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GOSSIP CORNER

by

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[NP]

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AUTHOR'S NOTE
TO THE FIRST EDITION

To the series *Tales from Gossip Corner*, which appeared in *The London Magazine,* other stories from *The Westminster Gazette, Country Life, The Tribune,* and *The British Weekly*, have been added, and I wish to thank the editors of these periodicals for permission to include them in this volume.

[NP]

CONTENTS

I. GOSSIP CORNER ... 1
II. BY THE LIGHTGATE UNDER THE YEW ... 3
III. ON THE VILLAGE GREEN ... 26
IV. ON CAMEL HUMP ... 49
V. AT 'THE BARLEY MOW' ... 73
VI. THE 'TEDDY-GROUND' ... 89
VII. IN FRONT OF 'THE SHEAF AND SICKLE' ... 117
VIII. ON THE VILLAGE BRIDGE ... 143
IX. AT THE VILLAGE SHOP ... 170
X. BY THE VILLAGE POUND ... 193

[1]

CHAPTER I

GOSSIP CORNER

I DO not promise you the truth of the following stories. Doubtless each one of them has some foundation in fact. But they have all been told and retold so many times, that it would be strange indeed if they did not owe a touch here and there to the fancy of the historian. All that the mere compiler can guarantee, in handing you this volume, is well expressed in the assurance so commonly given at the end of any rural story which excites surprise, 'Well, now you've a-got it as I had it. So I can say no more.'

I have heard them all at Gossip Corner; and there, a strict veracity is invariably sacrificed to the requirements of art. In the pure air of that delightful nook stories of all

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

sorts and colours spring up as thick as flowers on a south border under the smile of spring. They bud; they open; they expand. For this book I have gathered none but old-fashioned
[2]

perennials, and of these only such as are full-blown. So if some of the tales be a little of the past, why, so much the better. My bouquet will have an old-world air, like a bunch of gillawfers or bloomy-downs from a cottage garden.

And where is Gossip Corner?

Always in Honeycombe, so far as these records are concerned. But not always in the same place.

It is the Court which sits upon the doings and shortcomings of our neighbours, and, like the King's Assize, it shifts its quarters constantly and makes the circuit of our little village of Honeycombe. Of a summer evening it may be under the chestnut-trees by the green; or by the allotment gate, where men and women, fetching to-morrow's peas and beans, pass to and fro with baskets on their arms. In winter it sits mostly around the chimney-corner of the village alehouse.

Wherever it may be, there is always something to be learnt.

It was not until yesterday that I heard the authorised version as to how old John Pike earned a nickname that has hitherto seemed to be inapplicable in every detail.

And that is the first story that you shall hear.
[3]

CHAPTER II

BY THE LICHGATE UNDER THE YEW

IT was noonday, and midsummer, as of course you know, and our little meeting was unconvened and quite informal.

We did not gather, as, alas! does now and then happen, to discuss any question of village misfortune or ill-doing in particular, but were summoned by a Scotch bagpiper who passed through Honeycombe and suddenly struck up a reel in front of the parish church.

At the first note, every man, woman and child within hearing popped out into the street. The people of Honeycombe are fond of music, and drew round in a circle to listen with rapt attention. Old John Pike stood by looking on in open-mouthed wonder, whilst, without mishap, a younger Caledonian in kilt and tartan performed a sword-dance in the corners formed by crossing two long clay tobacco-pipes.

Old John Pike is not thought much of in Honeycombe. As he stood there yesterday a little apart, frowning approval of a rather intricate performance,
[4]

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

he appeared to be a mild, inoffensive person with a taste for art. When the music ceased he turned away and walked thoughtfully down the street alone. Some of the rest of us remained to talk things over close to the churchyard and under the shadows of the lichgate and the yew.

'I never could make out,' said I, 'why old John Pike came to be called Bluebeard. The name is inappropriate in every particular. He has never married. And if he had, to associate him even with a single justifiable homicide would strain and completely buckle up the finest imagination. And more than that, of a Saturday night, when he has had his shave, there is not the sign of a hair upon his face.'

There were Jonah Bagley, the smith — and Silas Legg, the baker — and the young Tom Platt and ever so many more, standing round, besides the womenfolk, and they all looked from one to the other, grinned, bestowed sly nudges, and finally roared outright.

'What! Didn't you ever hear?' they shouted in chorus.

'Not a word.'

'But 'tes an old tale, told and told again till at last he got wore out and then well-nigh forgotten,' exclaimed Silas Legg.

'Then you tell it, Silas.'

[5]

'No, no. You tell it, Jonah. Why, you saw it with your own eyes.'

'So I did!' cried the smith.

Jonah Bagley is a thick-set man of sixty, with a broad, good-humoured face for ever on the grin, showing a perfect set of teeth under a stiff moustache, once black, but now sprinkled with grey. His shirt-sleeves were rolled up above his elbows. He rested his hands upon his hips, threw back his head, and laughed anew.

'Oh, oh! an' so I did! But that must be up forty years agone.'

The smith cleared his throat and turned towards me. All the others drew closer around.

'Yes, to be sure,' said he, 'I can tell you the tale of

BLUEBEARD

'Oh, but things were different then. Ah, ah! Old John Pike had a beard in them days, sure enough. He must ha' been a man o' thirty or thereabouts, an' he had the fairest, softest, most beautifulest beard that ever wagged 'pon the chin o' man. 'Twas a beard, if I may so say, the colour o' a little maid's hair when you do call it flaxen. 'Twas a longish beard, too, wi' just a wave in the hair, the same as you do see sometimes in a cart-mare's undocked tail, a light chestnut mare now wi'

[6]

a cream-coloured mane, and he had a wonderful glossy sheen 'pon un where John did stroke un down in pride when he did join in conversation like. He were a terrible chap to talk in them days. There were nothen in heaven or earth that John couldn't explain like, or try to. But, worse than his tongue, he had a most shameful habit for one that did talk so fair. For John Pike was a man that would take a sly swig out of another man's firkin.

'Maybe you never heard of a firkin, for you do but see one now and again in these days. 'Twere the little old-fashioned cask that a man did use to carry his cider out to work. Might hold three quart or a gallon, and in the summer time we did hide un fresh an' cool under a hazel-bush or out o' the sun in among the brambles in the ditch. Why, 'twere so good as a cellar any day o' the week. And nobody ever thought o' thieving, till one day Jeremiah Platt—an' I don't tell you no lie, for he were young Tom's father—chanced to be casten his eye over hedge three grounds off, an' he catched sight o' John Pike, arms up, lags apart, head back, a-swigging away out o' the bunghole of another man's firkin.

'Now, Jeremiah, mind, could take his Bible oath to what he saw, though to be sure he couldn't so much as make affydavy to the partic'lar firkin. Mind, no man 'pon earth could speak more fair. Might be one's, might be t'other's. Still, as Jeremiah
[7]

said, no matter whose it might be, stealing can't be honest, look at it how you will. So Jeremiah he just whispered in every ear in parish what he had a-zeed. Then they one an' all swore they'd nab John Pike if they did die for it. An' they did say they'd put physic in the firkin—only, there, they couldn't settle 'pon it, and a'most fell to blows as to whose firkin. Did seem to be such a woeful waste o' good cider, too. An', besides, wash out the firkin how you mid, might disagree wi' the next man that did drink. Still, they were all o' one mind, as they had a couple o' months to think about it, to lay their heads together an' set a trap for John come next haymaking.

'But, la! haymaking were another thing them days.

'The womenfolk did go out then to turn the swathe and to rake after the wagon. An' a friend or so would walk out from town for to enjoy the smell o' the hay an' the fun wi' the maidens. There were two or three young chaps comed along that year. I count the word passed round there were some prank afoot. Young Christopher Jay, now, he walked over from town; he were a dyer by trade, an' I'll tell 'ee a tale about he one o' these days. And John, the cooper, up to hill; he that shut up the billy-goat in old Mother Blake's three-cornered cupboard. An' one or two more. There, I do forget. They must ha' had a' inkling o' what were up.
[8]

Though, if this were my dying word, I had no more thought o' what they had a-made up their minds to 'an you have yourselves at this moment.

'Now, John Pike, he was the cowman, an' did a goodish bit about the homestead. So he'd be out to the hay for a couple o' hours an' back again. An' one o' 'em put down a firkin just so as the dark staves an' hoops did peep a sort o' tempting like between the docks an' nettles by the gate where John must come an' go. Now, I tell 'ee, there were smirks an' smiles; an' the very maidens, though they did hardly dare to turn their heads, did cast round a' eye like to see if John were on the way. But no sooner did they glimpse un away 'pon the path than they all drawed up to the rick to gie the man a chance like. But John, he could no more pass a quiet firkin than old Mother Blake's cat could a dish o' cream. Some of 'em peeped round to watch John. An' he tossed back his head. An' his throat did glutchy. An' he did just about drink.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

'Well, you know, there is a moisture left 'pon the lips if you do drink out of a firkin. So John, you see, he just rubbed across his moustache wi' the back of his hand, an' hurried on not to waste time. An' up to the rick the folk they did gather round an' laugh, an' was so merry. But John, now he had a-had a drop to oil his tongue, did talk an' talk, an' every other word he did stroke down his beautiful flaxen
[9]

beard, an' all the while the maidens did encourage un like, an' giggle an' laugh the more. An' as they did chackle, John, thinking 'twere his wit, did but talk the faster, an' stroke an' stroke the more.

'At last one o' the giggling maidens up an' said:

' "Why, whatever have ' ee got on your hand, Mr. Pike?"

'Then John looked.

'Both back an' palm were all in streaks the colour of a blue china dish.

' "Why, you've a-got some on your beard, too, Mr. Pike!" cried one o' the maidens, so innocent as a babe.

' " Why, sure now, you mus' ha' been stinged by a waps an' borrowed your sweetheart's blue-bag," put in another.

'Then John, thoughtless like, clapped up his hand an' stroked an' stared again.

'Then Jeremiah Platt stepped out in front.

' " Why, Mr. Thief, now I tell 'ee you be a-catched. You've a-been a-kissing the mouth o' my firkin, for I did put a bit o' blue lip-salve 'pon the bunghole, now I do come to think 'pon it!" cried he; and though Jeremiah did pretend to laugh, you could hear his voice sound sort o' spiteful too.

'Oh! You never didn' see a chap look so sheepish. He couldn' deny a thing so clear. 'Twere not a bit o' good to talk then. An' all the folk jeered, till
[10]

verily an' truly in my heart I did a'most feel pity for the man. An' then Christopher Jay, the dyer, he stepped up an' spoke to John Pike. He spoke so serious as a passon, an' yet so very soft an' quiet, like a true friend.

" 'Tis a dye new found out," said he. " 'Tis a sort of a essence in the form of a paste, an' a quarter of a teaspoonful is enough for a fifty gallon vat. I should run down to the sheepwash there in the brook beyond the alder-bushes, if I was you, an' wash it off afore it do get set. For I tell 'ee this: 'tis a dye that do stand for a skin-rug or a doormat, so I don't see why it shouldn't for a beard. Why, you'll find it firmer, John, than the nat'ral yaller, for that must silver a bit in years to come when you do turn grey."

'Now, that just about frightened John Pike. He set off like mad down to the river. He laid hiszelf down all along-straight on his belly, wi' his head over the bank, an' he splashed an' splashed both hands so hard as he could. Now, that dye had such strength that they did say the river carried a tinge right down to the mill. Mind, I couldn't vouch for that my own zelf. I were up in the hayfield. But this I can promise —at the end of an hour an' a half John's flaxen beard were a beautiful sky-blue, an' then he had to go down to fetch in the cows.

'Christopher Jay owned afterwards that that beard took the dye better than any dyer 'pon earth

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

could ever have expected. No greasy patches, but as level as a piece of cloth. And John couldn't move it, either. Soap had no effect at all, and soda only served to bring up the colour. Christopher counselled John how he could make a goodish bit of money too. He said if John could only see his way to hire hiszelf out to the inventor, an' go round the country to market an' fair as an advertisement for that new dye, he need never to twist a calf's tail no more in this life, for his fortune was made.

'But as time passed on the joke really turned out a little too much, and more than one that laughed in the beginning begun to feel sorry for John Pike in the end. They used to gather round the man of an evening, and try to think what he could do. But if you do watch it, a beard is a wonderful slow-growing thing. The wimmin-folk said to look at John was really more tedious than to wait for the tay-kettle to boil. They soon saw the colour must take years to grow out, an' some foresaw that mus' turn into a sort of blue-tipped fringe in the doing.

'An' yet that dye, though it was so strong and cast such a clean fresh hue in the beginning, proved not satisfactory after all. The dyer said that what was wanted in good right to make a real good job of it was a chemical striker to bind it fast. But that might be only a tale, for fear his dying should get a bad name.

'It was haymaking time, an' sunny weather, to be sure, but after about a week or two John Pike's beard began to fade. Well, the parish were wonderful pleased to see how fast it went. Everybody thought the blue would be clean gone in six months; an' John felt glad in his heart. But when that dye came to a sort of a pale silver-lavender, there it stuck. It never moved a inch then, any more than Honeycombe church tower there. Then all the girls in parish did come an' reason wi' John, an' point out that a silver-lavender is but a poor colour for a man's beard. They said unless he could exactly match the shade for his hair, which was really too nice a thing to hope for, he must go through life looking no better than a fool. They could but lament what a pity 'twas that John's fleece should be too stiff to spin; otherwise 'twould ha' made sich lovely clocks for a few pair o' scarlet Sunday hose.

'So, for the peace of his life, the poor feller was a-forced to make up his mind to a clean shave, an' that's how John Pike comed to be called Bluebeard.

'I never heard that he ever took a swig since at another man's firkin. But I do sometimes feel a little sorry for John. He've a-lived a very quiet life. I do count 'tis the tale o' Samson over again. Cutting off his beard must ha' took the strength

out of his tongue. But la! I'd sooner hear a fellow-creature talk, even if he do talk nonsense.'

The company unanimously agreed.

We are no good at all at Gossip Corner unless we talk.

'By the by, talking of beards,' suddenly cried Silas Legg, the baker, 'did you ever hear about Miller Toop and Zebedee Luke?'

'No,' said one.

'Never mind whether they have or not. You tell it, Silas!' cried all the rest with one voice.

'Well, now,' explained Silas thoughtfully, 'I do know of my own knowledge that that is true, for my father bought both wheaten flour an' pig's meat off of Miller Toop for more than forty year.'

'Then ten it, Silas. Do'ee, now.'

'Well, well, if that's your wish,' conceded Silas Legg, the baker, as he stepped forward into the centre of the group.

He is a small man, with a little, round face full of puckers, and a complexion as pink and white as a young girl's. But that, after all, may be from the heat of the oven and the dust of the flour. No one has a more willing disposition than Silas Legg. He has a nervous little cough and manner very becoming in a man to whom every human being within ten miles is a possible customer.

[14]

Silas glanced at the clock on the church tower, and cleared his throat.

'Tis nothing, to be sure,' said he apologetically. 'However, such as 'tis, I don't mind telling the story of

MILLER TOOP'S PALM

'Well, we do all know Miller Toop's little gristmill, with the half-hatch door, and the byway down from the highroad, where the wagons do back in to load up the sacks.

'Quiet there now it may be, but there was a time when that old mill never let so much as a half-pint willingly run to waste. Then that little byway was sometimes so busy as a fair. And one afternoon Zebedee Luke drove his old mare and two-wheeled cart down from hill to fetch his bit o' grist. But mind, there was one or two others a-standing round about afore Zebedee Luke came.

'Now whether anybody had already a-ruffled up Miller Toop, or rubbed his hair the wrong way, I cannot say. For though miller always was a kind man and ready to do any neighbour a good turn, his temper was that short and crisp that he'd break off sudden if any mortal soul did thwart or condradict. Why, he'd look so smiling upon man, woman or child as the sun upon that pointing-end one minute; then just a word, and in two seconds

[15]

he'd be up like a tearing lion. But when his monkey did rise, mind, his tongue could be so bitter as barm. And yet he had a way of his own, too, so neat and dry as a biscuit.

'Well, Miller Toop was a little, sharp-featured feller, no taller 'an myself, but Zebedee Luke was a different sort of a man. He was tall as a bean-stick and lean as a rail. He had a thin long nose, the shape o' the back of a hedger's hook. He had the character, too, all round the country o' being the most discontentedest man that ever walked. He'd turn a penny twice, an' look both sides o' un, afore he'd buy a varden dip to light un up to bed. But a man like that do never thrive. He'll starve his bit o' ground, and say the seasons have a-cheated un. He'll sow half a crop, and show how the things o'

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

rooks have a-robbed un where 'tis so thin. Zebedee would go so willing as a greased gimlet to another man's house an' drink a cup an' eat enough for any two, though 'twere so good as half a day's work to get on the inside of his front door. Now, that sort o' man, to my mind, is no good to hiszelf an' no company to other people. My poor father used to say that surely th' Almighty had never a-gied un heart enough to enjoy hiszelf. Still, for all that, such an one may serve a wise purpose, and be sent by Providence to be both a trial and a lesson to his friends.
[16]

'Well, Zebedee comed down wi' his little cart, an' the lean old mare that had never so much as sniffed at 'a oat in her life, an' he bustled up to the hatch in a hurry to get his bit o' grist and go.

'Now, Zebedee had such a dissatisfied nature that he couldn't trust his own opinion to keep in the same mind two days running. And in those times there were different plans o' paying a miller. Some would pay in money, and some that had no coin did let the miller take his toll. And some, when 'twere wheat, would have back the bran, if they had a use for it. But Zebedee Luke could never hold twice running to the same arrangement. This was but a small bit o' barley for pig's meat, and he had agreed when he brought it down to mill to take all home for a price, money in hand paid. So you'd think there could be no difference arise between ' em.

"Well, Zebedee Luke," cried the miller, quite pleasant like. "An' how is Zebedee Luke?"

' "Well, miller," replied Zebedee Luke, for he was a man very sparing o' words. "An' how is Miller Toop?"

' " An' here's your sack, Zebedee, all ready an' waiten," said Miller Toop, an' brought the bag outside, an' shut the little half-door an' leaned out wi' his arms 'pon un.

'But Zebedee he eyed his sack up an' down a
[17]

good minute an' a half as if he were rather astonished at th' appearance o' un.

' " But if you do bear in mind, Miller Toop," said he, very slowly, "I said I'd pay, but I do see you've a-forgot that, an' measured out your toll a'ready."

' "No, no, Zebedee. 'Twere but a very poor sample an' that's all 'tis."

'Zebedee sort o' pouted out his lips an' tossed his head afore he spoke, an' the miller did begin to look a bit rusty.

' "Well, they do tell I that a miller's pigs be always fat," sneered Zebedee.

' "Mine be pork by this time, for the butcher fetched 'em the day afore yesterday," replied the miller, a bit short an' crusty like.

'Now, Zebedee was never a man wi' a quick tongue. He did give so much thought to his words as he did to his ha'pence afore he could bear to part wi' 'em. But all the folk drawed closer round; for there was a sort of a glint in the miller's eye as he leaned 'pon the hatch, an' they all grinned like, to think there would be some fun in a minute.

'To see 'em made Zebedee so surly as a bear. "Well, 'tis a old saying," drawled he, "that a honest miller have a-got a tuft o' hair in the palm of his hand. Now, I never had the opportunity to inform myself whether Miller Toop can show that sign or no."

'Then Zebedee turned from one to another, an'

[18]

simpered 'pon 'em all round. He thought he had a-said something that time. But la! in half a second the miller's hand was out like a terrier dog upon a rat, and he'd a-grabbed Zebedee's beard in his fist. "Oh yes!" cried he, an' gied a spiteful bit of a shake to make his meaning clear like. "Miller Toop have a-got a very fine tuft o' hair in his palm. An', what's more, he'll never part wi' un in this life until Zebedee Luke do own he's a honest man."

'Well, Zebedee hollared and swore, an' the neighbours they did laugh till they ached. For there was Zebedee 'pon one side o' the half-hatch an' Miller Toop 'pon t'other. An' Zebedee he couldn't go for'ard or back. For the little low door did block his way in front, an' no man in his senses could pull his own beard out by the roots.

' "Let me go! Let me go!" yelled Zebedee, louder than a stuck pig.

' " Then speak out, I tell 'ee. Have Miller Toop a-got a tuft o' hair on the palm of his hand? Yes or no? Speak out for your life, Zebedee Luke! Or, if you do find you can't work your lower jaw, just wink both eyes. Or, so sure as the light, in about half a minute there'll be a gap in your beard so big as a shard in hedge where the hounds have a-been through."

' Then Zebedee he worked his two eyelids up an' down for all the world like a goose a-flapping

[19]

her wings afore rain. An' then the tears did trickle down his cheeks. You see he couldn't in truth do other than own that such was the case; an' when the miller let go he just sat down 'pon his own sack and panted.'

'Did any further trouble come of it?' I asked.

'Well, he did talk o' law; but law do mean money, win or lose, an' so there was no fear o' that. An' everybody said how ridiculous a man did look to take notice of a little joke like that. So in a month Zebedee took down another grist o' wheat. Then miller brought out a quart of cider, an' they sat down like brothers side by side on the old upping-stock, an' drank together and talked. But Zebedee never made no further reference to the miller's palm. An' Miller Toop he also let the matter drop. But heart alive! There's the clock. I must make haste to pack my cart, or I shall be behind 'pon my rounds. Good-day.'

'Good-day,' said all of us.

'Ay, an' I ought to be going too,' said young Tom Platt with deep conviction, as he adjusted his shoulder more comfortably against the churchyard wall.

'We don't all do what we did ought,' said Jonah with equal seriousness, 'or we should be better off, most o' us, body an' soul. But this I will say: Silas do —he *do* look after his business, an' bake so

[20]

sweet a batch as any man living could wish to put tooth into. So did his father too. Though, to be sure, the old Silas Legg was the funniest man to look at that ever I did set eyes 'pon, an' so was the young Silas's mother too.'

'Eh?'

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

'Well, well! In a manner o' speaking like. The pair o' 'em really was for all the world like the two bits o' china 'pon top o' your mantelpiece, Jonah. I do always say so, an' always shall. You do mind about their courtship, don't 'ee? But there! We've all a-heard that hundreds o' times. I do mind it so clear as if 'twere but yesterday.'

Young Tom Platt was only young by comparison. There were older Tom Platts, several of them, yet this one could remember village history for at least five-and-thirty years. He was a great easy-going wheelwright, with a face as round as the block of a wheel. He clipped his stubbly beard so that was round also, and he shaved his upper lip.

Having once mentioned the matter, no power on earth could have stopped young Tom Platt from telling the story of

OLD SILAS LEGG'S COURTSHIP

'Yes. Well, you must know that the old Silas had a-cast eyes 'pon 'Lizabeth Blake for many a
[21]

year; leastways, so the tale did go. Not that old Silas had ever walked her out after work of an evening like or taken any step that should give just reason for talk. But then Silas was no walker. His legs were so bandy that, though the man was never heard to make complaint, 'twas really a'most painful for other folk to look at. You did only see Silas a-foot once a week when he did waddle to church. He used to ride roun' up in his cart, wi' the reins a-hanged up to a little hook in the tilt, to leave his hands free for the loaves. All the neighbours that knew his infirmity used to run out to door or down to the garden hatch at the sound of his wheels, though now and then he'd take a boy round to hop down an' go wi' the basket.

'Now Lizzie, she lived at the furthermost of the two cottages up overright the pound. 'Tis a quiet situation, just round the bend out o' sight. An' they did say —though I can't swear to that, mind, not myzelf —she did linger like an' talk to old Silas more than was necessary for the taking up of a quartern loaf, for 'twas mostly four-pound loaves them days. An' they did say that Silas would take any trouble like to turn over the loaves an' pick out a crusty one to her mind. An' to be sure the time they did take was a little remarkable like, for old Silas was no light-talking man. He was really an' truly more of a deep-thinking sort, though, for lack
[22]

o' telling, nobody living did ever come at what he did think like, in the inside o' the head o' un. An' this went on for years. The neighbours did all have a word to ask o' 'Lizabeth when she did hope to wed, but she did only laugh.

'Well, one day in early summer, there had a-been a drop o' rain, I do mind, an' the beans up in the little four-acre plough-ground there handy were all out in flower, an' did smell so sweet as a nosegay. Sally Platt — an' I do know this is true, for she were a first cousin first remove to me—she was in the upstair chamber o' the next-door cottage a-sot 'pon a low cane-bottomed chair, wi' her eyes 'pon a level wi' the window sill, a'most out o' sight from the road. And to be sure, being hot summer in the afternoon, all the windows were wide open, when Lizzie went down to get her loaf.

'Now whether 'twere the breath o' the beans, or the freshness o' the air, or the heat o' the sun a-shining down 'pon thik black tilt, I can't say, but Sally Platt, she said the old Silas looked 'pon 'Lizabeth wi' most wonderful longing eyes. An' Lizzie —why, she must ha' been hard 'pon fifty then —she sort o' stood an' simpered an' waited about, for no reason that Sally Platt could see, wi' the warm new loaf a tucked under the arm o' her.

"Elizabeth Blake," said the old Silas very
[23]

solemn, but at the same time very friendly like, "you be no young girl. Must be a score o' years, ay, handier to a score and ten, that you was out o' your teens. I've a-watched you many a year, an' thought about 'ee too. I do like your ways —that is, so fur as I do know 'em. If you be a-minded to change your name to Legg, I be willing to find 'ee the opportunity. You've a-got a few pounds an' a little house that comed to thee from your uncle John, I do know, an' I be comfortable off, too, all so well. We should be all that the better off together, Elizabeth Blake, if we should prove both o' one mind."

' " La! Mr. Legg," said Elizabeth, with her voice all to a flutter like, "but that's where 'tis. You do quite terrify a body. I don't know but what I be very well as I be."

' "You be," said Silas, with all the candour in life; "but there's no harm done an' no offence meant. I thought I could but put the question to 'ee, if 'twere only to hear what you did say."

' " La! Mr. Legg," said Lizzie. "You do put a poor body into such a flousterment."

' " But there, mind, Elizabeth Blake, I wouldn' never be the man to ask ' ee to answer in haste. 'Tis a very serious thing, matrimony, look at it how you will; an' none but the very young or the giddy-headed do think different. Take time to
[24]

consider, Elizabeth Blake, an' gie the matter your constant thought. There's no hurry at all; an' I do stop at your door, as you do know, never less than twice a week. I wouldn' press the matter 'pon 'ee. I wouldn' for the life o' me induce 'ee to act against your judgment by no words o' mine. I wouldn' say yes or no, if I thought it, not for a week, if I was you."

'Well, Lizzie Blake she jus' looked down 'pon the road, an' scraped up a little heap o' the white dust wi' her foot like, but all she could find to say in her confusion was:

' "La, Mr. Legg!"

' "You could walk down so far any time you do feel yourself at leisure, an' look over the house first if you was a-minded," suggested the old Silas. "I'd never be one myself to urge any woman to buy a pig in a poke, as the saying is. Though I do say it myzelf, you'd find it a comfortable place, an' though there mid be now and then a cockroach, an' I don't deny it, the little parlour is wonderful warm, for he do lie wi' his back to the oven. But I'll say no more now, Lizzie. An' there's no need for any more words. This day week when I do say 'How many?' if you should make reply 'Two loaves,' I shall take your meaning myself, because the boy mid be up in cart. 'Two loaves,' Lizzie. Do 'ee try to bear it in mind. Now don't 'ee forget.
[25]

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

An' if such you should say we shall be spared 'all further talk, an' then I'll just go down the first hour I've a-got to spare an' put in the banns."

'So with that the old Silas put his hand up an' jus' gied the reins a shake and the old hoss jogged on.

'Well, there were a pretty fine talk in parish, I tell 'ee, but all secret like, an', when the week were up, two or three went up in that window, an' waited out o' sight to hear the end o' it.

'Now no soul living could ever think o' Lizzie's answer not if they didn't know.'

Young Tom Platt glanced from one to another.

Those who knew shook their heads wisely and were silent.

Nobody hazarded a guess.

'The old Silas he asked very quiet like:

' " Same as usual, I suppose, Miss Blake?"

'But Lizzie, she had always been knowed to be a very careful manager an' to make a penny go so far as it could, an' she up an' said:

' "Two half-loaves, please!' "

[26]

CHAPTER III

ON THE VILLAGE GREEN

THE most interesting and picturesque nook of Honeycombe is the village green —a large square sward, worn bare in patches at the corner nearest to the school, where the boys play single-wicket against the trunk of a horse-chestnut tree and little maidens dance singing games.

It is not by the church, though the square grey tower may be seen rising behind more than one group of brown roofs and gables. But many of the most important houses in the parish as well as some of the humblest look out upon the green. The doctor's mansion, with iron railings and three stone steps before an oak door with windowed upper panels and a brass knocker, stands on one side. Our little alehouse with its swinging sign 'The Barley Mow' is on the other. Though to be sure we have a finer inn, an old coaching hostelry called 'The Sheaf and Sickle,' about a quarter of a mile away.

The south end of the green is shaded by a group of trees, and just in front, under two weather-beaten elms, stands the pride of our village —the

[27]

ancient village stocks. We are right to give ourselves airs in Honeycombe. Never a week passes but some 'foreigner' or the other stops to look at our stocks.

Old Jeremiah Platt lives in a low, thatched cottage, with a very stickle roof, and the eaves arch like the top rim of a pair of spectacles over two little upstair windows that look out upon the village green. Jeremiah, who, as you have heard, is young Tom's father, is prevented by age and general decrepitude from a regular attendance at our

meetings at Gossip Corner. Young Tom, as you know, is fifty, and he was Jeremiah's youngest son. Still, though Jeremiah married early, he married only once, and thus a moderate computation brings what is left of him to something less than one hundred years.

His hearing is gone; his eyesight is impaired. Fifty men might to-day drink out of fifty other men's firkins, with not even a blade or a leaf to hide the crime, without fearing detection from the sunken watering orb of old Jeremiah Platt. His memory is like a sieve with holes. The living, moving activity of a place like Honeycombe runs through it without leaving a trace. Nothing remains but a few good old tales that were told when he was young.

Now, when old Jeremiah began to get past work
[28]

and to talk with a stick, and to love standing about in the sun, having all his life been a watchful, observant man, he took to watching our village stocks. No sooner did a stranger appear on the green than old Jeremiah would hobble across in haste to ingratiate himself.

'Terrible wold-ancient things,' Jeremiah would begin. 'Did' ee ever hear o' the last time any man were a-clapped into they stocks by law?'

For years this story has proved a source of income to Jeremiah.

On one phenomenal, but never-to-be-repeated, summer day things proved so amazingly brisk that Jeremiah earned 'three quart.' He has never forgotten it; and now, when it rains, he sits in wait in the cottage porch. Thus, when we hold our regular evening meeting by the village stocks, he sometimes mistakes us for a group of strangers. He hurries across, peers at us without recognition through an old pair of tortoiseshell spectacles, nods his old head, and wags his long, unkempt beard as he pipes out the question:

'Did 'ee ever hear tell o' Constable Bartholomew White? I can tell 'ee, if you be a-minded, the name o'—'

We try to explain, but deafness is silence.

The old man, wanting no other consent, goes on, — 'the name o'
[29]

THE LAST MAN PUT IN BY LAW

'Then, you must know, a year or two afore my time, there lived in the old house by the corner one Bartholomew White, a very quiet man, who went but little in company, but would sit wi' a long clay pipe of an evening an' read books o' law by the hour. A very knowledgeable man, so they said, an' farmed his own bit o' land. Though he had a word, too, an' a twinkle in the eye o' un, for anybody. An' yet some folk thought he did hold hiszelf off like, an' stick hiszelf up to be a bit cleverer 'an the rest.

'Well, one Michaelmas, he chanced not to go up to the court-leet, where they did do the business them days an' choose the parish officers for the year. To be sure, every freeholder wur bound to be there by law, but the old ways had a-passed away. They didn' keep the strict rules an' laws no longer. But Peter Bagley —he took note

Bartholomew wur absent like, so he winked to one an' another an' passed round the word, an' they voted the man in petty constable for the year.

'They did hold the court in the big assembly room o' "The Sheaf and Sickle," an' they sent word by a boy for Mr. Bartholomew White to please to come to once up afore the stewart o' the manor to be a-swore in. So Bartholomew, he hurried down that minute in a fine tear. He talked an' hollared

[30]

an' whooped. He declared he'd never take the office.

' " Do I understand you do refuse to take oath, then, as by law required, Mr. White?" asked the stewart o' the manor, very stern an' serious like—though, mind, he did but laugh in his sleeve, and a titter did run from one to another all round the place.

'Then Bartholomew White he paused up a couple o' minutes an' looked grave. He knew the law. Refusal to take the oath could be made a quarter-sessions job—that could.

' " Gie us the Book!" cried he, all of a sudden, an' stuck out his hand.

'So the stewart handed the Testament, an' spoke out the words: "*You shall well and truly do and execute all things belonging to the said office according to the best of your skill and knowledge. So help you God."*

'Yet Bartholomew he hung back a minute, an' made a wry face, like one about to swallow a dose o' physic. Then pretty quick he kissed the Book and looked around. "Well, neighbours," said he, very quiet like, "since 'tis the wish o' all, such talent as I've a-got is at your service. An' I don't doubt to make so good a constable as one here an' there."

'So the stewart handed the staff o' office wi' a word o' praise, an' the parish set up a bit of a cheer like, and all passed off for a capital joke.

[31]

'Well, they had dinner an' a drop o' old beer fit to make a man's hair curl or to put a golden glory round a bald man's head. Then they comed out an' down street together, and Bartholomew, staff in hand, walked on so proud as a chile wi' a new toy. But, mind, the Miller Toop an' Jonah Bagley's gran'father chanced along at that time to have a bit of a dispute about the water-rights. So they got to words. And Farmer Bagley, being a hasty man —and the miller a bit quick wi' his tongue too—up wi' his fist an' gied miller a whisterpoop by the side of his ear like, a'most knocked the man down.

' " What!" cried Constable White. "A breach o' the King's Peace in view of the constable! I arrest you, Peter Bagley."

'The farmer looked round in a fury, yet he could but laugh after all.

' "You be new to the job, constable; words be no arrest," he cried, "though if you or any man do dare to lay hand on my shoulder—"

'Now, Bartholomew White was a fine upstanding man an' so strong as a elephant, but he knew the law, an' he did but just put out one finger an' touch Bagley on the sleeve. But being a'ready in heat, Farmer Bagley wrung up his fist.

' "What!" cried the constable, looking at all the parish standing agape. "Threaten a constable!

[32]

In the King's name, Simon Price, Gyles Brook, David French, John Every—"

'He called up a dozen to help the law take Peter Bagley, yeoman, resisting arrest.

'They were neighbours all, just fresh from their cups. They took it for a joke, though, to be sure, they were bound by law. So one and all catched hold o' Peter.

' " Put the man in the stocks till I do carry un afore the nearest justice," cried the new-made constable, so bold as if he had served ten year.

'To be sure, the man's friends didn' want another word. They were but too glad o' the chance. Farmer did fight an' kick an' splunge an' threaten, but away they carried un arms and legs.

'Well, a fine crowd swarmed around about pretty quick, like bees on honey, to look at Farmer Peter Bagley a-popped in the stocks. The womenfolk an' the childern all screamed an' hollared, an' a good many said the constable must be drunk, though, in fact, he was the only man sober.

'Then, all to a sudden, wi' a fresh commotion like, the crowd parted back an' Bagley's missus cut her way through like a wedge —a little woman, wi' a thin sharp face, an' a tongue like a mill-clapper. She looked at Bagley in the stocks. She turned an' glared at Bartholomew. She had no fear o' constable, staff or no staff. She let go. She called the

[33]

man all the names she could lay her little red rag to. But when at last it comed just as if the words had all run out, she gied one shriek, an' she up wi' her flat hand an' catched un a slap o' the head —there, 'twere said you could hear it above the noise right down to the village pound.

' "Eliza Bagley," cried Bartholomew. "Why, what have you done? To assault a petty constable in the execution of his duty, why I do scarcely know myself what 'tis; but must be high treason at the very least! I arrest you, Eliza Bagley. In the King's name, Simon Price, Gyles Brook, John Every—"

'But Mrs. Bagley, she couldn' wait to face the law. She turned tail an' ran like a hare. An' after that, as the tale is, she wur lost for hours. High an' low they searched but never a sign, till some did talk o' suicide, and thought they really ought to drag the duck pond in the barton. An' so they would, only just in the dumps o' evening, the maid, going down into a dark cellar to draw the supper drink, screamed aloud, to catch sight of a pair of shoes and white stockings peeping under the horse below the cask, jus' close to where she put down the candle. They were found to belong to Mrs. Bagley, holding her skirt back tight around her the better to squeeze herself into the corner in between the rounds of two cider-casks and the cellar wall.

'Well! after a time the crowd began to get

[34]

serious. They talked aloud, and all at one time. They said a joke was a joke, and this one had been carried far enough a'ready. But Constable White said it was no joke at all, but a serious business. He said it was no more a joke than his being appointed constable, and he should keep the King's Peace, as well as due watch and ward, according to his oath, to the full of his skill and knowledge. Then they began to see what the parish was in for, Bartholomew White being such a very knowledgeable man.

' "Well, well," said Simon Price, "I only lent a hand to help neighbour Peter Bagley in out o' merriment and goodwill. Now then, friends, enough said. We must take the man out again."

' "You dare touch a finger!" roared the constable.

'But Simon, he took a step forward.

' " 'Tis a rescue. I arrest you, Simon Price. In the King's name, Gyles Brook, John Every, David French—"

' "Damnation!" cried John Every.

' " One profane curse, and a constable hearing is bound to prosecute, John Every," returned Bartholomew.

' " 'Tis nothin' but tomfoolery. Come on, then, friends, one an' all," said they one to another. Then a few o' the boldest stepped forward an' made as if to open the stocks.
[35]

' "What! Take warning! Three or more is a riot. Gyles Brook and John Every, I arrest you both. In the King's name, David French—"

' " But do you mean to take up all the parish, Constable White?" drawled David French, afore he obeyed; for he felt a little in doubt like.

' "I do, God willing, afore the week is out," said the constable; "an' I do give you notice that alehouse tippling, David French, is ten shillings to the poor o' the parish, an' when your wife do step down of an evening an' lay ear to the window to make certain you be inside, that's eavesdropping, and that, if seen, I shall present to the next courtleet."

'Then the parish, they all looked one another in the face an' shook their heads, to think that Bartholomew should be fixed in his office, so tight as a nail in the old church door, for a whole twelvemonth. They saw the folly o' what they'd done, to make a man petty constable who was no fool. And just then the stewart of the manor came riding down street on a fine chestnut mare, an' drew rein to ask the meaning o' the noise.

'When the stewart saw and heard, he laughed fit to drop out o' the saddle.

' "You've done a fine thing for yourselves," cried he, "for the King himself dare not go against the law once put in motion. No power in this world
[36]

can turn out a petty constable. Mr. White is right in fact an' sound in law, an' has sworn to act according to his best knowledge."

' "Then what is the parish to do?"

' "Why, nothing at all," laughed the stewart.

' "Be I to bide here till night?" cried Peter Bagley out o' the stocks.

' "That's as mid chance to turn out, Peter Bagley," replied Constable White.'

Then old Jeremiah paused, and grinned, showing his toothless gums.

'And what did they do?' asked one of our gossips.

'Well, it was found in the book that a deputy might be appointed for good reason shown. But they couldn' pretend to no reason. So at last they thought to send a deputation to wait on Bartholomew and point out that his health could never in this world stand the strain of the office o' petty constable, carried out wi' so much duty an' larning.

'To that Bartholomew agreed.

'So in the end they swore in Peter Bagley deputy, because they all said, "For God's sake, do let us have a constable this time wi' some sense but no knowledge."

'And that's the true tale o' the last man put into Honeycombe stocks by law.'

[37]

One James Every, passing down the road, had stopped to join the gossips on this occasion. He did not belong to Honeycombe himself, though his grandfather once lived here, but he took a seat on the post of the stocks quite as if he were at home. James is a humpty-dumpty sort of a chap, and a parson's coachman by profession. On a post or a wall he looks his best, for he unbuttons his livery coat and the lower half of his striped waistcoat and sits at ease.

'I heard that tale years agone from my grandfather,' laughed James. 'Maybe none o' you do know how the neighbours served out Bartholomew White. But gramfer, he took part. So if you be a-minded, I can tell you that tale.'

'Go on, then, James. Let us have it,' cried all the company; and Mrs. Jonah Bagley, the smith's wife, came waddling across the green at that moment to make one more.

'Very well, then,' began James, 'and so I will. I'll tell you

THE REVENGE O' THE PARISH

'You may believe there was a deal o' talk about the setting Farmer Bagley in the stocks, and no matter what market or fair, wherever a Honeycombe man might chance to show his nose, he did

[38]

meet with the question: "How's the constable o' Honeycombe?" or some such words. 'Twas felt to be most terrible galling. Must ha' been. An' yet they could but laugh, you see.

'Now, Bartholomew had a wonderful yearling bull. Grandfather said that bull was a picture to look at. All the parish did go in wi' Bartholomew one at a time an' blink an' stare an' squint at that bull. But mind, 'twur a bull the nicest eye couldn' pull to pieces so very much. Look at un straight all to once or take un a bit at a time, that bull could kind o' turn his head an' dare you to find any fault. He was a masterpiece. Bartholomew might well be proud, an' so they all said. So the parish agreed, to pay Bartholomew out, they'd steal that bull.

'The bull were a-running in a little close o' ground wi' some other young stock. So up a score o' the neighbours went by night—an' Peter Bagley, the deputy constable, he made one—an' they fetched the bull, an' hid un away to a homestead two mile off.

'Well, next morning Bartholomew couldn' see his bull. He walked round his ground, but there were no gap in hedge. He looked in the ditch, but there were no sign. Some fool must ha' left the gate ope, thought he, and saddled his old horse an' rode across to neighbour Bagley.

[39]

' "Come in! come in!" cried Peter Bagley, out to door afore Bartholomew had time to dismount. ' "I can't stop. That young bull o' mine have a-strayed, an' I—"

' "Now, I'll be hanged if I do tell 'ee a word about un unless you do come in," interrupted Farmer Bagley, with a welcome that no man o' manners could refuse.

'So sure enough in Bartholomew had to go.

'Peter treated un well. There were a keg or two o' moonshine about them days. But every time Bartholomew did rise to make a move Peter did say, "I shan't tell a word about your bull unless you do take another glass, friend White." So Bartholomew he had to stay till dark, an' then Peter just whispered:

' "Your bull is safe an' sound up to Simon Price's; leastways I overheard the man telling Gyles Brook that he had found one in the lane up there."

'Well, the hour was too late then to go elsewhere. However, Bartholomew rode home contented, and the next afternoon he walked across the fields to see Simon Price.

' "Come in!" cried Simon.

' "I can't stop," said Bartholomew, "for I came about a—"

' " Now, I won't talk out in the open, and I won't

[40]

talk dry," said Simon, an' he took Bartholomew by the shoulders an' pulled him in.

'So Simon brought out his brandy, too, an' they sat for hours, for whenever Bartholomew did fidget in his chair like, Simon did shout at un:

' "Bide still, I tell 'ee. You do keep yourself such a stranger, 'tis a treat to have 'ee here. You can't fetch home the bull until to-morrow. Zit still."

'But at last Bartholomew needs must start, so Simon told un:

' "What Peter Bagley said is quite true, but 'twas t'other way about. Gyles Brook told me he had found a bull, so it must be yours, for, to be sure, there can't be two bulls lost in one parish to one time. Tidden likely."

'So Bartholomew walked home in the dark, and the next day got up betimes so as to go off early to see Gyles Brook.

' 'Twas a real disappointment to find Gyles had but just gone into the town.

' Still, when she came to think about it, Gyles's wife, though she didn' take no partic'lar notice, had a-heard a sound about a bull. But Gyles *must* be back in an hour, for the butcher was coming to look at a fat steer. So Bartholomew went in to wait. An' sure enough Butcher Coombes drove up in a two-wheeled cart. But Gyles Brook he didn' come home for hours, an' then he was so vexed

[41]

to ha' broke word wi' Butcher Coombes that they must go out and look at the steer at once.

' "You sit down, Mr. White," said he. " 'Tis good for sore eyes to see you here. You don't see enough o' your friends."

'Bartholomew waited an' waited.

'When at last they both came in an' he made his errand known, Gyles did laugh.

' "Good, now! I did talk to Simon about a bull, but that was one I found five year agone."

' "What!" cried Butcher Coombes, all in surprise. "Do I hear aright that Mr. Bartholomew White have a-lost a bull? Now, that's funny. Though 'tis wonderful how far stock 'll wander when they do get out. There's a bull been up to my place three days

don't belong to me. A young bull —a yearling bull —a red bull —well, then, the prettiest bull I ever set eyes on."

' "He's mine!" cried Bartholomew, and jumped up as proud as a young cock-robin.

' " Then you fetch un your own self an' welcome. I swear I won't gie un up to any other man. Come up to-morrow. I be glad you lost un, for you do hide yourself away too much, Mr. White. Drive up one o' your chaps, an' he can lead the bull home."

'Butcher Coombes was downright glad next day to see Bartholomew White drive into his yard. He
[42]

treated the visitor well. But 'twas noon and the joint ready. He wouldn't budge out one inch to let the sirloin get cold or overcooked. So Bartholomew had to stay and eat a bit o' dinner. And when at last they came to look at the bull he was no more like the lost one than—

'Well, Bartholomew White was angry, no doubt, but he called un "a measley bull."

' "In that case," said Butcher Coombes, a little bit cold and short like, "I be terrible a-feared I can't help 'ee, Mr. White."

'Well, Bartholomew he went all over the country from one to another. Wherever he did show his face they were downright glad to see un, an' everybody treated un like a king, till one day up to Grandfather Every's he met wi' another sort o' greeting.

' "Mr. White," says gramfer, most terrible angry like, "I don't believe you have a-lost a bull at all. To my mind 'tis nothing but a tale an' excuse to run about from house to house an' cadge a day's victuals an' drink. Why, I saw the bull myself in your very own ground three days agone."

'Then Bartholomew got a bit of an inkling like. He hurried off home, but afore he could get up to his field his eye catched sight o' the bull, sure enough, a-gazing at un over hedge wi' a sort of a contented countenance.

'Bartholomew stood aghast an' stared at the bull.
[43]

'Then thik bull winked.

'Still, twur a happy thing for the parish that their little game turned out so lucky as did. Because a'ter that, when any foreigner did put the question: "How is the petty constable o' Honeycombe?" they could make reply, "Still looking for his young bull that have a-hid hiszelf away in a rabbit-hole." '

James Every's story was well received.

It suited the genius of Gossip Corner; and, conscious of popularity, he vacated the post with the explanation that time would stay for no man, and he must get back to his horses. He did not, however, hurry away for that reason. It might only have been a delicate excuse to vacate the seat for a lady. Anyway, Mrs. Bagley at once occupied the post, and, being a middle-aged and motherly woman, concealed it entirely.

'Ay, time do run and bring changes,' said young Silas, with a shake of the head, proving that a great capacity for business does not preclude sentiment. 'There's no Whites in Honeycombe now—'

'An' no Brookses,' reflected Mrs. Bagley, very solemnly.

'An' no Frenches,' said her husband.

'But there idden no want o' Bagleys, you do know,' cried young Silas, with sudden gallantry.

[44]

Inspired by this encouraging assurance, Mrs Bagley became reminiscent and talkative.

'I do mind the last o' the Whites. She died a elderly spinster, she did. But so kind a heart as ever beat against a pair o' stays, she had. An' she had a-been a great beauty, so they did say. An' so she was still to my eye, anyway. Though, mind, at twenty she really must ha' been, an' to the last I thought her.

A SWEET PRETTY MAID

'She never told me her tale, but, if you've a-got a heart yourzelf, you can tell. You can see by little things, and guess by little looks like, when there have a-bin a something. An' I thought myzelf she were sweet pretty when she were old; ay, an' when she were dead, too; for I went in to touch her corpse in her coffin, an' she really did look happier than life.

'She were a woman most wonderful fond o' children, she were.

'I did use to go in an' dress-makey wi' her, for all her things were a-made at home. She did sit on a old-fashioned oak chair, an' sew and talk; an' in that dark old room, wi' the panel all round the wall, her hair did look like silver. An' then she'd put down the work, an' take up a book an' read.

[45]

Maybe she'd read out for a half hour, an' then look over the top of her gold-rimmed glasses to ask how I did get on. For she were a scholar, you see. She could play on the harpsichord, an' had a-been in foreign parts.

'Maybe you do wonder, but this is how that comed about. Bartholomew didn' marry early—not for years after they made un constable—an' then he tookt to hiszelf a wife of a more bettermost sort. They only had this maid, an' she were the apple o' both their eyes. They put her to a boarding school. They send her to France. They didn' mix so very much wi' Honeycombe folk, an' no doubt they had hopes wi' the land an' money to come to her that she'd marry into the gentry. But there was a something —or so 'twere said when I were a maid —about a young farmer over to Hilton and she. Though I never didn' hear the rights o' it —nor never shall.

'But, as I said, she were most wonderful fond o' children.

'She'd run out an' call in any chile that did pass along the footpath to dap a biscuit or a hunk o' figgy cake in his little han'. When she did walk down the parish wi' a little reticule in her hand, all the little boys and wenches did run out an' wait when she did come in sight. She were but a little woman, or not so terrible big. She did take two

[46]

or three steps, an' stop, for all the world like a polly-washdish, an' take out some little thing for one after another. If 'twere but a couple o' ripe hairy gooseberries, or a cluster

o' filbud nuts, there must be something so long as did last. Ay, she were most wonderful fond o' children, she were. There were very little schoolin' in those days for poor folk, but she taught ever so many to read, her own zelf.

'Yes! There must ha' been some trouble, though I never heard tell what. But one wi' a eye can see. Now, when I had a-walked wi' Jonah here, up ever so long, an' we both sort o' thought we did want to get wed, there were a bit of a upset. My folk didn' think so very much of Jonah, an' he only a journeyman at that time. My father were most terrible wild against it, an' mother didn' like it at all, though she didn' say so much. There we did all quarrel, an' I did bide an' cry. An' I went up to Miss White's to work, a-making a little black tippet, I do mind, an' I really do believe my eyes were so red as beef.

'Then Miss White she did raise her eyes from her book and look across at me most wonderful sorrowful like. An' at last she got up an' she walked across from her chair to the table where I were a-stood. An' she sort o' tapped wi' two fingers very gentlelike, on my hand-wrist, as I did hold the

[47]

scissors. An' she said, "Lucy, my dear maid, follow your own heart. For if you do give way to put off the man of your choice, maybe though you would long for ever, he won't come back."

'An' I sort o' looked at her, an' her eyes looked most wonderful solemn an' kind, an' for all that she did sort o' smile, too. An' yet I could see, a-hanging on the lid, like — now, I don't tell you twere a tear — but a sort of a evening dew. Then she put an envelope into my hand. An' she must ha' got it all in readiness afore, too, for she kind o' whispered, " 'Tis to help to buy the furniture." I were too shy to open it. But when I did, I could scarce trust to my own eyes. I had to run to show it to Jonah afore I could believe it true. For there were a ten-pound note!

'Yes, there had a-been something had a-turned her heart all to softness. Nobody can't never learn what, now. But, as I said, you can see. An' I always thought myzelf that her parents loved her so much an' wished her so well, that they did all the world for her. And then, meaning nothing but her good, stopped her from the one thing that her heart were bent upon.

'But, really, 'pon my life, she were most wonderful fond o' children.

'What, young Silas? You do laugh at my dozen. Why, she had the means, an' she had the

[48]

love. She did really ought to ha' had two-score. Yet she died lonely. An' all the money passed away to a distant kin.'

Such was the end of the sweet pretty maid. Nobody found anything to say about her story.

But dusk had come. Dew was falling on the village green, and the old stocks were almost lost in shadow.

'Good-night,' said one.

'Well, good-night all.'

Then very soon there was solitude under the old elm-trees.

[49]

CHAPTER IV

ON CAMEL HUMP

ALL Honeycombe turned out the other day to observe the total eclipse.

We had read a prediction in the weekly paper giving the very hour and minute at which it might be looked for, and discussed the matter fully in every bearing. With all our reverence for print, we do not place implicit reliance on 'these here newspaper chaps.' It is their business to sell the paper—of course it is. We were therefore guarded in our expectations.

'If there really should be a 'clipse, where would be the best place to see it?' we asked. Merely to step out from the front door and peer up at the sky scarcely seemed adequate to so rare an occasion. It was agreed that 'Camel Hump' offered the most open position for careful observation.

But then, as we all said, 'Who is going to take the trouble to climb Carnel Hump?' Besides, very likely the day might prove cloudy, and ten to one it would rain. Old Mother Blake declared in that case 'unless the noonday should grow
[50]

dark enough to tempt the fowls up to roost, she wouldn' believe in no 'clipse —no, not for love nor money.'

In spite of doubts and scepticism we all ascended Camel Hump.

Camel Hump is a steep, circular entrenched eminence just on the skirt of our village, and as the country around is either flat or undulating, it commands a splendid view. We strolled up singly or in pairs, those in front congratulating themselves that others were coming on, those behind that they had not been the first to go. Thus Camel Hump became the best attended gossip corner that has ever been known. Even old Mother Blake was there.

'For the life o' me I can't think,' said Mrs. Jonah Bagley, 'how the mind o' man can ever pretend to find out the movements of the heavenly bodies and foretell, so to speak, where they will be to a tick o' the clock, when to save his soul no man living could tell the coming of Honeycombe postman —no, not to three quarters of an hour.'

'I do suppose the 'thorities be more alive to things up there,' said her husband with a wink.

'Ay, but do make 'ee think,' she reflected.

'But they can't. They do but guess. Sometimes do come right, an' sometimes don't,' cried
[51]

the shrill voice of old Mother Blake. 'Why, when I wur a little maid, the very almanac hiszelf made out the end 'o the world for September 10th, an' though folk did talk as if

could be no good to harvest the crops, they lived to see best wheaten bread, afore Christmas, a shilling a loaf.'

'Ah! Things were different when you were young, Mother Blake,' said Silas Legg, and smiled around.

'They was,' snapped the old soul.

'They've gone on since then.'

'Have 'em?'

'Well, anyway you do trust to the prediction, for here you be,' retorted Silas.

'Silas Legg!' cried the old woman with excitement, and held up her lean finger. 'There's things a-found out, I don't gainsay; an' things once a-knowed, now denied, that be true as the light. An' more than that, I didn' come up to zee the 'clipse not altogether. I comed up to look about a bit an' take a squint at spots I hain't a-zeed for years.' She glanced down at the village and away at the outlying homesteads. 'An' tis worth the walk to do it. Verily an' truly it ackshally is.'

Altercation threatened, for old Mother Blake was a little, thin, wizen-faced granny of uncertain temper and quick tongue. There was a time when such as she went in danger of the stake. She

[52]

belonged to a generation that had passed away. Long ago a widow, she had a corner by the hearth of her eldest grandson, and asked for nothing but the warmth and her bit of food. So her clothes were old-fashoined even for Honeycombe, and she wore a long-waisted black gown and a funny straw hat the shape of a mushroom, on those rare occasions when she chanced to venture out.

But the heavenly bodies did not fail.

Silas Legg was still framing a rejoinder—a really smart rejoinder—when lo! there came—there certainly came a sort of sinking in, as it were, on one cheek of the sun's round face. Then the forethought of Honeycombe was revealed. Everybody had made provision for the eclipse.

Jonah Bagley and his wife had lighted a candle in daylight and smoked a piece of glass. Old Mother Blake herself had brought a little ancient diamond-shaped window-pane of a beautiful bottle-green, such as she had once seen used to look at a 'clipse when she was young. But Silas Legg merely took a pin from his waistcoat and pricked a pin-hole on a half-sheet of letter paper, secretly brought in his inside coat-pocket. Then he looked superior and gazed at the sun through that.

Imperceptibly the eclipse grew.

A strange, unearthly darkness fell on woods and meadows, out of a clear sky. It had no limits

[53]

like the shadow of a passing cloud. The thrush mistook, and from the tree-top poured his evensong. Smaller birds—linnets and finches—flew to the hedgerow and the copse. Distant-faring rooks, returning to their home-trees, passed slowly overhead. As the darkness deepened wonder and perplexity puckered the countenances of the score of villagers on that hill-top. They were deeply impressed with the grandeur of the

phenomenon, and yet—it *was* a puzzle, and a mystery also, how Silas Legg's eye could see such a lot through a pin-hole.

'Yet you can too,' cried old Mother Blake, still in a querulous tone of voice. 'An' always could. Zo Silas Legg don't show us nothing new in that. I could tell you a tale, if I was a-minded, about looking through a little spy-hole not so very much bigger. An' the more zo because herefrom we can see the very place where it happened. An' to be sure there's no good in keeping o' it a secret. For everybeddy that had to do with it at all is dead an' gone — ay, an' up in churchyard, put to bed wi' a showl years agone.'

'Then don't bide an' boast what you can do. Take an' do it,' urged young Tom Platt. 'Go on to once. Tell up.'

Old Mother Blake began without delay. Her shrill pipe of a voice, raised in excitement, sounded

[54]

almost unearthly in that weird light, as, with rapid utterance in the dialect of a generation ago, she told the story of

A LITTLE SPY-HOLE

'You do zee the wold homestead, the long low house close to the roadside —there, wi' the wooden shutters to the winders a-painted green, that do open back against the wall. An' the little farm across upon the hill. Well, a family o' Grangers lived in the one, and Dan'el Bowridge, zon o' the wold Conjurer Bowridge, in t'other. They were neighbours, but still there were little goodwill atween 'em. For times were hard, mind, upon all. The Grangers had a cow or two die, an' bad luck all round. An' Dan'el had zo much as he could do, too, to hold on to his farm like. But then, mind this, Dan'el were no great worker, an' he did get about an' lift his little vinger a goodish bit, too.

'Well, the Grangers were a most wonderful hard-working sort. They had to be. For they were a biggish family, though all a-growen up by that time. There was Lizzie, the woldest, that wouldn' merry Nehemiah Case. An' Maria —that did when they wuz both up middle-aged— and a lot o' little uns, an' a boy —zo that zome folk

[55]

did really wonder how they could do at all, seeing the misfortunes that did fall 'pon' em, one 'pon top o' t'other.

'Many o' the wold folk about did zay they must be overlooked or witched. An' more than one did whisper that Dan'el Bowridge had a-put a spell 'pon 'em. For Dan'el was the zon of wold Conjurer Bowridge, that I'll tell 'ee about zome day, and one o' these-here sly, prying sort o' men that nobeddy liked. A man that had a-drowed good chances away like an' then was envious o' others that had never had none. But if a neighbour should hint sich a thing to Farmer Granger he did only drow back his head an' laugh an' zay there was no sich thing in the world as killen a man's pigs by a evil wish, or casten a wicked eye 'pon 'em. For all that, there was a-many about did know well enough how could be a-doned.

'Well, early an' late, 'ithout might be jus' to midsummer, there was always a light in the winders o' thik wold house, zo that zome did wonder whe'er or no the folk did ever go to bed at all. To tell truth both mother an' maidens did zit an' spin so long as they could hold a eye open at night, or zo early as any one of 'em could wake to call t'others in the marnen. Yet they did manage to hide their poverty so well, too, under what they did earn that way, that volk couldn' never make out how 'twere
[56]

a-doned. An' Dan'el, you know, he did veel most terrible curious like, when he did walk home late of a night from "The Barley Mow," to know what they-there Granger folk could be up to.

'Well, one spring day in the marnen, Dan'el Bowridge comed down the road by the homestead. Maybe he chose his time. The volk were away to work one place an' t'other, maister out in field an' the missus out behind house in the dairy, an' Maria had a-went into town wi' the yarn. There were nobeddy in house but Lizzie, the woldest maid, an' she were up in the little chimmer where the winder do stick out in vront above the porch. Lizzie were no child, mind. I reckon she would ha' owned to thirty, an' she stood back behine the winder-blind and zaw Dan'el stop a minute in the road. Then Dan' el stepped forward an' rapped, but rather gentle-like, 'pon the door.

'Now Lizzie, she couldn' a-bear the look o' the man. They used to zay he were in love wi' her when they wanted to make Lizzie mad. He were a middle-aged little feller, an' fussy in his mind like, though his body were the shape of a barrel 'pon lags. An' that day he were out o' breath, an' did panky, an' gied a sort of a loose cough as he stood there. Lizzie zaid his lips did look blue an' his cheek red an' puffy. He made her think of a girt toad, zo she declared, an' to zet
[57]

eyes 'pon a girt fat toad did always gie Lizzie cold-shivers down the spine. So when Dan'el knocked she wouldn' go down.

'Dan'el, he didn' knock but once, an' then he stepped back into the road.

'Lizzie drew back from the winder.

'He glanced round most terr'ble artful-like, an' took a look up hill, an' down, an' over hedge, an' sort o' stood a minute doubtful-like. There were nobeddy in sight, nobeddy in hearen, an' nobeddy in house for certain.

'Of a sudden he stepped dree steps a-tiptoe, tookt a bradawl out o' his pocket, an' drilled a small hole in the shutter o' the kitchen winder. Then he shackled off down the village wi' a grin 'pon the girt face o' un.

'To be sure, Lizzie, she told the rest, an' they all tookt a look at Dan'el's little spy-hole. There 'twere in the wood, sure enough; zo neat as any worm could make, only a little bigger. An' Dan'el had a-done the work well too. There were no blind, but a few vlowers in the winder. An' he had a-got the spy-hole atween the top o' the geranium and the little fuchsia-bush, zo as he could look straight in 'pon the vire.

'You mid think they feeled most terr'ble wild.

'Farmer Granger swore he'd take un by the scruff o' the neck an' chuck un into hoss-pond.
[58]

'Maria, who were a meekish sort o' girl wi' a very tender heart, were more for droppen a bucket o' pigs' muck down 'pon top o' un from above when he'd got his eye to the hole.

'But Lizzie, who, to be sure, had a-watched his sly ways, she were the worst. "An' that's the little devil they do zay have a-witched we," she cried. "I do wish, wi' all my heart, I knowed the way to witch he."

'Well, out o' that they put their heads together and hatched up a plan.

'They zaid they'd play a joke 'pon Dan'el the first going off, an' then pay the man out well another time, for he would come again night after night, zo sure as the light. Lizzie thought to let Dan'el zee hiszelf witched to begin wi'. They knew about what hour he'd come away from "The Barley Mow," zo they turned to an' got everything in readiness all in good time.

'You zee, all told, there were nine o' 'em. There were poor wold grammer, an' farmer an' missus an' John that did bide at home, an' Lizzie, an' Maria, an' two littler maidens an' the youngest bwoy. Everybeddy thought out zomethen fresh, an' they got up a very pretty show for Dan'el.

'They put the boy to watch an' to run in at the back door in good time, as Lizzie zaid, "not to be zo rude as to keep the man a-waiten."

[59]

'The church clock had but just a-zounded ten when Dan'el comed in sight.

'The can'les had a-been a-blowed out, but a blazen vire made the wold kitchen bright as day. They had a-cleared the vloor, an' zet the chairs all round in a circle. A bowl o' salt stood all han'pat 'pon the hearth. Spring an' fall them days volk did all take brimstone an' treacle, zo they had a bit o' brimstone to mix in wi' the salt. They had a-put the little maid's waxen doll down 'pon hearth to look like a image. They was all a-zot round according to age from the right-hand corner, and looked zo grave as mutes at a funeral, all but the youngest maid, an' she did giggle till the boy gied her a dig in the ribs, an' then she cried.

'Poor wold grammer had to go fust.

'She stepped out in vront, took up a han'ful o' the salt an' chucked it on the vire.

'In a vlash the yaller vlames vell low, an' then changed to blue, and did sort o' clim' over the logs an' cling to the chimbley-back. 'Twere a sight to make a body creep. Then the vlames would turn green an' blue again, vit to make anybeddy think o' hell. The wold grammer bent down an' stood the doll up by the hottest coals. Then she spoke up an' zaid:

"It is not this thing I wish to burn,
But the heart o' Daniel Bowridge o' Honeycombe to turn.

[60]

Wishing thee neither to eat, drink, sleep, nor rest
Until thou dost come to me an' do my request,
Or else the wrath o' God may fall on thee,
And cause thee to be consumed in a moment—Amen."

'But afore the wold soul had a-doned the maidens beginned to ved all to a-shiver an' tremble like, an' brokt out into a cold zweat; an' when they did look round, the countenances o' the rest, what wi' the brimstone an' their fear, did appear more like a row o' faces o' corpses than Kirstian folk.

'To be sure 'twere but a joke, an' they had no belief in any sich thing, an' farmer he stepped forward in turn, wi' a sort of a twist o' fun like at the corners of his mouth, an' spoke it out again so clear as if he were a-reading the Psa'ms in church. An' he put on enough salt to a'most dout the fire, if it hadn' a-been for the brimstone.

'Then the kitchen did seem to get dark an' smell o' the sulphur —an' then the missus, her heart faltered like, an' she didn' get up.

' " That's enough. That's enough," zaid the farmer rather sudden-like. "Now let's go out."

' Zo they got up an' passed out in a line, like, backwards, an' very slow, wi'out the zound of a word.

'They had agreed afore not to go back in kitchen, but into the little parlour where the shutter was

[61]

sound. But zomehow or another, at the first going off, they couldn' sim to talk zo very much. " 'Twere but a fool's trick, after all," zaid the farmer.

'Then the poor wold grammer got in a bit of a flouster like, for she zaid the rascal-feller would go away an' tell, an' still there were many about did believe it all, an' they'd think it a real thing, an' the more zo because they had a-doned it all true an' zo solemn an' well. The poor wold grammer could scarce creep up the stairs to bed for vright. An' she had a rushlight in her room, too. The fear got hold o' her that if volk did know, an' talk, there might still be a law to get at 'em all, an' she zaid many a one had been a-burned here 'pon earth for less, to zay nothing o' the life to come. She zaid she was but a poor wold soul now—a zinner, one voot in the grave—an' maybe it would ha' been better if she had passed away afore she took part in any sich devil's tricks. Not that she believed in it a mossel bit. But she zaid did really look like inviting in Satan to zit down in house wi' the whole family.

'They felt most terr'ble sorry for grammer.

' At last farmer, to comfort her, zaid there could' be no truth in her fears after all; but still, for all that, next marnen first thing he would go down in parish an' boast o' the whole story from beginning to end as a joke on Dan'el, and then nobeddy couldn' think no ill. But 'twere no good. Long after granny

[62]

were a-bed she did bide an' talk to herzelf —half the night drough.

' But jist at the fust gleam o' daylight there comed a sharp knocken 'pon the vront door.

'It woke grammer.

' " 'Tis the constable. I do know 'tis the constable," she screamed out. "Dan'el Bowridge have a-told. He've a-told a'ready!"

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

'Farmer Granger went downstairs to ope the door.

'The rest, all but grammer, ran out and listened over the banister.

'Then they heard the constable's voice —though little more than a hoarse whisper:

' "Farmer Granger! Poor neighbour Dan'el Bowridge on his way home last night must ha' dropped down dead. He's cold and stiff under your kitchen winder." '

For some time nobody spoke.

The tragic end of old Mother Blake's story was unexpected; and, although more than one had laughed at the trick, the result of it, as each of us confided to his neighbour later in the day, 'was enough to gie anybeddy quite a turn.'

The coloured pane was no longer of use, the smoked glass had been thrown away and the pin-holed paper torn up. Not that the eclipse had

[63]

passed, but because the sun, being now completely overshadowed, might be gazed upon with the naked eye. So in silence we gazed.

Jonah Bagley was the first to speak:

'Daniel did die, as you do say, Mrs. Blake, in that way at that place,' said he gravely. 'But I never heard that tale afore. There was proof Bowridge had a weak heart, and the jury found "natural causes." '

'Ha! The jury!' sneered old Mother Blake. 'What did they know about it? No more than you did till I told 'ee. The Grangers were too frightened to tell.'

'No fear,' cried Silas Legg with a wise shake of the head.

At once the gossips became a self-constituted jury to retry the case with additional knowledge, but without prejudice and from a strictly legal point of view.

'I suppose it must ha' been nothing short o' murder, if the fac's had come out,' suggested young Tom Platt in his most deliberate manner.

'Dear no!' explained Silas Legg, with the spritely dogmatism of one who has served. 'There were neither threats nor malice. Couldn' be more than manslaughter, look at it how you will. Though to my mind 'twere justyfible homicide, seeing that Daniel had a-got his eye glued, in a manner o' speaking, to the pinhole, so to speak.'

[64]

'Ah!' interjected Jonah with sudden emphasis. 'That won't do. That 'ud be nowhere in law. Who do know that he peeped through the pinhole? He might ha' dropped afore he got there. You've a-got to be sure in law. Tidden so much what's in reason but what's in fact.'

Then Mrs. Bagley raised a rather subtle point as to the fact.

'I should say myself,' said she with great earnestness, 'that in all human probability Daniel Bowridge had not laid his eye to the pinhole when he dropped. No man saw, by all accounts, an' none can ever know in this world. But is it likely that the only son o' old Conjurer Bowridge, a man celebrated in his day as the most cunningest man for twenty mile around, should ha' dropped in fear when he really must ha' had the skill to take off any spell that could be laid 'pon any mortal soul? Not he. He'd just a-smiled, in the inzide of his heart like, an' said nothing. But he'd a-walked home an' put on a stronger spell to set that aside an' afflict the Grangers something awful. I don't believe

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

nothing at all about such things myself. But that's what he would ha' done —or tried to. So I do call it must ha' been visitation of Providence.'

'Ay, but Mother Blake offered to tell up about the old man and his ways,' cried Silas Legg. 'Come, let's hear about the old conjurer.'

[65]

'What, wold Conjurer Bowridge! Now to think after all these years you should bring up he.'

'Where did he live then?'

Old Mother Blake threw up both hands. 'Lack-a-massy then! The wold Conjurer Bowridge! Dear I!

THE WOLD CONJURER BOWRIDGE

'Now, for certain sure, everybeddy do know the sort o' shed about a mile on the north zide o' Honeycombe and the tumble-down wall close by, where there was once a long strip o' garden. A good-sized marlpit, full o' water summer an' winter, do lie at the end o' that. You can zee but little o' it now under the bushes and tall elem trees. But 'twas all open once and gied the name to the place, "Black Pond."

'To look at it to-day you would hardly believe that shed had ever a-bin a dwelling. But that was the house of the wold Conjurer Bowridge, and that was his garden, and that was his pond.

'He was a tall old man, zo lean as a rail, wi' long white locks o' hair that did cover the ears o' un. He had a long white beard halfway down his waistcoat, that did blow about in the wind, a'most like the flag 'pon church-tower, when he did stand out in road of a rough day. For, rain or shine,

[66]

hail, blow or vreeze, weather didn' make no difference at all to he. In that pond he had a-got a girt jack-feesh, zo long as your arm, that did come when he did shake the water wi' a hazel-stick, an' feed a'most close up to his hand. Many did think the feesh mus' be his fermilyer, an' did tell un what he did know. He had a tame raven, too, most times a-hoppen about the drashel or a-perched up 'pon his shoulder, zo black as zoot beside the wold head o' un zo white as vlour. Zome thought that sich times the raven did whisper in the ear o' un.

'Nobeddy wouldn't live in sich a lonely, outlandish place no more, a' der the wold Conjurer Bowridge had a-been moved out o' it. 'Twur a bit lonesome, for certain sure, but I do count 'twerden that. Nobeddy didn' know what pranks the wold chap had a-bin up to to 'quire all his larnen. He didn' read it all out o' books, I don't never believe. There, he never couldn'. Most volk thought he mus' ha' got his knowledge like, day by day, by word o' mouth. Maybe they was afeard that if the wold Scratch had a-bin used to drop in an' spend a hour wi' the wold Conjurer of a night, he might think hiszelf welcome to come in an' zit down wi' any new tenant for all time to come. Anybeddy don' want to make a friend o' he, you know. He mid pay anybeddy the compliment

[68]

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

one o' these days to ax' 'em roun' to warm their noses by his vireside. An' who better able to do it?

'There have a-bin hundreds an' thousands o' volk in trouble have a-traipsed along they vower roads to consult wi' Conjurer Bowridge. If a man had a cow bad, or his missus or woone o' the childern did vall into zome complaint, an' waste an' pine away to nothen, wi' a bucket o' doctor' s stuff in their inzide, an' all noo good, he did come if 'twur twenty mile to get the real truth o' it out o' Conjurer Bowridge. Why he cured John Priddy o' the nannyviper in the stomach. Conjurer could always tell volk, too, whe'er or not they was overlooked. An' he had a fore-knowledge when anybeddy was on the road to his place. He didn' wait till they did come an' knock to door. He'd stand by the house right out in the middle o' the square like o' the vower cross-roads, an' then he did walk out to meet 'em, an' look 'em in the face, an' tell 'em their business right out, like readen off of a book. You couldn' decaive the wold Conjurer Bowridge.

'An' the wold Conjurer Bowridge he could rule the planets and cast 'tivities to tell your future like; and he did pick herbs all in season, an' make a wonderful ointment o' different things a-picked under the full moon, that did cure waxen-kernels
[68]

an' sore necks, an' spots on the face an' all such-like. He didn' never zell that partic'lar ointment. He did gie it a free gift to anybeddy at the very minute they did fust catch sight of a new moon. Why, zometimes of a night there 'ud be folk a-traipsing all vower ways to be up at the vower cross-roads jis' afore the new moon did rise. There mid be up a score, all a-waiting wi' their heads down an' their eyes a-shut, to look up one to a time on the very nick when he did clap a little pot o' thik ointment into their palms.

'But more than anything the wold Conjurer Bowridge did excel when anybeddy had a-had anything a-stoled.

'He could work sich a spell that any thief, anywhere, at any time an' whatever he might be about, was bound to get up just as he might be an' carr' the thing he had a-tookt straight back to the place he had a-tookt it vrom. He couldn' help hiszelf. Yet the wold Conjurer Bowridge did never allow any rogue to be vound out by his means. He did make 'em put it back in the dead o' night. An' 'twere a thing well-knowed, that more 'an one thief had a-bin fo'ced to get up in his night-gown an' walk up vive mile or more wi' the property over hedge an' drough ditch straight as a crow do fly. Nobeddy zaw 'em, but Conjurer Bowridge zaid zo his own zelf. He zaid he did work only for good,
[69]

an' no thief that he did take in han' should suffer the law.

'Well, there were a-many about o' the better sort didn' hold with Conjurer an' his ways. All the gentry did call the man a rogue. Ah! But they that had to bear the brunt o' life, mind, did know well he could be a true friend. For he did take no money for his magic. Though to be sure he'd zell herbs an' teas an' salves that he did make hiszelf at the full o' the moon or whatever time he did know to be best. Or he'd take pay for casting of a 'tivity, to be sure he would. But then, the folk to whom he had a-done good did bear it in mind an' zend the man a present, maybe a spare-rib o' pork when they did kill a pig, or a good fat goose at Kirsmas. An' quite right, too. Zo you zee sometimes Conjurer had a goodish many things to part wi', more than he could use his own zelf.

'Now one, John Spracketter by name, lost a little eight-runged ladder an' a very tidy hayknife away from a rick in his home-ground.

'John veeled most terr'ble mad about it, for he had to borrow an' fetch an' carr' back morning an' night till he could replace it like, to say nothing o' the cost. Conjurer Bowridge had a-found a thing or two afore for John, an' all the Spracketters thought all the world o' his skill. So John stepped up to the vower cross-roads to zee what could be
[70]

done. "Now I'd bet a guinea," said he to his missus afore he started, "that Conjurer do meet I 'pon the road, afore I do get there, an' tell that I be a-comed about a eight-runged ladder an' a hayknife zo good as new, afore I do ope my mouth."

' "Get on wi' 'ee," cried his missus. "You do ope your mouth zo wide that all the world do hear what you've a-lost a'most zo quick as you do know yourzelf."

'Zo John he went on an' zaid no more.

'But when John Spracketter comed up to vower cross-roads there were no Conjurer nor sign o' any soul alive. The door were ope, but when he rapped there were nobeddy comed but the raven.

'John walked down to the pond, but Conjurer werden there.

'Then John, he got a-poking his nose one place an' t'other, a-sort of a-looking around the garden like, no harm at all, but to zee what he could zee. Conjurer had a-got some bundles o' very nice hazel pea-sticken in the corner, an' John he sort o' took up a bundle the better to look, an' dalled if he didn' eye his ladder an' hayknife in behind out o' the way like. An' wi' the zame he turned his head like, an' there were Conjurer a-stood a'most at his elbow.

'But the wold Conjurer Bowridge he only smiled.
[71]

' "You had to come, John, though your missus would ha' had 'ee bide away. Zo I had your little ladder an' your hayknife a-brought on here to save time. But I can't do that for everybeddy, mind, zo you mus' keep a still tongue. An' whatever you do do, don't 'ee breathe a word to your missus."

'There, John Spracketter, he stood amazed. He swore he'd never tell a soul for love nor money.

'Zo that zame night John's things were a-put back zame as usual.

'Now a good warm vire, a vew friends an' a drop o' cider be the ruination o' silence. John didn' mean to, but he let out. He could trust 'em all, he zaid, an' they declared quite solemn like they'd be zo secret as the tomb. An' yet, for all that, it did get about. The volk around velt zo proud to boast that really and truly there were no conjurer 'pon earth to come up to our wold Conjurer Bowridge.

'That went on for a bit, till all to a sudden, like a thunderclap out of a summer sky, one day about noon, the constables went up wi' a warrant to sarch Conjurer's house. They'd a-got a inkling o' zummat or 'nother, no doubt, from the talk.

'Massy 'pon us! they vound all manner an' sorts o' things, some o' 'em lost for years agone, that did belong to most everybeddy in parish.

'They took off the wold Conjurer there right to the lock-up. He never comed back. They did

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

[72]

pretend to show that he an' all the thieves about were rogues-agreed, an' zo the poor man got transported for the rest of his life.

'No, nobeddy didn' ever live in the little house up to Black Pond since then. The jack-feesh were a-found in the water dead, wi' his belly a-turned up, afore very long; an' what went wi' the rayen I never didn' hear tell.

'Conjurer had a-saved enough money to zet his zon up in a farm. An' the poor about all zaid 'twere a terr'ble girt pity that the country should ever ha' lost so good a man. For the pigs an' the folk too that he had a-cured were zomethen wonderful.'

[73]

CHAPTER V

AT 'THE BARLEY MOW'

THE ancients were quite right. The heavenly bodies do exert an influence on the lives of us poor mortals. Otherwise why should half a dozen hard-working, frugal, domesticated villagers like ourselves have found the way, as if by one mind and quite early in the afternoon, when there was no dearth of employment, to the kitchen of 'The Barley Mow'?

The eclipse did it.

To be sure, we had toiled up a steep hill and down again in the sun. But we were not thirst-driven. Some of us had cider and others pumps —at home. Yet by some mysterious unanimity, although quite independently, one and all were drawn to 'The Barley Mow.' We drifted there. Some of the womenfolk came also and stood in the porch whilst the men sat inside. They joined in the conversation through the open door and window without tasting the drink. That proves it was not a matter of drought.

The eclipse did it.

The alehouse kitchen has a stone floor and was as

[74]

cool as a cellar. A fresh green bough lay across the dogs upon a scrubbed and whited hearth. One of the Podymores of Upton was sitting in one corner of the settle. The Podymores of Upton, who from time immemorial have dealt in pigs, are more or less kin to everybody in Honeycombe. When not engaged upon professional duties they are really the jolliest people going, fond of pranks and a bit of sly practical joking. The fact is, they travel so much and spend almost all their time in company. And where in the world can be found a merrier or more instructive companion than a middle-aged sow with a rope round the knuckle of a prospective ham? Yet for real humour give me a herd of mad porkers, sprung from some family of genius endowed with original gifts.

All Podymores, even by marriage, in course of time possess small slits of eyes, fat round cheeks and short necks. A lifelong appreciation of pigs might almost produce a

Podymore. This was one of the merriest of the race; and he sat in the corner, with a cup in his hand, his double-chin projecting over a cotton sprig neck-tie tied in a bow and his pig-whip at rest on the floor beside him.

With old Mother Blake's story fresh in our minds, we fell to talking of the Grangers and what had come of that family.

'The poor man lost all. And he died—why, he
[75]

must have died at fifty. The widow left the homestead up there an' all the childern went out in life. That is to say, all but Maria. An' Maria after a bit married Nehemiah Case,' explained Jonah.

'She did so,' put in One o' the Podymores. 'Though Nehemiah, mind, had walked wi' Lizzie years afore.'

'That's true. That *is* true,' said Jonah.

'I do know 'tis true. I shouldn' say it if I didn' know 'twere true. I could swear 'tis true,' said the Podymore with a boisterous good-humour that sounded truculent.

'An' zo you mid —wi' safety,' agreed Jonah with a serious nod of the head.

'An' look here —the widow an' Maria lived in the cottage on the road to Littlemoor, an' the maid married therefrom.'

'I do really believe that's right,' confirmed Jonah, 'for I've a-heard much the same afore.'

'I do know 'tis right,' cried the Podymore. 'My grandmother, Mrs. Peter Podymore, she lived next door. To the day of her death she declared she made thik match. She were the merriest woman that ever wore out shoe-leather. She put folk up to the joke that done it. You see, Lizzie had served the man shameful bad. The Grangers at that time thought theirzelves better 'an the Cases. An' fust Lizzie would. An' then Lizzie wouldn'—
[76]

and then Lizzie didn'. But the Grangers comed down in life, an' in the end Lizzie died a maid.'

One of the Podymores threw back his head and laughed. He was so fond of a practical joke that he found humour even in the ironies of Fate.

'But Nehemiah he were so sore about the heart like, he wouldn' have a woman come a-nighst un, not for years. He got on in life though. He had the old Manor farm. An' there he lived alone for years—an' let a dairy o' two an' thirty cows—an' there he died—and lies buried in Honeycombe churchyard —on the north side—wi' a tomb so big as a house a'most.'

His manner had again become fierce, and he glared around upon the company.

' 'Tis a fac'!' said Jonah, glancing mildly from one to another.

'I do know 'tis a fac',' shouted the Podymore. 'An' I do know all the fax—all the fax, I tell 'ee—o' the prank my grandmother, Mrs. Peter Podymore, played 'pon this same Nehemiah Case, an' o'

THE CATCHING OF MARIA

'Look here now. Nehemiah Case —Mr. Nehemiah Case, I should say —he could not make it out at all.
[77]

'Here he had walked from Honeycombe to Littlemoor, up two mile there and back, in answer to a letter from Mr. Solomon Fry, to look at three heifers—and when he got there the heifers were gone and Solomon Fry was out. There must be some mistake, he supposed. Had it been the first of April, now, he might have suspected a joke. But it was the day afore Christmas Day.

'He felt most wonderful perplexed in his mind like, a-thinking these matters over, as he walked on wi' his head down up the village street. Living alone an' a serious disposition had sort o' bent his shoulders wi' a staidness beyond his years: for he was a bachelorman o' little more than forty, keeping house for himself, and sewing on his own buttons, as all the womenfolk used to laugh an' say.

' " Merry Christmas to 'ee, Mr. Case!"

'He started an' looked about.

'Nehemiah hadn' noticed nobody, and the greeting was all unlooked for. But after all it was only Maria snipping sprigs of holly from the garden hedge. Nehemiah had always liked Maria, an' his eye sort o' lingered that day. She was a young girl years agone, when he used to court Lizzie—but, to be sure, all that was past years agone and clean forgot.

' " The zame to you, Maria! An' all good gifts,"
[78]

said he, wi' a sort of a kindness in the voice o' un.

' "La, sure, Mr. Case! The best gift I could wish you 'ud be that it should please Providence to zend 'ee a good wife to keep your house an' stir 'ee up a bit."

'Nehemiah went round like a weathercock.

'This time the salutation came from the other side of the road, and there was Mrs. Peter Podymore a-looking so jolly over the orchard-wall. Th' Almighty had a-gied Mrs. Peter Podymore a very loud voice. Maria —stood there a-listening— couldn' help but hear. Nehemiah heard the maid laugh. Nehemiah felt all to a fluster like, and blushed like a peony to the roots of his yellow hair.

' "Zame to you! Zame to you!" he replied quickly, and hurried up street out o' the way o' it.

'But every whip's—while, from one side or the other—by the village pound, over the garden hatch, beside the churchyard gate — now in a treble voice an' then in a gruffish bass, for all the world like a anthem in a parish church, the words did chime in one 'pon another:

' "Merry Christmas to 'ee, Mr. Case!"

'Why, even the children by the village cross stopped their playing at "Buck! Buck! how many vingers" to chatter at un like a party o' tom-tits:
[79]

' "Merry Christmas, Mr. Case! Merry Christmas to 'ee, Mr. Case!"

" 'Zame to you! Zame to you!" muttered Nehemiah, and really felt glad at heart to turn his nose into the gate leading to his low-set old-fashioned homestead.

'When going abroad Nehemiah always made it a habit to lock his front door and thrust the key into a old sparrow's hole in the thatch, just the very same as you or I or anybody else mid. To be sure, another could get it so easy as hiszelf. Still, anybody that did come could see the man was out. Now, as he slowly raised his hand to the over-hanging eaves, he could not help but think that there was they in parish did know more than they did care to tell about they dree little heifers over to Littlemoor that were not to be heard o'. "Oh, well, there!" thought Nehemiah to hiszelf, for there were no bitterness in the heart o' the man. "Not much odds nother. Kirsmas time and all."

'A north wind sweeping across the moor had a-blowed the roads so dry as a bone. Capital for walking, no doubt, when you can catch heat. But now that it was late in afternoon, with here and there a flake of snow falling from a leaden sky, Nehemiah, as he stood fumbling wi' the key and the keyhole, began to feel the air nippy. He went first an' closed his front shutters for the night. Then
[80]

he opened his weather-beaten oaken door and went inside.

'The passage that night seemed wonderful dark. Now whether from the warmth of Christmas greetings or whether he felt upset an' chilly to think somebody had played un a joke, Nehemiah felt the want of a something, and for the first time he really and truly knew what 'twas to come home to an empty house. It was like coming home to nothing —this groping through the house with never a light —and he struck against a corner of the staircase as he passed. Yet his mistrust of womenfolk had made Nehemiah shy at a housekeeper. Only a village wife looked in for an hour of a morning, when the man was out on the farm, to tidy up and do a few chores.

'He hung his hat and coat upon the peg and went into the kitchen. A high-backed settle hid the hearth, but, opening the door, he heard the roar o' blazing wood, and stood aghast to see the place lighted up as bright as day. With a dread of fire, he ran in. Then, with lips apart, he stopped spellbound in the middle of the room, and with open-eyed wonder gazed around.

'The clavy, as they old folk did call the chimney-piece above the open hearth, was covered with holly. The ivy did shine on the settle so thick as on a old church wall, and there were great boughs of laurel
[81]

round the kitchen clock. From the middle of the black beam across the ceiling hung a mistletoe-bough a-spangled all over wi' berries like pearls. Nehemiah recognised it — fresh cut from the horner-tree in the little orchard at the back of his own house. And on the walls were decorations, red letters on a white ground, such as the maidens do make for church— only of a different wording:

' "Merry Christmas!" "Welcome!"

'Merry Christmas! Welcome! Nehemiah was no great wit, yet he sort o' felt a double meaning like in such words on walls where never a guest was bidden.

'And the thing was done so thoroughly too. Neither sprig, leaf, nor berry had been a-left on the flag-stone floor, which was clean-swept beyond belief. There must have been up a dozen o' 'em to do it in the time that a man could walk to Littlemoor an' back.

'Nehemiah heaved a sigh. Then he thought a minute. Then he shook his head an' saw through all the matter.

' "Folk 'ull talk an' chatter about this-here game," he said to hiszelf, "fine an' well, I'll warrant it."

'He drew an armchair before the fire and sat down.

'Why! somebody or other had put a cup of
[82]

cider down to warm, and there, close-handy on the corner-seat, was his bread and cheese and a knife on a little willow-patterned plate.'

'Something touched Nehemiah. He cleared up his throat an' sat up and drew the back of his hand across his eyes.

'Mrs. Peter Podymore always declared he saw the past come back, and had a thought of something that might have been. Maybe he did, for he talked, so they said, to hiszelf. Things would ha' been different if he could ha' wed wi' Lizzie. His thought had a-been to have her a-sitting on the other side o' such a chimney-corner —ay! and a dozen boys and maidens round the board maybe, God willing, by this time. He would ha' made her happy. He would —in a plain way. And she promised. Yes, she promised. And then ran word because her folk thought she ought to do better. Poor Lizzie! Poor Lizzie! For it turned out none too well after all. Poor Lizzie! Maria had a look of her sometimes. She had that afternoon as she spoke to him over the holly hedge.

'He took up his cup and drank.

' "Merry Christmas, Mr. Case!"

'Nehemiah looked all ways.

'Massy! The words must have got in the head o' un, for there was nothing but the wind in the chimney.
[83]

'It would be something to have somebody sitting there o' winter nights, or to walk with in the garden when days were long. Ha! the parish wouldn' ha' found it very easy to play their pranks if there had a-been a wife about. That was Mrs. Podymore's hidden meaning, no doubt. And Maria laughed. Now what made Maria laugh? Did she suppose that no woman would—

'Once more he took up the cup.

' "Merry Christmas, Mr. Case!"

' "Hark!"

'From the other side of the shutter came a murmur of voices, not so very distinct, but no mistake. So they had come right round to the back to peep in and enjoy their joke. He listened and could hear the womenfolk giggle, and sometimes a burst of laughter more than some maiden could keep back. Nehemiah Case was no fool, for all his quiet ways. If folk were going to laugh about this-here game, laugh they must, but never let it be said that Nehemiah Case got out of temper where no harm in the world was done.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

Nehemiah crept to the front door so soft as a cat; waited a moment; then all of a sudden throwed it open wide an' pounced out.

'The women screamed, the men laughed, but all ran helter-skelter to the garden hatch. All but one whom Nehemiah had the luck to catch by the

[84]

hand-wrist the very minute that he got out of the porch.

' "Now, do 'ee come in! You've a-got to come in!" cried Nehemiah.

' "Let me go, Mr. Case. Do 'ee let me go, do 'ee please."

' "Why, 'tes never Maria—"

' "Now, don't 'ee, Mr. Case. I do pray o' 'ee— please don't 'ee."

'For Nehemiah was a-dragging the maid into the kitchen and into the light, and now she felt ashamed of having trifted with a man she had known from childhood, and always in her heart sort o' pitied and liked.

' "Do 'ee zit down, Maria. There in the corner now, but not 'pon top o' the cheeseplate. I be sorry to my heart I should ha' bin out when you called. Still for all that I be pleased to see that you made yourself so much at home like," began Nehemiah with a wit that none had ever looked for in the man.

' "It wasn't I, Mr. Case. It wasn't indeed."

' "Who was it then, Maria?"

' "It was nobody at all. I mean —it was everybody— everybody in parish like."

'What with excitement Maria really did not know what she did make answer. But what with the fire-light shining on her face, she was the very

[85]

moral of Lizzie as Nehemiah called her to mind a-sitting in another such a courting-corner at a Christmas years agone.

' "Now speak up. What did you do, Maria? Zay. An' 'pon my life I'll keep it up till do turn to dust an' vall of itzelf. If 'tis ten year, Maria, I will!" cried Nehemiah all in a sudden heat.

' "Nothing, Mr. Case. Nothing."

' "Was it the clavy, Maria?"

' " No."

' "The clock?"

' "No."

' "Then you put up the 'Welcome'?"

' "No, Mr. Case, really. I was against that."

' "What for?"

' "Well, seeing that you don't never — never ask anybody. I mean — well, to be sure, you've a-got your own mind to use, Mr. Case - an'—"

' "Zit where you be, Maria," said Nehemiah solemnly, "while I do jus' get up an' shut out the draught."

'But the room was low, and as he turned he ran his head into the mistletoe.

'For the very life of her Maria could not help but give a little nervous giggle.

' "Why, heart alive, Maria! I'll be dalled if you didn' put up the mistletoe."

[86]

'As he went to shut out the winter wind he could hear the neighbours laughing in the road and joking about the catching of Maria. Then a sort o' crafty thought came into the mind o' Nehemiah, that since the maid had put up the mistletoe to be sure, the occasion did seem to call for—

' But back in the light his courage failed. Twenty pair o' eyes might be squinting in at the chinks o' the window. She had got up as if to run away, but he stood between her and the door. He really did not dare to kiss Maria. A hesitation crept into his heart, and such a wild thought as that melted away pretty quick.

' "Zit down a minute, Maria," he said in a voice little more than a whisper. "I wanted a word wi' 'ee."

' At the sound o' words so low and solemn the woman turned her head an' cast 'pon Nehemiah one glance so quick as a bird. Then she sat down and stared into the burning logs.

' "You be getting on in life, Maria. You be no chicken," he said solemnly. "Why, you must be up zix-an'-thirty if you be a day."

'Maria's silence gave consent.

' "Do 'ee ever think, Maria, when your mother should be a-tookt, what 'tes to live alone?"

' But Maria only stared into the fire more thoughtfully, if possible, than before.

[87]

' "Because I do know."

'Maria looked him in the face.

' "Shall I come an' zit beside ' ee in church tomorrow?"

' "La, Mr. Case! 'Tes too soon by half—"

'Shall I come an' zit bezide 'ee in church tomorrow?" he insisted in a firmer voice.

' " La, Mr. Case—!"

' "Where's Maria? Where's Maria?" cried Mrs. Peter Podymore, an' she an' all the rest o' 'em came a-running in at the front door.

' "Come in. Come in, all o' 'ee, and welcome!"

'Nehemiah turned and took a jug from the dresser.

' "Run and draw some more cider, Maria. For you've a-found out where 'tis."

'There, my grandmother, Mrs. Peter Podymore, she always declared they spent the merriest Christmas Eve that night that had happened in Honeycombe for years.

'But because he spoke so low nobody overheard what Nehemiah said to Maria, nor gave so much as a guess until the morrow; and then the villagers loitered, tittering, in groups, as all the parish came out of the little church.

' "Why, massy 'pon us! Mr. Nehemiah Case have a-zot wi' Maria!"

' "Merry Christmas, Mr. Case! Merry Christmas!"

[88]

they shouted on all sides as he walked slowly down the street with his future bride.

' "Zame to you! Zame to you!"

'Mr. Nehemiah Case made the same reply to all, as he turned a blushing cheek first to one and then to the other.'

[89]

CHAPTER VI

THE 'TEDDY-GROUND'

THERE is a well-established custom in Honeycombe, from which the inhabitants do not willingly depart. In the 'teddy-ground' they like to plant potatoes on an Easter Monday. It is a convenient day, and there is unanimity in Honeycombe. Therefore, unless that movable feast be early and the ground frost-bound, or a late winter hide the allotment under a coverlet of snow, young and old turn out together. Men dig the ground and strike out the drills. Children clap in the seed. Thus an air of holiday enlivens the labour of 'teddy-planting': and the women early in the afternoon, when their household work is done, stroll out to see how things are going. They carry out hot cake and bottles of lukewarm tea, and stand round for a talk. Thus every plot in our 'teddy-ground' provides a gossip corner at some hour or other of an Easter Monday afternoon. But we hold a general public meeting towards dusk, when work is done.

Then the ways of the potato are discussed. Its partiality in the matter of manures. Its love of
[90]

moderation in respect of stimulant, and sad degeneration after excess. Its necessity for change. Its liability to disease, and the comparative merits of the new sorts which have not got—'No, not one o' 'em. ha'nt a-got the heart, so to speak, of the true, old-fashioned rocks.'

'But they rocks be so deep in the eye, I do sim.'

'They be. An' for certain that do make so much waste in the paring.'

'It do.'

It was a balmy spring evening. The willows in the hedgerow were gay with their catkins, and every twig of the leafless elm was covered with its little purple flowers. The ground, just hitting the happy medium between wet and dry, had worked to perfection, and everybody enjoyed the satisfaction—the self-satisfaction—that follows a day well spent. We were so happy that each one got to telling lies—harmless humorous lies—about the biggest potato that he or she had ever grown, known, or heard of.

'Well,' said young Tom Platt, with a wink, 'years agone, when the teddy-ground were up pon hill, my father turned up one, a white elephant, that were the sort; an' thik teddy would stand upright in a peck measure, an' fit the rim so close as a egg to a egg-cup.'

'Whatever in this world did your mother do wi' un?' asked Mrs. Jonah Bagley.
[91]

'Baked un in his skin, to be sure. That saved the trouble o' paring. Besides, she hadn't a-got a saucepan big enough to put un in an' shut down the cover 'pon top.'

The laugh was with young Tom Platt.

'You wheeled un in a wheel-barrow down to bakehouse, I s'pose?' said Mrs. Jonah, with a toss of the head.

'No. There were a old couch-fire across to Farmer Every's, so we clapped un into the hot ashes. My father were very partial to a teddy done that way.'

We are rarely frivolous at Gossip Corner, and folly there is always short-lived. We seek the truth; and though we may laugh at harmless exaggeration, we quickly return to serious things. Old Aunt Jennings led us back on this occasion. She is a widow of many years' standing, but still in weeds —a comely, stout, comfortable old lady, who will never forget her 'dear departed' nor cease to shed tears. She loves to cross her arms, talk of olden days, and weep. Her happiest solace is to preserve the memory of poor Abraham wholesomely pickled in brine.

'La, young Tom Platt, there is no edification in such thoughtless tales, nor never can't be,' smiled she. 'But, speaking o' the hill, the biggest teddy I ever truly did see were a-growed by a old
[92]

couple that lived up there to the little house that is no more now than four bare walls wi' a bed o' sting-nettles inzide. He were put in the newspaper, thik teddy were. I an' my poor Abraham — we were young then — we walked across to look at un, an' thik teddy — I wouldn' tell you a lie for the world, an' 'tis so true as if 'twere the last word I had to speak — thik teddy were about so big as a smallish bladder o' lard.'

Old Aunt Jennings paused, reflected, and looked back into the past through half-closed eyes. Nobody questioned the size.

'I can see thik teddy now, as my poor Abraham did lift un up an' down in his hand like to feel the heft. Ay, an' the old couple that growed un, for they were the funniest old folk around these parts, even in them days.'

'What did they do then?'

'They didn' do nothing but live there, and grow teddies an' things for market for a living.'

'I don't see nothing so very funny in that, Aunt Jennings,' said Jonah.

'Oh! but their funny ways did make folk smile. An' more 'an that, though man an' wife, they were both o' one mind, an' did go by the name o' the united couple.'

'Then tell up about this here united couple.'

Old Aunt Jennings brushed a moisture from her
[93]

eye with the back of her hand, and nodding her head to her words, as some do to the sound of music, began the tale of

THE UNITED COUPLE

'Well, then, 'twere old Job Webb and his good wife —Thomasine were her Chrisen name, but always called Tamsin for short — and they lived, as I said, up there above the knap on the hillside. 'Twere a terrible lonesome place, wi' no other dwelling within a mile or more, an' a talk of a ghost, too, up by the quar'; an' yet, go where you would,

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

whether you did pass by or only look across the fields, the little house wore always a cheerful, contented look.

'He had a cabbage rose round the winder did really bear a bushel every year. An' there were a little flower-knot afore the door wi' a few warriors, or gillawfers, or none-so-pretties, all according to the season. An' there were two laylocks, one purple an' one white, one each side of the path by the garden hatch. An' there were two acres o' ground, an' a little grass field, too, an' all their own.

'They had a rank o' beebutts in the garden, up a score or more, an' a sow or two, an' a old cow, an' a old mare; an' Tamsin, she had a lot o' hens, an' a flock o' geese, an' did rear a brood or two o'
[94]

turkeys every year. An' in a sort of barton place there were a little duck's puddle, that they had a-digged out for theirzelves. Folk used to say they really couldn' think, if only they were nearer to company, what any soul 'pon earth could wish for more. An' then Job, he would make reply that work were the best company; an' so soon as a pair o' eyes could count six stars in the dimmet 'twere handy time to think about bed.

'You see they were such a wonderful wold-fashioned sort.

'As I do call 'em back to mind now, they do look to I more like bits o' old chainey than they do like real folk. Ver'ly an' truly they really do. For take 'em of a Sunday, now, of a summer day, as they did walk down to church. Job had on shoes wi' buckles, an' lambswool hose, an' breeches wi' little brass buttons to the knee, an' a red, brass-buttoned waistcoat so short that you did see a bit of his white shirt, an' a long, blue, flop-tailed coat. An' Tamsin had a sort o' yaller gown wi' a pattern of peonies, an' a striped petticoat when she did tuck the tail of her skirt through her pocket-hole. An' they didn' walk down together side by side exactly, for he were always up a dozen or a score yards afore. An' she had a tutty o' flowers in one hand, an' her book an' handkercher in t'other. An' when he did stop to wipe the sweat off
[95]

his face, so did Tamsin too, an' fan her cheeks wi' the book or otherwise the pocket-handkercher.

'But, mind, of a working day you did never see Job out of his long smock, without once in a blue moon there should chance to be company to sit a hour of a night. For those were days, mind, when plain folk did go to bed at dark, an' only burn candlelight in the early morning. From morn to night he always had something in hand: an' two days out o' the seven, or maybe three in the fortnight, he did drive into the town, fifteen mile there an' back, wi' his teddies an' things — such as turmets, an' veg'ables, an' eggs, an' honey, an' what not. He did grow a bit o' wheat, too, an' a patch o' rye, an' take it down to gristmill to grind together for she to make brown bread.

'But the main o' Job's trade was teddies, an' he were most wonderful careful about the choosing an' saving o' the seed. He did pick 'em over all o' one size, about so big as a pullet's first egg, so he did say. An' he did like 'em comely in shape, an' to feature their own sort like, if I do make my meaning clear. For he did grow one or two wonderful special sorts. An' to keep they safe he did put 'em away to winter 'em upstairs under the

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

bed. You see, 'twere a dry place an' sheltered, an' handy to cast a eye now an' again to see when
[96]

they did chimp out. But, more than that, if should ever come most terrible cold weather an' sharp frostes, why, to be sure, his hauling were soon done and the ground must be too hard to work. So he'd pitch out a bit o' tailen wheat to Tamsin's hens, an' do her odd jobs an' chores about house, an' make she lie abed.

'You see, Job, he had a-thought the matter out, an' he reasoned that Tamsin did keep the room wonderful well-aired an' warm, an' no cost out o' pocket in this world. The year the river were ice all over down here from the bridge to the mill, Tamsin laid abed one-an'-twenty days an' one night over. She knitted two pair o' gloves, an' a goodish bit of a white yarn petticut, an' three pair o' hose. But, mind me, Job an' she, they reaped the reward of her industry. Not one teddy out o' six sack had so much as a chilblain.

'Oh, they were a wonderful united couple, an' folk did respect 'em for their hard work and straightforward, simple ways. An' yet, though so simple, Job had a tongue in his head too, an' no living man were ever a-knowed to put Job down.

'Why, bless your heart, when Job did stand in the market, busy wi' the steelyards a-hanging at the tail o' his cart, the folk did crowd round so thick as Bristol fair, if you do take my meaning, only for the chance of a word wi' un.
[97]

'Then maybe one mid put the question:

' " Well, Job Webb? An' how's Job Webb? Have your missus a-hatched out a goodish brood o' teddies to year, Job?"

' "She have. A very tidy lot, thank God! How many shall I weigh you out?"

'An' then, so long as the big teddy lasted sound, he'd hold un up to show the crowd what a little encouragement from Tamsin in a season of distress could do for a seed teddy.

'Oh, they were a most wonderful united couple, an' nobody ever saw the like.

'You see, Tamsin did work an' further Job, head an' hand, every way she could. They never had a word o' difference in all their lives — or not so very often. They did fall out once, or so folk said, when Tamsin brought in a sickly young goslen-chick, an' put un down 'pon hearth afore fire in Job's best hat. There, I do say best, but Sundays or working-days — without 'twere the old billycock he did wear about barton — he had but one, a curly brimmed old beaver, that his aunt Webb chopped wi' un for two sittings o' aggs o' the black-red game an' a gallipot o' honey, after his poor uncle Webb had a-passed away.

'Job had a-been most wonderful fond o' his uncle Webb. He sweared he would have thik hat to keep in his memory, cost what mid. Tamsin
[98]

said, such near relations an' all, the hat did ought to ha' been a free gift; an' she did at the time call Aunt Webb a covetous old skinflint to think o' taking her honey an' black-red aggs. So Tamsin, she never liked the hat over-well. It might ha' suited poor Uncle Webb, but did make Job look a mommet, if ever she should use the word. It couldn't be

called a good fit, she said, when did take a goodish wad o' hay in the lining to hold it off Job's poll an' ears. She declared didn' suit Job a bit what anybody wi' a truthful tongue could can becoming. An' more than once and more an' twice she had just a-mentioned that she had a-heard it a-said that the clothes o' dead folk did bring moth into a house.

"So you see there might ha' been a bit of a something afore, like. Anyway, however, when Job chanced to drop in an' catch sight o' his hat down amongst the ashes, he went so mad as a hatter. He sweared he wouldn' ha' had his hat so used not to save the lives of a dozen goslen-chicks. An' Tamsin, she answered back she'd warrant there was no more harm in a innocent goslen-chick, that couldn' tell what he wanted, than in the head of a bad-tempered, cackling old gander wi' so much to say.

'But there Tamsin was wrong.

'That chick turned to an' proved different.

[99]

'And yet, as Tamsin pointed out, it could do not a mossel o' good to abuse she and use bad language; an' no man in his senses would blame a poor little, whindlen, sickly goslen-chick.

'Yes. Job an' Tamsin were a wonderful united couple.

'Mind me, they didn' have a easy time nother. They worked hard, brought up a little family o' ten, put 'em all out, an' saved up a few pounds to put a new life on the land, so as to keep it their own a'ter they were a-gone like.

'Verily an' truly, they really did deserve to do well, although the end turned out so sad. For Tamsin, mind, spite of all the work she did get through in a day, no matter when or what hour, looked always fresh an' smiling; an' when she had a-been up an' put herself tidy, she was, she really was, although up in years, so clean as a primrose. But then Tamsin she was one of a thousand. She was a woman o' gold she was — though so was he, too—'

'Wha-a-t! Job a woman?'

'An don't you think yourself so sharp, young Tom Platt!'

Aunt Jennings glared in a manner to make young Tom Platt look foolish, and tossed her head.

'Now don't go away, Aunt Jennings. Don't

[100]

you listen to he. How was it that it turned out so sad, then?'

Aunt Jennings calmed herself.

She seemed to feel her position as unprotected widow acutely, and although she made no further reference to the departed, she wiped her eyes.

Evidently shaken by this untimely interruption, she told the end in haste:

'Well, they saved a bit o' money, as I said. They couldn' a-bear to part wi' it out of their hands, so they hid it away in house. But la! when all is said and done, there's a plenty o' rogues, give 'em time, can rummage through every nook and corner of a little house such as that was. 'Tis a lonely place too. Two rough fellows, wi' crape 'pon their faces, comed of a winter afternoon, as mid be a hour afore dark, when Job was on his longest journey away to market. They tied Tamsin in her old chintz-covered chair, wi' a pair o' stockings of her own knitting in the mouth o' her to hold her tongue still. The

thieves searched high an' low, but they pretty quick found the money-bag, an' all the old folk's savings were gone.

'For all that, the old couple did but turn to an' work the harder. But somehow things didn' go so lucky then as when they were young. Maybe they never don't. An' more an' that, the times were on the change. Railroads comed in an'
[101]

brought things from other places. Job, he couldn' do so well. At last, work as he would, he couldn' save so much as a pennypiece. An' then, for a last blow, young Mr. William Every died.

'Then Job owned he was beat.

'I've a-heard tell that Tamsin, when he brought home the news, she just sot down 'pon a hen-coop wi' a full heart an' shed a silent tear.

'You see, the young Mr. William Every, he were the last life on the little holding an' the end of it all.

'Sir John, he didn't turn the old souls out. Their children lent a hand, an' they stayed on. But Job did trouble his heart wonderful to think the place was no more their own, an' none of his name to follow, not when they were a-gone. Whoever did meet the old man, he had but one word:

' "Tis the times," said he; " 'tis the times!"

'So this united couple were the last to live in the old tumbledown cottage on the hill, where, as I said just now, you can see no more to-day than a heap o' stones covered over wi' a patch o' sting-nettles an' a few wild raspberry canes near to the old garden wall.'

There was silence when old Aunt Jennings brought her narrative to this rather abrupt end. We felt
102
sad for those old-world souls, and were sorry not to have heard more of their ways.

Then one and another cast a sly look all round, and Silas gave Jonah a nudge in the ribs as one may say 'unbeknown.'

'I had hopes to ha' heared something o' that ghost,' said the smith, with duplicity ill-concealed.

Aunt Jennings screwed up her mouth, but made no other sign.

'Good-night all!' said she presently, and walked majestically towards the open gate.

It was certainly time to be moving homewards, for the long shadows from the row of tall, neatly-trimmed elm-trees beside the highroad stretched all across the brown teddy-ground to the sunlit hedge upon the other side. Yet we were grieved for Aunt Jennings to go.

'I don't believe in ghostes, not myself,' Jonah went on, and all the others smiled.

'I don't credit that eyes o' living man or woman ever saw one,' chimed in Silas Legg.

'You don't believe in ghostes, do ' ee, Aunt Jennings?' cried the smith, raising his voice.

Old Aunt Jennings turned round.

'A man may be a good smith, Jonah Bagley, an' hammer out hoss-shoes, an' yet not know all. Yet to some 'tis a-gied to see more 'an some,
[103]

an' therefore some always must know more 'an some.

Ah! poor Abraham, my poor man, long dead an' gone, he fell in wi' the littlest o' the Hill ghostes twice, an' after that saw all three o' 'em to one time once.'

'Then to my mind 'tis a bounden duty to make that known, Aunt Jennings.'

'For, so to speak, that really is next door to so well as if 'twere your very own experience.'

'Well, then, if you will, you must,' responded Aunt Jennings, returning with a show of reluctance to the group, yet evidently much gratified.

'So I'll just tell you of poor

ABRAHAM AND THE THREE GHOSTES

'You must know my poor dear Abraham, he made it a rule o' life never to take a drop too much out of his own house; that is to say, not more than he could bring home merry and comfortable. So I do know the tale to be true, for Abraham's word were as dear to he as untold gold. An' there was a goodish talk along at that time, for the three ghostes had a-been most wonderful troublesome' — old Aunt Jennings, using the words in an old sense, meant greatly troubled in mind — 'and many a one said he wouldn' come home by the hill-road after dark for the best fi'-poun' note that ever saw the inside of a pocket.

[104]

'You see, they were wonderful old-ancient ghostes, though not up in years, to be sure, in their own selves like. Hundreds o' times I've a-heard the story a-told round a winter fire. But none could ever tell their names nor the time it come about. It all fell out so long agone.

'Now, whenever mid ha' been, there lived a young lady, one o' the highest in the land, and she so beautiful as the morning an' her heart so pure as dew. An' she loved a young man high in station, but not so much as a acre o' land to call his own, an' no expectations to speak o' from any of his kin.

'Now her own friends they stepped in an' made she wed wi' another, who could ride out wi' a hundred serving-men. An' little better had they a-comed out o' the church, when the King sent a messenger a-hossback to call both bridegroom an' t'other off to the wars in foreign parts beyond seas. So you see the poor young lady were a-left more forlorn, so to speak, than if she hadn' a-wed wi' nobody at all. For wars were wonderful long them days, an' no sayin' who mid come back nor when. An' nobody heard so much as a sound for years, an' then 'twere a-gied out that the husband were a-killed.

'Then after that — as some said about a year later — the t' other comed back wi' a fortune o'

[105]

money a-won from the Turks. But her friends they wouldn' gie consent none the more for his wealth. An' then he — no; then t'other — no; then he what werden dead not really, believing t'other had a-hatched up the tale for his own ends like, comed back in disguise as a serving-man an' tookt service wi' t'other.'

Old Aunt Jennings paused and knit her brows.

'Do 'ee all see?'

'Ay; that's right, Aunt Jennings. 'Tis so clear as mud.'

'Very well, then. That was how it comed about that he — no, that is to say t'other — were to run away wi' the widder so-called, an' he were to drive t'other in a coach an' four at a certain time to a certain place to meet she and carr' she off. For word, mind, had a-been carried overseas that made this one pretend to be a serving-man. An' so that one, looky-see, drove the lady wi' t'other up here on top o' hill, an' jumped down an' oped the door, an' as she went to step out she catched sight o' t' other — no, I do mean he; well, then, the face o' her husband — by the light o' the carriage-lamp like. So she screamed and hollared for all she were wo'th like, an' dropped down flop there — right at his very feet. An' at that t'other jumped out. And then, sure enough, 'twere swords out, an' he an' t' other fought.

[106]

'Now, whe'er he killed t'other, or t'other he, I can't say; but they all killed one another, except she, what stabbed herself to the heart wi' a little poisoned dagger, no bigger than a bodkin, she did always make a habit to carr' wi' her in the form of a staylace tag. Maybe I ha'nt got it quite as happened. But for all that, I can assure you that everything were a-proved in the end to be all a mistake. An' that was how they three ghostes up to hill was thought to be different to all other ghostes that have ever a-been zeed or heard o'. Most ghostes, mind, do walk for their wickedness or to have justice a-put straight. Yet they, in truth, had all three a-been such righteous folks like, here 'pon earth, that they couldn' rest in whatever places they had a-went to, through the longful wish to fall in wi' one another so that all misunderstanding could be explained an' cleared up.

'Well, 'twas a-drawing on to the end o' the year, but not so wondelful late at night. My poor dear Abraham had only a-rode across to inquire about the young William Every, who were bad a-bed. Well, say mid be nine o'clock, but a cloudy, darkish night. To be sure, he might ha' had a cup or so in friendship to cheer up old Mr. Every; but he was coming by the packhorse track up there along the big corn ground, steady an' sober, at a walk, on his old mare. Then that mare

[107]

stopped. She were on the way home, mind. An' up twenty year old — an' waywise. But she stopped. An' there, out in middle o' the ground, poor dear Abraham first saw the smallest o' the three ghostes.

'Mind, the three ghostes were all different sizes, as they had been in life. He were bigger than t'other, an' the lady must ha' been a little, slight woman by all accounts. Poor Abraham said she had on little more than a thin film that night. She made poor Abraham kind o' picture to hiszelf white muslin of a Whitsun holiday. But then, to be sure, in life, wi' so much trouble at home wi' her friends, she might ha' been delicate like. Poor dear Abraham said he knew to once must be something to do with the spirit, she did look so much like steam a-rising out o' the spout of a kittle. She did come clear — an' trembley an' whivery an' quivery — an' then fade away — an' then sort o' pop out an' come in again. Though he were a'most bald, poor Abraham's hair stood on end for all his hat. He

said he should never ha' got home at all if the old mare, after she had a-looked a bit, hadn't a-walked on so quiet as a sheep.

'Well, the next night the young William were worse, and neighbour Every sent across to ask poor Abraham to come an' sit up. So he must needs go. Poor dear soul! he were a wonderful cheerful
[108]

man in a time of anxiety. And lo! there in the middle o' the great plough-ground, there she was again. Abraham said he couldn' bear to look, she did appear so much brighter an' stronger. In a manner o' speaking, as one might say of a bullock, Abraham thought she did mend wonderful fast in condition. So he just turned his head and rode on.

'The next morning the poor young William Every passed away.

'Oh! there was a wonderful large funeral, as you may think, for no man that ever trod shoe-leather ever was or again will be thought so much o' as the young William Every. To be sure, poor dear Abraham put on his black an' followed, an' then walked back from the graveyard to the house. There were port an' sherry wine, biscuits and sweet boughten cakes, an' a hot supper later on for friends an' the nearest o' kin. A goose one end and the other a spare-rib o' small pork. An' poor dear Abraham he stayed late that night, for he was never a man wanting in kindness to the living or in respect for the dead — never!

'Well, being just close 'pon midnight, he did think twice about that old pack-road.

'Still, 'were handier by up a mile, an' he thought he could come to no harm from the ghost if he didn't cast an eye her way. So he pulled down
[109]

his hat an' rode on. But poor Abraham said he couldn' help hiszelf. Do what he would 'twere like a spell put 'pon un, an' against his will he felt bound to look round. An', massy 'pon us! there was all the three ghostes, so large as life, or larger. They was stood maybe five or six chains apart, but not close enough as yet, as one would say, for quiet an' convenient conversation like. Poor dear Abraham, he couldn' a-bear to look. He set his heels into the old mare's ribs both sides, and she galloped home like a three-year-old racehorse.

'Now, some folk did pretend to say that could be no more than the smoke o' three couch-fires that Abraham zeed in that plough-ground. But I do know better. 'Twere only envy o' poor Abraham could ha' said such a thing. To my mind 'tis clear proof that on that very night they three poor ghostes gained their desire an' retired happy to rest. For if not, looky-see, answer me this: If poor dear Abraham didn' see they three ghostes, why have they three ghostes never a-been a-zeed since?'

The reasoning of old Aunt Jennings is always conclusive. Even the young Tom Platt found himself unable to demur. Jonah's eldest maid was standing by, a tall slip of a girl, carrying on her arm a cross-handled basket containing a dibble and the line.
[110]

'I do suppose,' said she, very thoughtfully, 'the young William Every must ha' been wonderful well off to be thought so much o'?'

Then old Aunt Jennings, well started by this time, went on again of herself:

'About so well off as the rest; no better an' no worse. But there: now I've a-talked so long I mid so well go on a bit longer an' tell the rights o' that too. The young William Every were thought so much o' because a'most all the property in Honeycombe parish were held

ON WILLIAM'S LIFE

'You must know that little Willie Every were really one o' the most beautifullest childern that ever a fond mother clapped eyes on. He runned away at ten months, an' called "Mama" an' "Dada" a'most afore you could look round. He really was a most wonderful forward child for his age, an' had the small-pox afore his second birthday, so that his little face were a-pitted quite a picture to see. Folk walked three mile an' more to look at it. My poor dear Abraham said — in a manner o' speaking — you verily could a'most a-planted teddies wi'out a dibble on the dear little feller's cheekbones. His mother were most terr'ble proud. You see, he really could not have the small-pox
[111]

no more. There werden so much as a square inch left for un to have it 'pon.

'Well, they pit-marks, mind, were such a recommendation that everybody took notice o' the boy. They said he must be safe, for such an attack as that couldn' but clear his system, an' take away all chances o' lesser complaints like. So anybody that took up a house or bit o' ground did put on young William's life, so that, 'pon my word, by time he comed to be twenty there were scarce a acre or a chimbly-stack in parish that didn' depend, so to speak, 'pon the young William Every.

'I must say William kept the promise of his early years, an' growed up so fine a young chap as ever delighted the eye of a woman. Well, there, no maiden just come sweetheart high, wi' her first thoughts o' love about her an' her fancy free an' all agog, could ever dream to pick up wi' a straighter-growed, handsomer young feller. Six-foot-two in his stockings, an' really an' truly a'most so big as a house. An' all smiles an' jolly good temper, too. For the young William Every were a very obliging young man. An' he bore a very fresh complexion — one that, say haymaking time, would really burn so red as fire. There, my poor dear Abraham used to say that the young William's face did glow so bright he could go down in
[112]

cellar after dark an' draw cider into a jug brimful, but without overflowing, by the light o' un.

'Now, all the old folk did use at that time to go twice a year to be blooded. Still, there were a-many o' the young did begin to say 'twere only waste o' time an' money. An' the young William, being such a bold young man, were one o' the first not to go.

'Then, sure enough, they that had a-got property on his life, they begun to shake their heads an' talk loud. They said a man so fresh-coloured did really ought to be blooded, whe' er he did hold wi' it or no. It was held to be such a serious matter that about half a dozen, all people o' property, met at "The Sheaf and Sickle" to talk it over an' agree what ought to be done. So they made up their minds to go in a body an' to get at the

young William, an' point out to he like that his life, under all the circumstances, could not really an' truly be called his own. They pointed out the risk he was a-taking. They begged an' prayed o' un to listen to reason an' be blooded. They offered to pay both for time an' money out o' pocket. So the young William, as I said, he were very obliging, he made reply: "Oh, very well then!" An' after that he went in to doctor to be blooded every spring an' fall.
[113]

'Now, when the young William were about two-an'-twenty he catched a bit of a chill, but nothing very much to speak of. But you should ha' zeed the excitement next day when the news did run round the parish like wildfire that young William were bad a-bed! An' all thought he had a-looked a little pale, for he, the last few wicks. Folk consoled theirzelves a man so strong could be only a little ailing, an' maybe wanted keeping up. Then every woman in parish turned to an' made un a little milk-pudden or sent up a sweetbread or some odd nicknack or the other calculated to tempt a sick man's appetite like. All the lane up to Hill Farm were a sight to see, wi' the good-wives an' the maidens a-runnen up, one 'pon the tail o' t'other, everyone wi' a dish or a basin in her hand. Now, when the young William saw this he didn' hurry hiszelf to get better. That idden so very likely. An' even after he were well like, his complaint were a-found to ha' left un wonderful subject, say every month or six weeks, to a nasty little hacken cough in church.

'Now, some o' they what heard thik cough began to think that toothsome victuals after all were not so much what the young William wanted as physic. They said that sort o' cough left alone would grow in quick time into a churchyard cough, an' that a drop o' herb tea, if it should chance to do
[114]

no good, could do no harm in this world. Then every woman in parish made a goodish drop o' herb tea, all different, wi' herbs picked at different quarters o' the moon. They went one a'ter another an' talked to William, as they said, for his good, showing how foolish it would be to allow a good constitution, so to speak, to undermine hiszelf for the want of a little help. They urged young William to drink it regular, though it might be found trying at the first going off, since must in the end make a man wonderful strong an' give un a good appetite. They promised after a bit he should be fed up an' brought to hiszelf again like. Well, the young William being so very obliging, he swallowed their herb teas so long as they stood by to look. An' they were all wonderful glad to see how quick that hacken little cough were cured.

'But just about that time the young William were a-tookt wi' a real complaint, so that he truly did feel a bit afeared his own zelf. He got so hot wi' a sort o' fever an' a burning information in his head, his body, an' all his limbs, that 'twere said you could strike a match on the fore part o' the head o' un as he did lie abed, wi' the sheet under his chin. Oh, he were downright glad wi' help! An' one an' all felt only too glad to bring it. All the womenfolk were a-running up the lane again, but everyone now wi' a bottle or a jug. No poor
[115]

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

sick body could ever be so well looked after as the young William Every, for really an' truly there were no complaint 'pon earth that one or the other hadn' a-thought o' an' provided against. An' yet be dalled if the young William didn' go an' die in spite o' it.

'His end came really very sudden after all.'

Old Aunt Jennings stopped.

Darkness was creeping on, and to be sure, one might reasonably have supposed that with the death of William her tale was done.

'But what complaint did he die of, Aunt Jennings?'

'Yes. What carried him off?'

'Well, the coroner *did* sit on the poor corpse, for certain,' reflected old Aunt Jennings thoughtfully. 'An' Dr. Byles he did open the body. He said all the physics a-tookt were sent by Providence, an' no doubt had their uses, an' so me could be mixed to a wise end. But even such as could, like, 'twere sometimes found better to mix 'em, say, in a bottle than in the poor sufferer's inside. He said it would be found a bad plan to take physic by the gallon unless 'twere under professional advice — but then, to be sure, they do always say that.'

'But what did the jury find, Aunt Jennings?'

'Ay, that's the point.'

'What was the verdict?'

'What did the jury bring in?'

'Ah, there! Now my poor dear Abraham — for certain sure he always did have a merry tongue—but he swore two o' the jury wanted to have "Found drowned," but seeing the amount o' property on the young William Every's life, they brought it in "Misadventure"!'

CHAPTER VII

IN FRONT OF 'THE SHEAF AND SICKLE'

MR. SAM GRIGG, the publican, told the following tales.

He is the landlord of 'The Sheaf and Sickle,' a fine rambling old hostelry which stands by the cross-roads at the place called Honeycombe Corner, and astonishes the traveller of to-day by offering extensive hospitality in a solitude. It boasts that at a push it could make up twenty beds. There are the bedchambers certainly, but no guest ever comes. It has a large clubroom that rarely sees company, and stabling that for years has never heard the munching of an oat. Some of the upstair windows have been closed up.

Yet there were merry times at 'The Sheaf and Sickle' in the old coaching days. But these have passed. All day long the place is silent now, excepting — it may be once a month throughout the season — when the foxhounds meet before the door. Then for a

quarter of an hour all is life and gaiety. Every man, woman and child in the village who can get away from work or meech from school
[118]

turns out to stare at the pack, the horses, the pink coats of the men, and the neat habits and smiling faces of the women.

On these occasions Sam Grigg claps on his best coat, the better to touch his hat to gentry. He has a bustling time, too, popping out with foaming tankards to riders of the lesser sort. But very quickly the hunt draws away. The road would be deserted again but for the little group of gossips who linger around the porch.

No self-respecting man, with business at home to attend to, can go in and sit down at so early an hour of the day. Everyone is too busy to do more than just stand outside. Sam Grigg fully recognises the limitations of this informal occasion. For one moment he disappears, and in a trice he is himself again, for he waits at Gossip Corner in a sleeve-waistcoat.

Mr. Sam Grigg is a large and tolerant man. His nickname in the neighbourhood is 'Little Samuel.' Mr. Simon Shore, the timber merchant, once offered to bet any living soul a guinea, to be spent in refreshment at 'The Sheaf and Sickle,' that Mr. Grigg would measure ten feet girth at two foot six from the ground. Sam Grigg took the deepest interest in the inquiry and lent a generous assistance.

Simon lost.
[119]

Mr. Sam Grigg's circumference, after the most careful geometrical calculation, was unanimously found to be only nine foot ten inches; and that was how he came to be called 'Little Samuel.'

Mr. Samuel Grigg's legs are short, and as he wears the tightest of breeches and gaiters, they seem to direct attention to his rotundity. They no doubt led astray Simon Shore, who is the best judge of timber in the neighbourhood. Yet Samuel's head is rounder than his body. He is what is known in this part of the country as a bullet-headed man. He wears his grizzly hair cropped short, and the fat on his poll hangs over his collar. His face is as the full moon, but ruddy. His cheek is as the rose, and he has a nose like a cherry.

But a man is to be truly judged by his mind alone; and the sympathies of Mr. Sam Grigg are of the broadest.

He is ready to laugh, talk, joke, and drink with anybody, and smiles upon iniquity in the kindest manner in the world. Yet Mr. Sam Grigg knows where to draw the line. Nothing must happen to compromise 'The Sheaf and Sickle,' and should the language of guests now and then become too florid, and particularly if the lurid words be high and loud, with a wave of the hand and a short phrase, judiciously blending a respect for customers
[120]

with a reverence for higher things, he will still all excitement:

'Gentlemen! My house!'

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

If men quarrel, as must happen, he is not the one to carp at the inevitable. He merely protects the sanctity of 'The Sheaf and Sickle':

'Gentlemen! Not in my house!'

It is enough.

Sober or drunk, no man has ever been known to withstand that impressive appeal.

However, we were by the porch after the hounds had passed out of sight. Little Samuel, his thumbs in the pockets of his sleeve waistcoat, and with a cluster of empty quart cups, as close as nuts, hanging by the handles on each forefinger, had stopped to put in his word.

The talk was all of horses. Jonah Bagley bad just said that Sir John's bay was really and truly as pretty a mare as eyes could wish to look upon.

'Now, what do *you* think, Mr. Sam Grigg? Did you ever see a better?'

Mr. Sam Grigg did not answer hastily. He gazed up at the sky and thought. 'I did,' he replied suddenly with decision, and then gravely shook his head. 'Once only, when I was young.'

'Whose was that?'

'She belonged to a young man, Jeremy

[121]

Coalberry by name, as good a sportsman, mind me, and a man with as big a heart as any who ever stepped. That mare was good in saddle, quiet and sound, carry a lady, clever as a rat; and he used to drive her, too, in a high, two-wheeled cart. And that mare was better behaved than any Christian, for she lived to up thirty, and never went wrong but once.'

'How was that?'

'Well, if you can all spare a minute, I'll just tell you the tale of

SARAH'S ONE MISTAKE

'Now, Jeremy Coalberry, he came into his means early, for his father died and left him a goodish bit o' land, that he had laid together field by field, for he was a saving old nipcheese, never worth a brass farthing to any man living. However, the Almighty was pleased to take him, and afore he'd had time to learn wisdom young Jeremy came into a fortune. But, you see, the poor young fellow he had the heart, but not the head.

'There was no sense in his spending, having never had a penny to part with before in his life. And yet there was no harm about Jerry, no harm at all, only a love of wholesome sport, and now and then maybe just one glass too much. So all went

[122]

well with the man, up to the time he fell in love with little Sally Drew.

'Now, Sally Drew was what I call a bantam of a woman, and Jerry was as smart as any sergeant in the Guards. Eyes never in this world saw such an odd match, for the feather in her hat did but reach up to Jerry's elbow, or a little more. She was a pretty, little, sharp Jinny Wren of a maid enough; but, mind me, all the Drews were but a sort o' skim milk turned sour. They did disapprove of everything 'pon earth that was any good to a man. They did talk against cock-fighting and run down bull-baiting, and set

theirselves up against cudgel-playing. There was no heart, like, went wi' the name of Drew; and Jerry, he really had, as you'll own when you hear, a heart so big as a nine-gallon cask. So folk did stop and smile and wink the one to the other when they did see that pair o' sweethearts walk off together to church.

'But the Drews, look-see, acted true to their breed and disapproved o' the match. They couldn't help it. It was one o' the Drews that disapproved of the foot races at Honeycombe Revel because the boys all ran in bare legs. She ran away and hid in a tent, and wouldn't come out till the sack race. But then the Drews disapproved of themselves, and the thing they liked best to talk about was that they were all born in sin.

[123]

'Yet that young couple, they did love each other most wonderful well and true. It was really touching to those who saw how they did walk out together in broad daylight, all so wonderful genteel, sort of arm in crook, with her little fingers just resting 'pon his hand-wrist. Jerry christened the mare I told you about "Sarah," only as a compliment to Sally, and because she was so good and quiet and free from all vice. Sally would now and again pop out of an evening after dark to meet Jerry in the lane, though she disapproved of what she was doing and knew it was wrong. And she told Jerry straight out that though she disapproved of the opposition of her friends, she disapproved of his conduct just as much. And unless he would turn over a new leaf and get rid of his birds of the game, and give up horse-racing and card-playing and tossing for drinks, and never take too much, she would have to give him up.

'She said she wouldn't have him promise, because she disapproved of anything like a pledge. A great big man ought to be strong enough to walk alone and give a "No" to temptation. He must just cast off his present follies and avoid all others, and show he was not a slave to any of them, and then, in spite of everybody, she would be a wife to him.

'Well, Miss Sally, she had her way. Jerry,

[124]

he behaved to a wonder. He sent his gamecocks fifteen miles away, gave up card-playing, paid for the drinks without tossing, and behaved like a deacon at a tea-meeting. By the winter, the Drews, seeing the change that had been brought about by this good example, gave consent; and as Jerry was well off, with a furnished house waiting only for a bride, and they had always disapproved of long engagements, consented for Sally to be married in the spring.

'So everything went well; and in order that Jerry might learn to understand the beauty and enjoy the pleasure of a quiet domestic circle, they invited him every evening to make himself one of the family. Then they had a little music; and, after that, Jerry played at spelicans with Sally, while all the rest sat round and gave advice. Now, spelicans was a game worse for the nerve than hot port and brandy. But Sally could do it. She could hook those little splinters out of the heap without a quiver. And when it came to Jerry's turn — which wasn't often, because Sally was not one to act without reflection — though he had nice hands when sober, and his mare a mouth like satin, his fingers did tremble at that game like a calves-foot jelly when you do hurry with the dish.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

'Very soon Jerry felt the strain begin to tell. First of all his conscience told him something was
[125]

wrong, and with such a tax on the mind, unless he could find relief, he should be an old man before he was married. The salvation of Jerry was that the Drews were early people. They disapproved of late hours, and always retired to rest at nine.

'That gave Jerry a chance for recreation, and enabled him to unbend the bow. He used to hurry home, tell his housekeeper not to wait up, put Sarah to the two-wheeled cart, and drive away on business. He always took the cart to make sure of getting home safe. For that mare was a beauty, and could do her sixteen miles an hour without a touch or a word. She'd trot home of the darkest night, take all the turns, go off-side to pass any slow-going wagon or the like o' that, draw in when anything was coming, and had never been known to make a mistake. Jerry's friends could just hoist him up into the trap, make the reins fast to the rail of the seat, and go to their beds in confidence. They all thought he couldn't be safer in his own little cot.

'But that mare did make a mistake.

'Whether she miscalculated the turn or Jerry deceived her by putting his hand on the reins, at the last four cross-roads from home she turned over the cart, broke off both shafts, and galloped away to her stable as hard as she could.

'Well, the noise of her hoofs woke up the
[126]

housekeeper, a staid, useful woman, and very comfortable where she was. She had her doubt about the wisdom of Jerry's intended marriage, being afraid she mightn't be able to get on with little Sally Drew. So what must she do but slip on a pair of shoes and a long mackintosh and run down the village in a nightcap to rouse up the Drews.

'The Drews, as I said, were a serious people, and recognised at once that this was a very serious occasion. They all got up, for they were a very united family. They sent the housekeeper to hire a horse and trap here at 'The Sheaf and Sickle,' whilst they walked on in a body to inquire into Jerry's fate. Little Sally pushed on in front, and lighted the way with a horn lantern. Her father and mother, both past middle age, did the best they could to keep up, and disapproved of Sally for going so fast. They were too much out of breath to find fault then, but they said to each other that it was most unseemly, and they must not forget to mention the matter when they got home; and just then they drew near to the four cross-roads.

' "Stop!" panted Mr. Drew suddenly. "Hark! What is that?"

'They could scarcely see each other in the dark, but they all stopped to listen.

"I think I hear music in the distance," piped Mrs. Drew.
[127]

' "There is certainly music — singing — in a rich bass or baritone voice," affirmed Mr. Drew. "Though I cannot distinguish the words."

'And just then little Sally Drew, who had gone further and further ahead, dropped the lantern and gave a loud scream.

'All ran forward, and there, in the very corner of the ditch, by the help of the starlight they could make out the wreckage of the two-wheeled cart, and under it, like a spelican at the bottom of the heap, lay Jerry Coalberry, singing like an angel or a member of the village choir. One of the cartwheels was up in the air: and, as he sang, he raised his left arm and gracefully twirled the wheel. The influence of the family circle had not been wasted on Jerry; for the song one might think to have as good a moral as any young couple intending matrimony could wish for:

"Round goes the world,
All troubles I defy,
Jogging along together, my boy,
My little mare and I."

'And yet the Drews were not pleased. They disapproved even of Jerry's harmless mirth. They declared they would rather see Sally a corpse than a Coalberry, and broke off the match.
[128]

'But when I tell you that the man, whilst he was singing, was lying with one leg broken and three ribs knocked in, you'll know what I meant when I said that Jerry Coalberry had a heart — what did I say? — a heart so big as a nine-gallon cask.

'He was very fortunate with that mare. He sort o' took care of her, so they said, for the sake of the memory of little Sally Drew. He drove her twenty years, day and night, but that was Sarah's only mistake.'

Mr. Sam Grigg turned to go indoors.

'Then what happened to 'em both after that?' asked young Tom Platt. 'Did the maid listen to what they said?'

'She did.'

'This little Sally Drew, now, did she get married?"

'She did,' replied Mr. Sam Grigg, 'after many years.'

'But I'll bet a guinea Jerry Coalberry never did. With his free way o' living an' all, he was built to be a bachelor; or that's my mind about the man, anyway.'

'I should take your money if I could wrong a man so far,' laughed Mr. Sam Grigg as he rejoined the group. 'He did wed at last. But not afore he had run through a'most all he had, and the mare was dead, and he bound to go afoot for want
[129]

o' means. But there was a funny tale about that, too. And though Sam Grigg is not the one to believe all he can hear, I do know the facts o' this to be true.'

'Tell it, then, Mr. Grigg.'

'Go on, Little Samuel.'

'Very well, then,' laughed the innkeeper, and cleared his throat. 'I'll tell you a tale about

A MAN LOST

'You must know in years gone by, and not so terrible many either, before all the roads were made and so good, it was no very uncommon thing for a man travelling from village to village on foot of a dark night, if he didn't know the way well, or had to take a footpath or a track across a bit o' open country, to get lost. Many a one has hollered himself ho'se, an' then walked about to keep warm until daybreak, for the early morning is most wonderful cold, and he was like to get scrammed if he should lie down or stop moving to catch heat. So a man would keep beating about just within a few yards for fear he might step into some pit or fall into a wet ditch.

'Well, Jerry, as I said, had spent most of his money and lost a good many of his friends. For the companions of prosperity, when the purse do
[130]

begin to run low, do drop off like leaves when the sap do run down. The men who used to drink with the poor fellow now found fault with him for getting drunk. He must have been then about five-and-forty, and still straight and active, but everybody could see he was no more than half a dozen steps from nothing.

'He used to get about of an evening to one or another of the smaller farmhouses in the neighbourhood. You see, he had been a man of means, and Jerry was always good company, and life is wonderful quiet at these lonely homesteads; so Jerry was always welcomed wherever he showed his nose, and made to sit by the blazing wood fire hour after hour, and tell a tale or sing a song, with a great cup of hot gin and cider always passing round to keep the company merry and glad. It was thought to be poor hospitality in those days that would let a man go home whilst he was able to walk straight.

'So one night Jerry was up at Farmer Every's, to the old homestead that's in ruins now, right away up on the brow of the hill. It was pretty late and they wanted Jerry to stay the night, but he wouldn't hear o' no such a thing. He knew the way as well as his own garden-path, and wasn't afraid of pixies, so he said. The old man Every was. He had been led away by 'em more than
[131]

once and more than twice, so he knew what he was talking about. However, he lighted Jerry with a lantern down to the turn into the lane, and counselled him, if any of the beggaring little things should meddle wi' un, to turn his jacket inside out to break the spell; and then said "Good-night," and let him go.

'It was a cloudy night, and, what was worse, a small, misty rain was just beginning to fall — the sort o' weather when by day you can't see more than a hundred yards or so in front o' your nose. Jerry could see nothing at all on one side or the other, and, as he afterwards said, for all the good his eyes were, he might just as well have had his head in a nose-bag.

'But a head is made to think with, and Jerry always declared that he stood still in the dark a goodish while that night on purpose to think. He said he got it in mind, so clear as day, that if a man can but keep moving on in a narrow lane he cannot fail to be right, because, if he should chance not to go straight, he must walk into one hedgerow or the other, and, to any sensible traveller, to find his head in a thornbush must act as a

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

warning. Jerry swore he kept so straight that in half a mile of winding lane he walked into a hedgerow only once.

'Jerry many a time declared afterwards that never
[132]

in his life had his memory been so unclouded as it was in that thick darkness.

'When he came to the corner into the road he turned to the left, crossed over, felt his way with his stick against the stone wall, counted three gates, put his hand on the milestone, reflected, and went into the drove. There were no hedgerows to the drove, to be sure, but a wet ditch on either side would, of course, act just as well. Jerry could not see, with everything so simple around him, how it was ever possible for any man to go wrong.

'In due time he came to the village, just as he had expected.

'Still everything went well, and he walked along the trimmed box hedge between his garden and the road until he came to the little gate that was to take him to his door. And now, towards the end of his journey, as will sometimes happen, Jerry's memory began to fail. He had always been under the impression that his gate had round, painted iron rails, but these were flat and of wood. Jerry thought again. He took off his hat and scratched his crown in the dark, but still was not quite sure. Yet this *was* his gate for certain. It *must* be.

'But I say Jerry's doubts only show the ridiculous shortcomings of so much education, which will teach a boy the length and breadth of all the rivers in foreign parts which he will never see, and yet never
[133]

warn him to take particular notice of the palings of his own front hatch — a knowledge which may be of the greatest importance and use to him any night after he grows up to be a man.'

Mr. Sam Grigg paused to secure the quart cups more firmly on his fingers.

The company cried 'Hear, hear!' to a man.

'Jerry Coalberry pushed open the gate and went in. And yet it did seem after all that there must be so me mistake. He found himself on a broad track of rough, open country, but still he pushed on. He must for certain find something he knew in a minute. And then, almost at once he stumbled over a little trench, where, to be sure, somebody must be carrying out some draining. He had hardly got on his feet again before he bundled into a hedgerow. He could feel the plashers across where they had been laid when the hedge was last made. Though all the sticks snapped and broke off so dry and brittle as clay baccy-pipes.

'Jerry felt angry to think that any slovenly feller should take so little care of his hedgerows. He knew well enough how it was — a faggot had been clapped in to stop a shard. Then he found out that he was climbing through a big double hedgerow. He pushed on, but that took him into a turnip-field. He could tell by the smell as he trampled on the leaves. Then he tramped on just as if he were
[134]

following partridges, until he came to a sort of open down — a sheep-run for a guinea, by the very fine grass. At last he stumbled and fell headlong into a clump of furze.

'Jerry's face was pretty well scratched, so were his hands, and bleeding too, sure enough. Still, he felt thankful for finding the clump of furze, because that told him exactly where he was. He was on Blagdon Common. There could be no doubt at all about that. Yet, though that was the very deuce of a dangerous place, Jerry's presence of mind did not desert him. He stopped to wonder how he had got there, and saw it all. To be sure there was only one thing that possibly could have happened. When he fell into the hedgerow he must have forgotten whether it was to right or left, and gone back on his own steps. There was a gate with flat rails opening into Blagdon Common just by the very devil of a spot — close to a twelve-foot gravel-pit and a deep boggy, soggy place. Jerry thought it safest to leave well alone and stay where he was.

'Presently he fancied he heard a dog bark.

'He listened.

'There was — a very distant dog.

'At once he plucked up hope. The dog must be at a homestead. That dog thought he heard somebody about and was barking fit to lift a thatched
[135]

roof. Where that dog was, the folk would take a look round to see that all was right. Surely the lungs of a man ought to be as good as a dog's.

'Jerry hollered:

' "Man lost! Man lost! MAN LOST!"

'Then he stopped to listen and then hollered louder, fit to wake the dead:

' "On Blagdon Common! Up by the gravel-pit and the fuzzy-knap. Man lost! MAN LOST!"

'Then Jerry heard a voice.

'He had never given a thought to the pixies, but this voice came out of the air. He fancied he had heard it before, and he trembled and went weak at the knees and broke out all over in a sweat.

' "Who is there?"

'He could see nothing, but it was certainly the voice of Sally Drew.

' "Sally!" cried he in a tone of great surprise; "what, Sally Drew?"

' "Certainly," cried the voice; "I am Miss Drew. Who are you? What right have you there? How did you get there? What are you doing in my garden?"

'That was a fine tale, to be sure, Sally Drew's garden, but it frightened Jerry the more. He clean forgot to turn his jacket inside out, but he laid down to hide in the furze-bushes and went on
[136]

shouting "Man lost!" without stopping and with all his might.

'Then there came a light, as it were, through a rift in the clouds. Jerry saw a vision of the head and shoulders of little Sally Drew. He had not seen her to speak to for some years, and her face was thin and altered. There seemed to be more nose and chin about her than when she was a little maid. Jerry thought that she must be on the way to be an angel now, for she wore a white robe with a little embroidery collar tied with strings

close around the throat, and held a composite candle in her right hand. He had heard of people appearing to those they had once loved, particularly when they had acted wrongly or unkindly, just as they had passed away.

'Then Jerry stammered a reply.

'Some said it was poetry:

' "Oh, Sally — I mean Miss Sally — Miss Sally Drew, I should never have got into this difficulty if I'd been married to you."

'Then he went on calling "Man lost!" fit to break a blood-vessel.

Presently he heard voices and footsteps, and pixies, in the shape of dodging, jumping lanterns, came running from all sides.

Sally Drew darted back and vanished from the window as she blew the composite candle out;
[137]

and in a minute the pixies changed to neighbours, and they picked up Jerry Coalberry from the gooseberry plot in Miss Drew's kitchen garden and carried him home to bed.

'Now, to be sure there was a deal of talk. The good folk around they called in a body the next day and reasoned with Jerry Coalberry. They pointed out the damage he had done to the property of Miss Sarah Drew: how he had fallen down all along-straight in the celery trench; made a gap in the double row of kidney beans, neatly stuck with second year's sticking; walked across the lawn and flower-bed, and bundled into the gooseberry plot. They put it straight to Jerry Coalberry, one and all, that a most complete apology was due to Miss Sarah Drew.

'Then Jerry put on his best suit and went up to the house, and let little Sally Drew talk to him for his good.

'She was a lady of property, and, say — say, five-and-thirty by this time. She shed tears and told him how it pained her to hear him, a man she had once loved, calling to her in the night that fearful cry of "Man lost!" She showed how appropriate it was to his own case and condition. She said, though a man might be lifted out of a gooseberry-bush, there was a place that none could ever climb out of. It was not the damage to the
[138]

celery or the bean-sticking, she said. That could be put right; but unless he could change himself she was afraid she could never — never forgive—And then little Sally Drew broke down and burst into tears.'

Mr. Sam Grigg stopped as if his tale were done.

Young Tom Platt is not quite a genius, but he has a most devouring appetite for useful knowledge.

'But I suppose she did forgive him in the end?' said he.

Mr. Sam Grigg smiled in a very superior way.

'You fool, Tom Platt!' cried he. 'Didn't I tell you — say, five-an'-thirty? She married him. Pretty quick, too!'

He turned on his heel to carry his cups into 'The Sheaf and Sickle.' But by the porch he stopped once more, and the gossips gathered round him again.

'And how did that marriage turn out, I wonder,' asked Jonah Bagley.

'Ay, did Jerry Coalberry change his ways?'

'Different men read different signs in different ways,' said Little Samuel, with a sententious nod of the head at every word. 'I can tell you one little incident of Jeremy Coalberry's after-life, and you must judge for yourselves. I shall tell you a tale of
[139]

JERRY'S LAST NIGHT OUT

'Now this I will say: from the day when little Sally Drew became Mrs. Coalberry there was a change carne over Jerry inside and out. He was well dressed, but always as plain as a Quaker, and he would do no more than nod to such as — when he had money — had been his oldest friends. So he almost, as one might say, dropped out of sight: never went to races, or played cards, or any of those things, but dug in Mrs. Coalberry's garden and set out the bedding plants in spring.

'There was a lot o' smiling about it, you may be sure. Folk were bound to say that it was a wonderful change. But she never let him out of her sight. There was always something to be done by day; and the tale was that Jerry did sit down in slippers and read his wife a good book after dark.

'Of course, I can't vouch for that. You know what people are and how they will say anything. I am going to tell you what I saw myself, and you can use your own minds what you believe from it.

'Well, years passed. The room where the club is held now was an assembly-room in the old coaching days, and still kept its name at the time of which I speak. There have been dinners and dancing
[140]

and fine doings in that old room, I tell you, if the planks o' the floor could only speak.'

'Well, in my father's time, when I was up a hard, stout youth, there was a dinner to help folk houseless after a flood, and the Sir John of that day he took the chair.

'Years had passed. Jerry was a staid man, beginning to blossom about the head. Well, a sort of iron grey at the sides then. And the dinner being for a charity he had leave to come, the more so that he had never touched a drop of anything since his wedding-day.

'I used to wait in those days, and Jerry came in very quiet, looked about from one to the other, and nodded his head and sat down. He talked a little at the dinner, and just had a glass poured out that he didn't so much as raise to his lips. But when the speeches came on he began to wake up and smile at the jokes. Then one after another, friends of his youth, did hold up a glass and "Take wine with you, Mr. Coalberry," in the old-fashioned way. And so Jerry got started. He got red; he laughed; he sang; and made a speech with no end to it. "Order, order!" Sir John did cry. But Jerry, he did take it to refer to the others, who were all laughing and making a noise. Then Jerry started to sing in his speech:
[141]

"*Round goes the world,*
All troubles I defy,
Jogging along together, my boys,
My—"

' "Order, order!" cried Sir John again, and his neighbours pulled him down by the coat-tails. But, somehow or other, the chair had got pushed back, and Jerry fell down on the floor.

'Well, the long and short is, he had to be picked up. But he hollered and shouted and sang, most unreasonable-like, and wouldn't keep quiet when he was told. So he had to be carried out, and I and another were sent to carry him home in an easy-chair.

'Now, the very minute the word "home" was spoken Jerry pulled himself together and began to get straight.

' "Oh, what will Mrs. Coalberry say?" cried he.

'All the way home he kept up the same tune:

' "Oh, what will Mrs. Coalberry say?"

'I tell you gentlemen, I pitied that poor man. It pained me to see what a good sportsman may come to. I may say I was humiliated when I heard that poor fellow always repeating the same words without change.

'I am only telling you facts, gentlemen. Every
[142]

man must hold what view his judgment draws from my statement.

'To me — well, to me—'

Mr. Sam Grigg paused.

In a tone of biting irony he once more muttered the words to himself:

'Oh, what will Mrs. Coalberry say?'

Then he tossed his head and walked into his house.
[143]

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE VILLAGE BRIDGE

THE river which runs below Honeycombe is one of the most versatile of flowing streams.

Amongst the meadows above the village it is still and deep. There it winds and loiters between rushes and sedge, sleeps under the tall trees of the wood that at one place skirts its bank, and darkens beneath the shadows of overhanging alder-bushes, as if in silent meditation upon tragedy and crime. In the heat of summer, when everything around is glad, it hides its face under the flat leaves of the water-lily, as though none should learn the secret concealed in its depths.

Suddenly the mood changes. Over the weir it dashes. Melancholy is left behind. It spreads itself to play leap-frog over a line of stepping-stones, and dances on a floor of gravel as if there were never a care in the world.

By the time it reaches the village bridge it is a smoothly flowing idyll, with gardens sloping to its banks on either side, and dipping places, by which an eddying ripple reflects the willow-trees awry, and
[144]

mockingly distorts the good looks of maidens who come down to dip.

A house somewhat larger than a cottage stands close above the bridge.

Of a summer evening the bridge becomes a very favourite gossip corner.

The air is so cool and pleasant that all the youths stroll down to sit upon the wall and smoke. Young giggling girls pass arm-in-arm, or stop to peer down at the water and join in the chat. Folk returning from work — one, it may be, with a scythe, and another with a basket of tools — linger to swell the group; and oftentimes some wayfarer well known to the villagers, but rarely seen, will rest a quarter of an hour on his journey to have a gossip with old friends.

He was a stranger to me who told the following tale.

I cannot even tell you his name, and have no wish to learn it for myself.

It is better to picture him the portrait of a man unknown, with no knowledge of his history but what his face and manner may reveal. For he was one of an ancient type fast passing away, and had drawn his simple wisdom, Heaven only knows from what well, without the aid of travel and with few books.

He was already talking when I came, and all the
[145]

gossips were silent when he talked. All had gathered around him as he sat upon the wall, his broad-brimmed hat in his hand, resting on the stick between his knees. He was over eighty, that was clear by the dates he mentioned, and yet unbent, and able to walk his ten and fifteen miles whenever occasion called for it. His beard was white, but tobacco-stained around the lips; his hair still thick and somewhat long.

His grey eyes were quick and bright, with upright, frowning wrinkles between them, although the expression of his countenance was of a smiling contentment. His language was singularly simple and pure; and although unlettered, he talked, as they say, 'like a book' — a folio volume of some three centuries ago.

His tale was of the river.

As I drew near his right arm was raised, with its lean forefinger pointing towards the larger house, half hidden behind willow-trees.

'Ay, ay,' he was saying, 'I can call to mind the year of

KITTY DALE'S SAD END

'That house was the dwelling of one John Dale for close upon twenty years. Kitty was born there; and scores of times I can call to mind to have seen
[146]

the maid — a child in a little short-sleeved, low-necked frock and blue pinney, fishing for minnows from that very step.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

'My father left Honeycombe at the Michaelmas as Sir William Macnaughton was stabbed by Akbar Khan something before the Christmas Day following. I was the firstborn of our family, and but nineteen at the Candlemas then next coming. Kitty was at our place overnight, as we hauled away the furniture at daybreak, and she sat there with my little sister on the shaft of a wagon packed up sky-high and roped, drawn up before the door all ready to start at dawn. She was a-cracking hazel-nuts from her lap. She had on red hose, and I can see the empty shells at this minute all on the ground around her feet.

'The maid had a look already as if her brain might now and again give birth to some thought of a sweetheart; and I own I was not blind myself to the promise of beauty when that child should ripen into a woman. She was merry and frolicsome up with us. And the more so, it may be, that there was very little mirth and laughter in John Dale's house. And the mind of the child even then was bent upon going away. All her thought was for the next few months to pass to reach fourteen years and be bound apprentice away in some town. I never set eyes on her after that night. She never

[147]

once chanced to be at home when I came to Honeycombe.

'Some six years later, it was somewhere about Hallowmas, a tranter stopped to our place to pick up a basket of apples we wanted to send away. My father and I, we carried the hamper out to the van and stood by the garden hatch talking, as I well remember, about the famine and the new disease just come in the potatoes. Then of a sudden tranter stopped in his conversation and put his hand up to his mouth.

'He spoke in a whisper:

' "John Dale's Kitty down to Honeycombe have a-been led away in the town. She drowned herself there in the pool above the Conegar stepping-stones the night afore last."

'The maid was nothing to me, but I felt my heart jump. Hundreds and thousands of times since then I've pondered over Kitty's face, and, old as I am, my heart must needs seek the ease of a sigh if I do but think o' that child now.

'Folk do believe, no doubt, that tranter's words do sum up all the story of Kitty Dale's sad end. I tell 'ee, no. There is more in any human act than the mere fact. I've found more in life than that. There is the underlying nature of things that do bring the deed to pass.

'Now take John Dale himself. For what should

[148]

ha' been the best years of his youth he was a wild fellow, who lived only for his pleasures, without a thought to love. He drank and spent and gambled; and for the early part of their married life his poor wife could have found little joy in her home.

'Then of a sudden he turned right round, touched no drink, but worked and saved, and burned every pack of cards he could lay his hands upon. He was a man of strong will, but stern; and no sooner had he conquered his follies than he could find no patience for a fool. He forgot the years of his boisterous youth. He forced on his children the sobriety of middle age.

'If they did but laugh he thought they must be on the road to iniquity. He brought silence into his house whenever his finger lifted the latch. That was why Kitty longed to be off instead of staying at home to help her mother.

'It was about a week after Michaelmas when Kitty came home. She got off the coach at the four cross-roads three miles out, and crept down the road here towards dusk close to the hedgerow in front of a party of leasers wi' their sheaves 'pon their heads, and as she thought, maybe, before her father would be in. She said she had left her place by agreement, but she told her mother the truth, and they kept it a secret for a while, for Kitty put a deep trust in her young man.

[149]

'Her father's tongue never ceased about the giving up of her situation. But she kept out of his way, and her mother found reasons to send her here and there out of his sight when he was in. Then she wrote a pitiful love-letter, and carried it into the town to post, so that none in Honeycombe should know to whom she was writing. But nothing came in reply. Day by day she watched the postman trudge over the bridge out of the parish without so much as casting a glance at the door. So in the end she deemed herself forsaken, and by the end of October they saw no hope.

'John Dale was like a man beside himself. His heart had no pity for the child. He talked of her disgrace and wickedness, and promised the vengeance of heaven upon a daughter who had given so little heed to her father's teaching. He called her names of shame, and, bitterest of all, a trusting fool. It broke her heart, and she crept downstairs in the night and cast her life away in the black pool in Granger's meadow above the stepping-stones.

'But mark you this! It was noonday and past by the time they found the body. Granger's folk unhung a gate and covered her with a wim-sheet to carry her home. There had been no talk as yet. Her parents thought that she, who had once been so merry, had but runned away. Folk were away at work, and there was none about. But as Granger's

[150]

men came upon this bridge, a stranger, a young man on horseback, rode up from the opposite direction and drew rein.

' "Could you be so good as to tell me," he asked, "in which of these houses Miss Kitty Dale do live?"

'So there is a true tale of this river and of this bridge. The young lover was from home when Kitty's letter had been delivered. His friends were well-to-do and decent kindly folk, and seeing that Kitty was of no lower station in life than themselves, they bade the youth make haste to do right. So the young couple might have married by licence before the week was out.'

The old man rose to proceed on his journey. There was no sound but the swirl of the water around the buttresses.

"I am thinking,' said he, very quietly and looking away up the road, 'that harsh and severe judgments on the sins of our fellow-creatures are rooted not in love of righteousness, but in the fear of hell. Good evening one and all — I've still got a few miles afore me, an' I must be getting on.'

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

Then in silence we watched this rural philosopher walk slowly up the hill and, round a bend of the winding road, pass out of sight.

It is not possible to remain sad for any length of time at Gossip Corner. The longest tale is quickly
[151]

told, and often has an unexpected way of leading into another of a totally different character.

The man they call Bluebeard had joined the group without ostentation and listened with deep respect. As you have heard, he is clean-shaven, and his jaws are very lean. During a quarter of a century he has never been known to smile, and very rarely to speak. It was with the greatest surprise, therefore, that the neighbours heard him gloomily mutter to himself that talking of Kitty Dale's sad end made him think of Tranter Luckstone's mule.

'What's that, Bluebeard? Tranter Luckstone's mule!'

'To be sure,' reflected Bluebeard as he tried to shuffle away, 'there was nothing between Kitty Dale and Tranter Luckstone's mule, except, as you must have all heard, that Tranter Luckstone's old hoss got the glanders and died.'

'But what sense is there in that?' asked Jonah Bagley, taking the man by the arm and pushing him into the very centre of the group.

'Why, you see, they passed a brief round the parish to help Tranter into another hoss. But somehow or another the money didn't come in so very fast, an' he went into market most terrible sad. For Tranter had an eye for a hoss an' he hadn' a-got enough in hand to bring back a hoss he could take any pride in. So talking o' Kitty Dale's sad end, as
[152]

I say, brought back to my mind that Tranter Luckstone rode home 'pon the back of a mule.'

'But what had Kitty a-got to do wi' it, Bluebeard?'

'Well, you see, there had a-been two mules, though one were dead. An' the gen'leman that brought 'em out o' Spain, so folk said, an' drove 'em a pair some years, why, to be sure, he were dead too. So the odd mule were a-put up to auction, an, as I said, Tranter bought un. So hearing o' Kitty Dale brought, so to speak—'

'But how, Bluebeard?'

'Why, Bluebeard?'

'What, didn't I say at the first going off? Well, then, the dead man's name had a-been Dale.'

'O — 0— oh!'

'Well, never mind about the inner workings o' Bluebeard's mind, like,' cried young Tom Platt.

'Let's hear what he've a-got to tell.'

Bluebeard was diffident. However, he stroked his chin, and began at once the tale of

TRANTER LUCKSTONE'S MULE

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

'Well, as you may believe, no sooner did Tranter come home than all the parish turned out, as one mid say, to see what sort o' hoss he had a-bought wi' the money collected. But when they saw the man
[153]

'pon a mule they all laughed fit to die. They laughed at his big ears, an' they laughed at his tail, an' Tranter's neighbour, Farmer Moggridge, up an' put the question why 'pon earth Tranter had a-bought he.

'Well, Tranter he still had the words o' the auctioneer a-ringing in his ears like, an' he made reply that a mule was a very serviceable animal, wi' the speed an' intelligence o' the hoss an' the high character o' the dunkey. An' that a mule was wonderful good up hill an' down, an' in a manner o' speaking surefooted enough to haul a fair tidy load over Honeycombe church tower, seeing there were a bit of a buttress to gie un a purchase like.

' "In course I do own," said Tranter Luckstone, "a man wouldn't load a mule for that so heavy like as he would to trot 'pon the level ground."

'Then the mule, Tranter pointed out, was so long-lived.

'If there had a-been a mule in Noah's Ark — which, of course, there couldn' have a-been no need for — 'twud be a wonder if any man could prove his death, unless it happened to come about by a accident.

' "That did show," said Tranter, an' the man had a very serious way wi' un when he talked, "that a man mid live to a very good old age an' still hope to leave a mule as a legacy."
[154]

' "To be sure all the parish were a-stood about a-laughing. But, mind me, Tranter Luckstone were a dapper little man in a sleeve-waistcoat, an' he never moved a muscle of his face. He had a tongue, though, could talk to that sort o' music, just, so to speak, like a canary bird in a cage do hold up his head an' zing when there is a bit of a chackle all round."

'Then neighbour Moggridge he spoke up an' said:

' "Well, for my part, Tranter, I do love a good hoss, an' I do bear no ill-will to a dunkey. I'd keep either one or t'other; but I'll be hanged if I'd ride a-straddle or otherwise sit up behind a mule."

' "But if I do keep both in one, neighbour, I shall save keep," said the tranter, and he just kept on a-hitching out the mule.

'Then Farmer Moggridge, who were a staid an' portly man, an' well-to-do, an' did wear top-boots and a blue brass-buttoned coat to market, he looked at the matter from a more serious view like.

'He shook his head.

'He said as churchwarden he did ought to think o' the parish, an' looking at the origin, like, o' the mule, did really seem like a thing born out o' wedlock an' not altogether respectable. He said Tranter ought to think twice afore he did bring a mule into an innocent parish like Honeycombe.
[155]

' "No living thing, man or beast, can help his parents," the tranter made reply.

'So as Farmer Moggridge's grandfather by his mother's side had a-been hanged for stealing a sheep, he said no more, but walked on. Still, for all that, Farmer didden feel so pleased in his mind like as the folk a-stood round did. An' then Tranter went an' turned his mule out in ground.

'Well, Farmer Moggridge, his second maid, christened Rosmund, was always called Jinny for short. This Jinny were a pretty, fair-skinned, tow-headed maid, wi' eyes so big an' so blue as the saucers in a willow-patterned company tay-service. She werden built for hard work, but she had headpiece. She did love story-books, an' she were a wonderful maid wi' her needle, too. She worked a picture of Sodom and Gomorrah in woolwork, you really could warm your hands at the flames. Well, then, folk said Jinny's parlour couldn' never want airing, if she did but hang it up above the mantelpiece. She were sort o' gifted, you know, wi' such taste. She had a-been a schoolmissus up the country somewhere. But she an' a young Scotchman had a-catched a mind to one another, an' so Jinny had a-comed home to get ready against the wedding.

'You see, such times, to be sure, there is a lot to do. 'Twer beautiful weather, an' the tail-end o' May like, an' Jinny did carry her work out in the
[156]

orchard behind the house, an' whilst she did work her vingers to the bone, she did look up at the apple-blossom an' think o' he.

'Jinny had such thought, you know, an' such taste, that she had a-worked all the chair-covers an' the sofie-covers for her parlour that was to be all wi' her own hands. An' as Jinny's man was a Scotch-man, out o' compliment like, she had a-doned 'em all wi' Scotch thistles. There, they thistles were life itself. Her father felt so proud as a turkey-cock as he did watch the crop grow, like. He said they thistles really did tempt a farmer to hurry along the old man wi' his scythe to cut 'em off, for fear they should seed.

'Well, Jinny, she got 'em all done down to the last stitch. All her friends and relatives did travel miles to look at 'em, mind, an' up a dozen comed one afternoon. Jinny tied a line across from two apple-trees an' pegged 'em all up so that folks could really an' truly see. Her uncle Abraham Jennings up to hill, he looked in so well as the rest; an' there, he showed hiszelf most wonderful pleased.

' "Jinny, my dear," said her uncle Abraham Jennings, "I've a-heard tell that the Scotch be a most wonderful hardy race."

' "They always was," said Jinny, so sweet and pure as a real lady.

' "They mus' be," said her uncle Abraham
[157]

Jennings quite thoughtful like, "strong tough chaps, there can be no manner of doubt. But Jinny, my dear, I shan't never dare to come to see your husband after you be wed."

' "But why not, uncle?" asked Jinny. "You'll find no pride about he."

' But uncle Abraham Jennings shook his head.

' "No, Jinny, my dear. I should be so terr'ble a-feared you mid ax me to sit down."

'You can judge by that what they thistles was like. An' when the visitors started to go, Jinny walked away wi' 'em so far as the garden hatch, to say good-bye an' shake 'em by the hand an' see them off.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

'But Tranter Luckstone's paddock lay next to Farmer Moggridge's orchard, wi' a deep break-neck sort of a gully in between. There, 'twer like the roof of a house one side, an' did overhang t'other. But that were nothing to thik mule. He just stratched out his neck an' he eyed they thistles, an' he were bound to go. He really must ha' tookt more after his father in mind like than after the mare, to have such a craving for a few thistles. When folk comed next day to look at the spot where he found a passage, they saw Tranter was right about the sure-footedness of a mule. They said to one place he must ha' went head-down, like a vly on a ceiling, for there werden any other way short o' wings. But however that
[158]

may be, thik mule got across to they thistles. He ate the whole crop. Folk reckoned afterwards that he must a-ben disappointed at the first going off an' went on in hope. They thought so early in the season like he must ha' looked to find they thistles short and crisp 'pon the tooth, like a young carrot or a stick o' celery; an' then one after another turned out sort o' dry 'pon the tongue, more like a woolly turmet. Anyway, he chawed 'em all up so well as he could an' so long as they lasted. When Jinny comed back thik mule had stopped feeding, an' to all appearance were lost in thought.

'There! Poor little Jinny, she were most awful upset to see the toil o' so many weeks destroyed in five minutes by a ugly thing of an ignorant mule.

'Farmer Moggridge, he went into a fine tear. He runned round orchard an woke thik mule up soundly wi' a bat-stick. But mules be terr'ble stubborn an' proud-stomached, an' that didn' bring back Jinny's thistles, only made the mule kick a bit an' Tranter Luckstone cuss. Jinny cried an' wept, an' cried an' wept. She said she should never have heart again for any more chairs and sofies.

'Such trouble, for a time, made Jinny Moggridge a very serious maid, an' she set herself to work six antimacassars, crochet-work, all Scripture subjects. But before the set was finished the Scotchman took a
[159]

holiday an' comed down to stay at Honeycombe. When he was gone Jinny turned to an' worked the chairs again in English roses; an' 'twer said at the time she made a very good match an' lived happy. They brought up a family o' nine — or ten — if I do mind aright, an' that's all I do know o' Tranter Luckstone's mule.'

Having thus delivered himself, Bluebeard shuffled back into obscurity.

He had told his story, such as it was, without a smile and in a doleful voice, and sighed with deeper melancholy when he spoke of the happiness of the bride. He was almost more surprised than his audience to have found himself telling it.

But the gossips would not let him go.

'Here, come back, Bluebeard,' cried the young Tom Platt, catching him hold and dragging him by the coat-tail.

'But, to be sure, that's not all,' remonstrated the old Aunt Jennings.

So the maidens caught hold of Bluebeard and pushed and elbowed him back into the circle.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

'Look here, Bluebeard,' argued Jonah Bagley, with something of admonishment in his tone. 'This won't do, you know. That is but a one-eyed sort of a tale, I do call it, wi' a very poor end. To be sure Jinny Moggridge married if she could, and lived
[160]

happy if she had the common-sense to enable herself so to do.'

'That's the way wi' all maidens and wimmin-folk,' explained Mrs. Bagley in a very superior manner, 'an' no more than any man o' sense do expect.'

'So we don't care tuppence about Jinny,' admitted old Aunt Jennings; 'she went her own ways an' outlived the Scotchman, as I do happen to know, tough as he med ha' been, by a score o' years.'

'But what about the mule?' cried young Tom Platt. 'Neighbour Tranter Luckstone do drive a broken-kneed mare wi' a spavin in her off hock an' a string-halt in her near hind leg. If the mule was so long-lived as the old Tranter did talk about, why didn' she come down to our Tranter by will?'

Then one and all began to encourage Bluebeard.

'Now, just collect your thoughts, Bluebeard, do 'ee now.'

'Give the matter your best attention like.'

'Bide quiet all round, an' stand back an' gie Bluebeard room to think.'

'Search your mind, an' put this question slowly to yourself like. If Kitty Dale brought thoughts o' Tranter Luckstone's mule, what do Tranter Luckstone's mule bring thoughts o'?'

Then an expectant silence fell upon the little group whilst Bluebeard thought.
[161]

'Nothing at all,' said he hopelessly, 'unless well, they did use to laugh an' say that Tranter Luckstone's mule broke up the Honeycombe Catch and Glee Club.'

'To be sure then. Don't bide there an' ham-chammer. Tell it to once.'

This was what Bluebeard had to say about

THE HONEYCOMBE CATCH AND GLEE CLUB

'You see, Honeycombe in those days was a place talked of far an' wide. Everybody for ten mile round was agreed, so 'twere said, that no music 'pon this earth could be more sweet an' more touching like than the music in Honeycombe Church. There was such harmony throughout that did excel all other parishes round. There was such a lot o' good singers in Honeycombe an' up a dozen musicians as well. Farmer Moggridge, he were both. He did play the bass-viol an' throw back his head an' join in wi' the voice all same time. But Tranter Luckstone did blow the clarinet, so you couldn' expect no more o' he, not even when 'twere a anthem, than just to tap time wi' his foot like.

'I've a-heard the old folk tell, when I were a boy, that 'twere a lovely thing to see Farmer Moggridge tune his bass-viol to the church bell.
[162]

'After the parson had a-comed into church, wi' all the parish at the tail of his cassock, Farmer Moggridge did use to walk down under the tower, catch hold a rope, an' strike one stroke, no more an' no less, 'pon the passing bell. He had a deep, solemn tone, thik bell. An' Farmer Moggridge did hold up his grey head — for he had a-been one o' they that do blossomy early, particularly about the poll — an' wait an' listen.

'He didden sound his viol for up a minute or more. My mother said, to watch how he did wait all ready to nick the right moment to a touch like, must always turn any serious mind to thoughts o' death. An' then, all to a sudden, he did het the bow into the string, forard an' back, an' screw up an' down by turns wi' his t'other han', till thik viol did moany an' groany just the very same as some poor feller critchur wi' a colic in his inzide. Then when he had a-got un right, Farmer Moggridge, wi' a happy smile 'pon the face o' un, did stamp off wi' un up the gallery stairs.

'Now Tranter Luckstone he wouldn' tune his clarinet to a church bell. He had a little blow-pipe he did clap in his mouth. Then he did blow. Then he did whip out the little pipe an' pop in the clarinet an' squeak like a stuck pig. Farmer Moggridge did look on an' smile down his nose all the while. He did look down 'pon thik pitch-pipe. You zee, the little pitch-pipe didn' hold exactly the same opinion as
[163]

the church bell, if may so say, an' so the clarinet an' the bass-viol werden at all times o' one mind, in particular when there was a anthem.

'Farmer Moggridge used to say he couldn' go quite so far as to swear that Tranter's pitch-pipe was wrong, but he could take his affidavy any day o' the wick that the bass-viol was righter than the clarinet. An' to be sure, my mother said, though they mid now an' again be out in more difficult places, they did blend lovely together when they did bust out in praise, like at the "Glory Bes." But Farmer an' Tranter, mind, although musicians and bound to argify, had all their lives been the best friends in the world. An' the more so because at the Catch an' Glee Club there were no church bell, an' so Tranter had it all his own way for the pitch-pipe.

'Now the Honeycombe Catch an' Glee Club had a-went on for years, an' though they did meet once a wick reg'lar, besides when they did go out, they had never so much as a high word.

'Tranter Luckstone had a beautiful counter voice, an' though he did talk in business like any other man, he could sing like a woman, or otherwise, as some did say, so sweet as an angel in heaven. He did lift his eyebrows and screw up his lips like one a-blowing a flute, and coo so clear an' mellow as a wood-pigeon. An' then, so I've a-heard tell, he did mount up to a top-note an' quaver like a skylark.
[164]

You couldn' hear very many words, so I've heard more 'an one say. 'Twere all nothing but music wi' Tranter Luckstone.

'But Farmer Moggridge, he did fill his chest and throw back his head an' sing bass like a earthquake. My mother used to say that to hear the Honeycombe Catch an' Glee Club do "The Alderman's Thumb" at a sheep-shearing party would wring tears from any feeling heart. Did from she, I do know, when she were up four-score, only to speak o' it.

An' to think that might ha' went on for ever if it hadn't a-been for Tranter Luckstone's mule!

'Now, when Farmer were a-walloping thik mule all roun' an' in an' out between the apple-trees, an' Jinny were a-stood by wi' her yaller hair in a mop, a-crying out "Great nasty, ugly brute!" and "Silly, pig-headed, mump-headed, nog-headed, biddle-headed fool of a thing!" Tranter chanced to cast a glance over the gully.

'He hollered out to stop that.

'He gave Farmer Moggridge language, so folk said afterwards, not fit for the mule to hear, let alone a young maid so well brought up as Jinny.

'He called the man a "gallows fool," at the moment not thinking any harm like. But then, as Tranter owned, when he came to talk over the matter next day in cold blood, he shouldn' a-minded one bit in the world, only for Farmer Moggridge to drive
[165]

thik mule a stretch gallop for half an hour on a full belly was no more nor less than to pray th' Almighty to make un brokenwinded. An' from that time forward for up a month, Tranter never put his mule to the van, nor unhitched 'un, without he did just pinch his gullet an' listen to the cough, so thoughtful as Farmer listening to the church bell, to prove whe' er or no the petition had been a-granted.

'So maybe there were a bit of a coldness a'ready like, when early next week all the neighbours went in to Farmer Moggridge's sheep-shearing. Well, the day had turned to rain. There were a bit of a thunderstorm an' the grass in the home-ground were too wet for the maidens' shoes. They had supper in the kitchen, an' then they went out across the barton to the granary for the young folk to dance an' the old to sit roun' an' look on, an' the Catch an' Glee Club did sing in between, so as to give the dust o' the danters time to pitch like.

'Well, most folk thought Tranter outdid hiszelf that night.

'Mind, thik home orchard where Farmer Moggridge tanned thik mule's hide do yield a cider most wonderful strong if you do keep it a year or so. An' Tranter Luckstone got most wonderful merry. He did half close his eyes, look up at the roof an' purse up his lips till his upper notes that night poured out
[166]

so clear as a song-thrush after rain, wi' no more than the leastest little bit of a crack, maybe twice or three times at the most. When he had a-finished, all the company clapped their han's an' hollered out to hear it again.

'Then Farmer Moggridge, his tongue must wag.

' "But, neighbours all," cried he, "let Tranter rest, now do' ee. If you do drive the man to sing 'pon a full belly, 'tis no better than to pray to th' Almighty to make un brokenwinded. If that should hap, mind, he mid sing for 'ee more or less; but what I do fear is, he'll never again have bellows enough to blow his little pitch-pipe."

'Now, Farmer Moggridge, like the tranter hiszelf, had a solemn way wi' un when he were merry, an' his words they jus' drove Tranter so mad as a bull.

' "Go up in tower an' hang yourself wi' a church bell-rope, an' then your bass 'ull come in for a coffin," cried he at the top of his voice.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

'Now, 'twere really very unfortunate, for, as I said afore, Farmer he couldn' bear a sound of the word "hang."

'He jumped up in a tear.

' "If I werden in my own house," cried he, "so sure as the light I'd twist—"

' But Tranter cut un short.

[167]

' "Don't say the word house, Farmer Moggridge. I've a-got no wish to come to your house. I'll never again take bit nor sup in your house. I'll never again sit down in your house nor your company under any roof outside the vower walls o' the church."

'Well, the neighbours, they all catched hold o' un, an' though they tried to hush un down into his chair again, Tranter he would go off home in a huff. But he proved a great loss. When things was quieted down a bit the t'other singers of the Catch an' Glee Club could do no more but start "Blind Mice," an' "A boat, a boat," an' such like rounds, for all the company to sing an' get lost in.

'After that, wherever he did go, Tranter Luckstone did keep his little pitch-pipe all ready in the pocket o' the sleeve-waistcoat, so as whenever he did fall in wi' Farmer Moggridge otherwise to fair or market or 'pon the highroad, he could take un out an' blow. But the parish were o' one mind that Tranter was wrong, seeing that Farmer Moggridge he couldn' carry about the church bell wi'out a wagon an' hosses, nor the bass-viol wi'out putting hiszelf to a good deal o' ill-convenience.

'Then all the members of the Catch an' Glee Club did walk about, so thoughtful as a lot o' grass widders, in doubt an' wonder as to whe'er or no in time to come Tranter mid find his way back.

[168]

'Well, next spring there comed a gen'leman to Honeycombe who had heard o' Tranter's wonderful mule. He wanted to buy one for a match-mule to drive wi' another as a pair. Well, Tranter's proved to be the very moral both in size an' colour an' make o' the one he had. Verily an' truly they mid ha' been twins, for they did match like a pair o' black eyes.

'So when Tranter turned to an' recounted all the good points of thik mule — how he could climb, an' was so fast as a racehorse, an' so sure-footed as a four-post bed, an' what a constitution he had, an' a appetite that could stomach an' do well on anything — why, the gen'leman paid Tranter's price, money in hand, an' took away thik mule there-right.

'Then all the parish turned out, wi' the same expectation as afore, to see Tranter come home next day wi' a good smart horse.

'An' the bargain he had a-made caused so much talk in parish that harmony was restored, an' Tranter Luckstone, when he turned out the hoss, nodded an' passed the time o' day to Farmer Moggridge across the orchard gully.

'I do say nodded, because you must know that Tranter had a-lost his voice a-hollering to thik mule in all weathers on his winter journeys.

'He never found un no more, an', if I may

[169]

so say, the poor man went to his grave in a whisper.

'So after all said an' done, that was really how Tranter Luckstone's mule broke up the Honeycombe Catch and Glee Club.'

[170]

CHAPTER IX

AT THE VILLAGE SHOP

INCREDIBLE as it may appear, we have an industry in Honeycombe.

Our village is the birthplace, the only source and great manufacturing centre for Patricia Brook's celebrated Easter cake. You must have heard of that cake even if you have not suffered after it. It is still the wonder and the pride of our neighbourhood.

Every year, for a week before and after Easter, the little shop at one corner of Honeycombe Green is a sight to behold, and neighbours on all sides and up the village street are for ever popping out to door or down to their garden gates to peep and admire.

It is not the shop itself which attracts such industrious attention. Familiar enough, that needs but brief description here.

A low thatched cottage, with a half-hatch door — during business hours open at the top — a little window with many panes of glass, so ancient that they cast a green unwholesome hue upon the

[171]

bottles of candy and peppermint bull's-eyes, all of Miss Patricia Brook's invention, that stand in even rows on a starch box, tastily concealed by a mountain of oranges and nuts — that is all that catches the eye of any passing stranger. Yet through the open door bacon, cheese, bootlaces, tallow dips, red herrings, and a hundred other things of use and beauty, may be both seen and smelt.

No. It is not the shop itself, but this vernal outburst of bustling activity that is so extraordinary. The commerce is so extensive.

Carriages with pairs of horses, such as prance in the foreground of an almanac-engraving to indicate the class of customer which supports some huge emporium in the town, would be no fiction in a drawing of this important establishment.

Say of an April morning, when the bunches of jonquils in the garden are yellow as gold and lilac is breaking into flower in the sunny showers, certain as the light, no eye on earth can watch so little as a quarter of an hour without seeing draw up before that crowded door a dogcart, or a van, or a one-horse chaise, or a donkey cart — or even two. For we supply the trade as well as the gentry, and the village children also when they come money in hand.

Our gossips then are in perpetual session. Yet although strangers bring news from elsewhere, the

[172]

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

conversation is certain Sooner or later to do justice to the memory of Miss Patricia Brook.

'Did you ever hear o' Miss Patricia Brook?' asked Mrs. Bagley of myself as we were standing by the shop on the morning when Simon Shore, the timber merchant, passing through Honeycombe, stopped to get a dozen to carry home to his 'missus.'

'My good soul,' replied I, 'I have heard so much of that distinguished lady that if I were to piece together the scraps of information gathered at many a corner, with such of her words as have been handed down, there would be nothing left to tell.'

'Nothing left to tell,' cried Simon Shore, with a peculiar smile, hinting at a hidden meaning behind his remark.

'Then you tell it. Yes, tell it,' said they all.

The smiling gossips stood around and hemmed me in, ready to nod assent or to make corrections as I went on.

'Very well,' said I. 'This is all that the world knows of

PATRICIA BROOK'S RECIPE

'Miss Patricia Brook was the most distinguished person who ever lived in Honeycombe. Others far richer, fancying themselves of loftier social position,

might put on more airs; but none has ever possessed her secret art, whoever since may have claimed to possess the recipe.

'The great recipe fell to Patricia Brook as the reward of virtue.

'She did not weary of telling how that came to pass. She would lean upon the half-hatch in the slack season of a summer evening and repeat the story again and again, until the false front under her cap would get awry with excitement — for Miss Brook was well on in years at the time of her greatest popularity, and also wore a beautiful set of false teeth that looked almost too perfect in comparison with her wrinkles. The returns from the recipe fully justified both these expenditures.

' "Yes. Now all you young maidens bear in mind. I had the recipe a-gied to me for nothing in this world but because I was so clean. There, I always was most wonderful clean. I must ha' been born clean, I really and truly do believe. For when I were but a little bit of a maid, if I had but so much as a smut 'pon the arm 'o me, or 'pon my little naked shoulder, as we did go in those days, I never could rest till my mother did come wi' the corner of a handkercher, jus' damp wi' her tongue, to clean it off like. An' I were jus' the same in my growing up. Always so spic an' span as a primrose. Lo! The many that did want me, to be sure. An'

though I did walk out wi' more 'an one, and more 'an two, I never didn' let my head run 'pon the menfolk. I wouldn' never let 'em tumble me, an' I wouldn' never lean my arms 'pon a gate. Bless you, all o' ee! Why, I could a-married times. But I used to come down here, to this very shop, to help the old lady who did reside here and carried on the

business when I were up a young woman. And I'll tell 'ee true, though I were so young, I were artful, and I had my eye 'pon the shop and the recipe. An' I thought if I took t' other I should never get they. So I stayed on here an' worked my very best. Till come one Candlemas, just at dark, and the old lady frail and Easter near, she beckoned me into the little inner room and shut the door. And she made me lay my hand 'pon the open Bible, 'tis Gospel true — and a tallow candle, ten to the pound, and a little brass tray and snuffers stancting close beside on the small oaken table and nothing else — and declare most wonderful solemn like, that I wouldn' never tell in her life nor set up in trade against her. And after that she put into my hand the recipe, a-wrote down, the only one in the whole world, in a blue endilope that I could show you now — and will —"

'Then she would disappear for a moment from the doorway, and presently return, holding up to the wondering gaze of the maidens and womanhood
[175]

of Honeycombe — as a priest might hold up a relic — a long-faded envelope.

' " There! And the old lady put it in my very own hand. And she said, 'Patricia Brook —Patricia, my good maid, I do give you that recipe because you be so clean. You be neat in your person and clean in your face and hands, and none otherwise could ever make in good hopes to sell.' And that's how I stepped into the fortune o' the celebrated Easter cake, that all the gentry will have, and some do think nothing o' twenty mile to send for."

'Then Miss Brook would carry the envelope away again to that secret hiding-place, which no living soul could ever suspect.

'And almost before you could look round she was back again.

' "But la! sure 'tisn't all in the recipe, but something in the hand. Why, if four-and-twenty o' you a-standing round to-night could read every word o' the writing and then go home and make, could I take one cake a-piece and send out in the same two dozen? Oh, no! There'd be some so hard as tiles and some so short you couldn' really lift 'em to your lips between finger and thumb. And then the baking, too, must be just to a touch like, just to a nicety. There must be a thought o' moisture and yet must be dry. For all the world like the highroad
[176]

there in spring after a day's sun upon two days' rain afore the dust can blow. And then the sugaren, too. Now, that's all in the hand. How could I look a customer in the face if I did sift the sugar like ashes, all in heaps? But if you do take a cake o' mine it do tempt the eye like. For the sugar do lie so even as hoar-frost on a meadow. Though I do say it myself, it do. It really do."

'It did. Neither customer nor trade competitor ever questioned the excellence of Miss Brook's art. She brought just so much temperament to the execution of that unrivalled composition, of which she alone held the copyright, that every cake was in perfect taste. Sweet, yet with no suspicion of mawkish sentimentality, its currants were sprinkled with judgment after clear perception that profuse ornamentation is out of place upon a serious occasion. Miss Brook's Easter cake was a poem. Under mastication it melted like a dream.'

'Go on,' urged Mrs. Bagley rather impatiently.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

'Well, as years went on the sad truth became recognised in Honeycombe that Patricia Brook must some day die. No confectionery, however spiritual, can confer immortality. She had no kin. Nobody alive could claim by blood to come into or take possession of the great recipe. The parish felt it was time that Patricia Brook began thinking about her end.
[177]

'Now the same thought must have come into the head of a middle-aged confectioner, a customer from the market town, for one year, just at the beginning of Lent, he came across to Honeycombe and wanted to buy the great recipe. He offered gold untold; a large sum down at once, with a percentage during life, for the immediate goodwill of the wonderful Easter cake. But Miss Patricia Brook laughed money to scorn. "What!" she asked, "be I to stand arms-crossed an' watch another make my very own cake?" Then the confectioner went on to point out with management the trade that could be done. He said that Easter cake might make its way all over the world. He said, "Look at the celebrated biscuit made in Bath! Look at the Banbury cake and the Sally Lunn!" But Patricia Brook told him she had never yet put tooth into a Banbury cake and was never well after a Sally Lunn. Then the confectioner up and offered marriage.

'Now that made Patricia Brook look. But she did not look long. She saw at once the impertinence of the proposal, and she up with a dried haddock, lying handy on the counter for the next customer, and beat it about the confectioner's bald head.

'But this offer brought Patricia Brook many very serious thoughts. She knew she was alone. She knew the value of the cake, the obstinate
[178]

persistency of man, and feared lest that confectioner, although beaten, might return. With nobody to come after her the future was a blank. She yearned for company. She needed protection. But the only alternative to matrimony that she could think of was little Jinny Bragg. She did not make promises, or find Jinny a regular place; but when confectioners were in season, and the man might be expected to call again, even though it were only to order, she set Jinny Bragg to stand in the shop and "enter down how many in the book," whilst she ran out into the garden and "croupied down to hide" between the black-currant bushes and the winter rank of brittle kidney-bean sticking. Thus Miss Patricia Brook, in her wisdom, betrayed a fear in the presence of temptation such as our first parents only experienced after a consciousness of guilt.

'The real considerations which weighed with Miss Brook were the respect of the surrounding gentry, based upon the unvarying quality of her wares, which, one year after another, did really come so true to one another as marrowfat peas in a pod.

'It did her heart good to see the carriages drive up; or, better still, for the young ladies to come tripping in from the Hall, and talk — yes, talk so pleasant an' so smiling as roses on the house-front — that is, if roses could smile — an' then, after all,
[179]

carry away their cakes in papern bags so simple as you or me. After these visits it was her joy to say to the neighbours, "Ah! when Patricia Brook is gone, Patricia Brook will be missed."

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

'Then the attentions she received in the parish.

'Jane Bragg — that is, Jinny's mother and wife of John, the sexton — never failed for years, whenever that household killed a pig, to send in as a present, say, half a pound of black pudding, an irresistible but malignant delicacy in which poor Miss Brook revelled, although it invariably made her ill. She really loved such little attentions. And yet, between the spasms subsequent to this one, there would sometimes intervene a moment of clear insight, when she divined a motive underneath this respectful offering. "Ah! But Jinny Bragg would never have the hand," sighed Miss Brook to herself, with a solemn shake of the head.

'Every girl in Honeycombe, each after her own peculiar way, set herself to woo Miss Brook.

'There was spirited competition to mind the shop whenever the old lady might chance to walk down street; but if she went into the town — a mysterious event which the public could not anticipate — envy went rampant on the outer side of the hatch. Such expeditions, undertaken to provide the ingredients, one at a time from different places, created quite a stir in Honeycombe. It was believed

[180]

that, by keeping an eye open and putting this and that together, something or other might some fine day be "wormed out."

'But nothing became known. Even the belief that the subtle flavour, so universally admired, had its origin in "sherry-wine" was shaken when the old lady, pouring from the very bottle which had given foundation to the rumour, explained that she was always obliged to keep a little something in the house to correct the richness of Mary Bragg's black pudding.

'Thus the village might have learned that the composition of the wonderful Easter cake could no more be guessed at than the creation of suns and worlds, for which the recipe lies hidden, God only knows where, in the great blue envelope. A secret so elusive, so strictly exclusive, could only arouse a deeper wonder and a more eager hope. So in addition to a high percentage upon large returns the recipe continued to bestow upon Miss Brook a sort of unearned increment. It was her constant boast that for the last ten years she had never put hand to clip the little box-hedge in the garden or so much as cracked pod to shell one single pea.

'One fine day there came a surprise for Honeycombe. Miss Patricia Brook had verily and truly taken on Jinny Bragg. To be sure, Miss Brook said nothing. In response to direct inquiry she did but

[181]

gaze as steadfast as a church monument. And Jinny was one could lie and look like innocence itself. So the terms the village never quite knew. But Jinny popped in and out like a young rabbit in summer all day long.

'This was what really happened.

'It was noon on the day before Candlemas of a year when Easter fell in March, and Miss Brook, weary under the burden of business cares, was resting with her hands upon the counter when Jinny ran into the shop.

' "A pound o' best an' a pound o' blue," said Jinny.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

' "There, do 'ee jus' cut it off an' weigh for yourself, for I do really feel I don't know how," panted poor Miss Brook.

'Then Jinny up and spoke.

' "La! Miss Brook, you really do want reg'lar help. Why, idden there any mortal soul you could trust, like? Whatever could folk do if anything should happen, as happen some day or another it surely mus'."

'Patricia Brook looked at Jinny. She was a great, strapping maid, with big eyes, a colour fresh as morning, and hair — well, not carroty. Jinny went mad as a wild cat if anybody called it that. The old-world phrase of Honeycombe described it well. Jinny had "a head like a house a-fire." And her broad face was honest; or, rather, of a very
[182]

transparent dishonesty even more commendable.

' "Jinny," said Miss Brook, with both feeling and pride, "I shall go on till I do drop. I do know I shall. And, Jinny, though I've got none belonging to me near enough to put on black, I shall be missed. So sure as Easter do come round an' cakes be wanted, but no Patricia Brook, Patricia Brook 'ull be missed."

' "But, la! Sure you'll learn somebody. Why, you'd better to take somebody on to show by degrees."

' "But where is she, Jinny?"

' "Why, I'd come myself," cried the girl, putting on a flippant manner to cover the audacity of the suggestion.

'Miss Brook looked grave.

' "Jinny!" she began with judicial firmness, "you be clean—"

'Jinny beamed. Even without excitement her cheeks glistened with the peculiar sheen of yellow soap.

' "Well! And so I be," she admitted.

' "An', Jinny, you be willing—"

' "I ben't afraid o' work. That nobody can't say."

' "But, Jinny, if I was to take you on, do you know how it would be? Some fine spring morning, wi' all the boughs in leaf, an' the birds in voice, an' a smart young chap a-gallivanting down the street.
[183]

An' then — fly away, Jinny. Fly away here from to the church."

'Miss Brook threw up her arms to indicate the unpremeditated rapidity of Jinny's flight.

'For the moment it appeared that a suspected constitutional inaptitude for celibacy would ruin Jinny's chances.

'However, it was arranged that, without establishing any claims upon the recipe, the maid might come in daily at five shillings a week to make herself generally useful and mind the shop.

'Well, time passed, but Jinny stood the test, and every day proved more and more satisfactory. She was "willing" and "a girl you could speak to," and "wonderful quick to learn," and "one you did not have to keep on telling twice."

'To be sure one summer Jinny did walk out "wi' a sojur." But Miss Brook was far too high-minded to take notice of that. In the days when she was so much sought after Miss Brook had done the same thing herself, though not for long. And as the hero quickly returned to his regiment, considering the great talk of war there was in the papers, Miss Brook kept a still tongue and hoped for the best. Yet along at this time she was wonderfully restless and always saying she should be missed.

'She had taught Jinny everything — everything, that is, excepting the one thing of importance. The
[184]

sugar-sifting, the rolling-out to a perfect thinness, the cutting with the middle-sized saucepan-lid, the baking, and all that goes to the creation of a first-class Easter cake, Jinny knew. Only the recipe was withheld.

'To be sure, like mankind upon this planet, Jinny was not permitted to appear upon the scene until infinite mixing had thrown everything into inextricable confusion. The ingredients of the mass, as she found it, were beyond identification. The sources from which the materials were secretly obtained remained as far outside the reach of observation and inquiry as the origin of matter. But that one mystery disclosed, there could be no more to learn. Jinny would be as competent a maker as Miss Brook herself—'

'Go on,' urged Mrs. Bagley once more.

'To think of this gave Miss Brook pain.

'All her life she had lived alone, and her deepest interest had been the celebrated cake. It brought her fame and gossip and a self-respect often denied to unchosen spinsterhood. But now, with old age creeping upon her, she began to doubt of her boast that when she was gone she would be missed. She began to change her tone: "Ah! wi' Jinny holding the recipe, why should anybody give another thought upon the memory of poor Patricia Brook? It would be Jane Bragg's cake then. Only for a week at most
[185]

would her name be remembered, and in six months not a soul would stop to read the text upon Patricia Brook's head-stone."

'This secret misgiving grew and grew. She sat nursing it hour after hour over her winter fire; for of late her blood began to run cold, and there was no need to go out into the draughty shop since Jinny was so clever. She began to grow querulous with the maid, and to find fault without reason. The neighbours would loiter in the shop. She overheard their talk and laughter with Jinny, but they did little more than pop their heads around the parlour door to inquire how Miss Brook did. Now and again the young ladies from the Hall looked in to see her. Thinking to cheer her up, they would congratulate the old soul upon the talent and utility of Jinny, who was even able to make the celebrated Easter cakes "under your direction, Miss Brook." The old lady suffered the misery of the successful artist who outlives popularity. Set aside, she saw another climbing into her place.

'About this time John Bragg, the sexton, a kindly, sympathetic man, who took an especially friendly interest in very elderly people, or any who fell sick, made the remark

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

one morning in the churchyard, whilst rolling back the sod to dig a grave, that in his belief, though he might be wrong, poor Miss Brook was fast "breaking up."
[186]

'This remark in no time grew into the statement that the sexton had it from Jinny that poor Miss Brook, suffering from an internal incurable complaint, could not be long for this world, and Miss Brook rose high in the public regard. All the neighbours ran in frequently, and many of them stayed a long time. They talked about her symptoms, and found she had every complaint ever mentioned in the advertisement of a quack remedy. So Patricia Brook took comfort. But this happened less than a week after Christmas, when all the days were cold. And that year orders for the celebrated Easter cake came pouring in early and late. There seemed to be no end to them. And all the ingredients as yet to be got!

'Miss Brook pondered and lingered, and put the matter off again and again. Jinny would have to go on all the errands, and so the great recipe might as well be given at once. Yet, to be sure, sooner or later the secret must out. Even if Jinny were not to know now, some day the hiding-place must be ransacked, and the blue envelope must fall into other hands. It gave poor Miss Brook a cold shiver to think of it.

'For days she remained in indecision, and it worried her to know that Easter was coming and she had no time to lose.

'One evening she sat up later than usual with
[187]

an extra log on the fire, and looked down upon the glowing embers and thought. She was restless, and troubled with a strange feeling that something was going to happen. She had never felt so solitary. Yet it was not really late, and now and again she could hear a voice or a passing step upon the village street. She wished that Jinny by some chance would come in. At last she went to the door and called and sent to fetch the maid. And she swore Jinny on the book and gave her the blue envelope to go and buy the ingredients.

'And that same night — she died.'

'Very well,' laughed Mrs. Bagley. 'You've a-kept your ears open to some account. But don't you suppose now that you've ever a-tasted that Easter cake, for Jinny could no more make the true thing than a fool. What do you think, Mr. Shore?'

Mr. Shore was seated in his two-wheeled cart in the middle of the road with that same mysterious smile upon his face.

'Now, I can tell a tale,' said he, 'about

THAT BLUE ENDILOPE

'For as you do all know, I was born in Honeycombe, but left when I was up a hardish lad. We boys used to creep in and rob the old lady of the nuts and figs. One winter's night, soon after dark, the old soul came out to door and glanced up and
[188]

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

down the street. She saw nobody about and went in again, but I popped in behind and slipped to the corner where she did keep the Spanish nuts in a sack.

'The old lady was wonderful restless. She kept moving about and talking to herself, and she opened the door between the shop and the parlour. I didn' dare to run out, but I could look into the room through the chink between the hinges. The candle stood there on the oaken table by the side o' the snuffers on a brass tray. She brought the Bible and laid it open before her. "I'll swear the maid 'pon the Book just the very same as 'twere done to me. I'll pray to God to send her in. I'll pray to God. Hark! Likely enough there's somebody in the street would run for her."

'Then, mumbling all the time, the old soul crept upstairs and down again wi' the endilope in her hand. She opened it and sat down by the fire. She put the endilope on the table, but read the paper in her hand. "Fifty years — fifty years," she kept saying over. "Fifty years Patricia Brook's Easter cake — an' might be Jinny Bragg's afore next spring — or anybody else's who should get hold o' the recipe. If they should come and no Easter cakes they'd miss — they'd miss Patricia Brook."

'And all of a sudden out darted her brown old hand and the paper was in the fire.

[189]

'It curled and writhed and twisted. Then burst into flame upon all four edges, and in a second was gone.

'The old woman laughed. "Ha! Let 'em see now how they do get on when Miss Patricia Brook is gone then."

'Then very slowly her face became grave.

' "There, 'tis nothing — nothing at all," she consoled herself, "I've a-carried it in mind these many years. I could write it out again, if need be, every word — every blessed word. But I won't; no, I won't — not a letter of it. Let 'em sigh for poor Patricia Brook when she's out o' reach. An' I'll send Jinny round, every day for a week, to every shop at every town hereabout, to buy this to one an' that to another, an' half o' the things for other uses. Then she can never worm it out. Ha! ha! She'll think unlikely things can have no other purpose. I'll make her promise on the Book. I'll have her round now hereright, an' make the most o' the things that be foolishness. Who's that out in street, I wonder. I'll just step out an' ask 'em to run in an' tell Jinny as they do pass by. Who is that, I wonder—"

'She got up, and went past me, and opened the inner door of the shop, and leaned on the hatch and called:

' "Who is that?"

[190]

' "John Bragg."

' "Oh, John Bragg! Now that's lucky. Could 'ee send Jinny in for a moment? 'Tis about the Easter cakes."

' "Sure an' I will then," replied the sexton, and Miss Brook went back into her parlour.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

'In less than five minutes Jinny was there. As she catched sight o' the open Book in the light of that one dip I could see her eyes, her face light up, and her bright hair shine like a copper pan. Miss Brook motioned to her wi' a finger to sit down at the table.

' "Jinny. Put your han'. So help you God, you'll never breathe a word."

' "I never won't, Miss Brook."

'The girl leaned forward, and so did the old woman.

' "Jinny, first thing in the morning you must go into town. You must order a sack o' the finest wheaten flour. Then go to the wine vaults for a bottle o' best London gin, an' into Hodgson's, the chemist's, for two pennyworth o' saffron, an' then — an' then—"

'But this effort to invent was too much for the poor old soul. She stopped short — then pressed her long, lean fingers upon her wrinkled forehead.

' "I can't mind!" cried she in alarm. " 'Tis lost to me, an' I can't call it home, Jinny. Jinny, what is it? Where is it? 'Tis gone."

[191]

' "Then where's the blue endilope?" asked Jinny quickly. "Shall I run an' fetch it to once?"

'Miss Brook leaned back in her chair and covered her face with her hands.

' "Oh, Jinny! Wicked woman that I be, I've a-burned the blue endilope. I couldn' a-bear for another to have un. I've a-burned un up — or what was in un, that is to say — this very night in that very same fire. 'Tis no good to look, Jinny. The paper is but ashes an' smuts a full half hour agone. For I've a-lived to old age wi' none belonging to me — none o' my very own like. An' I couldn' a-bear to pass an' not be missed, I did want to be missed. An' I do! I do! An' I thought better o' it. Though I said I could hold every letter in mind for myself. An' then, after the end, for every soul in the parish an' for miles round hereabouts to say there's no cakes worth the sticking a tooth into now Miss Patricia Brook is laid in her last home. But run out in shop, Jinny — tear a leaf out o' the 'count book — bring pen an' ink, do 'ee. Quick, an' you shall write it down. Now then, Jinny. 'Tis this: Rub one pound o' fresh butter—No, no. Take two pound o' finest wheaten flour — no — rub one pound— 'Tis fled from me, Jinny. 'Tis gone like the swallows from the houses when the frostes be — I mean as the year do age. But, Jinny, London gin and saffron be but lies — so is

[192]

sherry wine a wicked lie too — 'tis — 'tis brown brandy. An', Jinny, hearken once again while I do try. Take two — no, rub one— 'Tis gone 'tis dark—"

'Jinny snatched up the blue endilope and in a minute was calling for help. I slipped out as the neighbours ran in, but I never told, for I was there a thief. But the old woman never spoke again, an' Jinny had no more than the empty endilope.'

The gossips of Honeycombe were astounded.

'Now thik Jinny Bragg, mind, was a clever woman. She knew the value of a name,' cried Mrs. Bagley. 'For I've seed her, wi' my own eyes, hold up the endilope just like the old woman did.'

'Yet folk did say at the time 'twere a wonder how two hands could make such a difference like,' reflected her husband.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDIi SALAMANTiNi

'No, though called Patricia Brook's, 'twere never the same.'

'Jinny made un too sweet.'

'Ay. An' where is the good old saucepan lid? Paugh! She went an' bought a thing to cut 'em out wi' fluted edges.'

[193]

CHAPTER X

BY THE VILLAGE POUND

WITH that solemn deliberation which defies contradiction, and will not admit even of question, the clock in Honeycombe Tower struck noon.

It strikes upon the passing bell, and sounds more like a warning than a mere statement of the flight of time. And just upon the last stroke, as if in contrast to its deeper significance, the vendor of the local newspaper passed slowly down the street, tinkling his bell.

In a moment the village, which to all appearances might have been dead, became alive. The newsman called us to discuss the affairs of the neighbourhood, and, this being a leisure hour, we popped out of doors, and presently gathered to hold a gossip corner by the crumbling wall of the old village pound, where the two roads part.

Honeycombe is critical and difficult to please. It has no patience with the modern press. When fed upon facts it hungers for sensation, but being regaled with wonders, calls them lies. We never get a satisfactory repast.

[194]

'There is nothing in the papers nowadays,' grumbled Silas Legg, when he had carefully turned over and scrutinised the sheets, yet nowhere found the name of Honeycombe.

'Tis the poorest penn'orth, an' have a-been for the last twelvemonth, that ever man laid out money in,' reflected Jonah Bagley. 'An' yet you be bound to buy an' look, so as to keep your mind contented like.'

'You be!' agreed his wife. 'For do sound so foolish in company, when anything is a-brought up, to sit an' stare, eyes ope an' mouth agape, an' say nothing.'

'I can't a-bear it,' said old Aunt Jennings with feeling.

'Though, to be sure, you can't look to find much about Honeycombe, such a little place as 'tis. Nothing ever happened here to Honeycombe, or ever will,' reflected young Tom Platt.

'There's a tidy lot here, though, about the 'lopement o' Lawyer Brown's maid,' cried Silas suddenly, in a more hopeful tone, as he drew his thumb down two full columns in admiration of the amount.

'Now there you was wrong, Tom Platt,' remonstrated Jonah, holding up his finger and shaking his head. 'For years agone there was a 'lopement here to Honeycombe. An' that I do know the

[195]

rights about, for my own father, poor dear man, he shod the wold grey hoss the young couple rode away 'pon.'

'What, both 'pon one hoss?'

'They did, in them days.'

'Who were they, then?'

The smith raised his hat, and thoughtfully scratched his crown with the little finger of the hand that held it.

'Ho! ho!' laughed he. 'That was a fine old tale. Tale, do I say? Why, there was up half a dozen tales that did kind o' hold one to t'other like a cluster o' nuts. The 'lopement was the very end, to be sure. But never couple o' loviers went through so many trials afore or since. Why, 'twould take up a half hour to tell so little as I can call to mind about it.'

'Never mind, Jonah.'

'Go on, Jonah!'

'You've a-got little to do, Jonah!'

'Well, any way, I'll tell first about the courtship o' the couple, for they suffered so many mishaps that ever after they went by the name of

THE MISUSED LOVIERS

'Mind, 'tis fifty years 'an more agone that Simon Price an' Gyles Brook, who you must all have a-heard o' for certain, were neighbours down here in
[196]

the valley, the one at Woodrows there by the side o' the hill and the other at Chestnut Close.

'Now, Simon was a man of very quiet behaviour, an' of a hot, stubborn temper when moved. But he was wonderful near. He walked down to Honeycombe shop once to get change for a penny, so as to reward a boy that had led back a stray hoss. So he were bound to save money, because he did work hard an' spend none.

''Twere the common talk all round the country that Simon had a-saved a tidy lot, for he were a widder man, an' had brought up but two maids, an' the younger o' they married young. But Bessie, the elder, she lived on at home, an' her work must ha' been worth more than keep an' clothes, look at it how you will, though Simon thought it all the world if ever he should dole her out a shilling for herzelf.

'Now, more than a Score o' years must ha' passed since Bessie grew to be sweetheart high, an' so far no man had ever had a thought to put her a question worth the asking. You see, Simon being a man so little inclined for company, she had few friends to come to the house. There was nothing but work up to Woodrows, and get up so early as you like, but burn no tallow of a night after dark. Yet everybody, old an' young, did have a word wi' the maid too; for Bessie had a round, red face, enough to make a mute laugh at a funeral.
[197]

VNiVERSiTAS STVDii SALAMANTiNi

'That face couldn't do nothing but smile. Must ha' been something in the shape, like. Set Bessie off, an' she did grin till really an' truly did make a body ache in the jaw only to look at her. She could no more stop than a hoop a-trundling down hill. So everybody had a word an' a joke for the maid, so to speak. All the young chaps did pay her some little kind attentions, too, at any feast or revel, if 'twere only to squail her wi' crab-apples or slip a cockchafer down the back of her neck. Bessie never didn't trouble. When the cockchafer did buzzy inside her frock she did only grin the more, an' get some friend to go an' thump between the shoulder-blades so as to squot the chafer an' make un stop a-tickling.

'But Bessie, mind, was a wonderful maid to work. She could put her hand to anything, an' turn a furrow so straight as any man. She was a strapping, great maid, wi' black hair an' eyes like sloes; an' you could glance at her an' take your oath she was heart-whole. Though, to be sure, the neighbours had lotted her out, like, for Gyles Brook, and told her so many a time. Gyles must ha' been past forty, so, as they pointed out, there was no time to waste. Now this Gyles was a mildish, blue-eyed man, who had always lived at home, too, and was ruled by his parents.

'Now, the Prices and the Brookses, they werden

[198]

exactly cousins, like. We do all know how 'tis wi' neighbours. Maybe that now an' again stock did stray, and then they mid have words, though they had no deep disputes.

'They were always ready enough to help one another at the sheep-shearing or the harvest, just in the old-fashioned way afore so many machines were thought o'. So, one year soon after midsummer, young Gyles, he walked across of a Saturday to help haul Simon's hay, for the clouds did threaten rain, an' the green woodpecker had been a-calling "Wet! wet! wet!" for the last two days. As it turned out, Gyles did pitchy an' Bessie did rakey behind the load. So there were many a chance for a word an' a joke, an' Bessie's face wore nothing but smiles an' blushes all the day through.

'An' somehow or another to Gyles's eyes the maid's arms looked wonderful shapely, too, though they were burned so brown as nuts. An' wi' so much work, mind, she stood so straight an' lissom as a poplar-tree. Well, the day, maybe, was close an' warm, but fail out however mid, Gyles, he catched a mind to the maid straight off thereright. 'Twere so much as he could do, so they said, to take his eyes off her to lift the hay up to the loader. An' Bessie had a bit of an inkling, too, for she did glance up under her lashes an' her white sun-bonnet, an' smile an' look down 'pon the grass again.

[199]

'Gyles, he walked up to house wi' Bessie after the last load, an' took a cup o' cider an' a crust o' bread an' cheese wi' Simon as the custom used to be. When he left, to be sure Bessie just went so far as the garden gate to see the visitor off, like, an' the gillawfers an' the pinks did scent most beautiful in the early dew. So they stopped to talk a minute, though they couldn' neither o' 'em think o' nothing to say; an' Bessie did grin, an' so did Gyles, all so well.

'Then he up an' said: "Bessie Price, I do know my mind, if you do know yours." But la! Bessie couldn' be expected for the life of her to tell what he meant. So he sort o'

kissed her once or twice unbeknown to herzelf, as one mid say, whilst she stood a-thinking, an' by that time old Simon comed out to door an' called her in.

'There be things in life do take a terr'ble deal of explanation, an' young Gyles had no wish that Bessie should be left in doubt. He walked up round every night to make his meaning clear, an' she did just go out by chance and hap to fall in wi' un. Long afore har'est there was scarce a soul in Honeycombe but did know that Gyles Brook did walk out Bessie Price. Folk used to watch; an' the boys an' maidens did go up an' talk to 'em, one after another, an' walk on by their sides all innocent-like, till sometimes did really look more like a fair than a
[200]

courtship. But though the presence o' company did make Gyles look most terr'ble solemn, Bessie did hold up her head in pride an' smile her best.

'Well, as winter began to draw on an' the days to shorten, Gyles would walk across after dark an' creep in round behind the mows at Woodrows for Bessie to slip out. There was a old barn at the back of the farm, an' the ivy on the walls had never been cut back for years. 'Twas the loose hanging sort, an' did hang out up three feet some places. Gyles used to wait there for Bessie till all were still. If a step should chance to come anyway within hearing they did stand back in the ivy out o' sight, an' keep so quiet as mice. More an' once old Simon passed 'em by.

'That went on very well for weeks. Then one night, so dark as pitch, they thought they heard folk a-coming. There certainly was more than one, for they could hear whispers, too. They got in behind the leaves an' waited. Bessie said in Gyles's ear it must be some neighbours up to some prank, and now they should just see. But la! the folk comed round both sides o' the old barn. An' all to a sudden like, young William Every pulled out a lantern from under his coat, and there were the young Abraham Jennings holding up a net, an' half a dozen boys set to a-beating 'pon the ivy-leaves, like mad, wi' bat-sticks an' long apple-poles.
[201]

' "Lauk-a-massy! 'Tis the bird-batters!" cried Bessie, and they both rushed out. But Abraham dropped the net 'pon top of 'em in a jiffy. The loviers were both a-catched so safe as thrushes. "There's a wonderful fine roast here!" shouted out Abraham, an' all the rest stood round, whilst William held up the light, an' laughed fit to split. But for once in her life poor Bessie couldn' laugh. She stamped an' hollared an' screamed. One o' the apple-poles had a-poked out her right eye.

'They was all wonderful sorry, for sure. Still, for all that, it soon healed up. Bessie said she didn' trouble about it not over-much, only she couldn' a-bear to walk to church of a Sunday wi' no eyeball in the naked socket. She said it didn' seem to be decent when she did look at herself in the glass. So she went into town, to the bird-stuffing man, about a glass eye. The best match he could find came out of a stuffed antelope that he used to keep in the shop-window till the poor thing got most wonderful old an' went bald in patches all over.

'The stuffing-man said, now that the eye was no more good to the antelope, Bessie could call it her own for a shilling if she was a-minded. He said no man could say fairer than that.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

'Bessie said she didn't think one minute of the price, but she thought the eye looked a bit too big for the purpose, like.
[202]

'The stuffing-man told her all the better for that, because, once fixed in, he could never come out, an' he could warrant to fix un in.

'Well, Bessie went home that evening most wonderful proud, for everybody in Honeycombe swore they had never seen a repair better carried out. An' Gyles got to be very partial to that eye. He did love to look down into the depths o' un, like. He could find no guile nor double-cunning in that eye. He said he could always look for a sincerity there; an' then, come what would, he should feel he could trust Bessie.'

Jonah stopped a moment to take breath. He raised his arms to stretch the muscles, for it was easier to him to hammer out a horseshoe than a long narrative.

'An' so then they 'loped, I suppose?' said Jonah's eldest maid, a tall slip of a girl, eager to skip and get to the end.

'Well, not at that time,' reflected Jonah slowly. 'For everybody both sides stood out against it. An' though, between 'em, the young couple must have numbered fourscore years, yet all through life they had been so ruled by others that now they couldn' sort o' make up their minds to act for theirzelves. No. The next mishap that befell to the poor things was
[203]

SIMON'S LITTLE REMONSTRANCE

'You see, Simon couldn' a-bear to think that Bessie should leave him, or that Gyles should come to live at the house. An' he were terr'ble upset, too, at all the laughter an' the talk. If he did but show his nose down in Honeycombe, one or another had a word to say about the bird-batting, or to inquire whether the folk at Woodrows did find the weather warm enough to roost in the ivy. Simon really did not dare to show his nose at market or fair, not even if he had a bullock to buy or sell.

'He got so mad, he swore Bessie should never marry the man; an' if Gyles did come round a-courting he'd pepper un up wi' a charge o' snipe-shot till his corden breeches had so many holes as a colander. Mind, the gun was there ready to hand a-hanging against the beam over the kitchen fireplace, an' he did keep un a-loaded wi' dust-shot in winter, ready to pop out when he did see the sparrows thick around the mows in the barton of a frosty morning.

'But nothing 'pon earth couldn' daunt they two poor young loviers. Though Gyles might be a mild and timid man in some things, he did brave all dangers for Bessie. They forsook the ivy, but they used to meet on the north side o' the house, where the eaves o' the dairy did come down low within
[204]

reach of hand. If they did stand in close to the wall, the thatch did shoot off the wet better than a umbrella if should chance to rain. They spent hours a-telling o' their love, an' how they would wed so soon as ever they could see the way like.

VNiVERSiTAS STVDII SALAMANTiNi

'But Gyles had a voice that couldn' whisper. He did mumble like the sound o' a hive o' bees, or some little grist-mill to work a long way off. When old Simon did sit by the fire to smoke his pipe of a night, he did for everlasting sort o' hear a distant buzzing. He couldn' make it out. He thought at one time it must be something a-working in his own head, like. Yet he did never hear it but when he did sit quiet by the fire. Then he did walk round to listen. He found 'twere a constant tale o' true love, not far from the dairy winder. Then Simon said he'd be hanged if he didn' just about make young Gyles jump.

'He left they fond loviers alone for that once. But the next night, just in the dimmet, when nobody were about, he went out a-tiptoe an' oped the dairy winder, maybe so much as five or six inches.

'Then he went back an' sat down quiet; but so soon as he heard 'em there at dark, he slipped off his boots, took down the gun, and walked in his hose across the stone floor so stealthy an' silent as a old tom-cat. He stopped an' listened, an' what
[205]

he heard drove Simon wild. For they were a-telling how 'twere wonderful hard to be interfered wi' at their ages.

' "There, though I do say it myself, 'tis little better an' slavery, an' my father is no other than a old nipcheese," said Bessie.

' "And sorry I be to say it," mumbled Gyles, "but my folk do both talk an' act like fools."

' "Well, Gyles, they do," agreed Bessie.

' "I do know they do," buzzed Gyles.

'Then Simon could hold his hand no longer. He felt that to hear young people talk like that o' their elders did verily an' truly deserve a lesson. He put the muzzle out o' window, an' let off both barrels — bang! bang! — into the air.

'Mind, Simon had no thought to do Gyles any real harm. He only wanted to make the man jump, an' teach un the folly o' setting hiszelf up in the face o' everybody. But the gun was no more than eighteen inches from the head that was nearest, an' the sudden explosions a'most frightened the fond loviers to death. They thought the end of all had a-comed.

'Bessie screamed, Gyles hollared. An' they ran away an' hid in the barton between a barley mow an' a wheat stack. They sort o' thought theirzelves over to see if either one was a-wounded like. But Gyles felt so sound as a bell; so did Bessie, too, all
[206]

but a sort o' ringing in the ear o' her. So they comforted one another that there was no harm done at all. They laughed pretty well at old Simon's little remonstrance, until they found the day after next that the noise had a-broked the drum o' Bessie's left ear.

' 'Twere quite touching, so folks said, to the day of her death, to see how Bessie did have to turn her head round to Gyles, if ever he should chance to speak to her 'pon the wrong side.

'Then those young loviers began to look into things a bit. They reckoned up all their misfortunes an' all the time they had a-lost, to say nothing o' a right eye an' the hearing of a left ear. They asked one another what it had to do wi' anybody else that they did go a-courting since they had a mind to. They said, what between pranks an' opposition,

they might suffer real damage one o' those days, and be sorry for it to the ends o' their lives. So they agreed that, being o' full age, an' nobody having the right to say "Nay" or lift vinger against 'em, they would just run away and get wed.

'They thought out a capital plan. Gyles had a good old hoss o' the old packhorse breed, an' he said he'd carry a pillion up to hill when he went up wi' the cart for some hay, an' hide un under a truss. An' Bessie should slip away of an afternoon, so soon as ever she had a-done milking, an' go up an' wait
[207]

by the rick. And Gyles was to come so quick as he could, when all looked quiet an' nobody about. An' they said they'd ride away safe an' steady, like, same as they did mean to go on, an' marry by licence in the town.

'An' if any did dare to interfere, they'd come back an' have the law o' 'em after they were man and wife. For, they said, if they did put in the banns it must be misery for both all the time till they could be called home an' wed. So they said they'd take a fortnight to get everything real ready an' han'-pat, an' so that Gyles should have time to give his old grey just about a lot o' oats. An' so soon as ever the old hoss could be got up in heart for such a desp'rate undertaking, they'd 'lope.'

Jonah Bagley paused an' looked from one to the other as if to say: 'Think of that now!'

'Well, we do know they did 'lope,' argued young Tom Platt. 'Or there couldn' never ha' been a Honeycombe 'lopement.'

'But not one o' 'ee could ever guess,' Jonah went on impressively, 'not in a month o' Sundays — not unless you've a-heard it afore — what happened on the road to that 'lopement.'

'Why, the old hoss were o' the same mind as theirzelves, I do suppose, an' runned away wi' the lot.'
[208]

'Not at all,' said Jonah, with a superior air. 'But bide quiet a minute, and I'll tell 'ee the truth about

THE HONEYCOMBE 'LOPEMENT

'Now, you must know that wi' so much on his mind an' having to act a sort o' double part, as one might say, Gyles Brook very often felt all to a fluster like, wi' a sort o' sinking in his insides. Folk saw that now an' again he would drop into "The Sheaf and Sickle" at odd times an' cheer his heart wi' a quart. His countenance wore a wonderful thoughtful look, too, an' he didn' go up round Woodrows much, so some did think that he and Bessie must ha' falled out or maybe had a few words.

'Now, Gyles were a-standing by the inn porch one afternoon, when who should drive up but a Bristol bagman, in his wellington boots wi' tassels, an' a thick greatcoat wi' a cape. That was how they used to travel round them days. They did drive long journeys from one big town to another, an' there put up for maybe the best part of a week, an' go round an' show their wares an' sell. An' this man, he had a-travelled a goodish way

a'ready; an' though 'twas winter, what wi' a heavy load an' the road none too good, his hoss was all to a lather o' sweat.
[209]

'He jumped down to stamp his feet an' bang about his arms to warm hiszelf. He couldn' spare time, so late in the day, to have his horse a-tookt out. He jus' slipped the bit out o' his mouth, called for a pint o' beer, an' held up the cup. Then thik hoss just whinnied, an drinkt that pint o' beer to the last drop like a Christian.

' "Ho! ho! What! do your hoss drink beer, then?" asked Gyles. An' he had a very slow, drawling way wi' un when he did show surprise.

'An' so they dropped into conversation like, though, to be sure, the Bristol bagman did all the talking, for he carried a wonderful tongue in his head.

' "As you see," said he. "An' he'd suck up half a gallon if I were to call for it to be brought out. I ask a lot o' my hoss sometimes. Too much. More than is fair. That hoss has done twenty mile a'ready, an' there's ten more in front. But I treat him well. Feed him well, an' think o' him afore I go in an' think o' myself. He's a good hoss. Staunch an' willing. But hoss nor man can do no more than his best. I ask enough to break his heart sometimes. But I give him a pint o' sound beer, that warms him up, gives him pluck, puts a fresh spirit in him. Why not? Why not good malt? I say. Good to cheer a man. Why not a horse? I ask. Can you or any man say 'No' to that?"
[210]

'Gyles said he couldn' say "No," but he had looked on in wonder to see how eager the hoss drinkt beer. He should ha' thought that to hold out a pint o' beer would make most hosses turn away their heads.

' "An' so 'twould;" cried the bagman. "But just let a hoss taste it, an' feel the good o' it, an' he'll never turn away again. Now, the first time I stood this hoss beer I had a'most to pour it down his throat. But half an hour after you should ha' seen him go. Trot, like clockwork. Such action! Folk pulled up to watch. I could ha' sold this hoss that day for money. But no money coined can buy this hoss. You wait a minute. Stand here an' watch, and you'll see."

'Then the bagman climbed into his trap, wrapped his wellington boots up warm in a rug, an' tucked in the ends, waved his hand, an' said "Goodbye!" an' started.

'Gyles Brook stepped into the middle o' the highroad, an' stood with his arms folded to watch. It all proved so true as the light. The bagman's hoss went away like a young colt for pluck, an' yet steady as a churchwarden.

'Gyles pondered over that a goodish bit. Look at his old grey how he would, he was a most terr'ble slug on a long journey. An' Bessie was no butterfly. He could back Bessie to pull down pretty handy
[211]

ten-score in any beam-an'-scales. Gyles thought the matter over, an' spoke about it to Bessie. Bessie said, "We can but gie it a trial, an' what harm can it do?" For sure enough, as she pointed out, it would be a very poor time to begrudge threepence for a pint of beer when you are running away to get married.

'Well, when the time comed, everything went off to a touch. They met up to the hay rick as 'greed 'pon. Nobody saw or so much as missed 'em, or, if they did, they didn' know where to look.

'It turned out a lovely night, wi' the stars all soft an' dim. Not a sign o' rain nor so much as a cloud in the sky, an' a great full moon climbing up behind the hill just upon sunset, ready to keep watch 'pon 'em right into the small hours, so to speak. An' when Bessie had a-stepped 'pon a truss, so as to sit herself down 'pon the pillion-pad, wi' her two feet on the footboard, an' her right arm round Gyles's waist for a steadyment, the old grey jogged off most beautiful.

'No soul 'pon this earth that they mid chance to fall in wi' could ever ha' harboured suspicion of a 'lopement, they looked so much like some comfortable, staid couple a-riding home from market, or tempted to bide late to a Kirsmas party by reason of a light night.

'They didn' hurry. They knew they had a long
[212]

journey afore 'em, an' the old grey just jogged on 'pon the level, but walked both uphill an' down. 'Twas a terr'ble lonely road, but they could see every vuzbush an' every bit of rush or sedge in the wet places. They said they'd go half way, an' then have a thought to the comfort o' the old grey.

'But they hadn' a-travelled more than eight mile when they found he did lumper a goodish bit. So they said they'd git off an' walk half a mile to catch heat, an' then Bessie should hold his nose for Gyles to give un the beer. The only fear they had was that the old grey might get so frisky after it that he wouldn' bide still for Bessie to get up. But she said she didn' care a button. If it came to that, she could walk.

'Well, they stopped in the middle o' Furzydown Plain, where the road is little better than a grassy drive, just where the old gibbet used to stand. They owned in after-life that they did have doubts in their minds, like. But when they saw in the moonlight how the old hoss did hang down his head a'most so low as his hoofs, an' how he did blinky an' then half close the eyes o' un, they 'greed that anyway not half a gallon could put it into such a wise old head to run away. They said they didn' care if he did, so long as Bessie could just get up, an' he didn' run back home. So Bessie just pulled open
[213]

his mouth, an' Giles put in the neck o' the bottle an' poured down that pint.

'Now, mind, that were a very dangerous thing to do. The effects o' drink in the first going off is more than the mind o' man can foretell. Why, wild Injians an' savages o' that sort, if they do but put it to their lips, do run raving mad. There's some men so made an' constituted that about two teaspoonfuls do make 'em sing an' talk thirteen to the dozen. But there's some all the other way about. If they do take only so much as would make another man friendly, they do get so vicious like you can't dare to say a word. 'Tis a wonderful thing to think how differ'nt differ'nt individuals be in their cups. But you'll never guess what Gyles's old toad of a hoss were like when he was in liquor.'

Jonah paused, and looked from one to another. But guessing is not a strong point with Honeycombe folk, and, though each opened his mouth, nobody ventured a word.

'Why, the pig-headed old fool just dropped down on his knees thereright! He didn' give hiszelf so much as ten seconds to offer a prayer, but he just put hiszelf to bed, so to speak, easy and comfortable, there 'pon the grass. He stretched out his neck, an' laid down his drowsy old head, and, afore they had so much time as any one o' 'ee would take to strike a match, he fell sound asleep. They
[214]

couldn' wake un. They shook un up, an' hollared in his ear. But la! the old hoss might ha' been dead but for the loudness of his breathing.

'Well, they didn' know what to do. They sat down 'pon the old fool side by side to talk it over in the moonlight; an' they wondered, if so be they let un rest through his first sleep, like, whether they'd be able to beat reason into 'un wi' Gyles's ground-ash stick. But then they saw that might be long to wait; for the old hoss soon dropped into a sleep so sweet an' quiet as a innocent child, an' you can't stop about so wonderful long when 'tis a 'lopement.

'They looked at the matter all ways.

'Gyles had the licence in his coat-pocket. Ten to one they must ha' been missed by that time — an' they were half way to church a'ready.

'Gyles shook his head, an' feared as how that old hoss would never wake in time to carry 'em there, for anything less than a earthquake.

'Then Bessie reasoned it out too, an' said, wi' tears in her eyes, that, though it might be illconvenient to leave un there on the road, she didn' see how they could be expected to carr' the old hoss. She swore she didn' care so very much if the old, ignorant, nog-headed, contrary fool of a numskull never didn' wake at all in this world. She said they could walk now, an' get there in time, please God;
[215]

and she didn' mind walkin' the leastest bit 'pon such an occasion. So they turned to an' walked an' was married. An' then they stood an' chuckled to think that no soul 'pon earth could undo that.

'But mind, nothing in this world could ha' turned out better for the bride an' bridegroom. For the old hoss had his sleep out, an' got up refreshed. He jus' shook hiszelf, pulled a mouthful or so o' grass maybe at daybreak, an' trotted off home a'most so soon as 'twere light. There had a-been a terr'ble to-do, sure enough, when the young couple were missed. But when the old grey trotted into Chesnut Close Farm, all wi' the saddle an' pillion on, but no Gyles or Bessie, the old folk could not tell what to think. Old Simon had a thoughtful look on his face when he had to milk the cows all by hiszelf. The Brookses declared there hadn' never a-been a more hard-working son than their Gyles, afore the thing of a maid toled un away from his home. Though, to be sure, Bessie was a terr'ble industrious woman, an' mus' have a tidy bit o' money if anything unexpected should happen to Simon. An' the most unthought-of things do come to pass sometimes. Really an' truly, more often 'an not, in a manner o' speaking. To be sure, nobody could object to Bessie in herzelf like, an' never had, any more than to wish the young couple to take thought, like, afore things did go too far. The
[216]

Brookses remembered that they always had liked Bessie, really, from the first.

'So everything were made up; an' when Mrs. Gyles Brook were brought home, a quarrel arose as to at which house the newly married pair was to live. And happy they lived for many years an' brought up six. So such was the end o' the Honeycombe 'lopement.'

As Jonah came to a stop the church clock struck one.

'Bless my heart,' cried he, 'and here have I talked for an hour.'

Then he hurried away to his forge.

VNIVERSITAS STVDII SALAMANTINI