their eyes, may take definite shape ere many years have elapsed, and that cases such as old William's—they are, alas! too common in village life—may become things of

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the past. Whatever scheme be finally adopted, it is to be hoped that the recipients will be allowed to contribute their share. Old-age pensions are good, but thrift and independence are better.

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Chapter XII

HARD by the churchyard lies the parson's meadow, which slopes down to the stream from a steep terrace at the farther end, and is dotted here and there with tall elms, stately beeches, and ancient thorns that in May are a mass of snowy blossom. Where the brook bends beneath the poplars, it widens into a miniature swamp, planted with osiers, and surrounded by grassy banks sown thick during spring with primroses and violets. On one side is a disused drain, the home some years ago, before he removed higher up the stream, of a badger that wrought sad havoc with the tennis-lawn, turning it up from end to end that he might reach the tender shoots of fine grass which suited his fastidious palate better than the coarser produce of the meadow.

Next in succession as the tenants of the drain came a pair of stoats, who lived there in great content and reared a creditable family; they were followed by rabbits, and these last are so well pleased with their residence that they refuse to vacate it. Other wild creatures are also to be

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found—weasels and harmless green snakes which, on account of their family resemblance to the adder, are too often done to death by the children. Adders indeed are rare; though on one occasion the kitten was found playing in cautious fashion with something that was not a ring-snake. -Miss Kitty, her head on one side, an expression of puzzled interest on her innocent face, was dealing the foe a succession of rapid taps about the eyes with her paw, to which the snake responded by proud rearing of its insulted crest and much ineffectual darting of its forked tongue. It was despatched by the gardener's spade and was hung up as a warning to its relatives not to interfere with other people's pets.

The morass itself is a favourite refuge of many kinds of birds. Wild-duck and moorhens nest among the willows: blackbirds, linnets, thrushes, and finches of almost every description build in the surrounding trees. There may be heard the sedge-warbler's note; the shrill ha-ha-ha, so like a mocking laugh, of the great woodpecker; the jay's harsh cry and the rough croak of the corncrake. There is yet another bird which, for want of a better name or more accurate information concerning it, is dubbed the devil-bird. As may be surmised from its soubriquet, it has never yet been seen, therefore its outward appearance is a matter of conjecture. Not so its whistle, which is maddeningly familiar to frequenters of the parson's meadow. It starts with a bar of what promises to be a pretty

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enough tune, but at the fifth note it stops suddenly short, and starts again with the same result. In no wise discouraged by failure, it spends the whole long summer day in striving vainly after the remainder of that tune—an example of strenuous endeavour crowned by small success.

The ragged ivy-clad firs that abut on the field, are haunted by an owl, which during autumn and winter is suffered to dwell there in peace. With the advent of spring the blackbirds, who, with a pair of ring-doves, appear to consider that they possess a monopoly of the firs for nursery purposes, assemble in council, and after mature deliberation they proceed to “hessle” the poor owl, as the rustics say; to eject him, that is, with much chatter and scolding, from his comfortable quarters. Though he could defy two or even three of his noisy foes, he is no match for half a dozen, and he is

compelled to seek refuge amid the fastnesses of another ivycovered tree near the morass, from whence he nightly sends up his melancholy hoot.

May transforms the green meadow into a veritable field of the cloth of gold, where cattle stand knee deep in buttercups, and the air seems to quiver with the weight of song from insects teeming in the grass, and birds making music among the fresh young foliage. Then it is that the chorus from tiny throats swells loudest, that the doves coo most emphatically, that domestic affairs, such as the feeding of hungry mouths, begin to press upon feathered parents,

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Those two sparrows flying busily backwards and forwards, seeking worms and flies, have a solitary nestling, but it is more trouble than the thrush's large family next door, for it is a cuckoo! There it sits on the railing from morn till eve, shaking its wings and crying, “More, more!” in frenzied entreaty, while its foster parents exhaust themselves in their unceasing endeavours to satisfy this abnormally greedy, well-grown child; already, though but half fledged, it is larger far than they. Let us hope this is not the little sparrows' first essay in matrimony—to hatch out a cuckoo at the start is enough to discourage a young couple just beginning housekeeping.

When the June sun has set amid a flood of amber light that turns the distant woods to gold, and touches the swaying tree-tops with shafts of trembling radiance; when one by one the stars steal into the pale blue sky; when no sound save the whispering of the leaves, the murmur of the brook, is heard in all the darkening world, then from the deep shade of the great elms the nightingale's first notes float out upon the air, followed by a flood of rapturous melody. It ceases, to break forth again at midnight when the moon etches the shadows on a silver background, and that poignant song, thrilling through the stillness, smites the heart with a sense of pleasure that in its mystery comes near to being pain.

Not alone in spring and summer is the parson's

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meadow beautiful. See it during autumn when it is a study in red and brown and yellow. That flame-coloured branch in the beech is the earliest to hang out the signal of summer's departing: thence the rich hues creep slowly over the whole tree, until it is a second burning bush, unlike the first, alas! in that it is transient and consumed. Before

rough winds begin to blow the leaves fall one by one, fluttering softly to the earth as if parting were no sorrow, and so many still are left that these are scarcely missed. But when October gales sweep the landscape they come whirling down in clouds, torn from their parent stem by the relentless blast,

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and the beech is left stripped, despoiled, standing in naked majesty against the leaden sky, its every twig and stalwart branch outlined with exquisite distinctness—even in this its hour of humiliation it is beautiful still.

Though shorn thus of its glory, it is not forsaken by its former friends. Beneath its spreading boughs is strewn great store of nuts which attract the ring-doves, pattering busily among the withered leaves. Squirrels too, flash up and down the smooth green bole, and even the well-fed hens do not disdain to avail themselves of its bounty. Sometimes it happens that these last pay dearly for their greed. Among the animals which visit the meadow Reynard is a not infrequent guest, and more than one roving absent-minded fowl has he snapped up in the grass. Retribution has been known to overtake these breaches of hospitality. He was trotting in leisurely fashion down the slope one day, carrying a plump hen which he doubtless intended for his supper, when he found himself confronted by a human foe. Instead of exercising the better part of valour and making off with his prize, he turned viciously on the enemy, dropping the fowl to snap at the man. The latter snatched up a stake close at hand, at the same time securing the stolen bird, and Reynard was compelled to beat an ignominious retreat to bed, minus board.

It may have been the same fox which ran up the meadow from the churchyard and took refuge behind

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a pile of faggots. A few moments later the field was dappled with hounds, and the hunt, putting their horses at the fence, rode in and out among the trees, their pink coats gleaming against the sober background. That was poor Foxy's last run; he was dragged from his hiding-place and held up aloft. One instant his glossy fur shone in the pale wintry sunshine; the next he was flung to the clamorous pack.

When snow covers the ground and the earth is fast bound by iron bands, the wild inhabitants of the meadow forsake their loved haunts and repair to the adjacent garden,

where hares find cabbages, birds crumbs—thrown out to them day by day—and squirrels a heap of nuts; for though the iniquities of the two last are manifold, the remembrance of their sins is forgotten in the time of dearth. Even partridges, stray woodcock, snipe and a solitary heron are glad to avail themselves of the parson's field, where the sound of the sportsman's gun is seldom heard to vex them with its terrors, and calm security for the most part reigns. No ruder noises dispel the quietude than the laughter of the school-children when they pour themselves into the meadow at their yearly treat, and their fresh young voices, as, joining hands in a wide circle, they chant some ancient ditty—"Here we go round the mulberry bush," or "Green gravel, green gravel"—whatever that singular product may be.

Once indeed, the ordinary frequenters of the leafy

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shades fled affrighted to coverts new from the clamour that prevailed throughout a long hot memorable June day, the remembrance of which abides with us still.

The village was left to take care of itself while young and old, every soul the place could number, save the absolutely bedridden, repaired to the parson's meadow, there to speed the sunny hours with the strains of a real brass band—no mere dulcimer and concertina—and sports many and curious, including a greasy pole surmounted by a leg of mutton. This last, if the truth be told, proved an occasion of blaspheming to more than one ambitious youth, the language that was expended on spoilt clothes and sore palms falling far short of a parliamentary standard. The prize was secured by a persevering lad, who, after repeated attempts, succeeded in attaining the goal of his desires, whence he descended with a rapidity that was involuntary on his part, to declare that he "'udn't niver goo up an"—emphatic—"gr'asy pole agen, no, not if a whole sheep wur stuck a-top on't, let alone a bally leg o' mutton!" a sentiment which his discomfited rivals heartily applauded. Over the men's tug-of-war (married versus single) excitement ran high, the matrons and the maids urging on with shrill cries their respective champions to the contest which took place across the brook. The struggle had swayed doubtfully backwards and forwards some minutes, when a sharp-eyed advocate of matrimonial bliss discovered that her side was

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short of its full complement by one, and proclaimed the fact with such insistence that proceedings were stayed while a brief consultation among the married team ensued as to whom should be chosen to fill the gap. A wag suggesting that the thatcher was a “likely man, who did oughter pull fine seein' he've just took his second missus,” shouts were raised for “Giley! wher' be our Giley then?”

Slowly the ponderous form of the thatcher heaved into view, striking dismay into his opponents, who had only just managed to hold their own before, and who shivered in anticipation of the wetting this doughty recruit seemed to promise them. With becoming solemnity he divested himself of his coat and waistcoat, handed them to Leah who exhorted him to “goo on an' mind as he pulled they young chaps into the bruk,” and tightening his belt, took his place on the rope, a modest yet confident smile illuminating his weather-beaten visage, as who should say: “Though 'the battle is not always to the strong ' the odds that we shall win this one are great.” And win it they did. From the moment the rope was drawn taut the Benedicks “ran away” with the bachelors, who suffered themselves to be dragged across the stream after a fashion which the girls stigmatized as “summat ridic'lous and crool to see; the girt lot o' young safts!” at the same time giving their dripping swains to understand that the latter “needn't think as we be gwine to let them objec's come anighst our best frocks, 'cause we ain't!”

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Such heartless want of sympathy in their downfall occasioned some murmuring among the single men, who were thereupon counselled by the matrons to “goo an' get wed as soon as you can find an ooman to tek you; a man be never no good till he's married (not over much then, neether!) an' all you young chaps 'ud be twicet what you be now, if you'd each a missus to look arter 'ee.”

It was useless to combat these opinions, supported as they were by the husbands' superior bulk; the insulted youths could only receive them in silence, and resolve to remedy the defect as speedily as might be.

Of all the events that day the married women's race was the most mirth-provoking. The prize—a long length of white calico—was earnestly coveted by mothers of families, and was responsible for the large number of entries. A stranger lot of competitors surely never awaited the starter's signal! Young matrons, middle-aged matrons, a few displaying the respectable white hairs of age; stout women, thin women, and “betwix'

an' betweens," as those who held a middle course between the two conditions, described themselves; some minus their boots, which they had discarded to attain greater speed, others having their skirts kilted half-way to their knees with the same object, were ranged in an extended row across the field. At the dropping of the handkerchief off they flew, vigorous white-stockinged legs flashing over the grass, loosened hair and petticoats

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streaming in the wind, and amid the laughter and cheers of the by-standers they reached the goal—all save a poor-spirited half-dozen who fell out at the very commencement to sink upon the turf and fan their heated faces, while they declared that they only started to "hearten up 'tothers so as 'um shouldn't feel shy-like." For their part, they "thanked the Lord that they could buy whativer calica they wanted."

Notwithstanding these lofty sentiments, the enunciators thereof regarded the winner of the despised trophy with jaundiced eyes when she returned panting but triumphant. She was a small wiry woman whose six sons—imps of mischief, every one—had given her abundant practice in running, and who, when congratulated on her success, replied: "If they tother oomans had axed my bwoys, they could ha' telled um as 'twurn't a mossel o' use fur they to run agin I. An' if it comes to that, I reckon as I could mek a good few men look foolish!"

The fun and frolic in the meadow were kept up so long as daylight lasted. Only when night fell did the crowd melt away to seek some point of vantage, whence they might view the circle of flame-tipped hills that girt the vale with a ring of fire.

Since that summer day, whose jollity was marred by no inharmonious note, quietness has again held sway over the field. But "the old order changeth, giving place to new"; and perchance, ere long, the

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parson's meadow may once more be the scene of a merry gathering. For though we cannot choose but mourn the old order which we loved, that it finds its fulfilment in the new is surely mete cause for rejoicing.

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Chapter XIII

DURING summer the village, with the exception of a few houses near the upper end, is almost invisible to the passing wayfarer on the highroad, since at this season of the year it retires into the leafy concealment of its gardens and orchards. The roofs of thatch, tiles or slates are hidden by a mass of verdure that viewed from afar, before the sickle has touched the ripened grain, looks like an emerald set in gold. Around on every side spreads a well-nigh unbroken sea of yellow corn, and here and there from the quivering undulating waves rise scattered patches of woodland, dark and motionless as islands. The distance is veiled by a delicate blue haze; over the whole expanse a slumberous stillness broods. The traveller might almost fancy he had reached the lotus-eaters' land, where it is always afternoon.

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The lark's music growing fainter and more faint as the singer soars upward towards the clear azure, the corncrake's whirring note, the cry of distant flocks, the rustle of the slender wheat-stalks bending beneath the wind's caress,—the silence is broken by such sounds as these, or by the subdued whistle of the far-off locomotive which, with its suggestion of a world of toiling cities and busy marts, serves but to enhance the idyllic repose of this sequestered spot. If the impression of aloofness be thus apparent in summer, it is doubly so when winter's chastening hand is laid upon the earth, and furious storms rage round the battered dwellings; when the roads are blocked with snow, rendering outside communication impossible, or even at the close of an ordinary December day. The very trees seem to shiver at their own bareness, and lift gaunt appealing arms to the leaden sky. In all the neutral-tinted world of russet woods, and brown fields that stretch away until they meet the sullen heavens, there is but one relieving touch—a faint pink line behind the coppice on the south-west knoll.

As the day hastens to its end this line grows and deepens, flushing the clouds with purple, orange and crimson, lending a transient glow to hill and dale, and striking red gleams from every window it can reach. The brief vision of glory has scarcely faded, ere from its lurking place by the brook a white mist steals, creeping up and up until skeleton

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woods and dreary uplands are blotted from view, and the horizon is brought down to within a few yards of the cottage doors. Slowly the cows drop homeward one by one

from their pastures in the vale; children let loose from school seek the warm shelter of the fireside, and the street is deserted save for a tired labourer who splashes through the mud amid the softly-falling dusk. How desolate, how forlorn does the village now appear! how severed from all ties with the rest of the empire of which it forms such an infinitesimal part, such a pitiful fragment!

But a bright spot of colour looms against the grey background; a soldier strides jauntily down the road, and the horizon, that a moment since was so narrow, embraces half the globe. The sight of that one scarlet tunic evokes a crowd of undying memories; it conjures up a vast shadowy host of nameless heroes who have planted the British flag in every quarter of the earth, and watered it with their life-blood. Nor in this work has our corner been behindhand; her sons are no laggards, they ever were fighters, and far and wide have they gone to strive for Sovereign and country. Some of them have come back to live out the remainder of their days in the old home; others stayed behind "over there," in the six-foot strip of foreign soil which they bought and bequeathed in perpetuity to the empire—it is rich in such legacies. Among the former is an old veteran who served through

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the Crimea; having managed to survive the campaigns, and what was perhaps, a greater feat,—the hospital at Scutari, he returned to England, married a wife, became the proud father of two comely daughters, who are the crown of his old age, and is now tranquilly awaiting "Last Post" and "Lights Out." Like all our village soldier-lads who take upon themselves the responsibilities of wedded life, he is an excellent, nay, an indulgent husband, and being "very handy wi' his fingers, a' most as good as an ooman," he is able to relieve his invalid spouse of many household duties. The chief event of his later years was the Jubilee parade of veterans at Chelsea Hospital, when he formed one of the long line in which "every breast was shinin' with honour," to quote his own words.

Poor old fellow! He felt somewhat lost among the crowd on this great occasion. The bustle of London bewildered him, and in his anxiety lest he should miss the last train, and so be stranded for the night amidst the howling brick wilderness, he would not wait to partake of the excellent tea provided by those who organized the parade, but set off immediately the inspection was over, walked to Paddington, and arrived home weary

and exhausted, but happy in that he had been able once more to wear his beloved medals.

Nothing gives him keener pleasure than to dilate to an appreciative listener on his military experiences, and to air his views as to the army and its

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officers. Going one evening to call on his wife,. I found that she was away from home for a few days, and that the old soldier was left to look after himself. This he appeared quite capable of doing, though he complained that it was “wunnerful unked wi' no one in the house to spake to.”

He was frying bacon for his supper, and begged me to remain through the operation. While he deftly turned the slices in the pan, he poured out a flood of reminiscences stimulated by an occasional leading question.

“We was in Ireland,” he began, “when the war wi' Roosia broke out, an' orders come down from the War Office to bring up the rig'ment to its fightin' strength as quick as med be. Our sergeants went out into the streets o' Dublin an' swep in the men like tea-leaves off the floor; in they brought ‘um, any they could get, put 'um in a bath, an' sent 'um afore the doctor, who passed um whether they wur fit or not. What did it matter to him if 'um died, so long as the rig'ment had its number? we wur full o' sich green stuff, blesh you. An' die they did, like so many flies, when we got to the Crimeer! An old soldier knows a few things; he can forage fur hisself, an' take keer o' hisself, but them poor raw lads didn't know nothink, needier what they should, nor what they shouldn't do. Well, I had plenty o' fightin', o'ny I often wished as I could ha' read about it fair an' plain in the newspapers; folks at home knew a deal moor about

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the battles than we who wur in ‘um. You see, Miss, there's the firm line in front, an' the supernum'ary rank behind, an the non-commissioned orficers to look arter you, an' all as you've got to do is go straight forrard an' *kill*. It soundes simple anuff to talk about, but 'ten't sa easy to do. The Roosians wur bad to fight; they bayoneted the wounded, which wurn't fair, 'cause a man ceases to be an enemy when he's lyin' on the ground. I went right through them three battles, and was in the trenches afore Sebastopol until I got the diesentry, then I wur sent down to Scutari, which wurn't sa bad, if you could move your hands or walk about. But to lie as I seed some poor chaps, wi'out the strength sa much

as to lift a finger to knock away the flies hangin' all round their eyes an' mouth an' nose—swarms of urn!—ah, that wur crool, worse nor any fightin'. Our Colonel as brought us out o' the Crimeer wur a nice man, but he wurn't strict anuff; we wur like his own children, an' he said he couldn't punish them as he'd led sa often agen the enemy. But he got into trouble for't, 'spesh'ly when we went to Canada. The war between the North an' South States was beginnin' just then; lots o' our men deserted to the Americans, an' when they'd had anuff of it, they'd write an' ask the Colonel to let 'um into the rig'ment agen. It don't do to be too easy, just as it don't do to be too strict like some orficers, who ty-rannizes over the men. S'pose you've just pipeclayed

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your belt, an' hung it up ready for p'rade, an' a speck o' dirt gets on it. In comes the orficer, puts his glass to his eye, an' that there glass magnifies that there speck till 'tis as big as a door-knob. ' Sergeant,' sez he, ' that man is dirty; put his name down.' That kind o' thing puts a man in a trumble, meks 'un disheartened. It don't do to ty-rannize; you can lead the men anywhere, but they won't be *druv*!"

Though the village is permeated with the military instinct, and has furnished recruits during the last few years out of all proportion to its size, its ignorance on the subject of war and the army is profound. Even those families that can boast one or more soldiers among its members, are not much better informed than others less privileged. The rustics know that the army is a vast body of men—larger, they imagine, than that of any other power in the world, and "moor'n arra one could count in a day," for figures convey no idea to their minds, so low a number as 500 being quite beyond their grasp. Parts of this great body, notably those in which they have a personal interest, are being continually shifted (I am speaking now of the normal state of affairs before the South African war began) in a foolish unnecessary manner to all quarters of the globe. This arrangement or disarrangement is peculiarly trying to letter-writing relatives of soldiers abroad. English addresses present no special difficulties; Irish names also may

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be achieved; but Indian nomenclature is enough to drive the illiterate correspondent to despair. Ferozepore, by an unnatural transition, becomes "Freezypoor," and Mian Mir scarcely recognizes itself in "Min Marn." The Land of the Five Rivers however suffers the strangest change, Punjaub being ruthlessly metamorphosed into "Punchjam!"

"Shifted agin!" exclaimed a sorely tried parent who had just mastered an address in which Bareilly figured as "Brolly;" "shifted agin, but this time a sez 'tis fur his 'elth, so that sims moor sens'ble like. They be gone up on the Downs, 'cause it be coolder ther' nor down below, but I cassn't tell 'ee the name o' the place—'tis a comacal anuff 'un, like all them over ther."

By the Downs the speaker meant of course the hills, the greatest height to which her mind could soar being the low chalk range of her native county.

Another elderly lady of larger imagination told me with much pride that her soldier grandson then serving in India, was "up in the clouds, a sez, an' he can't get no higher nor that."

To the peasant the army is a huge voracious machine which swallows unlimited raw material in the shape of ploughboys, and turns out the smart finished article—a British soldier. Of the manufacturing process, beyond the fact that "they has to larn their shootin' an' their drillses," the feeders of the machine know but little.

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"I can't tell 'ee nothen about sojerin'," remarked a mother of many sons, "though I've three bwoys in the army; but lor, they niver sez nothen about the life; they ben't given to talkin' brodgel like some. Harry telled ma as he got drunk once, afoor he had his good conduck badge, an' the news on't wur stuck up in barricks fur ivery one to know: ' Harry D drunk! ' I shouldn't think as that could ha' bin very pleasant readin' fur'n, ivery time as he paced in an' out: a said you couldn't help but see't, 'twur writ sa large an' plain."

Of war itself the villagers had until quite lately the most confused and hazy notions, which the eager perusal of everything connected with the Boer conflict has helped somewhat to clear. I remember taking a relative in the army to call on the mother of a soldier, who, like the majority of our lads now with the colours, first went into action during the Frontier campaign. For the benefit of her military visitor, whose powers of self-control were sorely tried by the recital, our hostess proceeded to describe a skirmish in which her son had lately taken part—

"They went out to fight one marnin, did our folks, an' the enemies wur all in front of 'um. Then they gets a-shootin' the one side at the t'other, an' the Major-Colonel, or whativer a calls hisself, was 'ounded—our Major-Colonel, I means—'cause they black

'uns dwun't ha' sich things by what I can mek out. The men had to car' 'un away, an' tek 'un home, so arter that a-coorse they give out fightin'.

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My son had a bullet through his elma, an' another betwixt the spine o' his back an' his pack what he wears, but he wurn't hurted nothink, so a sez in his letter."

Those letters—how eagerly they are expected; how unconsciously quaint they oftentimes are when they arrive; and how difficult to answer if the mother is "no scholerd!" A touching little incident occurred in this connexion when I happened some time ago to be paying a visit to an old couple who lived in a "lone" cottage, of which there are several within the bounds of the parish. I walked across the fields on a Sunday afternoon, and over the landscape lay a Sabbath calm. In the fallow, where the teams had left them yesterday, the ploughs were idle, speaking of toil past and to come, while up the slope to the crest of the knoll stretched a broad expanse of young wheat, earnest of that toil's fruition and symbol of life that springs ever anew from decay and death. There was barely sufficient wind to ruffle the green shoots, or to stir the crisp carpet of last autumn's leaves in the dark woods standing in ordered stillness along the course of the stream. Above the homestead a thin blue line of smoke curled lazily upward to lose itself in the grey heavens. Though it was but the first month of the year, the air was so soft that the cattle were grazing in the open meadow; they raised their heads and drew round the gate when they heard the fogger's step approaching.

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"Cup, cup, cup," he called, and with meek dignity the fragrant dewy-lipped cows made their stately way across the road and into the yard where racks of hay awaited them. The fogger, a mild-faced old man whose blue eyes had faded from their former bright hue, shut the yard doors behind his charges, and his duties for the day being over, he invited me to accompany him to the cottage under the wood, where his wife sat solitary by the fire. Time was when a crowd of merry children had clustered about the hearth, but the nestlings had flown, leaving old John and Eliza to end their married life as they had begun it—"just me an' my missus."

The daughters were married or in service, the sons in various situations; one of the latter was a soldier then fighting his country's battles in far-off India, and many a night the mother lay awake, she told me, thinking of her boy in that mysterious region which she knew only as "over ther'," "t'other country," or "furrin' parts."

To-day when her husband had ushered me in, and had ensconced himself in his armchair, still wearing his hat, for the labourer seldom sits bareheaded even in the chimney corner, she began at once about the Frontier war. "Pl'ase, Miss, I wants to know if them black men over ther' ben't purty near all killed by this time? I seed t'other wik in the paper as five hunderd on 'um had bin shooted in one battle, an' that be a sight o' folks, more'n ther' be in our village." I answered that I feared many still remained to

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fight, and inquired after her son Frank. "He wur very well when us larst yeard from 'un; they'd had a ter'ble lot o' fightin' just afore he sent off this," and she handed me a letter which ran thus—

"Lundi Kotal Camp,

"31/12/97.

"Dere mother i now takes the pleasure of ansering your kind and most welcom letter" ("Emily wrote it when she wur larst a-twhum, fur I be no scholerd," put in Eliza) "'opin' this finds you well as it leves me at present. I am alright ceptin' for colds. Dere mother, we had an awful Christmas Day, the awfullest as ever i knowed. I was on piquet duty an' I thinked of you and father—did you think of me? We had a great fight yesterday, but I wasn't afraid. I'segot used to the bullets, but it was a horribil sight, the horribliest sight as ever i seen. I have got a dab at shooting niggers, it is all my delight, but it is rather dan'erous work, dere mother, i am glad you got the shawl alright and now I must conclude, give my love to farther, and tell him not to fret, for I am alright and jolly.

"your Loving son

"Frank."

In reply to a questioning look the mother explained that her son one day saw a comrade knitting a shawl, and "Frank got him to larn he to knit one too, so as he could mek one for me—bless his heart. He sent it off an' 'shured it, that it was bound to get

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year safe, an' a beautiful shawl it is! Ah, I did ought to be thankful as he've bin spared. Now ther's poor Barney Homes from the next village—he wur in Ireland, an' he volunteered to goo to the war. He hadn't bin ther' two days when they gets a-fightin', an' in the battle Barney wur shot in the leg. One o' the officers as come from these parts, an' knew all about Barney afoor he 'listed, knelt down by 'un wi' the bullets flyin' about like hail, and tried to squench the blood, but 'twurn't a mossel o' use; so up he picked 'un on his back an' ran wi' 'un to put under a rock. As the officer was a-runnin' a bullet struck Barney in the tempil of his head an' killed 'un d'rectly minnit. To think as that med ha' bin my bwoy! 'Tis bad, ter'ble bad fur Barney's mother, an' I can on'y thank the Lord that mine wur spared." Eliza then went on to speak of the difficulties that beset her correspondence with Frank; she could read, but writing was beyond both her and old John's powers, so that except when one of the daughters was at home she was dependent upon the good offices of a friend, or of another son who came every Sunday to visit his parents. "I tries an' tries to persuade 'un to write to his brother. I fetches 'un the pen an' the ink an' the paper; but ther', bwoys ben't like gals—'tis a wunnerful deal o' trouble to get 'um to do aught as they ben't pertic'ler set on doin', an' Mark be like the rest; he 'ull on'y do what he've a mindt."

Having had some experience of "bwoys" and

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their dislike to letter writing I stepped into the breach and offered my services, which were gratefully accepted.

"Pl'ase to deerect 'un to wher he be now, Miss," said Eliza; "he 'ull get it quicker so'n if you sends 'un to Freezypore an they forwards 'un on; year be his number an' his comp'ny."

The important task of addressing the envelope accomplished, I set to work on the letter itself, and inquired what I should say. "Gie 'un our luv, an' tell 'un that I thinks of 'un every day; aye, many times a day, an' say as how we wur powerful glad to year from 'un, an' that we both be torrablish, 'ceptin' 'tis fur colds, an' but ther', Miss, I wur allus a poor hand at mekin' out what I wanted to say in a letter. You jest put what you thinks; twun't mek no odds to he; he 'ull be pl'ased anuff to have a line, I'll war'nt."

I scratched away in silence for some time, then turning to old John, who usually left the talking to his wife, I asked whether he had no message for his son. The mild old face

twitched, tears filled the faded eyes. “My luv, an' tell 'un to goo down on his knees an' thank the A'mighty fur havin' spered 'un”—the fogger's voice broke—“an', Miss, you med put in a text. You can put un tergether better nor what I can; isn't ther' summat in the Psalms about the Lord bein' a shield an' a deefence, an' coverin' his head in the—the day—of battle?”

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The old man broke down, and hid his face in his hands. Eliza was weeping softly, and my own eyes were dim so that I could scarcely see to finish the letter.

Men may talk grudgingly of the millions spent on war; but its true cost cannot be reckoned, since it is paid not in gold, but in tears and blood.

Two years later I wrote to Frank again—having sent him several letters during the interval—this time to break the sad news that his mother was dying. It was not an easy task; full well I knew the bitter grief my tidings would cause him, for our soldier lads, despite their stolid demeanour and sometimes blaspheming tongues, possess very tender hearts, and it is when they are on foreign service that the full measure can be gauged of the love they bear to those at home.

Not laboriously concocted epistles only, photographs of the scenery, beautiful Indian tablecloths and shawls, together with many other things, find their way across the sea to the village. I remember a cottage almost squalid in its poverty being lighted up by the brilliant hues of some gorgeously embroidered cloths which the widowed mother displayed with intense pride and reverent admiration. They were the gift of her son who enclosed a note bidding her sell them if she were short of money, and he would send her more like them.

“But I 'udn't part wi' 'um not fur whativer,”

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she said, as she folded them in their silver paper

again.

Socks too, and stockings for little brothers and sisters, vests, shawls as we have seen, guernseys, knitted many of them by rough but loving hands among the wild mountains of the Khyber, attest the warmth of the absent boys' affection.

"He be moor comfort than all the t'other childern put tergerther," remarked a woman, as she told how two pounds sterling had reached her from camp at Lundi Kotal; "he never writes, doesn't Jim, wi'out puttin' summat in his letters."

Indeed, it may be said of all the soldier sons that when the first shock of their enlistment is over, they are a pride and comfort to their parents. "We niver has to lay awake thinkin' o' they 'cept when they be fightin'. Now ther's Fred as works at home, an' is sa ter'ble fond o' drink; I dwun't niver knaw what time o' night he 'ull come in, an' I listens an' listens often till midnight afoor I years his step on the stairs. Wi' they in the army it's quite diff'rent. I knaws as they has food to eat, clo'es to wear an' a good bed to sleep in; they're boun' to be inside barricks at such a time, an' seein' I dwun't knaw what they're doin' I cassn't fret about 'um."

I think I have shown clearly enough that our village does not regard the army as the refuge of ne'er-do-weels and black sheep.

The high estimation in which we hold the rank and file is greatly owing to the influence of a large

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land-owner who lives not far away, and, himself a retired officer of distinction, is deeply interested in all that concerns the soldier's welfare. He is ever ready to provide employment for the reservists; thus the young recruit enlists with the pleasant consciousness that when his term of service with the colours expires, he can return to his native place, where work and a friendly welcome await him.

That our people, despite their many and obvious faults, are yet sound at heart is shown by the following, which was said to me by the wife of a farm labourer—

"I have but one son, and a while back he talked about gwine in the army; he did'nt never 'list, h'wever, an' I'm glad of it, seein' he's my o'ny one. But I 'udn't ha' stopped 'un by sa much as a word, fur 'tis a noble thing to fight for the Queen!"

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Chapter XIV

OUR boys enlist from a variety of reasons. Some go because their fathers before them were soldiers; others because they are tired of "follerin' the plough-tail"; others again adopt the profession of arms from a spirit of adventure and pure love of fighting.

"I likes to year about the blo-ud," remarked a youth when reading a letter from his brother in India, in which the writer described his experiences of a sharp action on the North-West Frontier. "I likes to year about the blo-ud—mek's I feel a-sif I'd like to have a shot at them black fellers myself," and off he went straightway to enlist in the home battalion of his brother's regiment. Another boy took the shilling because he was "grizzled at" by his foreman. The distracted mother of this would be warrior followed him to the barracks and offered to buy him off; she had already sent two sons abroad, and could ill afford to lose the wages of a third. His reply to her entreaties was that he "udn't goo back to doggin' about the fields not fur whatever." He liked soldiering (he had been

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at it then one day!) and a soldier he meant to be. He has since been ordered not to India like the majority of his friends, but to South Africa, where he was very busy for months trying to catch De Wet instead of Kruger, whom, before he left England, he announced his intention of bringing home. He is still at the Cape, healthy and content and by no means tired of soldiering.

My readers may remember that I promised to tell the story of Emmanuel Welsh who came to the parson at night desiring baptism, and of how it happened that he too donned a scarlet tunic. He was one of the first—of late years—to enlist from the village, and the motives which influenced him were rather different from those that moved the other lads, wherein lies the chief interest of his tale. He had no natural bent towards a military career; his instinct was to live and die "in his nest," in the place which had given him birth; to lead the same peaceful if monotonous life as his fathers had led before him. Yet for love of a girl he shouldered a rifle, and passed from the seclusion of his Berkshire home into the mysterious world beyond—"over ther' in t'other country."

Em'ly Jane Greenaway was the acknowledged belle of the village; that being so, it was the more surprising she should "take up" with Emmanuel, or Manny as he was popularly called, who, judged by externals, was not prepossessing. But in the circle of which I write—the "circus bucolicos!"

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no woman is too ugly or, as regards her morals, too frail, no man too ill conditioned or "drunketting" to find a mate. Not that poor Manniwel was either of these last, being

simply a red haired freckled young labourer, with a certain dogged honesty about him that atoned in the eyes of some people, Em'ly Jane presumably among the number, for lack of more brilliant qualities.

The maiden had coquetted with several swains before her wavering fancy made its final choice, and there were not wanting ill-natured folk who said that they "did wunner as she didn't look a bit higher while she wur about it, than that girt ock'erd chap who couldn't sa much as pass the time o' day, he wur that ter'ble shy." The affair began in church, where Manny sat at the outside of the pew among the men on one side of the narrow aisle, and Em'ly Jane on the other, also at the outside but among the women, for the good old custom of separating the sexes prevails here, along with the black gown in the pulpit and the clerk in the responses. One Sunday a favourite hymn was given out, and Manny, to his great distress, found that he had forgotten his book. His pretty neighbour, missing the sound of his lusty voice, good-naturedly handed him across her own hymn book, and from that moment his fate was sealed.

When next they met he ventured to remark with many blushes that it was a fine day, although,

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as a matter of fact, it happened at the moment to be raining heavily. Then he took to twisting himself round in the seat and fixing his eyes upon her all through the sermon instead of slumbering according to his former habit. Finally he screwed his courage to the sticking point and asked her whether she would walk out with him on Sunday afternoons. This, as every one versed in village etiquette knows, if not quite a definite proposal is at least the front door to the same. Em'ly Jane, gratified by his silent adoration that was essentially different from the coarse flattery of her other admirers, consented without demur, and the two slipped from "walkin' out" to "keepin' comp'ny"—a phrase denoting a much warmer relationship—according to the correct procedure of rustic wooing. Spring and summer glided happily away; though no word of marriage had been spoken, it was perfectly understood by both that this was the goal whither they were bound. A lad and lass of their degree not seldom keep company together for years without broaching the delicate subject, and if questioned thereon will answer in tones of shocked surprise, "Oh, we ha'n't begun to think o' that yet!"

There was every probability that Manny's and his sweetheart's tranquil dream would unroll its silver length far away into the future, and this doubtless would have been the case had not an unforeseen incident occurred which checked its

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course midway. The slow-moving music of the quiet pastoral was strung to quickened action, harmony gave place to jarring discords, and this was how the mischief was wrought.

The gentle slopes of the downs, their shallow valleys and wide grassy plains afford excellent facilities for cavalry manoeuvres. The War Office becoming at length by some means or other aware of these facilities, it happened one bright morning early in September, that the partridges were awakened not by the popping of guns, but by what was to them a far lesser evil—the thunder of artillery. Along the Queen's highway streamed regiment after regiment in seemingly endless file—scarlet tunic-ed dragoons whose tall busbies lent such fierceness to their eyes; saucy hussars on their lean wiry horses; proud lancers sitting bolt upright in the saddle, as immovable as the weapon at their side; gorgeous horse-artillerymen urging the guns forward, while the earth trembled, and the villagers stood agape with wonder, and opined that "them girt gallopin' cannon 'ud soon shuckit our housen to bits if they wur to come this way many times, 'ee knaw."

"Body an' sowl," remarked one old man to his crony, "body an' sowl, what a sight on 'um ther' be! Folks sez as ther' be hunderds an' hunderds moor over ther' in furrin' parts, along o' the black men, but I cassn't think it."

"'Ten't likely," responded the other, "when

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ther' be sich a comenjous number year. 'Ten't to be wunnered at as the Queen meks we pay fur our dogs, seein' she has to kip all these. It must cost she a deal o' money to feed 'um an' dress 'um in they fine clo'es, let alone giein' 'um their wages. Lor-a-massy, to think as all them nice young fellers is made, as you med say, fur nothink but to be shot at an' kilt! Not but what they looks jolly anuff now—their trubble's afoor 'um, poor chaps. I 'udn't ha bin a so'jer, no, not if you'd payed ma ever so."

The house where Em'ly Jane then lived with her parents, is a pretty yellow-washed cottage lined out with black beams and covered with roses. It lies close to the Turnpike

at the head of the village and exactly opposite the wayside inn. As she stood in the garden among the late blooming flowers, herself the fairest blossom there, many a look was cast at her from lancer and hussar; many a martial bosom swelled with admiration for the self-conscious little beauty. But no excuse can be pleaded for falling out when one's steed has to do the work; the trooper cannot allege a sore heel as may his comrade of the line, and our susceptible heroes had perforce to content themselves with worshipping from afar.

The long procession had wound out of sight, and the rustics were thinking of returning to their ordinary avocations, when a few horsemen were descried in the distance, riding leisurely along as

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if they had all yesterday and to-morrow for to-day's work. They proved to be a sergeant of hussars with his troop. Halting outside the public house, they dismounted, and while one of their number held the horses, the rest clanked into the bar and demanded refreshments. A rustic verandah wreathed with ivy, nasturtiums and canadensis runs round the outside of the inn, and here the soldiers flung themselves down on a bench to rest, stretching out their long legs and spurred boots to the sun, and surveying the world with benignant condescension. Before many minutes had elapsed, they were the centre of a crowd of small children who stood with feet well apart and hands behind their backs, and regarded the newcomers in solemn silence.

"Look at their girt swoords," a little girl took courage to whisper presently to a fairhaired boy of some five summers.

"Wot's them funny li'le wheels in their boots fur, then?"

"Oh, them's to scrat t'other man wi' when they gets a-fightin."

And so the low-toned colloquy went on.

"Rum little kids," remarked Sergeant Chance, setting down his tankard and wiping foam from his moustache. "What's your name, sonny?"

"I are Joey," replied the aforesaid small boy.

"You're Joey, are you? and what is your other name?"

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"But' I are *Joey*" was all that could be extracted until a bolder spirit ventured to speak out—

"Please, sir, he be Joey Welsh; that's his brother a-ploughin' in yon field, an' that be Em'ly Jane athert ther', as he be keepin' comp'ny wi'."

"Giving us all the family history, eh? Where did you say Em'ly Jane was? Ah!" and Chance, looking over the way, quite forgot to wonder what the Queen's English might be for "athert ther'."

The garden was ablaze with begonias—pink, crimson and yellow. It was not these however, that riveted his attention. Leaning on the rustic paling was a girl in a light cotton dress, shading her head from the sun with a wide rhubarb leaf. The sergeant's quick glance took in every detail of face

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and form, from the beautiful dark grey eyes with their thick black fringe to the dainty ankle that peeped from beneath the hem of her gown.

"Ah," he repeated, "so that is Miss Em'ly Jane; the chap who keeps company with her knows a good thing when he sees it, and so does yours truly."

He took up his tankard, and with his long sword clanking at his heels, strode across the road.

"Here's to your good health, Miss; proud to make your acquaintance," he said, accompanying his words with a deep draught.

The girl blushed to the roots of her hair, and the soldier, noting with approval her becoming shyness, continued gallantly—

"My name is Sergeant Chance of the—th Hussars. You'll be coming over to the camp one o' these days, Miss, and if you inquire for me I'll show you round and stand you tea at our mess."

Em'ly Jane, quite overcome by this politeness from a real soldier, not a mere volunteer who donned his uniform once a week, was stammering out a reply, when a loud shout from his comrades at the inn caused Chance to turn his head. Far away in the distance a moving cloud of dust that emitted bright sparkles and flashes, was rapidly approaching.

The hussar muttered an oath and darted back to his troop. There was a short sharp word of command, and in less than a moment the whole party were in the saddles, and away down the road towards the camp at a smart trot.

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A few minutes later a general officer, surrounded by a brilliant staff, rode by in the same direction, and this was the last the villagers saw of the troops that day.

The interview between his sweetheart and the dashing sergeant had not escaped the observation of Manny, who, as the children had said, happened to be at work in a neighbouring field, and like every one else had suspended his occupation in order to watch the "sojers goo by." When he presented himself at the Greenaways' that evening for his accustomed promenade with the maiden of his choice, he was vaguely conscious of an undefined change in her attitude towards him. She looked at him with critical eyes, and for the first time it struck her how clumsy he appeared in comparison with the smart well set up men whom she had passed in review that morning.

"Wot had that ther' sojer chap to say to 'ee?" inquired the young ploughman as arm in arm they took their way along the highroad, which at this hour, deserted as it was, proved solitary enough for the most amorous pair.

The beauty tossed her golden head. "I don't see no call to tell you everything as is said to me; we ain't married yet, an' p'raps never shan't be."

"He axed 'ee to goo to camp an' ha tea wi' un, cause someb'dy as yeard 'un telled I so. Now luk 'ee, Em'ly Jane, thee doesn't goo wi'out me. I

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ben't a-gwine to have that man a-coortin' my wench, so thee knaws."

Manny's heart was sore and he spoke more roughly than he otherwise would have done, but the remembrance of the trim figure in well fitting uniform that hung over the pales in such close proximity to a certain lilac gown, of the dark head that bent so close above the fair one that the hussar's busby almost brushed the girl's soft cheek, set all his blood aflame and stirred the twin devils of hatred and jealousy within him.

He stuck to his word, and when Em'ly Jane announced her intention of visiting the camp, he gave up a day's work and wages, put on his Sunday clothes, and insisted on accompanying her.

The two were wandering between the long lines of tents and picketed horses, when Manny noticed his sweetheart hanging out pink signals of welcome to some one, and Sergeant Chance, looking smarter if possible, than before, emerged from a group of men and came to meet them.

"So this is your friend?" he remarked when Em'ly Jane had bashfully presented the village lad as "the young man what keeps comp'ny with me."

The soldier drew himself up, squared his shoulders—unnecessarily, seeing they were so square already—and looked the other over from head to foot with a cool supercilious scrutiny that made Manny tingle.

Until that moment he had been modestly proud

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of his Sunday suit, purchased at Cateswick—"This suit entire for 12*s*. 6*d*., extraordinary value!" Now he became painfully conscious of its glaring deficiencies in style and cut. From behind the shelter of Em'ly Jane's broad brimmed hat he furtively eyed his rival—tall, erect, clean limbed, jaunty of carriage, assured in bearing, with bronzed face and sweeping moustache. These physical advantages alone, even when not combined with the irresistible attraction of Her Majesty's uniform, would have weighed heavily against the homely young ploughman, and the latter realized, with a crushing sense of his own helplessness, the futility of struggling against such overwhelming odds. Unhappy and ill at ease, he maintained a sulky silence, while his sweetheart, whose shyness had quickly vanished, giggled and talked, bridled and blushed with the sergeant.

"Your friend ain't much of a hand at conversation," remarked the latter presently; "what is his name, if I might be so bold?"

"Emmanuel Welsh; but we mos'n generally calls him Manny or Manniwel, for short."

The other laughed. "Got some rum names in these parts; he ought to join us instead o' loafin' about the country; we'd soon lick him into shape an' make a ' man ' of him."

The lad's face flamed. "An' what else be I now?" he asked savagely.

Again the sergeant gave that aggravating laugh,

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and turning to the girl said: "What do you say, Miss, to me and you having tea at our mess? Your friend seems a bit put out about something; p'raps he'd best forage for 'isself at the canteen."

Em'ly Jane assented, and Manny watched the two out of sight, Chance, with his usual cavalry swagger accentuated by the consciousness that he was the envy of all his comrades, endeavouring to shorten his stride in order to keep pace with the tripping steps of the dainty little figure at his side.

"Curse him, *curse* him!" said Manniwel under his breath and crept away, not to the canteen, but to a friendly thicket where—well, no one saw exactly what he did there; but when one of the villagers whom he encountered an hour or two later, happened to remark on the swollen appearance of his eyelids, he curtly replied that "his eyes wur his own, he s'pwosed, an' he couldn't see as it mattered to aim wot 'un looked like, so long as he wur satisfite wi' um." From which it will be seen that affairs were no smoother between him and his faithless sweetheart. True, they rode home in the same long wagon, but whereas in the morning they had occupied a comparatively small portion of the plank that served for a seat—for when two people sit very close together with their arms round each other's waists a wonderful economy of space results—in the evening the lad, having taken his place early, was near the driver, while the lass, having

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hurried up breathless just as the wagon, full almost to overflowing, was about to start, was squeezed in close to the tail-board, and told she "med think herself lucky she wur tuk in at all."

After this Em'ly Jane went often to the camp, but Manny never again; and folks began to talk and say how she "had gin him the go-by all along o' a sojer chap, what more'n like had a missus a'ready; you could niver tell wi' them kind, bless 'ee; they wur that artful, year to-day an' gone termorrer, an' as like as not a sweetheart in ivery place. They dwun't think no moor on't, 'ee knaws, than yuttin' their dinner; 'tis them fine clo'es as does it!"

Manny heard some of the whispers about himself, but he said nothing; he merely waited until the last of the troops had left the neighbourhood. Each Sunday morning he had gone to church and sat at the outside of the pew, but the place across the aisle was vacant; its owner was over at the camp service, a grand affair, with the parson at the drumhead and the band to play the hymns. Each Sunday evening he had knocked as usual at the Greenaways' door, only to find it locked and the house silent and empty. But when the last hateful uniform had vanished, he boldly accosted Em'ly Jane in the street one day, and asked her whether she intended to walk out with him any more.

"Thee'st trated ma ter'ble bad," he said with a kind of rugged dignity, "thee'st trated ma ter'ble bad, mekin' game o' I an' my neame which my godfathers

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an' godmothers in my baptism, wherein I wur med"

"I never," cried the girl with a shade of compunction, for her conscience reproached her, and she was sufficiently fond of her quondam swain to wish to stand well in his estimation. "But I'm willin' to let byganes be byganes," pursued the young man, waving aside her interruption, "fur I'm 'mazin' fond on 'ee, Em'ly; meks I feel all flappety like when I thinks o' t'other chap. I cassn't let 'ee goo, my dear, I cassn't let 'ee goo! ther's nowt I 'udn't do to get 'ee fur my missus!"

Em'ly Jane was unprepared for this burst of passion and knew not how to respond. Her heart melted within her, and she was on the point of yielding to his encircling arm, when the crackle of a letter in her pocket, as Manny pressed close beside her, turned the scale and decided the course of two lives.

"Your missus!" she said with a laugh, stiffening her little figure and drawing away from him—"Your missus! you o'ny twenty year old an' me eighteen! I reckon I'll wait a bit longer before I tie myself to a man for good and all."

"Now dwun't 'ee bide; I'll be ever so saft an kind to 'ee when we be wed, though I'm a rough chap enough to look at. Let ma goo to parson an' gie 'un our neames to call o' Sunday; ther's a house I knows on as we can get, an I've saved a pound or two fur tables an' cheers an' such-like."

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"I tell 'ee I *wun't* wed thee 'it, so ther,'" answered the girl hotly, dropping her small affectations of speech and lapsing into the broadest dialect. "Do 'ee think as I be a-gwine to marry a labourin' man at ten shillin a wik an' live year all my days? 'cause I ben't—good-night." And she slipped away into the dusk leaving Manny gazing after her, a prey to the most conflicting emotions.

After this he gave up sitting at the outside of the pew, and instead of waiting at the corner when service was over, as all the other youths did, until their respective sweethearts came out of church, he stumped away down the road with his hands in his pockets and his head on his breast. No one ever ventured to speak to him, and his little brothers were very careful at this time to keep out of his reach. Manny was one of twelve children, and, as their father pertinently observed, "When they be all a-twhum ther' ben't cheers anuff fur'n to set on," which was perhaps the reason why he spent so much of his spare time, not to mention his money, at the public house. Mrs. Welsh was

an industrious woman with a sharp tongue and a warm heart, both of which were kept in working order by her large family, who swarmed about the tiny cottage like rabbits in a warren; their mother was never seen without a baby in her arms, and usually in addition a small garment to mend or make. She was engaged one evening early in the winter on a minute pair of corduroy trousers, destined to become

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the property of Joey, when Mark, the second son, burst into the kitchen and flung himself down on a bench in front of the fire.

"What mishtiff hast thee bin up to now?" inquired Mrs. Welsh, who was ready for any delinquencies on the part of her unruly offspring.

"Ain't a-bin up to nairn, bin to chapel."

"Where's our Manniwel?"

"Dunno; not long o' Greenaways', fur when he meets she, you can *year* silence. Our mother, Jake Cassel wur a-tellin' I, as we came home tonight, as how Manny said a manes to 'list fur a sojer termorrer."

The poor woman uttered a cry of dismay. "Our Manny to goo an' be shot at an' kilt! But I'll buy 'un off," with desperate decision.

"A sez a wun't be boughten off," continued Mark, who evidently relished the effect of his communication. "'Tis all along o' that girl—she's a consee-quence little hussy, a very consee-quence little hussy."

Thus it came about that, despite his mother's tears and his father's commands, Manny found himself the following day enrolled as a private in the—th regiment of the line, having walked to the station and taken the train to the nearest barracks. Contrary to the usual custom of recruits, he refused to go home to show himself in his clothes; he had his photograph taken however, as

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they all do, and sent it with no small pride to his mother, who in turn exhibited it to her neighbours amid a chorus of admiration.

"Lor, 'ow nice he do look! I shouldn' ha knowed 'un wi' them fine clo'es an' his 'air parted sa fine an' smoothed over his for'ed—ther's his elma an' all. Well, you oughter be proud of 'un, Sairey Welsh, an "I meks no doubt but wot you be."

Em'ly Jane was almost the only person in the village to whom the likeness was not shown, and though she professed perfect indifference concerning it, she would cheerfully have parted with her best Sunday hat to secure a peep. Her hints and cajoleries were in vain; Mrs. Welsh guarded her treasure jealously from the girl who had "druv my poor bwoy to be a sojer."

When Manny returned the following autumn on his first furlough, the scarlet tunic made the village green quite cheerful, and proved a centre of attraction to the children and youths. Em'ly Jane, whose fickle sergeant, after having corresponded with her for some months, had finally married another girl, took to walking up and down street when that vivid spot of colour was anywhere within sight, but the smart recruit was apparently more proof against her charms than the ploughboy, for Manny, though his eyes followed her wistfully, made no overtures of reconciliation, and sat quite square in church without letting his looks wander in her direction.

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During the year that intervened between his first and second term of furlough, Em'ly Jane discovered that Manniwel was more to her than Chance ever had been, or could be. She resolved that she would make an effort to recover the affection which she had "prized not in the having," and when the young man again appeared in the village, this time with a stripe on his sleeve, she went boldly up to him holding out her hand. Manny gravely saluted, looked at the hand, but did not offer to take it.

"Won't you let bygones be bygones, as you once said, and be friends with me again?" she asked tremulously.

"No, Miss, I can't be friends with you"—he had dropped his dialect for the regular barrack accent—"I can't be friends, but if you're willin' I'll—walk out with you."

And so the old sweet bondage began once more, but this time with a difference. Now it was Em'ly Jane who pressed for marriage, and he who hung back, saying he must get his colonel's leave, and that he wanted to win a step before he took a wife, "for I go to school reg'lar, and am trying to read and write a bit better so as I can get on to be a sergeant by-and-by."

The less compliant she found him the more Em'ly's love increased, as is the way with women, so that when the order came for him to proceed on draft to India, where the other battalion was stationed, the pain of parting seemed more than

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she could bear. They walked down to the station with him, she and his mother, but the girl could not trust herself to say farewell before strangers, so at the stile in the last field she stopped, kissing her lover again and again, and clinging to him until, in his anxiety lest he should miss the last train and blot that clean sheet of which he was so proud, he put her gently aside and hastened away down the road. At the corner he turned, but his eyes were dim and he could only just make out the little figure under the trees; there was the flicker of a white handkerchief, the watcher at the stile saw a red one waved in reply, then the scarlet tunic vanished round the bend, and with it Em'ly Jane's best hope of happiness.

The first letter, with its strange postmarks, with Private Welsh's number and his company officer's initials on the envelope, was an event in her life, for epistles from India were not as common then as they have since become in the village. “To think o' that bit o' paper comin' all them hunderds an' hunderds o' miles acrass the sea! 'tis a wunner as he yen't mildee'd wi' the damp, bein' sa long on the water,” remarked Mrs. Greenaway to a neighbour who had dropped in for a gossip. “Read 'un out, gal, ther's nothen but wot arra-body med year.” Thus adjured, Em'ly cleared her throat and began—

“Dere emly, i hops this fiends you well, As it leaves me at Present. I likes Over here very Well; all the men is Black, there is No Lions and tiggers,

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but sum snaks, i ain't seen none but the other men says They have. dere Emly, we wears wite does when its more hot, cos its alwais hot here and the flys is anuf to eat you. and Now I must Conclude with much love from Your lofing manny. i thinks and thinks on you emly. don' you never furget your own trew luv. x x x x x .”

Poor Manny, he had not advanced very far along the path of learning, but his letter was none the less precious for its misspelt words.

The neighbour was duly impressed with his literary skill, and spread through the village the surprising intelligence that “over ther', wher' Manniwel wur gone, the men all turned black an' wore no clo'es, so I reckon he'll be a nigger when a comes 'ome, an' he sa fair when 'e went away. Well, well, 'tis a comacal worruld, an' ther' be some rum folks in 't!”

Emmanuel had been three or four years in India when the war with the Afridis broke out, and his regiment was one of those ordered to the front. He wrote in high spirits at the prospect of seeing service, but his mother could not sleep for thinking of her boy, and his sweetheart crept about the house with a wistful look in her grey eyes.

She was sitting listlessly by the fire one evening in midwinter, when the postman's quick footfall was heard on the flagged path. The girl sprang up and ran to the door. “A letter for me, mother, from India; do bring a light.” She deciphered the

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words, written in pencil by the camp fire, with some difficulty, glancing impatiently from time to time at the feeble flickering flame of the solitary candle. “Why, there's a coffin in the wick; let me snuff it out.” As she did so she added with apparent inconsequence, “I wonder what Manny's a-doin' now. I should dearly like to know.”

Ah, Em'ly Jane, little did you reck that at that moment your lover was lying face downward on the cold earth! Swiftly out of the darkness had come the messenger of death, to find the sentry at his post.

Was he thinking of his home in far-away England when he fell stricken without a cry, of the little thatched cottage on the green, of the sheltered meadows by the brook, of the long line of rolling Downs where he had ploughed and sowed and reaped year in, year out? Who can tell what thoughts were his? He died at his post, for his country; and his name is numbered among those of whom it may be said that they did their duty. What higher meed of praise can be accorded to prince or peasant?

His comrades brought his body into camp, and when they stripped off the uniform that he had been so proud to wear, and that had cost him so dear, they found on his breast a letter from home, stained scarlet with his life blood.

Em'ly Jane has wooers still, but she keeps company with none of them and folks say she is hard to please. She cannot forget a bloodstained letter

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which came back to her from across the seas, and is now one of her most cherished possessions. She remembers how cheerful the green used to look when that bright spot of colour haunted the strip before her door, and she wakes at night to find her pillow wet with tears. For in dreams he comes back to her, her soldier lad whom she sent to his

death, and who lies so cold and solitary in his narrow bed among the great mountains that stand like sentinels guarding his sleep.

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Chapter XV

OUR several "lone" houses are set down in the most varying situations; one nestles cosily amid the sequestered meadows of the Vale within sight of the railway; another stands up, unsheltered by bush or tree, on the very summit of the Downs. Church, school, shops and doctor are luxuries hard of attainment in the ordinary course by the tenants of these remote dwellings, for the existence of which it is sometimes hard to find a valid reason. "They med ha' dropped straight out o' the sky by the way 'um be stuck about—dwun't sim rightly to b'long to narra parish, but just to anywheres, which be same as no'ers," quoth an unwilling exile from the village who found the isolation a convenient peg whereon to hang a grievance. As a rule the inmates of lone houses do not feel their lot a hard one: on the contrary they appear to think that the fact of living thus apart confers upon them some subtle distinction. "We 'udn't bide in that ther' gossipin' village, not if you paid us fur't; wher folks mindes everybody's bizniss 'cept their own, an' you can't step up your coort or round your garden wi'out all

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the place chatterin' on't. It medn't be wunnerful lively year, but 'tis quiet an' peaceable, which is moor nor what it be down ther'." We of the village, hearing such remarks, are tempted to retort that the speaker rates her own importance and our powers of

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observation over highly; yet the words contain a fragment of truth as all exaggerations do. Eyes that have long been accustomed to the loneliness of the hills or outlying fields, are apt to become dazzled by the glare of publicity attendant on life in even so small a township as ours. Nor is publicity the only evil: the noise of passing carts, the neighbours' chatter, the shouting and laughter of the children, the sense of personal restraint, of being hemmed in by houses—there may be as many as half a dozen within speaking distance—all these things are irksome to the solitary who craves for the quietude and freedom he once enjoyed.

A rather pathetic example of this was given by a young married couple whom I will call Snell. The wife was born in one of two distant cottages tucked away amid the folds of

the Downs, and here she grew up—a shy wild creature who walked the two miles to school when the fancy seized her, which could not have been often, for on my visits to the house I invariably found her sitting in the chimney-corner doing nothing, "just like a lady," as the people ignorantly say. The mother suffered from a bad leg, and her only neighbours being a couple of farm-lads who lodged in the two-roomed "cot" close by, she could not be very severely censured for preferring to keep her daughter at home instead of sending her to service. When the girl was barely seventeen she married one of the lads who was perhaps a year older than herself, and the two

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children—they were little else—set up housekeeping in the empty cottage adjoining that of the parents. The arrangement worked happily. The grandmother with the bad leg nursed the babies which soon began to arrive, and the daughter still sat in the paternal chimney corner when not engaged in "tidying up" her house or cooking her husband's dinner. But the young couple's employer had occasion to remove them to a village in the Vale where the conveniences of life lay under their hand, and for a while I lost sight of them.

The old people found it "terble unkéd wi'out the childern"; they had never known till now that the place "wur a bit lonesome." Nor were the Snells better pleased by the change: they were not at home in a village; they felt "stived up" among so many buildings, the shackles of civilization lay heavy upon them and they pined like caged birds for their native hills. Great, therefore, were the rejoicings on both sides when the young people returned once more to the old home. The husband brought back with him a racking cough which he had acquired "down there," but he would "soon get rid on't," he said, now that he "bid no longer in that hole." Poor fellow! he never lost the Vale's unwelcome gift; the pure air for which he had longed, failed to cure him, and under the grip of his fatal malady he grew weaker and thinner until he was little more than a skeleton. He was always patient, and there was something very

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touching in his gentle tolerance of the youngest child's demonstrative caresses which must have sorely tried his feeble strength. Of the village to which he believed he owed his illness he would say—"I didn't like the people nor the place nor aught about it 'cept the parson; he wur lovely—ah, he wur a *beautiful man*!" I never learnt why the poor

invalid was so enthusiastic—not liking to press him on the point, but I have often wished that the clergyman could have known how gratefully he was remembered. Such encouragement is not too common in rural parishes.

Mrs. Snell no longer has leisure to sit in the chimney corner. After her husband's death she and her parents clubbed their resources and removed to another “lone house” near the Ridgeway. Two of the four children are entirely dependent upon her, and she supports them and herself by field-work—reaping, haymaking, weeding, bird-scaring and suchlike. She is often to be seen trudging down to the village to fetch her parish allowance of bread; a weary journey she finds it, especially during winter, when mud, rain and snow have to be faced. It is hard to recognize in the brave cheery woman who contrives with her scanty earnings to keep herself and her children so neat, the whilom slatternly girl. For Mrs. Snell has profited by the uses of adversity.

As far as book-learning is concerned, her education, it must be confessed, is somewhat deficient,

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and her parents being even more illiterate, the filling up of the recent census paper was a source of much labour and anxiety to the whole household. The grandfather did his best with “the thing,” but he was “no scholerd”; he hoped it was all right; if it were not, “they”—meaning the authorities—“'ud ha' to put up wi't.” His doubts about the success of the family's efforts were amply justified by results. His birthplace he gave as “England,” and in his care not to understate his age he returned it as two hundred and six instead of some seventy odd years. He at least had not found time winged. With his wife also it goes haltingly and well it may, seeing that for the greater part of her life she has been a martyr to her leg. The changing seasons form her only variety; she seldom sees a fresh face, her infirmity precludes her from walking and a ride in wagon or cart is a pleasure to be dreamt of, rarely enjoyed.

When I saw her soon after Christmas, she plaintively said that she had not crossed the threshold nor spoken to any one outside her own family except myself, during the last thirteen weeks.

The mother of one of our farmers had a similar experience. She was taken as a bride many years ago to a lonely house called Thrush's Farm, which lies among the lower fields. For two months after her marriage the young wife did not see another woman,

and the state of the ground was such that she could not venture beyond the courtyard. Six

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good horses stood in the stables, but all six were not sufficient to pull a cart through the mud of the farm-road. The house was a mile from the village, and a mile of stiff mud some two feet deep is an impassable barrier.

I was wandering one day in the meadows near this undesirable residence when I met a widow whose son had lately extricated himself from an awkward scrape by emigrating to Queensland. On my asking after the culprit I was assured that he had "got acrass the water all right," and was "torrablish an' comfer'ble over ther'." "Don't you go fur to think, dear mother," he wrote, "as I be downhearted, cos I ben't. The very first night I come off the ship I went and had a jolly good

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drunk!" This piece of news was a wonderful solace to the mother. "If that ben't just like poor 'Lija," she murmured; "he allus wur sa sperrity!" She was an honest hard-working soul herself, but unfortunate in her sons, who are all more or less *mauvais sujets*. One became a soldier and after a long spell of foreign service took his discharge at Halifax, N.S., where he made up his mind to settle, having already married a young woman who "came from those parts," to use a rustic idiom. He returned to England to claim his arrears of pay and created a small sensation by suddenly appearing in the village, for he had not thought it worth while to write to his mother beforehand of his coming. She was working in the fields when a neighbour brought her the tidings that her son had arrived. Patty told me the story of how she received the announcement.

"Three or fower on us wur pickin' squitch near the bruk when I years some 'un a hollerin' at ma, an' ther' wur Harriet as lives nex' dooer, beck'nin' to ma wi' her hand. ' You be wanted,' sez she; ' your Teddy's come home.' Arra one could ha' knocked ma down wi' a feather when I yeard that. ' Our Teddy come home? ' I sez wi' my heart all gwine flippety-flop like a girt bird inside ma. ' Aye, he be a-waitin' outside your house this blessed minute.' 'Tother oomans wanted to knaw what wur up, but Lor' bless 'ee, I didn't stay to chatter wi' they—my Teddy wur a-waitin' fur ma—so I set off

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runnin' as fast as I could cut wi' my apern on an' my weeding pockut tied round ma. The squitch fell out as I ran, but I just let 'un lay. I niver stopped to pick 'un up; an' you med think as I didn't tek long a-gettin' home to my bwoy."

Teddy ill repaid his mother's affection. He remained in England about six weeks, living the while on Patty, who could barely support herself, and departed as suddenly as he had come, after "borrowing" the few shillings the widow had managed to put by for the coal club. He was not allowed to escape scot free however. His elder brother's wife happened by accident to see him striding, bundle in hand, up the village on his way to the station, and divined that he intended "making off unbeknownst," as she put it. Darting after him, she accused him, in tones that brought all the neighbours to their doors, of stealing his mother's hard-earned savings. Teddy, thus shamed before his little world, unwillingly refunded the money he had borrowed, but could not be induced to contribute a penny towards the cost of his food during his stay. Patty shakes her head now when she speaks of her son, and says mournfully: "A didn't trate ma well, didn't our Teddy; but ther', he be my bwoy when all's said an' done!"

In the Vale, rather nearer the railway line than Thrush's Farm, is a second homestead, tenanted by a cowman and his wife who are employed by a large farmer to attend to the dairy and poultry. When

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we were children Leaze Farm of all our picnic places was the best beloved. Its attractions were innumerable: besides the farmyard with its mysterious barns, and huge straw ricks up which we clambered and slid down again, there were the more alluring joys—unattainable elsewhere—of tangled woods haunted, so rumour said, by a no less awe-inspiring beast than a wild cow; and sedgy ponds where blue dragonflies flashed to and fro, and wide-eyed forget-me-nots grew among the rushes. If these pleasures palled, there still remained the noble sweep of the Great Western, with its straight gleaming rails linking the two horizons, and the breathless rush of the expresses thundering out of space to disappear into it again, or the more measured passing of a goods train that "like a wounded snake dragged its slow length along."

The farmhouse stood in an orchard, from which a wooden bridge flanked by a rustic bench, led across a ditch to the flower garden and the front door. The dwelling was only a superior cottage—"built when Adam was a little boy," as our people say when they

wish to convey a powerful impression of age, but its lean-to dairy, its diamond-paned windows and creeper-covered walls made it singularly picturesque. Inside it was as snug as a house could be. The parlour was a perfect museum of jugs, cups, wondrous vases, weird china images and pictures of strange and fearful hues. Among the latter were two—one of the late Queen as a child in

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a pony chair, and one of the Princess Royal, which for sheer ugliness would be difficult to surpass.

I cherish grateful memories of that parlour and of how good it was to gather there in the firelight for tea after a long day's skating on the railway ponds. We were a large, hungry party on these occasions, and the demands we made on Mrs. Hands' larder would have appalled any less courageous housekeeper. The eggs used always to be brought to table in basins, their appearance recalling a story of an English matron—a connection of mine—in Paris, whose French accent was not acquired there. She ordered as she imagined, a modest couple of *oeuf à la coque* for her own and her husband's breakfast, and was puzzled to account for the look of astonishment, quickly suppressed, which flitted over the hotel waiter's face. It was her turn to show surprise when he reappeared bearing a tureen filled with boiled eggs, which he placed before her. "*Voilà, Madame!*" he said, stepping back in expectation of some word of praise at his ingenuity. Instead of bestowing this the outraged lady demanded an explanation. *"Madame a dit douze ceufs à la coque*" said the waiter with a deprecatory gesture, "*et j'en ai apporté douze seulement!"*

It was in a lane not far from Leaze Farm that the following authentic fragment of rustic wooing was overheard. The amorous pair had sat some time without exchanging a word when the lady broke the silence:

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"John," quoth she, "why doesn't 'ee say summat?"

John reflected. "'Cause I han't got nothen to say," he replied.

Again there was silence, and once more it was the woman who took the initiative:

"John," she inquired tenderly, "why doesn't 'ee tell ma that thee loves ma?"

"'Cause I've telled 'ee that afoor," answered John, who evidently disapproved of vain repetitions.

But the lady was tenacious of her privileges and not easily daunted.

"John," she asked for the third time, "why doesn't 'ee gimma a kiss?"

The tardy wooer pondered long.

"I be gwine to presen'ly," he said at length, and at this point the historian of this veracious tale removed for obvious reasons out of earshot.

A few years ago the pretty old house in the orchard was burnt down. The fire occurred on Ascension Day, when the bells were ringing to evening service, and no sooner was word brought to the village than every man, woman and child who could set one foot before the other, hastened to the scene of the disaster. By some mysterious means the few people already in church learnt the news and changed their minds as to the desirability of attending service just then. Church, they reflected, can be had at any time; whereas a fire, the sight of an acquaintance's house in flames—and on such a

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glorious evening!—may occur but once during a lifetime. Reasoning thus, they melted away to disappear by side paths where they would not meet the parson. The latter as he laid his hand on the door was greeted by the clerk, who might have quoted the words of a youthful fellow sexton in an adjoining county: "Please, sir, there be o'ny one congreegation in the church an' he's a she." He confined himself however to remarking that "they'd all flod off to the fire, so he'd gin up pullin' the tinker," as we call the hurry bell in our part of the world.

Before very long the clerk also was speeding to join the goodly company at Leaze Farm. The fire originated in a beam behind the chimney, and the cottage being old, burnt like tinder. A few of the household goods were saved, but only a few. The feather beds, the bureau that many a lady would have coveted, the high-backed Windsor chairs, the curious crockery—all perished, and poor Mrs. Hands—stripped of those countless odds and ends which, though often intrinsically valueless, mean so much to a woman and bulk so largely in her conception of home—had to begin life afresh as it were, when she was already descending the hill of middle age.

Another cottage arose from the ashes of its predecessor—run up almost before the ground had time to cool; it is a red brick building which, from the moment you enter the orchard, stares you in the face with an aggressive vulgarity that closer

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acquaintance does nothing to mitigate. The creepers that covered the old walls, perished in the fire, the flower garden has been removed to the back of the house and the rustic bridge has vanished. The loss of her pretty home seems to have robbed Mrs. Hands of much of her former housewifeliness; the spring of her energy is strained; she says it is not worth while trying to keep "this poor little place tidy," and one cannot help sympathizing with her disgust at the change. She consoles herself with the belief that she will not "have to put up wi't long," and as each summer comes round, she expresses anew her surprise that it finds her still at Leaze Farm, "for last winter I were that bad I *did* think as I *must* ha' died." Her existence is somewhat of a struggle, for her size, never inconsiderable, increases with years and her health at the best of times is "very middlin'."

In one of our now untenanted lone houses there dwelt for a short time a couple who were described by their intimates as "ter'ble comacal, both on urn." Johnny lived by his wits and had lax ideas on the subject of game and property laws. He drew no fine distinction between *meum* and *tuum* save when such was necessary for the safeguarding of his own interest, and if during his prowls, nocturnal or otherwise, he chanced upon a loose bit of paling, a gatepost that obviously needed support, or an indiscreet fowl that had strayed from home and safety, he would annex all and sundry, carrying home his booty unabashed upon

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his shoulder in the sight of the whole village. Johnny was an inveterate poacher and roamed the fields at all hours of the day and night. The weapons of his craft were chiefly wire snares and nets at the manufacture of which he was very skilful. Often was he to be seen sitting on the green outside his door busily engaged with shuttle and twine on one of the large nets that are used for sparrow-hawking, called also bat-fowling, which was one of his sporting pursuits. He contributed little or nothing to the support of his wife and family, but lived in great comfort himself, leaving them to "scrabble up" the necessaries of life as best they could. It was not until the infirmities of age crept upon him and

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his hand lost its cunning, that he began to feel the pinch of want, and he then proposed—all the children being now creditably settled—to appropriate poor Keziah's

earnings. The relations between the pair had long been anything but amiable; this last piece of selfishness however, brought affairs to a crisis. After a stand-up fight in which the man proved victorious, Kizzy declared that she would go into the "House" rather than support her husband any longer.

"I be sick an' tired an't," she cried, "an' I wun't, I wunt', I *wun't* gie 'un another penny as long as I do live. He screws an' scruples ma down till I can scarce kip body an' sowl together, but I 'ull chate 'un," shaking her fist at an imaginary Johnny; "I 'ull goo up to the House an' he shall ha to work fur hisself." And to the "House" she went, being the only case I recollect of a village woman voluntarily asking admission.

The last time I met old Johnny he had been a grasswidower about a year, and people said that though he carried a bold front to the world he did not at all appreciate the discomfort of his position. I was walking along a high grass path when I saw him coming over the brow of the hill from the direction of a spinney in which doubtless, some of his snares were laid. Three or four women were at work in the field close at hand, and they also perceived the old poacher.

"Hey, Johnny," they cried, glad of any break to

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vary the monotony of their occupation, "wher' be off to then?"

"What be that to you?" he retorted; "I comes an' I goos wher' I've a mindt wi'out chatterin' about it to a passel o' oomans."

"How do 'ee manage to scamble along wi'out Kizzy?" pursued his interrogators. "Us yeard as you were in the House along of she; be you a-gwine this winter?"

"No, I ben't," he flung back at them as he ploughed his way over the rough ground; "no, I ben't! I'd soonder goo to—" naming a locality popularly supposed to be a hot place—"than to the House."

"Ha-ha!" laughed the women; "I 'udn't talk like that if I was you, Johnny, 'cause sich comes back sometimes on arra-one!" but he was already out of hearing.

The old loafer had few friends, and the Guardians, hardening their hearts, would allow him no outdoor relief. During some months he fought stoutly against cold and semi-starvation until he was compelled to submit and follow his wife to the "House." When she heard of his arrival she pleaded that they might live in separate wards, for said she, "I've had anuff o' he, an' I reckon we 'ull kip better friends apart!"

Both have since died in the workhouse. Their children, who are all earning honest livelihoods in various parts of England, would not suffer them to be buried at the expense of the parish, but fetched

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the bodies from the pauper mortuary and had them decently interred in the village churchyard.

The couple represented a type that happily has disappeared; they belonged to a past generation, and no greater proof could be given of the moral and material progress made by the village during the last fifty years than the contrast between the poacher's mode of life and his children's, which is as cleanly as his was sordid.

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Chapter XVI

AT the foot of the Downs, near the spot where Town-brook takes its rise, nestles a hamlet embosomed in trees. The little settlement, which consists now of a few cottages and an ancient Manor, has declined in importance of recent years like many other rural settlements throughout England. It once numbered among its inhabitants three families of substance who were distinguished in the old parish books by the rare prefixes of Mister and Mistress. One of these families bore the undignified name of Tubb, and against a member thereof are writ down in the register the words, "*Reputed* gentleman"—causing a wonder to arise as to what manner of slight this individual could have passed upon the clergyman to be thus branded with the doubt for all posterity. Another of the hamlet's dead and gone worthies was the knight Sir Oliver Greenway, who during part of Queen Anne's reign filled the post of churchwarden. It was while he was in office that a vestry meeting was held at which the parishioners there assembled agreed to "refer the debate betwixt the village of—— in the County of Berks

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and the said parish of B—— in the County of Wilts, to William Wright, Esq. (one of Her Majestyes' Justices of Peace for the County of Oxon), fully to determine betwixt ym to w^{ch} of ye said parishes Elizabeth wife of John Higgs does of right belong. Witness ye hands—— ." Then follow the signatures of the chief people present, the list ending with "the mark H of Hugh Smith," which is the most conspicuous object on the page. The records do not state how the controversy began, nor whether it raged around Elizabeth

Higgs' dead or living body. Considering that it was deemed of sufficient importance to be referred for arbitration to a magistrate of an adjoining county, the obvious inference is—human nature being frail—that a question of money was involved therein. Sir Oliver's family was already settled in the village, actively engaged in marrying and giving in marriage, when Queen Bess ascended the throne, and during more than two centuries they retained their position and estates, imposing their name on a portion of the place where they dwelt, which name is still in use, and filling the various public offices of churchwarden, overseer of the poor, and "supervisor of the highwaies," with commendable zeal. Gradually, however, the knight's descendants dwindled in numbers and dignity, until those who are left, work as labourers on the land their forefathers owned.

The Tubbs, of whom I shall have more to say later,
were reduced to a solitary representative, while the
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third family named Pope cannot show even this much, since it has died out altogether. Indeed extinction generally seems to be the fate to which the entire hamlet is doomed, if one dare judge the future by the past. House after house disappears; barns are pulled down, no new ones arising to supply their absence; the pound has vanished and of what were formerly a gentleman's mansion and garden nothing remains save a palatial pigeon-cote, built of the bricks and stones from the house, a clump of daffodils and a fragment of the wall that bounded the enclosure.

A hundred or more years ago the mansion stood in a pleasant well-timbered field high above the stream, and afforded accommodation for the invalids who resorted thither to seek healing in the bethesda at the foot of the terrace, where a warm spring used to come bubbling up from below before the bank had been cut away and the brook profaned after the manner described in my opening chapter.

A native of the hamlet whose father and grandfather had there lived out their days, and who both possessed "wunnerful good reemembrances," told me that he had often heard the former talk of the bath near the "whirllypool," which last he himself had beheld as a boy. "It steamed like a furnace it did, an' all the water quimpled an' b'iled somethen cur'ous. I did use to like watchin' it chuck the little stwuns in the air and kip 'um flyin' round a-sif it 'udn't gie 'um no rest." By this restless fount was supplied the

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bath which was built in what the speaker just quoted called a “nuck” or hollow, where the chalk rock retreated in a rude semicircle. Thither the patients would wend their way, descending from the house and threading the willow grove at the head of the stream, while the rustics looked on agape. Some of those who were cured, occasionally showed their gratitude by revisiting the spot which had proved to them in truth a “House of Mercy.” It is half a century since the last patient drove across the hills to view once more the remote village where during her distant youth she had found health and, in token of her thankfulness therefor, to distribute gifts of money among the poorer inhabitants.

Like the bathing establishment, over which latterly a certain Dr. A—— presided, the “whirllypool” would now be difficult to find. The widening of the stream's bed and the silting of the soil have choked the gushing jet and reduced it to quiescence; the laying bare in the interests of the watercress of many new cold springs has cooled its ardour. The water no longer “quimples”—a beautiful word, compounded evidently of quiver and dimple—and “biles” within the nook, but creeps away in silence as if ashamed of its present slavish state. The one thing of note that the hamlet still can boast is the Manor House—at once its pride and *raison d'être*. The handsome rambling old building abounds in cupboards behind the wainscot, in odd steps and superfluous corners, in

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panelled rooms and all the necessary machinery wherewith to construct secret chambers and ghosts galore The smaller portion dates back to Elizabethan times, and it is probable that this contained some hidden means of egress, for those were troubled days, and men when they built their

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houses knew not to what strange uses they would be put. There are several tales connected with the old wing, that which treats of Sir Nicolas Howse and his wife Lady Betty being one of the earliest and certainly the most graceful. For the benefit of two Bostonians who had found their way to the village, I filled in the framework of the bare tradition with a few additional details, and set the story forth in order, so that the visitors having seen the Manor, might read the legend; which they did one summer day when sparkling drops bedewed the lawn, and all the flowers—lilac, and laburnums pink and

golden—drooped their heads, heavy with moisture after a morning's rain. Do my friends remember the steamy June afternoon, I wonder? If not, these lines may serve to recall it to them should the latter meet their sight, as perchance they may, for from Berkshire to Boston is not the far cry that at first thought it appears.

The incident I am about to relate happened during the Commonwealth. Life in our unimportant village flowed on for the most part as calmly throughout the stormy period of the Rebellion as though the land were not reeling beneath the shock of civil war, and only a few miles away, beyond the hills, blood was being spilt and lives were being laid down on behalf of two such widely different ideals. The records show that, with the exception of a short interval from 1644 to 1646, vestries were regularly summoned and parish officers elected as

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usual, and when in 1656 the old parson died, after holding the living for fifty-seven years a successor was at once appointed who possessed the qualifications of Master of Arts and Fellow of his college.

It would be difficult to say which side the bulk of the villagers favoured, but whatever were their predilections, Sir Nicolas Howse of the hamlet Manor held openly for the king. He appears to have fought in the earlier stages of the struggle, to have returned home, and having either through interest or insignificance escaped denunciation as a malignant, to have taken a wife and eschewed further publicity. When Charles II crossed the Border at the head of Lesley's Scots, the fighting instinct awoke anew within Sir Nicolas' breast; he rode off to join his sovereign, taking with him the farm-servants that lodged in his house, and Lady Betty was left in the lonely Manor under the care of a trusty old retainer, James Viner and his deaf wife Joane.

The anxious weeks during her husband's absence passed doubtless all too slowly; little news from the outside world could have filtered down to the far-removed spot, and there being few neighbours of her own degree near at hand, Lady Betty's social intercourse must necessarily have been restricted. She sighed as she sat spinning in the oak parlour one September evening, for a few days since a hawker had brought word that the Royalists had been defeated with great slaughter by Cromwell

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and his Ironsides at Worcester, fifteen hundred of the king's men having been taken prisoners. Of Sir Nicolas nothing certain was known; some said he was among the slain; others that he had been captured and summarily executed as a traitor to the realm; others, again, that he had escaped like Charles from the battlefield and was in hiding—small wonder therefore that Lady Betty sighed! She had thrown a cloth over her wheel and was preparing to retire when she heard a tap on the deep-splayed window that looked into the garden a tap so light that she thought an ivy branch had struck the glass. The sound was repeated, and this time she whispered through the shutters, "Is any one there? Who is it?"

Softly came the answer back—"It is I, Nicolas; let me in."

She unbarred the casement and two minutes later the knight was seated in the elbow-chair by the fire contentedly watching his wife as she flitted hither and thither laying out such cheer as the larder could afford. "I must try to reach the coast, and thence cross to France," he said, when he had recounted his escape from the battle and his subsequent wanderings. "I may not with safety remain here more than a few days, since Parliament is scarce likely to let me off scot free a second time."

"Dear heart, would you leave me again so soon? Why not stay? No one need know of your

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presence. James and Joane would cut out their tongues ere they would betray you,"

"The wounded hare seeks its form, and the stricken bird makes for its nest. This is the first place they would seek me in, wife. Are there Roundhead troops in the village?"

"A party arrived yesterday, so Limping Absalom told James."

"Even as I said: they reckon to run me to ground in my own earth."

Two days passed, the hours not lagging now for Lady Betty, who shrank from the thought of parting again with her husband. On the third morning she was feeding her pigeons before the house, and the tame creatures were wheeling about her, perching on her shoulder and eating from her hand, when beyond their snowy flutterings she caught the glint of steel flashing along the road that led to the village.

"The soldiers are coming! Hide, hide!" she gasped, flying to warn Sir Nicolas, and she had but just descended to the oak parlour before the trampling of horses, the jingle of accoutrements were heard without.

"Open!" cried a harsh voice, as the owner thereof smote upon the door with the hilt of his sword; "open in the name of the High Commonwealth of England!"

"What is your will, sir?" inquired Lady Betty, her head very high but her heart full of fear.

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"Madam, my orders are to search the house and premises, the Parliament having reason to suspect that the rebel Sir Nicolas Howse is concealed here. I will also, by your leave, speak a word with your servants."

"My husband is no rebel, but a faithful follower of his Majesty King Charles II," retorted the lady hotly. "As for questioning my domestics, you will do that, I trow, leave or no leave."

The cornet, after ordering his men to search the farm buildings and to extract all possible information from the labourers in the adjoining cottages, summoned the two old servants and inquired when they had last seen their master. Joane was deafer than usual to-day. "Eh, what do a say?" she asked.

"Have 'ee a-sin the measter?" shouted John.

"Have I a-sin 'un? Why, the man must needs be a fool! Didn't I nuss 'un when a wur a babby?"

"When did you *last* see him?"

"Nay, sir, I never asked to see 'un; I could allus see 'un wi'out askin'"

"When did you *last* behold Sir Nicolas?" bawled the irritated officer, who longed to resort to means more forcible than words.

"Body o' me, what a noise you maketh! Do 'ee want to split arra-one's head? Mine be all niddlenoddlin' a'ready wi' your clatter," and Joane began to whimper and wipe her eyes with the hem of her gown.

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"You are not deaf nor dumb either," said the cornet, turning savagely on James, who removed his hat and rubbed his head in an attitude of deep thought.

"I seed Sir Nic'las in June, afoor hay harvest," he said at length.

"Do you mean to affirm that he has not been here since—within the last few days? Beware lest you be found trifling with the Parliament's officer, old man."

But—"I seed 'un in June, afoor last hay harvest," was all that could be extracted from James, and the baffled interrogator, finding his questions produced no result, called two of his men and ordered them to search the house.

Upstairs and downstairs they clattered and tramped, prying under beds, looking into cupboards, striking the walls with their sword-hilts to hear if the wainscot rang hollow, even descending into the cellar and searching an apparently useless shaft which this contained. Their labour, however, proved fruitless; no trace of the fugitive could be found. The trumpet pealed a shrill note, the troopers came running from outhouse and stable, which they had searched also in vain, and when they swung themselves into the saddle, my lady began to breathe freely once more. The cornet gathered up his reins, but ere giving the order to march he turned and scrutinized the front of the mansion, as though his eyes would fain pierce its

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thick walls. While he gazed a sudden inspiration struck him.

"What lattice is that?" he asked, pointing to a window so small that it was well-nigh unnoticeable, high up in one of the gables.

"'Tis the winder of my lady's closet where she keepeth her gowns an the like," replied James.

"How came you to overlook it?" was the officer's stern question, and the men to whom it was addressed shook in their shoes, or, to be more correct, in their jack-boots. "I will see this same closet," said he, springing from his horse and hastening upstairs. He looked everywhere for the door, but it was so cleverly concealed in the panelling that he was obliged to call James to his assistance. When it swung back, it revealed a low, dimly lighted cupboard, where on the oak floor three or four people of moderate stature might stand half doubled together. It contained a couple of boxes, a pile of household linen awaiting the wash, and some dresses hanging from nails against the wall. The Parliamentarian bent his tall head and passed through the small doorway; he stamped on the boards which rang true, and smote on the whitewashed walls, and ran his sword through the gowns, while Lady Betty watched him in quivering silence. But no one could lurk behind those stabbed skirts, since they did not reach to the ground by a foot. The prize the Roundhead coveted was not there, and he rode away disappointed.

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“He! he!” cackled Joane, shaking her fist at the retreating file of soldiers—”he! he! ther' be none sa deaf as them who wun't hear!”

“They've yet to larn that Berksheer folk bent sa saft as 'um looks,” remarked old James, with a wink?

But where was Sir Nicolas? you will ask. Come with me to the cupboard again, and look behind the dresses. There, two feet or so from the floor, is a narrow slit, into which if a man can just manage to creep, he will find himself on a low broad shelf scooped out of the thickness of the wall and running far back to a point above the entrance to the cellar. “The hiding hole,” as the people call it, is still to be seen at the Manor. In the recess lay Sir Nicolas, having escaped discovery for the time; but his wife, so anxious before to detain him, now declared that from henceforth she would know no peace until he were safely out of the country.

That same afternoon two riders issued from the avenue before the main entrance, and turned their horses' heads towards the downs that lay immediately to the south. One of the pair was young and sat erect in his saddle, his long cavalier lovelocks streamed over a laced riding-coat, a ring flashed on his ungloved hand. The other stooped as though from age; his hair was cropped close to his head, his face was besmirched, his clothes were ill-made and of coarse hodden-gray cloth. Like his master, he wore a rapier, and a brace of horse-pistols

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was stuck in his belt. The travellers' intention was, if possible, to cross the open tract of downland between the hamlet and Newbury before darkness fell, and then to push on with all speed to the coast in the hope of finding a boat the same night that would put them over to France. For the first half-mile of their journey their way lay along a hollow lane where they were effectually hidden from sight. On leaving this they emerged on the bare hillside, and here it behoved them to keep a sharp lookout in case of being seen and pursued. They had not ridden a mile when one of them glancing back, saw the steel caps of two troopers rising above the rounded curve of the down.

“They are after us!” he cried, clapping spurs to his horse, and the ride for life began. The fugitives seemed to be reserving their strength, for they kept their steeds well in hand, checking rather than urging them to their full powers. The soldiers on the contrary

thundered along at the top of their speed, and soon began to gain on Sir Nicolas and his companion.

“Let us smite them, brother Malachi, let us smite them hip and thigh,” quoth Trooper Mathew, and “Halt, or we fire!” responded Malachi.

The two men in front bent to the saddle-bow, as a couple of bullets whistled harmlessly over them, and raced forward until they reached the Ridgeway. Here the cavalier apparently lost his head; he

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struck off to the right, galloping wildly along the old road towards the west.

“This way, master, this way!” cried the servant who still held due south for Newbury; his words however, fell on deaf ears.

For a moment the troopers were perplexed and drew rein to take counsel.

“Do thou follow the master while I catch the man,” said Mathew.

“Not so,” answered Malachi, who was but a machine; “our orders were to ride in company lest perchance one should be slain.”

On therefore they sped behind Sir Nicolas; mile after mile they spurred their lagging steeds, yet they could not overtake the flying figure nor come within firing distance of those floating curls.

At length the cavalier's horse began to give signs of weariness; from a gallop it subsided into a trot. The sun had long since set, the quiet stars shone forth and the moon was rising round and red above the golden stubble.

“Halt, or we fire!” rang through the stillness, and this time the command was obeyed.

“A pretty dance the ungodly youth hath led us,” grumbled Malachi, as they set out towards the hamlet.

The prisoner spoke never a word, but gripped his saddle, swaying from side to side like a drunken man. About a mile from the Manor he would have slid to the ground had not Mathew caught him.

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“By Gideon's pitcher 'tis a woman!” cried the soldier as hat and wig fell off disclosing Lady Betty's fair head.

“And the servant was Sir Nicolas!” exclaimed Malachi, ready to gnaw his hands for rage.

"Whither are you taking me?" inquired the lady on recovering from her swoon.

"To our cornet; he will belike know how to deal with such a baggage," returned her captors grimly.

"But not in this garb! Suffer me first to change it. Moreover I am faint and must rest—you also require refreshment."

"Time enough for that when we have seen our officer!"

"Five minutes, only five minutes!" pleaded Lady Betty, who began to exhibit symptoms of hysteria. This last clinched the matter. Malachi and Mathew could face cannon undaunted, but not a female in hysterics.

"Joane, set bread and meat before these good men, and draw them a flagon of sack a-piece," cried the lady briskly as she re-entered the house. The troopers were thirsty and the wine was welcome. They could hear Lady Betty moving about overhead, and—and When they woke in the morning, the house was empty, the birds had all flown. Then they remembered that the sack had tasted somewhat strange. Their cornet's language on learning the double trick which had been played

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upon them, was not such as befitted a godly man. But rave and rage as he might, he could not secure the offenders, for they had escaped beyond the sea, to return in happier times when the king enjoyed his own again.

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Chapter XVII

SOMEWHERE about the beginning of the eighteenth century the Manor came into the possession of the Tubbs who greatly enlarged the old house, and added a Queen Anne's wing that includes a wide stone-paved hall, a beautiful carved staircase and a second wainscotted parlour. They seem to have been people of fashion, for to the best bedroom was attached a "powder-closet," where ladies in hoops and patches submitted their heads, and bucks in brocade their wigs to the hairdresser, who manipulated them in the well-lighted cupboard that the larger room might not be dusted by the powder. The mansion—for to that pompous-sounding title it now might fairly lay claim—doubtless exercised the usual country-house hospitalities then in vogue, and we can well imagine it the scene of hunt breakfasts, of card and supper parties at which would be gathered

such society as the neighbourhood could offer, the gentry being dragged thither in their ponderous coaches through the miry lanes.

People in those days must have possessed extraordinary

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capabilities in what I have heard described as the "knife and fork line," and must have lived not wisely but too well, judging from an ancient book of recipes which I and my sister unearthed from a lumber-chest in an attic at the Manor. It originally belonged to the grandmother of a dear old friend of our childhood and contains directions for every imaginable culinary contingency from roasting a plain joint to making muffins. One Richard Briggs compiled it, who was for many years cook at the White Hart Tavern, Holborn, the Temple Coffee House and other taverns in London. Aware of the difficulty of his task, he submits it with "Deference and Respect, conscious that Errors will creep into the best Performance and that the only Merit I can claim is that of having corrected the Mistakes of former Works and added the most useful Improvements derived from my own Practice and Experience."

When Mr. Briggs tells the housekeeper, bent on making muffins, to "take a bushel of white Hertfordshire flour, three gallons of milk-warm liquor, a quart of mild ale and half a pound of salt," one begins to wonder whether a tub will suffice in which to mix the ingredients. The majority of the recipes throughout the book are on the same lordly scale—there is nothing small or mean about the late Temple Coffee House cook. Here is one of his soups—called Almond Soup.

"Take three pounds of lean veal and two pounds

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of scrag of mutton, cut them small and put them into a soup-pot with four quarts of water; when the scum rises, skim it well and put in two turneps, two heads of celery, two leeks all washed well and cut small, and two blades of mace; boil it gently until half is reduced, season it with salt and a little Cayan pepper; blanch half a pound of sweet almonds, beat them in a mortar, and as you beat them, put in half a pint of cream to keep them from oiling; strain your soup to the almonds and rub it through a fine sieve; put it in your pot again and make it hot, but do not let it boil; have ready three small French rolls about as big as a tea-cup, blanch a few Jordan almonds, cut them lengthways, and stick them all over the tops and sides of the rolls; put your rolls into

your tureen and pour the soup over them; these rolls looks like hedgehogs and the French cooks term it hedgehog soup."

For Spanish Pea Soup he says:—"Get a pound of Spanish peas and put them in water the night before you use them; then take three quarts of soft water and one of sweet oil; make them boil, then put in your peas with a head of garlick; cover your pot close and stew it gently till the peas are soft; season it with pepper and salt; beat the yolk of an egg in a little vinegar and put in; stir it well, fry some large sippets in butter, and put them at the bottom of a soup-dish; poach six eggs and lay on the sippets, then pour the soup boiling hot over."

The following "Common Plumb Porridge for

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Christmas" combines quality with quantity in a manner quite after Master Briggs' heart. "Take a leg and shin of beef and cut them small and put them into eight gallons of water; when the scum rises, skim it well; boil for six hours, then strain it into a pan; clean out the pot and pour your broth in again; slice the crumb of six penny loaves very thin, and put some of the broth to them; cover them up for a quarter of an hour and then give it a boil up, and rub it through a sieve; have ready six pounds of currants well washed and picked, four pounds of jar raisins picked and stoned, and two pounds of pruens; boil all these in the soup till they swell and are tender, then put in half an ounce of mace, half an ounce of cloves, and two nutmegs, all beat fine; mix them in a little cold broth first, and then put them in with four pounds of sugar, two quarts of sack, and the juice of four lemons; boil it up ten minutes, keep it stirring, then put it into earthen pans and put it by for use; when you want it, make it hot and send it in a soup-dish or tureen with crispt French bread."

Immediately below this is a recipe for Portable Soup which requires, along with many other ingredients, three legs of veal, one of beef and ten pounds of lean ham, all to be boiled down until it is as stiff as glue. "This," says the author complacently, "is a very useful soup for travellers or large families; for by putting one small cake into a pint of boiling water, and giving it a boil up, it will make

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a pint of good soup. It possesses one good quality, it never loses any of its virtue by keeping if kept in tin boxes in a dry place."

Some of the made dishes rejoice in singular names, such as Barbecued Pig, which is broiled sucking pig dressed with "Cayan pepper" ad libitum and Madeira wine, and garnished with barberries; "a sirloin of beef in epigram" also sounds strange. "Oxford John" is nothing more formidable than highly seasoned mutton collops, and "Bombarded Veal" probably tastes better than its name would seem to promise. To the last is appended a note—"This is a beautiful dish, for when it is cut across, it looks of different colours," and in case some of my readers may feel a curiosity on the subject of bombarded veal I herewith give the recipe, praying those who possess a soul above eating—if any such there be—to skip these few pages.

"Take a nice small fillet of a cow calf, cut out the bone and some meat out of the middle and make the following forcemeat: take half a pound of lean veal (the veal you cut out), half a pound of beef suet, half a pound of fat bacon and the crumb of a penny loaf soaked in cream; beat it well in a marble mortar, season it with beaten mace, nutmeg, pepper and salt; chop a little parsley, sweet herbs and lemon-peel, and put in; mix it up with the yolk of four eggs, then fill the hole in the middle with this forcemeat, and with a sharp knife make holes through the fillet, fill one hole with forcemeat, another with stewed

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spinach chopped fine, another with the yolks of eggs the same as for egg balls; truss it as tight as you can to keep in the stuffing; put it in a deep stewpan with a quart of gravy, half a pint of white wine, a bundle of sweet herbs, and half a pint of fresh mushrooms; cover it close and stew it for three hours, then take up the veal, skim the gravy and take out the sweet herbs; put in a piece of butter mixed with flour, a sweet bread cut into pieces, some truffles and morels and two artichoke bottoms cut in four; boil it up till it is thick and smooth, and squeeze in the juice of a lemon; have a roll of forcemeat boiled, cut it in thin slices, put the veal in the dish, pour the sauce over, lay the slices of forcemeat round it and garnish with lemon and beetroot."

Mr. Briggs' imagination does not soar to any great heights on the subject of puddings; he has no fewer than seven preparations of rice all very much alike and six of bread. The only original recipes that I can discover are those for cowslip, spinach, and tansey pudding, none of which sound inviting except perhaps the first.

"Get half a peck of cowslips, pick the flowers off, chop and pound them fine, with a quarter of a pound of Naples biscuit grated, and a pint and a half of new milk or cream; boil them all together a little, then take them off the fire; beat up the yolks of eight and the whites of four eggs with a little cream and a spoonful of rosewater; sweeten it to your palate; mix all well together, put it over a slow fire,

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keep it stirring till it is thick, and then set it away to cool; lay a puff-paste round the edge of the dish, pour in the pudding and bake it half an hour; when it is done, sprinkle some fine powdered sugar over it and send it to table hot."

Italian Pudding is as follows:—

"Lay a puff paste over the bottom and round the edge of the dish, pare and slice twelve pippins and lay in it; cut some candied orange-peel fine and throw over them with a quarter of a pound of sugar and half a pint of red wine; take a pint of cream and slice some French rolls very thin into it, as much as will make it thick; beat up ten eggs well and put into the cream and bread, pour it over the rest and bake it in a moderate oven."

Among the recipes for pies, of which the book contains a goodly number, are directions for a "Swan Pie," that recall those sets of Indian boxes packed one inside another. First you take a fowl, stuff it with veal and bacon and lay it in the breast of a goose; this again is to be inserted in the swan, which is then to be placed in a dish, covered with crust and surmounted by a swan modelled in butter; or should the cook be unequal to the creation of this work of art, by a wax model which can be purchased.

"There is a great deal of work in this dish," concludes the author plaintively.

"Yorkshire Pie for Christmas" is very like the foregoing, except that it contains an even larger

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number of "boxes" which include a turkey, a goose, a large fowl, a partridge and a pigeon all fitting one inside the other. It might reasonably have been supposed that these were sufficient for one dish; but no such thing! A hare, six woodcock, some moor-game or small wild-fowl are to be laid around the turkey, and the whole is to be enclosed within ramparts of crust, for which a bushel of flour and ten pounds of butter are directed to be used. It is significant that at the end of his book Mr. Briggs gives a recipe for "Surfeit Water," and that among the herbs from which it is distilled rue and

wormwood find a prominent place! He adds that the water may be made at any time of the year in London, because the ingredients can always be bought there—a piece of thoughtfulness, which he who makes the late Temple Coffee House cook's rule of life his own will not fail to appreciate.

The reign of the Tubbs at the Manor was not all mirth and feasting—the picture has a grimmer side. Their money squandered, the two representatives of the family came to bitter words which led as usual to blows. Tradition asserts that one brother was foully done to death by the other in what has since been known as "Tubb's cellar," beneath the Elizabethan wing. Here is the shaft already alluded to, for which no purpose has yet been discovered.

For the last fifty years and probably for long before the opening has been masked by boards supported on stout joists: the lower extremity,

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according to a labourer who explored it when employed as a youth about the farm, seems to trend towards the head of the cellar stairs above which is the recess where Sir Nicolas found safety, but any connection there once may have been between the two is now effectually blocked. Into this shaft the body of the murdered Tubb is said to have been cast; and be the legend true or false, the cellar has by some means acquired an evil reputation for ghostliness. In the first half of the century, when it was the custom for unmarried farm servants to lodge beneath the master's roof, the dreaded dungeon was utilized as a place of punishment for refractory carter boys, and dismal tales the latter would tell on their return from Limbo of the horrid sounds that had assailed their ears. Whether the noises were due to spiritual visitants, to the imagination of the captives or to the homely agency of rats must be left undecided.

I was talking about the old house to a woman who had been maid there before she married one of the farm lads, and on my asking her whether she had ever heard of the Tubbs she broke out with—"Oh, please, miss, don't mention them wretched Tubbs! I had more 'n anuff o' they when I was servant at the Manor. Many's the time I've bin down to draw the beer for supper, an' up the stairs agen I've flown, leavin' the tap runnin', 'cause I could ha' sworn I heard the two brothers creepin' up behind me as I stood by the cask."

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The timid Hebe however, could not plead guilty to having noticed any definite sound or seen aught more terrifying than a toad. Neither did it appear from her account that the spirits took advantage of the numerous opportunities she afforded them of refreshing themselves from the barrel. The entrance to the old cellar has lately been built up; but with all due respect for bricks and mortar, the ghosts, if worthy of the title, will not be deterred by such a flimsy barrier from visiting higher circles when the fancy seizes them. Though the key may be turned on a family skeleton, a family ghost, like the X rays, sets matter at defiance.

As was to be expected of a race owning a murder for an heirloom, the Tubbs came to nothing: the Manor, with the lands appertaining, was sold, and the sole survivors of the name—-again two brothers—removed to one of their cottages in the village, where they lived together until their death. They seem to have been distinguished to the last by their lack of amiability—which, all things considered, is perhaps scarcely a cause for wonder—and the story goes that possessing little else about which to quarrel, they fell out over that apple of discord the fire and its management. Who knows but that the burning question might not have led to a second murder, had not an ingenious mediator devised a scheme whereby both parties should be satisfied? Henceforth the Tubbs sat back to back over the domestic hearth, each busied with his own particular little

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furnace—there being ample space for two on the broad stone—which he poked and replenished to his heart's content.

This picture of their latter days reminds me of an anecdote respecting an elderly married couple, whose connubial bliss was marred by the unconquerable desire both cherished to obtain absolute control of the fire. Each resented the lightest touch laid upon it by the other, and their relations became at last so strained that they agreed to sit in separate rooms.

For a short time harmony reigned between the pair; gradually however, the thought of that other fire, to which his hand was forbidden to minister, drew the old gentleman like a magnet, struggle as he might against the attraction, to his wife's apartment and the wrangle began once more.

My private opinion is that when apart the pair missed the excitement of the daily skirmishing, and were glad to plunge into the fray again.

Of the Tubbs, one—-a "bachelor man"—remains in the village, and is remarkable for his peculiarly uncomely appearance and his skill as a cricketer, though as regards the last, he has now taken to living on his former reputation.

The Manor-house has changed hands more than once since his ancestors sold it, and has seen a variety of tenants. Among them was the old lady who owned the book of recipes, and who when we were children, used frequently to invite my sister and

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myself to "take a dish of tea" with her. These occasions were red-letter days in our lives; we were allowed to range the house at will, to explore its nooks and crannies, and to gather what fruit we pleased in the walled garden. The climax of our pleasure was to listen while "Grannie"—so we always called her—dived into her reminiscences of the past and brought forth treasures new and old for our enjoyment. She had a slim upright figure, and

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soft pink cheeks framed by a row of white curls; and the question long perplexed us whether the latter were due to nature or to art. We greatly desired to solve the riddle, but dared not broach the subject, for notwithstanding her gentle manner, there was an air of old-fashioned stateliness about our friend which ensured respect. Dorcas the housekeeper was also well advanced in years (though her mistress always spoke to her of "your young eyes") and the array of cakes and strange preserves with which she would load the table for our benefit was bewildering by reason of its variety. Many of them, like "Conserve of Red Roses," were made from the old book which says—"Take rosebuds, cut off the white part from the red and put the red flowers and sift them through a sieve to take out the seeds; then weigh them and to every pound of flowers take two and a half of loaf sugar; beat the flowers very fine in a marble mortar, then by degrees put the sugar to them and beat it very well till it is incorporated together; then put it into gallipots, tie it over with paper, over that a leather and it will keep seven years." The preserved peaches owed their excellence to the same source. "Take the largest and finest you can get," directs Mr. Briggs, "not over ripe; rub off the lint with a cloth, and run them down the seam with a needle skin deep; put them in a jar, and cover them with French brandy; tie a bladder over them and let them stand a week; make a strong syrup, boil and

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skim it well; take the peaches out of the brandy, put them in the syrup and boil them till they look clear; then take them out, mix the syrup with the brandy and when it is cold pour it over your peaches; tie them down close with a bladder and a leather over it. You may put peaches into a deep jar or glass, cover them with French brandy and a spoonful of the brandy with a slice of the peach is very fine in punch. A pine apple is very fine cut in slices and covered with fine old rum, to be used in the same manner and it will keep a long time."

Of Dorcas's cakes I can give the recipes of two or three which particularly struck our fancy.

Portugal Cakes.—"Mix into a pound of fine flour a pound of loaf sugar pounded and sifted; then rub it into a pound of sweet fresh butter until it is thick like grated bread; then put to it two spoonfuls of rose-water; two of sack, ten eggs well whipped with a whisk; then mix into it eight ounces of currants and mix all well together; butter your tin pans, fill them but half full and bake them. If they are made without currants they will keep half a year; add a pound of almonds blanched and beat with rose-water and leave out the flour; these are another and a better sort."

Saffron Cake.—"Take a quarter of a peck of fine flour, a pound and a half of fresh butter and six eggs well beat, a quarter of an ounce of cloves and mace beat well together very fine, a little cinnamon, a pound of powder sugar, a spoonful of rosewater,

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a pennyworth of tincture of saffron, a pint and a half of yeast and a quart of new milk; mix it all together lightly with your hands thus—first boil your milk and butter, then skim off the butter and mix with your flour and a little of the milk; stir the yeast into the rest and strain it, mix it with the flour, put in your spice, rosewater, saffron, sugar and eggs; beat it all well up with your hands lightly and bake it in a hoop or pan well buttered; it will take an hour and a half in a quick oven."

"Nuns' Cake" is as follows, and I may remark in passing that if this be a sample of their ordinary food, the rule of fasting cannot be over strictly enforced in the convent.

"Take four pounds of fine flour and three pounds of double-refined sugar beaten and sifted; mix them together, and dry them before the fire till you prepare the other ingredients; take four pounds of butter, beat it with your hand till it is as fine as cream;

then beat thirty-five eggs, leaving out sixteen whites; strain your eggs through a sieve to take out the treadles and beat them and the butter together till all appears like butter: then put in four large spoonfuls of rose or orange flower water and beat it again: then take your flour and sugar, with six ounces of caraway seeds, and strew them in by degrees, beating it up all the time and for two hours together; put in a little tincture of saffron to colour it, butter your hoop, put it in and bake it three hours in a moderate oven."

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More even than Dorcas's cakes we enjoyed Grannie's stories: her life seemed to have been full of incident compared with ours, which at that period held nothing more exciting than the arrival of a fresh batch of puppies or kittens, the discovery of a stolen hen's nest and such like. Mrs. W was born when the last century was in its youth, and like Hannah with the "bad leg," who lived on the Millway, could remember the French prisoners at Cateswick; indeed her own fate was romantically connected with a certain Captain Legrand, a fragment of whose history she told us shortly after we made her acquaintance. The simple narrative seemed to bring those soul-stirring if troubled times so near, to add such a vivid personal touch to what had till now been sober lesson-book history to Jennie and myself, that the impression it left on my mind will never be effaced. Many years have passed since we sat on the hearthrug in the firelight, listening to Grannie's tale, but the scene and many of her words are still fresh in my remembrance. We had begged as children do for "a story—not a fairy-tale" (we considered ourselves beyond these fables!), "but a true story about what happened when you were a little girl like ourselves." Grannie remained silent a few minutes gazing into the glowing embers, then looking round, she said, "Very well; you shall hear of something which happened to me when I was even younger than you are: it was a very, very long time ago, but I think

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I can remember it," and she smiled as if amused at the idea that she could forget any of those far-away childish days from which, as they recede, the mists clear continually so that they stand out ever more sharply defined the older one grows.

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Chapter XVIII

"YOU may not perhaps know, dear children," A began Grannie, "that I was born in this neighbourhood—not, it is true, in this village, but in another situated a few miles from Cateswick where a great Saxon king first saw the light. All through my childhood we were at war with the Emperor Napoleon, that terrible man with whose name my nurse used to frighten me when I was naughty, as no doubt I often was! ' Boney will come and take you,' she would say, until in my nervous dread I composed a special little prayer which I used to repeat to myself every night in bed, that God would keep wicked Boney from ever crossing the sea to carry off poor little English children. Ah, there were hundreds and thousands of hearts in England uttering that petition though possibly not in the selfsame

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words! When I was about ten years old I used to be allowed to drive with my father to Cateswick, when he went to attend the justices' meetings. I stayed at my aunt's house while he did his business, and many a happy hour I spent with her, learning a new stitch for my sampler, watching her make pickles and preserves, or sitting quietly on my own little stool spelling out ' Robinson Crusoe ' and 1 Pilgrim's Progress.' During these drives we often used to meet the French soldiers whom Lord Wellington had taken prisoner and had sent to England. I cannot tell you how many there were at that time in the country, but the number must have been considerable; they were scattered up and down all over the land, and even such a small town as Cateswick had its quota. They used to make baskets and cabinets which the neighbouring gentry bought as curiosities, and in this way the poor exiles earned a few shillings. The officers being on parole were allowed to walk out of the town along the various highroads as far as the third milestone; when they arrived at that spot their limit was reached and they were obliged to turn back. Such a short distance it must have seemed to them after their long marches in the Peninsula! There was one Frenchman whom we almost always saw: he was a tall gaunt old captain, and he would sit on the bank by the side of the road gazing towards the east with a look on his face which brought tears to my eyes—it was so wistful, yet so patient.

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"One day my father when passing greeted him in his own language, and I should like you to have seen the smile which lit up those rugged features at the sound of his mother-

tongue. On our return from Cateswick that afternoon we were surprised to see our friend the captain at the same spot; he was evidently waiting to speak to us, for when we came near he sprang up and advanced into the middle of the road. Father reined in the horse and the old soldier, putting his hand to his shako, held out a little bouquet of wild flowers with the words—' *Pour la petite*! I looked at father to know what I ought to do, and as he only smiled and nodded, I took the simple posy, wishing I were on the ground that I might make the donor a curtsey. You look surprised at that, children, but when I was young we were brought up to behave much more ceremoniously towards our elders than are young people nowadays. I was an only child and my parents rather indulged me on this account, for I was not treated like many of my little friends who dared not sit in presence of their father and mother without permission. But to continue my story—after the first breaking of the ice the captain would give me a bouquet whenever we happened to meet him. He had found out our regular day and hour for driving to Cateswick, and wet or fine, hot or cold, we were certain to see his tall form somewhere near the third milestone. He was much disappointed if by any chance I were prevented from accompanying my father, and would

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in that case send me the flowers and a polite message.

"When winter came with its cold winds, and nipped the pretty blossoms, my friend, who could not afford to buy flowers, would bring me charming little posies of coloured leaves and berries, and thus our acquaintance went on during some three months. We learnt that the officer's name was Legrand, that he lodged over a little saddler's shop in the market-place, and that he appeared to be almost in a state of penury. His uniform was exceedingly shabby, but it was free from every speck of dust; his boots, if patched, shone until you could fancy that you saw your face in them, and he wore his weather-stained threadbare military cloak with the air of a prince.

"One day a great event happened—there were not so many in my life at that time that I should not remember it, and though it took place seventy years ago and more, I can see it again to-day clearer than if it were of yesterday. Father and I were going to Cateswick, and my mother, who had been weak and ailing for some time past, gave me a message to take to the doctor, with instructions to bring back a bottle of physic. I recollect how she kissed me as she tied on my fur-lined hood, saying, ' Good-bye, my

treasure, take care of the physic, and be careful when you are crossing the streets; they are always full on market-day.' On the drive we did not see our friend at the milestone
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as usual, and we wondered what had happened to keep him away.
"' Perhaps he is ill," said father, ' or possibly he has been exchanged for one of our officers, and has returned to France.' The thought that we might never see him again made us both feel quite sad, and the drive that morning was a dull one.
"When we arrived at Cateswick I went to the doctor's and waited while a draught was made up, then tucking the precious bottle tightly inside my muff, I made my way along the narrow street that led from the surgery to the market-place. In those days there were pavements in the main thoroughfares only; when any vehicle came by, the footpassengers had to cling to the wall to avoid being run over. I was tripping carelessly along when I heard a great clatter behind me and a posting carriage drawn by a pair of horses, dashed round the corner. In another instant I should have been knocked down and trampled under foot had not a strong arm come to my rescue. The captain was walking up the street in the opposite direction, and seeing my danger, darted forward, swinging me out of the way with one hand, while with the other he seized the bridle of the nearest horse. He was dragged along some yards before the frightened postillion succeeded in bringing the runaways to a standstill, and when my father, who had seen the whole occurrence from a distance, came up, my friend, a little white about the lips, was bowing
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and smiling, while one arm dangled helpless at his side. It was some moments before father found his voice; he could only gather me to him and hold me very tight. Then he turned to the officer, and stretching out his hand, he said huskily, ' You have saved my only child at the risk of your own life; come home with me and be my guest for the remainder of your stay in England.'
"Captain Legrand shook his head. '*Ma parole*, besides I am ill. Your fogs and rain gif me cold—*Je tousse*—during all the night."'
' I will arrange the matter of your parole with the military authorities, and my wife will nurse you back to health,' urged my father.

"The Frenchman twirled his great grey moustaches; a smile twinkled in the corner of his eye. ' You will cure me dat I become str-r-ong to go fight against your Vellington vonce more? *Mon ami*, you air-r too generous—you air-r not good patriot! I desire no payment for what I haf done; risk is the soldier's pleasure, and I also had one such a *petite*, but, alas! I lost her and her mother both in the same year, when I was far away in that cursed Spain. Ah, *mon Dieu!* both in the same year. Now I haf but my son Eugene, and I lofe your little one for the sake of mine who is gone.'

"All my father's entreaties were fruitless. We could not persuade the captain to come to us, though my mother herself went to his dreary lodgings and begged him to do so. He received

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her as if she were a princess, and thanked her for the honour she conferred on him in deigning to visit his humble abode; but his term of imprisonment, he said, could not last much longer; he would certainly be exchanged before many weeks had elapsed. Poor old man! he did not know that there were so many prisoners in the country of higher rank and greater influence than himself, that there was small chance of his returning to his regiment. He grew thinner and more gaunt as the winter advanced; his cough became very troublesome, and it was but seldom he was able to crawl as far as the third milestone. My mother grieved over his altered looks, and sent him a hamper of good things every week, also some syrup for his chest; but I do not think he drank much of the latter, for later on most of the bottles were found unopened in his cupboard.

"At last there came a time when the old soldier could not rise from his bed, yet he was still hopeful: ' When the warm weather comes, I shall be well again and go back to fight,' he would say. *We* knew, though, that the sinewy right hand would never draw sword again; that the only journey he would take would be the last long one from which there is no returning. When at length the truth dawned upon him, the craving to see his son before he died overcame every other feeling. '*Mon petit, mon petit,'* he would cry until my tender-hearted mother could bear it no longer.

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"' I shall send for the boy,' she said one day to my father, ' and tell him to come at once if he wishes to see the old man again."

"' He is at a military school in Paris, and I very much doubt his getting permission to visit England, seeing we are at war with the Emperor."

"' Surely Napoleon would not be such a pitiless wretch as to forbid a son going to visit his dying father?" exclaimed my dear innocent mother, so the letter to Eugene was despatched, and with it some money for his journey. A month passed, then another, bringing neither an answer nor the boy. The captain meanwhile grew rapidly worse, and we knew the end could not be far off. He expressed a wish to say farewell to ' *la petite*" so one day I went in with mother, and I remember the feeling of awe that came over me at sight of his face on the pillow: it was ashen grey, and oh, so thin! There were great hollows in the cheeks, but the eyes smiled as kindly at me as ever. ' I could not die without seeing my little one again,' he whispered in a faint voice. At this I burst out crying and sobbed, ' Please don't die before he comes; do wait a bit longer—he will be so disappointed! ' The old man began to tremble till the bed shook under him. ' What does the child mean? ' he asked.

"' She is a foolish little girl, and does not always quite know what she is talking about," replied mother, who feared to excite the patient.

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"I remained silent and confused, aware of my mistake, when suddenly I caught the sound of light flying footsteps on the stair. A moment later the door was burst open, and a slim dark-eyed youth wearing a shabby uniform rushed in. "*Mon père*!" he cried, flinging himself on his knees beside the bed. "*Mon fils*" and the two, separated so long, were clasped in each other's arms."

At this point I remember Grannie paused, and though we longed to know what would follow, we could neither of us steady our voices sufficiently to ask her to go on. Perhaps she understood, for presently she began again in her soft tones:

"Captain Legrand died very peacefully, holding Eugene's hand in his. He never knew that the boy, not being able, as my father surmised, to obtain permission to visit his dying parent, had run away from the military college and had made his way to the coast on foot, walking during the night and hiding where he could during the day, lest his uniform should betray him, and he should be caught and sent back. My father, knowing that a heavy punishment must surely await such a breach of discipline, would not permit him to return to his native land after Captain Legrand's death, but put him to school in

England for a year or two, where, on account of his nationality, he had to fight many battles, finally vanquishing his antagonists as much by his sunny forgiving temper as by his fists.

“When peace was at last concluded all over

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Europe, and the Emperor safely shut up in St. Helena, my father wished Eugene to go back to France, thinking that as the son of an old officer he might get a commission in the army, but my boy said No, he would rather fight for the country that had given him a home than for the one that had driven him out, so he entered a British regiment and was sent off to Canada, where he remained five or six years.”

“It was a sad day when he came down to bid us good-bye. My parents loved him as a son, while I —'When I return you may perhaps be married,' he said to me, 'and I also, *qui sait?*' I did not like this speech; indeed it so offended me that I ran away and hid myself among the nut trees, where I cried until I fell asleep. When I woke up he was gone without even a kiss!”

“Did you never see him again?” we asked. Grannie smiled and gazed into the fire as if she saw some pleasant picture there. “Five and a half years later he came home, and of course in that time we had had many letters from him. In some of them he spoke much about the colonel's daughter, how pretty she was, and how we should all love her did we but know her. I felt quite sure I should not.”

“One lovely morning in June I was sitting under the old apple-tree, shelling the first green peas—in those days we were taught to be useful, and I was not above lending a hand in the housework, though

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my father was a justice of the peace—when I heard steps on the gravel. I did not trouble to look up, for, thought I, it is only old Peter the gardener; but some one came who halted in front of me, and his coat seemed to throw a scarlet reflection over the peas. I raised my head now, and saw my boy standing there, so tall and brave in the king's uniform, and with something in his eyes as he gazed at me that had not been there when he went away.”

“`Eugène!” I cried, jumping to my feet, while the basin fell on the ground and the nimble little peas rolled in all directions.

"I thought he would throw his arms round my neck and kiss me as he always used to do when he came home for his holidays from school; instead he only took my hands with a low bow and put them to his lips. 'Is this my little playfellow?" he asked, still gazing at me with that strange look.

"I could have cried with vexation; to think of the many many times I had pictured his return, how I should run to meet him, and how he would put his arms round me and kiss me on both cheeks in his funny French fashion! It was too hard that everything should be so different. I turned away and began to pick up my peas. 'Let me help you,' he cried, going down on the knees of his fine trousers. We gathered up the pods and I went on with the shelling while he talked. He told me of his doings in Canada, of his voyage home,

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and how he had posted from Southampton all through the night to get to us the sooner."

Grannie made such a long stop when she reached this part of her story that we were obliged to ask her to continue.

"He had been home a week before the colonel's daughter was mentioned, then it was I who began to speak of her. We were sitting under the same old apple tree; this time I was stripping rose leaves from their stem to make a *pot pourri*. 'And how is your colonel's daughter—are you not longing to run away and see her?' I asked, peeping at him from beneath my shady hat. 'May I tell you a story?' he said after a pause. I nodded, for I thought I knew what was coming, but as it turned out I did not. 'There was once an orphan,' he began, 'who was very unhappy because he had no one in all the wide world to love him—father, mother, sister, all were gone. But he met a little blue-eyed girl and she said to him: 'Poor boy, I will love you; we will play together and quarrel together, and make it up again, as if we were really brother and sister. You shall have my father and mother for your own, and even my country shall be yours.' Then the boy was happy because he had found everything that before he had lost. Years passed and he had to go far away, but he did not forget the little girl whom he had left behind—he often thought of his adopted sister. At last one day, one joyful day, he found himself at home again.

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He flew up the garden path and saw the most beautiful picture you can imagine, ready to greet him on his return. Under a spreading apple tree sat a golden-haired young

princess in a white gown, which the sunshine that fell through the leaves, gemmed with points of light like diamonds. She was lovely as the dawn, and when he saw her his heart stood still with fear and reverence. All other women became as nought to him in comparison with her, and he thanked his kind fate that he was free to devote himself as her sworn knight to her service. He had lost his little sister a second time, but he had found much more, for he had found his queen."

"Were you very pretty then, Grannie?" we inquired. She smiled.

"Darlings, he loved me, and love sees beauty where perhaps much does not really exist."

"And did Eugène marry his princess?"

"Yes, they were married and they were very, very happy"

Our dear old lady paused once again, her silence seeming more eloquent than words, while we sat on the rug and wondered whether any one would ever call us princesses (my sister, I may say, ceased long ago to speculate on that subject, having solved it entirely to her satisfaction).

"Where is he now, and how is it that you are not called Madame Legrand?" we questioned presently, becoming tired of our own thoughts.

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"I will answer your second question first. When we married, Eugène took my name by my father's wish, who had no other son to carry it on. 'Where is he?' you ask. He is gone, children; gone like all the rest! He gave his life for his adopted country, and died fighting shoulder to shoulder with his own people, for he fell in the Crimea. And I am left here still!"

She lay wearily back in her armchair, fingering her thin little wedding ring, while my sister and I stole away to where Dorcas was knitting by the kitchen fire.

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Chapter XIX

ON three sides of the hamlet the uplands stretch away north, east and west with never a hedge, nor a boundary stone, nor aught save here and there a thin line of trees, or a solitary spinney to break their undulating sweep, so that the fields run into one another in the friendliest way imaginable, corn rubbing shoulders with sweet-scented beans, and clover with purple vetches or crimson sainfoin. No charge of monotony can reasonably

be preferred against a landscape whose tints, unlike those of a grass country, are ever changing, and which summer decks in an iris-hued robe. Of all the flowering crops sainfoin, called by some sangfoin from its blood-red tinge, is the most beautiful. Between the village and the downs rise a series of detached eminences, and one of these, a copse-crowned knoll, for a brief period in June rivals the pink heatherclad hills of Wales. Like a great ruby set amidst the encircling verdure it glows, flushing the very clouds which pass over it. Alas that its glory should be so short-lived! To-day it is and tomorrow it falls in long swathes beneath the mower's scythe. Clover

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and beans when in blossom strike a less distinctive note of colour; but theirs are charms which appeal not merely to the eye, and he who has not listened on a drowsy afternoon to the humming of the bees among the one, and inhaled the fragrance of the other when honey-laden toilers come booming homeward in the mellow twilight of a June evening, has yet to gauge the full measure of that richly dowered month's delights. Later in the year when summer's chaplet is withered and brown, a field of mustard blooming through the autumn is a welcome sight. Its counterpart—the weed charlock—I have known outlast the winter and continue into the spring, the bright yellow flowers being a veritable patch of sunshine to which the eye gladly turned from the sombre sky overhead. It was on such a patch one mild day in February that some young lambs first discovered the world was larger than they had hitherto supposed it to be, and judging by their gambols on finding themselves outside the fold, the knowledge appeared to afford them extraordinary satisfaction. Let them frolic while they may! Their light-hearted youth—should they escape the “bitter herbs”—is quickly spent, and ere long they will subside into like dull timid bleating creatures as their dams yonder. From the days of Homer downward the shepherd's “timorous flock” has been a favourite subject for the exercise of the poetic muse to which, doubtless, the helplessness of sheep appeals even more strongly than does the fact that they form a picturesque

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adjunct to the landscape. The ordinary individual is accustomed to associate with this helplessness an absolute lack of intelligence, which negative quality he usually

describes by the positive epithet “silly.” Yet this, curiously enough, is the last a shepherd would apply to his charges. “Ock'erd” they often are in his opinion, “contrairy” too, and “wunnerful cunnin” but stupid—never. I must confess that it required more faith than I can boast, to accept the statement made by an old shepherd that “ther ben't no two ship the same, neether in temper nor 'it in face. Ther be just as much diffrence, bless 'ee, atween they as ther' be atween you an' me.” The speaker was Old William's brother, whom he greatly resembled, and seeing that to my inexperienced eye his charges looked all exactly alike, I felt inclined to dispute his last proposition.

He proceeded to enumerate certain types of ovine character, beginning with the “stiddy 'uns as never wanders.” To these, in recognition of their virtue, is assigned the honour of wearing the bells, since they will not abuse the privilege by leading their companions out of bounds. At the other end of the scale come the “mouchers,” who are only happy when they are enjoying forbidden pleasures and who, like “the giddy lamb” of my childish days, seize every opportunity of escaping from the insipid safety of the fold. I cherish a secret but most reprehensible sympathy for the “mouchers” whose undisciplined habits have brought discredit on their

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race since the beginning of time. If only they did not put their liberty to such base uses! But when these woolly prodigals, quick to descry the smallest gap, by patient enlargement of the same have worked their way to freedom, they hie them straightway to the nearest field of ripening corn or sweet clover, where they browse with abundant zeal, small discretion and too often tragic results. “For,” to quote the shepherd's elegant phraseology, “sich as they 'ull yut till 'um bustes, when 'um gets the chanst.” This last ignoble trait is shared by the bullies, who however shun the rugged path of adventure and prefer to secure an additional allowance of food by the simpler process of thrusting weak comrades from the feeding trough, and fighting any friend suspected of possessing a bundle of hay larger than their own. The meek mothers of the flock call for no description: theirs is a placid law-abiding existence, the chief end of which is to raise successive families from year to year.

One quiet autumn afternoon, when the land was so still that it seemed to have sunk already, the year's work done, into its winter slumber, I strolled across the fields whence the last sheaf had been garnered, which the last gleaner had forsaken, and leaning on the

wattled cotes I watched the shepherd prepare the evening meal. He set out the shallow troughs or "cages" made of thin laths nailed closely together at the sides, filled them with hay and turned them over, so that what was the lattice-work bottom

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became now the top, through the wide interstices of which the fodder could be pulled. The sheep meanwhile followed his every movement from the far corner of the fold where they had previously been driven, and as soon as the first cage was ready they began to sidle slowly towards it inch by inch, stretching their necks and sniffing wistfully at the fragrant clover hay. Ere long a lamb whose courage was as yet untempered with discretion, emerged from the throng, pushed forward by those behind who anticipated sharing the booty if not the danger, and advancing with a careless mien, contrived to snatch a wisp from the nearest trough. Close at hand lay the dog—until this moment vigilant but motionless. Now however he raised his head, cocked his ears and looked toward his master for the expected signal. The shepherd, unwilling to resort to stern measures, tried expostulation—"Git out wi't, ullee? Goo back, I tells 'ee," he said, addressing the miscreant; but finding the latter continued his depredations unabashed, he launched the bolt—"Ther's one on 'um; ketch howldt on he; drive 'un off!" There was a flash of black and tan, a snarl, a bark, and before the lamb quite knew what had happened, it found itself hustled into the middle of its companions and flying helter-skelter to the extreme end of the fold, while the dog swept round now on this flank, now on that, to drive in stragglers.

Time after time the little comedy was repeated,

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until at length the last cage was filled. When the collie saw that the work was done, he slipped over the hurdles and sat erect, his head turned in the direction of home, while his master as he watched the flock crowd unreproved round the food, volunteered a few remarks on the training of sheepdogs in general, and this one in particular. "I bought 'un when a wur a pup—guv five shillin' fur 'n I did, an' sence he've bin growed, I've bin bed two suv'rins moor times 'n I can ree-member. But I 'udn't part wi' 'un, not fur whativer, 'cause, luk'ee, if he be worth two suv'rins to a stranger, a be worth a deal moor to me as bred 'un from a pup an' teached 'un what a knaws. He wur a good 'un to train, aim as tuk a deelight in his work. All I larned wur done by kindness—niver a stick ha'n't bin led

acrass his back. Wi' this kind o' dog arra-one can do moor by kindness nor by be-uttin' of 'um—they be like oomans as must be spoke saft to an' humoured."

The shepherd slung his basket on his back and like the collie set his face towards the village. The shadows were beginning to lengthen; in the East evening was slowly drawing her veil over the open sunlit fields. Suddenly the sheep as if by common consent suspended their meal; they lifted their heads and sent forth plaintive bleatings upon the stillness. Their ears, sharper than mine, had detected the presence not far away of another flock which a few minutes later came into view above the rounded curve of the upland. It was being led to a

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fresh fold and hearing its friends' greeting, returned answer with voices and with bells that, mellowed by distance, sounded sweetly through the fading day. When near, these last, it must be admitted, bear an all too close resemblance to the homely music produced by the application of a metal spoon against an iron tray, wherewith rustics are wont to titillate the ears of swarming bees. To any one who associates the tinkle with warmth and sunshine, with the humming of drowsy insects amid the scented lilac, the sheep-bells, heard perhaps for the first time across snowy fields, bring a quick leaping up of the heart, a vision of all the wonder and wealth of summer's high noon, that blots out for the moment the wintry landscape. During the lambing season many shepherds remove them from the necks of the yeaning ewes who are snugly ensconced in a yard littered deep with straw, or are folded behind hurdles padded breast high, and set in a sheltered corner round which the wind rages harmlessly. It happens sometimes that a mother dies leaving an orphan to be reared by hand, and this not infrequently finds a home in a cottage, where it becomes a household pet. I have often seen a little woolly lamb lying on the hearth, usurping the place and privileges of dog or cat. Such a pet is pretty while young. When it attains any size it takes up more room than is convenient in a small kitchen, and requires more food than accords with its owner's straitened resources. It is turned out to find what

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provender it can along the roads, with the not surprising result that it raids adjacent gardens, and becoming an intolerable nuisance to the neighbours, is at length delivered over to the butcher.

About the season of the year when "the hoar frost copies on the ground the outward semblance of her sister white," our shepherd, like him of whom Virgil's dark browed disciple sang, leads forth his little lambs to pasture. When buds begin to blow, and the sun shines on both sides of the hedge, the tinkle of bells is heard again in the fields and the young creatures dance to its music as they pass in and out of the pen through the gap-hurdle, their little black muzzles and legs twinkling among orange mangolds, of which they are allowed to eat their fill before the ewes are turned on. Country folk maintain that the smell of sheep is an antidote to disease and that it is healthy to walk round a fold. This may or may not be the case; exhilarating it certainly is when larks are singing overhead, and the first faint flush of green is deepening and spreading on hedgerow and tree, in corn field and clover, to watch the frolics of the lambs and listen to their shrill bleatings and their dams' deep answering note.

Accurate adjustment of the dimensions of the fold to the requirements of the flock is gained only by practice. Even experienced shepherds are liable to err in this particular, and will confess that on occasion they have enclosed too much or too little space.

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There does not appear to be any definite rule of proportion between the number of animals to be folded and that of the hurdles to form their pen, and while most shepherds by a glance could say roughly how many sheep a fold contained, few could give even an approximate idea of its area. One man, partly to gratify my curiosity, partly to gratify his own which had been roused by my questions on the subject, took the trouble to count the hurdles inside which three hundred ewes and their lambs were enclosed with space enough and to spare. He found they numbered a hundred and twenty, showing that sheep are not extravagant in their demands as regards house-room.

It was remarked to me by a Berkshire farmer not long ago, that though plenty of these useful animals may be reared nowadays, shepherds are dying out, and paradoxical as the statement at first sight appears, it nevertheless contains a measure of truth. There can be little doubt that as a type, distinguished by definite characteristics, this, like many another class of farm servants, is being educated out of existence. The external signs of the shepherd's calling have disappeared, the short blue or white linen jacket commonly worn by working men, has replaced his smock; the long frieze coat, in appearance not unlike his charges' woolly fleece, wherewith till recent years he defied the stern breezes

of this part of the country, has been doffed for—significant sign of the times!—a military cloak.

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His crook, at once the symbol of his profession and the instrument by means of which, according to popular belief, he checked the forward and "taught" the laggard members of his flock, has shrunk to a mere ash-plant, an insignificant walking-stick used to support his steps during his frequent journeys from the fireside to the fold, when he is leading his flock across the fields to pastures new or driving them, unwilling victims, to the neighbouring market town. But for his dog trotting meekly, with drooped tail at his heels, he is indistinguishable from his unskilled fellow-labourers.

Happily however, among the Downs, a remnant of the past generation still survives, whom the present age has been unable to modernize save in externals. The greater portion of these men's lives has been passed in solitude; for weeks at a time they have been absent from their homes and families, sleeping in a tiny cot, which was moved from place to place as the requirements of the land or the supply of fodder on the ground necessitated the presence of sheep. An occasional trip to the nearest village for provisions alone broke the monotony of their existence during this enforced seclusion, when "you med goo fur days wi'out seem arra-one to spake to, 'ceptin' 'twur yer pooer dog or the ship." As may be supposed, they are for the most part a taciturn class, slow of speech, illiterate, incredibly ignorant of the world outside their own limited circuit. One such hermit of the Downs

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lately mentioned to his employer the fact that he had never been in a train, though he had more than once "sin he a-runnin' along." The master, with the kindest intentions, not only gave him a holiday but supplied the funds for an excursion to a distant town. The "shuckettin' an' hollerin'" of the locomotive proved too much for the shepherd's nerves: he "wur that frowtened," as he himself expressed it, that on the first available opportunity he descended to *terra firma*, swearing by all his gods that never again would he commit himself to an undertaking fraught with such peril as a railway journey. Despite their ignorance, these old fellows can upon occasion display a shrewd mother-wit.

“When I wur livin' down in the Vale,” said one who lived for some years in our village and who may be regarded as a typical specimen, “some folks attackted ma, an' med game on ma, tryin' to put ma in the dark 'cause I wur a shepherd. 'Shepherds be a pooer lot o' iggerants,' um sez; ‘they dwun't knaw nothen 'cept 'bout their few ship.'

“' Have you read your Bible?” sez I to they, ' 'cause I have, from Genesis to Revelation, an' I can't see as shepherds be sa wunnerful little thought on sence the beginnin' o' the worruld. There's Jacob an' Moses an' David as wur shepherds: they sims to be spoke of ree-speckful anuff in the Bible, by what I can mek out. An' ther's one thing I'd like to ax 'ee. Have you iver yeard tell of a carter or a

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fogger bein' med a king, like David wur? “Bless 'ee, all them carters and foggers gin up tarrifyin' ma fur bein' a shepherd arter that.” How the hero of this story acquired his Biblical lore was a mystery, since he confessed to me that he was “no scholerd—childern wurn't fust to 'tend schoold when I wur young, like 'um be now.” He came of a race of shepherds: in fact it was a tradition in his native village that for more than a hundred years one of his family had taken part in the shearing on a certain farm. Like his father and grandfather before him he began to learn his trade at the early age of seven, which did not leave much time for the acquisition of head knowledge. Tiring of the peaceful monotony of the fold, he exchanged his crook for a sword and took the Queen's shilling. Within a few years, however, he reverted to the occupation of his youth, and came home light in pocket—having bought himself out at his wife's entreaty—but rich in that valuable commodity, experience. Part of his brief period of service with the colours, which has conferred distinction upon him for the remainder of his life, was spent in Ireland, and it was his turn, on finding himself once more among his old associates to gibe at whilom scoffers as “pooer fullish craturs what thinks England be pretty nigh the hull of the worruld an' that the Irish be black men!” At times he was assailed by poignant regret that he did not follow the example of a friend, learn to read and write, make the Army his home, and attain finally

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to the dignity of a sergeant with a pension of fourteen shillings a week. These pangs of blighted ambition became particularly keen throughout the lambing season, when he not

seldom had to leave his bed two and three times during the night—be there rain, frost or snow outside, to attend to the yeaning ewes. The war in South Africa fired him with
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renewed martial ardour: he heard “as they Bores be comin' over here to pull the Queen off her throne an' shut her up in a little island. But afoor things got to that, I reckon I should putt on my red jackut an' goo out to strike a blow fur she—blessed if I 'udn't!”
It must be remembered that to shepherds all days are alike. Every seven years they complete one of working Sundays, and a favourite method of calculating the length of their professional career is by these Sabbatical milestones. Seven such is considered a creditable record, but I know shepherds who have put in eight and even nine years of Sundays. Holidays with these workers have been few and far between—a day in a decade, perhaps—illnesses even rarer. One splendid veteran with clear-cut features, a complexion like a polished rosy apple, and eyes that seemed to have absorbed something of the sky's blueness, who laid aside his crook, not on account of any infirmity of age, but because he had had “anuft o' messin' about wi' ship,” could show a clean bill of health throughout his seventy-one years, with the exception of a slight attack of rheumatism, brought on by sleeping in his cot during a lengthened spell of bad weather. The immunity from bodily ills enjoyed by this class of farm-servant seems to corroborate the statement, mentioned a few pages ago, as to the beneficial effect upon the health which the proximity of sheep exercises. If the authority of one of their number is to be trusted, shepherds
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come third on the list in respect of longevity, notwithstanding the exposure to all weathers which they necessarily undergo, and the onerous nature of their duties, for, “you've allus got summat on your mind: maister leaves everythink to you, an' if anythink goos wrong, you jest about ketches it,” plaintively remarked a member of the profession. Sometimes, on the contrary, it is the master who “ketches” it, as in one case when the man, irritated by what he considered unjust criticism of his dog and censure on the quality of the lambs—fully aware moreover of his own value—pulled his employer from the saddle, engaged him in fair fight and drove him ignominiously from the fold, the other taking his thrashing with meekness from a servant whom he dared not dismiss in these days when his equal would be difficult to find.

Here are two anecdotes—I can guarantee their genuineness—which give some idea of the ignorance and simplicity prevalent among the shepherds of the Downs. One such was tending his sheep when he was approached by a candidate for the County Council who requested the promise of his vote.

“Vote?” inquired the man of flocks, removing his hat in order to stimulate the flow of his ideas—“vote? what be that, h'wever?”

“Don't you take any interest in politics, that you don't know what a vote is?” retorted the other. A ray of comprehension pierced the shepherd's brain.

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“Oh aye, now I knaws what 'ee be drivin' arter,” he exclaimed with interest. “So this be a noo kind of tick, be 'un? I knaws the or'nary sort, but I ha'n't niver yeard o' these polly 'uns afoor!”

The second incident happened to the father of a lady with whom I am well acquainted and who related it to me herself.

A doctor well known in the district, was riding over a wild stretch of down, when he came across a fold and stopped to exchange a few words with its guardian. A couple of questions elicited the fact that the latter inhabited a desolate cottage, far removed from any other dwelling, and the physician further proceeded to inquire how the lonely family managed to obtain medical assistance in time of illness.

“Well, sir,” replied the shepherd in all good faith, “we dwun't ha' no doctor: we just dies a nat'ral death!

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