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Pease, Howard (1863-1928)

The White-faced priest

and other Northumbrian Episodes (1896)

THE WHITE-FACED PRIEST

AND OTHER
NORTHUMBRIAN EPISODES

By

HOWARD PEASE

Author of

“BORDERLAND STUDIES”

“THE MARK O’ THE DEIL”

LONDON:

GAY & BIRD

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE:

MAWSON, SWAN, & MORGAN

Prologue

IN a former volume the writer was accused of an “excess of gloom,” and in a later work of a tendency towards “the terrible,” but in the present impression no such shadows will, he believes, be discoverable, and he can only hope that at a time when, as some think, the rechauffé Elder and the savoury neuropathic appear “usque ad nauseam” on fiction’s daily menu, the following episodes dealing with the sturdy, independent, Anglo-Saxon character of the Northumbrian people may be found to please the palate.

If anyone is inclined to be skeptical on the subject of “Black Geordie’s” feats, either as hewer or trencherman, as related in the text, it may be stated that he represents a character notorious some forty years ago throughout Northumberland for his physical prowess.

It is said by tradition that he could hew a “score¹ of tubs” a day, in anything approaching a decent, or “canny,” as he would have preferred to express it, “cavil.”

Further, that he usually partook of two “potpies” for breakfast, and on one occasion demolished two legs of mutton for his dinner.

In the “Flight of the Lodger” again, “Temple Tommy” assumes the guise, and definitely adopts the phraseology of the late Mr. Gleghorn of Seaton Delaval—a man of the most singular piety, of the most kindly disposition, and consistently devoted, from his youth upward, to the cause of Christianity.

As the writer only met M. Gleghorn once, it may well be that he has done but scant justice to the closing scenes of a singularly beautiful life; at the same time he believes that his discourse as he lay dying was almost identical with that given in the sketch.

For this, as for sundry other information, the writer is very greatly indebted to Mr. R.A.S. Redmayne, Viewer of Seaton Delaval Colliery, whose knowledge of the pitmen resembles Sam Weller’s acquaintance with London in being at once “extensive and peculiar.”

If any reader feels surprise at the prominent part assigned to theology in the sketches which deal with pit life and character, he must bear in mind that the writer has deliberately chosen out this particular aspect for treatment, as formerly, in another book he selected the sporting side for presentation.

¹ About 8 tons.

Either phase is distinguished by a like energy and directness, an energy and directness typical of the Northumbrian nature, though naturally enough the two strains are not usually met with in the same individual.

And now one word as to the dialect.

The remarks of an able critic in regard to a former work are here quoted, for they are at once true as regards any literary production that deals with a particular form of speech, and may also serve to excuse the writer in the eyes of the more patriotic Northumbrians, who may resent their ancient Doric being watered down to suit the taste of a “furrinor,” who may even go so far as to stigmatize it as “a cruel jargon” upon occasion. The critic then pointed out, “that to reproduce phonetically a wholly incomprehensible dialect is but to worry and puzzle your readers. It may be said that this is impossible, for who could transliterate the burr? Or who has ever been able to write the vowel sound “o” in the Northumbrian equivalent for “home” or “stone”? “Hyem” and “styen” suggests the real sounds to none but an expert. All the more reason, then, for keeping out of the way of stone walls, and leaving one’s head unbattered! If the delicious original be beyond capture, why essay to zany it?”

And now, having at last set up his little booth in the great mart of literature, and duly cried his wares, the author steps aside with the final hope that amongst his samples of Northumbrian lore some may be found to tickle the sinner and some to please the saint.



HOWARD PEASE

GLOSSARY

Aa: I	Gliff, fright
Aa's: I am	Gobby, boastful. Pigg, Mr. Jorrocks' huntsman, it may be remembered, warned his master of the evil effects attending 'setting up one's gob.'
Aad, old	
Aad-fashioned: old-fashioned, astute.	viz: Hadawa, go away
Brass, money	Hirple, to limp
To best, to get the better of	Hoggers, pit knickerbockers
Buzzor, the steam whistle of the Colliery. If it sounds at 7.45 p.m. it is an intimation that the pit will be 'idle' on the morrow	Hunkers, haunches; 'squattin' on his hunkers', this sitting in a balanced position on the heels is the immemorial posture of a pitman in his leisure hours.
Cavil: the quarterly ballot amongst hewers. As coal is so much more easily "won" in some seams than in others this method ensures a certain fairness in the apportionment of places.	Ivvor, ever
Clag, to stick	Mevvies, maybe, perhaps
Clarty, dirty	Ne, no
Checkweighman, an official appointed by the men to 'check' the 'weighman' of the owners	Neet, night
Clivvor, clever	Nivvor, never
Dee, do	Notis, notice; to "get notice" is to receive notice of dismissal.
Deputy, overseer appointed by the owners to superintend the working of a mine.	'Pay-Friday' and 'Pay-Saturday,' pitmen are paid fortnightly on the Friday, and the Pay-Saturday is always a holiday; non Pay-Saturdays are known as 'Baff-Saturdays'
Dwam, swoon	Pigeon-ducket, pigeon-cote
Elwis, always	Priest, a Roman Catholic or Church of England clergyman. This is probably a survival from pre-Reformation times, for the Presbyterian and Methodist are not 'priests' but ministers.
Fley, to frighten	

Reet, right

Relap, relapse

Sapling, greyhound puppy under 12
months of age

Shut fast, or Shoot fast, 'blowing down
the coals without nicking.' Those using
this method are liable to dismissal.

Staps, the strips of a barrel

Stagnate, surprise

Ti, tiv, tae: to.

Thor's, there is

Aa's warned, warn'd: I warrant you

Weeda, widower.

Wes, was

Wey, why

Wheor, where

Wor, our

Yor, your.



THE WHITE-FACED PRIEST

Chapter 1

“GOOD EVENING,” I said in reply to the curt wag of the head from my acquaintance “the Heckler,” upon whom I had suddenly chanced in my stroll after the day’s work was over.

He was sitting, as was his fashion of an evening, upon the top-most rail of the gate, by the roadside, ready to hold forth in his oracular manner upon any subject that may be brought under his notice. Usually he was surrounded by a host of admirers, who consulted him, as enquirers of old the Delphic oracle, and like those ancients, usually departed, [4] I believe, if not greatly enlightened, exceedingly gratified that such an epitome of hidden wisdom should exist in their midst. I understood indeed that they had recently manifested their appreciation by electing him to the post of check-weighman at the Colliery.

To-night, however, he was alone, save only for the companionship of his grey-hound, the “aad bitch,” Bonnie Bella, who sat below him looking up at him with keen face and soft brown eyes, endeavouring, by an occasional low whine, to draw him from his rail and induce him to take her for some further exercise.

As he was alone, I ventured to stay a while for a “crack,” for I found his pawky wit extremely diverting; so long, that is, as there was no fear of it’s being exercised upon myself in the presence of bystanders, who, standing round with elbows poised to nudge, and smiles ready to break open at a word, insisted on regarding every sentence he uttered as an unanswerable repartee.

The bells were sounding from the Church [5] which stood on the eminence beyond the Colliery, so, by way of opening a conversation I enquired, “And how does the new Rector get on? Is he a good preacher?”

“He canna preach a bit; he's nowt ov an orator,” replied the Heckler somewhat contemptuously. It was a characteristic of his to look down upon everyone with whom he was not personally

acquainted or identified in some way or another, and indeed so great was his admiration for the "add bitch", "the wife," and the rest of his personal belongings, that he had little left for the outside world and "furrinors" generally.

"But he has a bit of gumption in him for aal that," he continued reflectively; "he wes passing us i' the road t'other night, an' he gie'd us good 'e'en, then, catchin' sight o' the aad bitch, he says, "That's a good-looking dog, that o'yors," says he. "Bein' a priest, he mevvies didna ken the difference twixt a dog an' a bitch, but I thinks he means well, and' gie him a bit time, I'll back him ti fill his Chorch before he's done wiv it." [6] "The Wesleyan minister's a new man also, is he not?" I enquired further.

"Ay, he's a furrinor too," replied the Heckler, "an' a tarr'ble clivvor chep, I hear tell, but I divvn't like the looks ov him; he's far ower gobby for the job; ti listen tiv him taalkin' one might think he wes a member o'Parlyament, a Justice o' the Peace, an'-an'-the Judge o' the Waterloo Cup aal rolled into one. My marrer, though, he favours the Methody, for he says he likes a chep wiv a bit kyte (stomach) on tiv him; a good eater makes a good worker, says he, but I think he's wrang; I likes the wiry ones best mysel', they divvn't make a great show at their vittals, but they'll gan till they drop, like the aad bitch. Sae I've backed the priest ti fill his Chorch sooner than the Methody fills his chapel, an' seein' that the Methody's getten aboot six weeks start my marrer gie'd us a shade ov odds - five pun ten tiv a fiver."

"I suppose," said I, smiling at the quaintness of the Heckler's point of view, "that they [7] will have hard work at first, being somewhat handicapped probably by the performances of their predecessors who, between them, if all tales be true, sadly neglected their flocks."

"Ay, yor right there, the other two between them wes as good as a circus a'most, as ye might say, for the priest as soon as ivvor he hed his bit fortin' left him, hired a curate who wes oot ov a sitivation ti do the work for him, whilst he went aff playin' hissel aal ower the country-side, cock-fightin' an' racin' an aal, till one day his curate fell sick aal ov a sudden, an' he'd ti tak a torn hissel, onexpected like, ov a Sunday mornin'. He'd been hevin' a glass or two, ye ken, an' the Chorchwardens had a tarr'ble job ti get him ti the vestry, whilst aal the folk wes waitin' i' the Chorch, lookin' at each

ither, some o' the women half ways twixt cryin' an' laughin' an' the lads standin' a tiptoe, nudgin' each ither an' startin' talkin', whilst the chep who played the organ had come ti an end ov his repertory, an' wes lookin' about him like one o' them organ-grinders I-talyan fellers when he's finished turnin' the handle. [8] Well, in comes the priest at the finish, an' hirples along through the sarvice somehoo or anither till they wes aal doon on their knees wiv him prayin' - mevvies whereabouts he wes caallin' hissel a 'misorabbil sinnor'," continued the Heckler, his face assuming an air of preternatural gravity rendered more emphatic perhaps by the slight contraction of the left eye-lid which accompanied it, "an' there he stayed stock still, whether it wes that it came ower him sudden that he wes a fair disgrace tiv his profession, or whether he wes ower mussy i' the heid ti gan on, I divvn't knaa, but anyways there he stayed, an' the Chorchwardens hed jest ti set the people awa' as best they could, nivvor even handin' roond the dishes for a collection nor nowt."

"Well, that wes the end ov him, he got the bag efter that, an' high time too, I'm thinkin'," concluded the Heckler.

"You're a Churchman, then, I suppose," I said, so judging from the extent of his knowledge of the late Rector's misdeeds. [9] "No, I's no Chorchman," he replied, "but mony's the time I've assisted the Chorch, for I's often given the aad priest a help back frae the public ov a moonless night, oexterin' him along past th' pond, an' pitheap an' aal."

"But had he not a wife to look after him?" asked, for I suspected the Heckler of exaggerating, and indeed 'twas well known that a good story lost nothing at his hands.

"No," he replied, "he was a weeda when I kened him."

"Well, and what about the Methodist? You said there was a pair of them," I continued suggestively.

"Ay, ay, he wes a queer un, but I doot he wes a bit dotty i' th' heid the last year or two ov his time, for once when one o' the Circuit stewards wnet to call on him he flung the ink-bottle at him, cryin' oot as it wes the deevil, an' that he would exorcise him. He'd been ta'en wiv a swellin' i' the

legs, same as cart-horses gets sometimes, [10] I b'lieve; they call it limp-in-gets-us² or something o' that species, ye ken, a maist displeasin' sickness I shud fancy, an' I divvn't wunner if he wesn't quite right i' the heid. He just sat hissel doon iv his armchair, an' swelled up, like the Missus' trial doughs i' the oven, gettin' bigger an' bigger, doin' nowt but eatin' an' drinkin' an' divertin' hissel wiv harmony. He wes a fine singer, I believe, an' a tarr'ble heavy player on the harmonium, though I nivvor mind hearin' him mysel. At the first the doctor he taps him, and efter that he gans aal ti staps like a beer cask when ye take the hoops aff it."

"Dear me," said I, "then I'm afraid there will be a terrible amount of work for the new men to start on."

"Ay," replied my informant, "yor right there, no doot at aal about that. There's a vast o'sinnors here about, aal sorts, big an' little uns, like harrins, an' same as them, 'ull take a vast o'curin'." [11] "But that wes the buzzor," he said abruptly as a steam whistle sounded, "and I mun be gannin' home. So long," he added as he curtly nodded farewell.

"So long," I replied, as I turned to continue my solitary peregrination.

As I walked on by myself I fell to wondering how the new "Priest" would get on amongst his rough yet kind-hearted Northern parishioners: if he were to make a good impression at the start all might go well with him, and the good he might accomplish would be incalculable.

But if he made a false step at the beginning he might never be able to recover ground, for I knew enough of the Northumbrian to be aware that he is both "hasty and hot," quick to take offence and tenacious of his impressions, though so warm-hearted withal that when once he has become your friend you may reckon on his friendship for a lifetime.

The new rector was a young man apparently, and it would be sad, I reflected, if he should waste [12] the best years of his life away, as 'twas said others had elsewhere done, by knocking vainly at a chained front entrance, when all the time the back door stood open, offering a firelight welcome.

2 Lymphingitis.

After a fruitless essay then he would probably give all effort up, become a soured, disappointed man, worse than useless in his profession where much would be expected of him, and finally, like the "swollen Methody," be driven to "divert himself with harmony," if he did not prefer to follow the example of his immediate predecessor at the rectory. The memory of the Heckler's bet came into my mind, and I smiled again at the quaint predominance of that sporting instinct of his, though I took leave to doubt whether theology sufficiently interested pitmen as whole to induce them to take any active side with either "Priest" or "Methody."

Still, it was a good sign, I thought, that the Heckler had "taken him up," so to speak, for he was the men's representative in a double sense, and his good word was a passport to a "furrinor." [13] For myself, I looked forward to making the new rector's acquaintance, for there were no young men of my own age and position in the village with whom I could enter into definite companionship, and the long evenings in the winter were very wearisome. Possibly the apprenticeship to any profession is dull work, but that to mining engineering is perhaps the dullest of all when, as in my case, one has to reside in a pit village - grimy, unsanitary, uncared for, destitute of all adornment whether of art or nature.

I had not been in the village myself above six weeks, and was only now beginning to get to know the men. They appeared to me to delight in showing their worst side to a stranger, - like schoolboys standing off, as it were, and carelessly watching the rougher of their number make trial of the new corner. If he gave himself airs, or permitted himself to swagger before them as some superior being from another sphere, their backs bristled instantly, and they became as surly as a backyard watch-dog. No amount of petting or [14] coaxing, no crying of "good fellow, then" would propitiate the suspiciousness thus unfortunately aroused, and I knew of cases where motives had been misunderstood, and good intentions had yielded evil fruit through some original inappropriateness of speech or manner. At the same time though, they were the warmest hearted people alive. Once convinced of the genuineness of your interest in them, and their reciprocity was extraordinary. Sow a kindness here and there and your harvest was a hundredfold. Once you had been inside a pitman's

home, had shaken "the missus" by the hand, and partaken of her tea and "singing hinny"³ you were a friend for life. Even in the case of the "viewer," or the "maister" as they called him, who had but recently been appointed manager, and who was somewhat unpopular because he had introduced some new rules into the pit (previously greatly mismanaged through a former official's carelessness), they were careful to add, after soundly abusing him, - that [15] they believed he was a "clivvor man," and certainly a "brave worker". There were also, of course, a certain residue of rough men who cared for nobody; whose one ambition, indeed, seemed to be to make this evident, but they carried no weight with the respectable majority, and were always coming and going, either being sacked or tiring of set labour.

They were, taken as a whole, an extremely earnest set of men. In whatever they took up they showed a positive Anglo-Saxon energy. Most had some sporting "hobby" or "pastime:" this one's heart was set upon homing pigeons; that other's upon dogs; a third spent all his spare time and most of his "brass" in backing himself to beat "anyone in the world" at quoits; a fourth would shoot sparrows in the same cosmopolitan spirit, and each and all were self-styled champions notwithstanding their occasional defeats, for which there were always a thousand satisfactory explanations. Others of a quieter temper were devoted to gardening, and grew leeks (the village had been [16] famous time out of mind for its particular variety) that resembled life preservers for size and weight; and, in addition to other vegetables of a dropsical appearance, had a special love for pinks and pansies.

A few here and there, in whom the old Puritan spirit was alight, gave their spare time "to the Lord," and sought after sinners with a like devotion to that displayed by their companions in their sports. One man even had collected so much money that he had been able to build himself a "temple," (as the wooden building he had erected was unusually termed), wherein he welcomed all, - believers and unbelievers alike. He kept a diary, 'twas said, wherein he recorded the names of all those he had brought into the "narrer path," and on a Sunday night would recount his struggles of the

³ Girdle-cakes, so styled from their fizzing or singing on the girdle.

week with the "aad enemy," who never tired of throwing impediments in the way of those who were being "brought" with difficulty "to the Lord."

All his holidays and idle days, when the pit [17] was not working, "Temple Tommy" would go his rounds, never entering a train, nor so much as taking "a cast" in a trap from a friendly driver, lest one of his sudden "calls" might be interfered with, which sent him hither and thither, like an apostle of old, at a moment's notice.

He, too, was a "champion," as his friends asserted, pointing to the tale of his conversions, but others said that a large number of those he had "gether'd inti the reet way" had lapsed into the old paths again as soon as ever the first effect of his untutored "hot gospelling" had passed away.

It was a strange, uncouth district for a young man to come to as a complete stranger, and I confess I thought the Heckler would probably lose his bet, for the new rector had only recently left Oxford, and was presumably a High Churchman; one whose doctrine would soar above the heads of these rough but kindly people, who loved a moving oratory and the hot eloquence of the human heart. "There," I thought to myself, [18] "the dreaming spires of Oxford town," here, the blackened stacks of pit buildings, a disfigured landscape pockmarked with pitfalls; tall chimneys vomiting smoke like grimy dragons, and everywhere the naked strivings after wealth.

No mediæval mouldings here, nor corbels carved with drooping heads of monk or nun; no mystic atmosphere, lit with the subdued glories of reverential art and fragrant with the memories of the devoted dead. About the crumbling carvings of that old-world town a soft breeze seemed to breathe, bearing, to adapt the ancient Platonic metaphor, from the abode of intellect a fostering culture.

Here, on the contrary, in Selaval pit village antiquity was scouted; all things were new, and most were jerry-built. The atmosphere was laden with the sounds of ceaseless activity, and intellect concerned herself alone with the requirements of commerce.

The snorting of the boilers, the groanings of filled waggons, the shrill warnings of impatient [19] engines at the railway crossings, all testified to the hot rivalry for wealth. The climate, too, was cheerless, for of a summer afternoon an easterly "haar" would frequently creep up from the sea, muffling the bright evening in a plaid of mist.

I was thus meditating as I walked along, when I perceived coming up the road at a quick pace a black-coated individual, wearing a soft felt hat. I observed him somewhat narrowly as we passed, for I had a shrewd suspicion that he was none other than the "Methody," and, indeed, his appearance tallied with the description briefly furnished by the Heckler in our previous conversation.

There was a look of determination in his face, backed by a square jaw, which pointed towards success; a fine nose, eyes rather closely set, an incipient protuberance under the fall of the waistcoat (the "bit kite" alluded to by the Heckler's marrow), and a somewhat heavy tread of the heels, - all were marks, I thought, of the man of enterprise and good business habits. He was [20] clean-shaven, moreover, save for a slight moustache, apart from which and a somewhat aggressive manner (as of one whose social status was not yet perhaps satisfactorily settled), there was nothing to distinguish him from a budding curate, fresh from the 'Varsity.

"Well," thought I, as I passed on, having offered a brief 'good evening,' "I admire the Heckler's judgment usually, but in this case I think he is at fault, for here is a pushing man evidently, presumably not Oxford or Cambridge bred, unhampered by any mediæval notions, neither a mystic nor an ascetic, but simply a good man of business."

Having seen the "Methody" (for I found on enquiry that my conjecture was well founded, and that it was none other than the Rev. Mr. Pearson whom I had encountered), I felt a keen desire to meet the "Priest," and compare him with the other. After all, I reflected, as I walked up to the Rectory, the next afternoon, I might very likely be mistaken in my suppositions, and the [21] Rev. Mr. Pulleyne, M.A., Oxon., might very well turn out to be a muscular Christian, one who would delight his flock with exhibitions of strength or skill in the gymnasium recently attached to the

Mechanics' Institute. There was no opportunity, however, of my correcting or re-enforcing my original forecast that afternoon, for the Rector was out, and was not expected back till late.

As matters fell out, nearly a fortnight elapsed before I saw him, for I was suddenly stricken with the influenza and rigorously confined to the house.

Sitting up one afternoon, however, by the window, I saw a figure passing by on the other side of the road who was unmistakably a High Church clergyman. "That's the man," I thought to myself, as I marked his low, rounded hat with the broad straight brim, and caught a gleam as of a silver cross depending from his chain.

He was somewhat under the medium height, thin, but not emaciated, and walked trippingly as one well pleased with himself and his surroundings. [22] He turned, as I was watching him, to speak to an old woman, and I caught a glimpse of his full face; sensitive, mobile, full of high purposes undoubtedly, I thought to myself, but no great look of determination or convincingness behind that glow; rather a slightly self-conscious elation, something of that simper not uncommon in young men making their *début* in their profession with a wonderful degree of self-importance. 'One rather likes it in a budding "sub" or politician, 'thought I, 'but somehow not in a shaveling priest, for after all one does want somebody to fight and make laws for one occasionally, but the actual ordering of one's life must be carried out by one's self in the best way one can.

Every line of his body, every emotion on his face, thought I somewhat ill naturedly, for a fortnight indoors had given me the bile, cries aloud, "Yes, I know I am good; far better than Tom, and Dick, and Harry, yet I will not be hasty in judgment, but," and here comes a smile on a wave of the hand, "will make allowances." [23] He passed out of sight almost at once, then in another moment my door bell rang, and I felt certain it was himself come to call upon me.

The heavy step of the domestic stirred the stairs without; simultaneously with her rap she entered, and presented me with the Rector's card as she said, "Here's the Priest's ticket; an' he'll come up an' hev a crack wiv ye, if yor willin'. I tell't him ye wor a vast deal bettor, but lookin' tarr'ble shabby still; an' mevvies a bit cumpany wud do ye ne harm."

"Show him up," I said, smiling, for Mary's directness always diverted me, and was in itself a tonic of some power, "for I should like to have a talk with him." She disappeared forthwith, then returned shortly with the visitor, and having showed him in and dusted a chair for him, remarked, "I wes just bringin' up the maister's tea, mevvies ye'll hev a cup as weel?"

"Thanks," said my visitor, turning half way round towards me in a somewhat embarrassed manner, "if I may, I should like to have a cup, [24] but perhaps I shall be keeping you up too long, for I know how strict doctors are in cases of influenza."

"Na, na," replied Mary, before I could get in a word, "let him sit up a wee; he'll be gettin' bedfast like an aad wife else."

"Mary, or 'Mar-wie,' as she is more usually styled," said I as the door shut, "since I fell ill has taken entire possession of me, but I hope you certainly will stay and have a cup of tea."

"Thanks very much," said Mr. Pulleyne, as he took a chair beside me, "I have been calling on various patients all the afternoon, and it is quite hard work in a manner, for I havn't got used to the 'northern' pronunciation, and sometimes I can hardly understand what they say."

"How do you like them?" I said, "though perhaps it is scarcely a fair question, for they delight, I know, in showing their bad side to a stranger, and you havn't been here three weeks yet. I fear you will find them very different from your Oxford parishioners, and the country terribly black, desolate, and windstricken after Christ [25] Church Meadows, the Parks, and Magdalen Walks."

"Oh, but I think the landscape has a certain charm nevertheless," he replied, "with its breezy aspects and long stretches of field and fallow, lit at sunrise and set with the crowded glories of the sky. Last night, as I was walking abroad towards sundown, the pageant of the west was all about me: a clear cold wind blew from the north bearing great clouds, like pictured galleons, set with golden sails, across the plain before me as though it were an inland sea.

Even your pit buildings, with their black heapsteads and tall chimneys have a picturesque appearance of a sort: at a distance they might be taken for huge elephants lifting up their trunks to

Heaven, and when they let off their great clouds of white steam one might think they were dragons breathing forth hot breaths, and as for the pitmen I like them extremely," he continued, and now he had grown quite enthusiastic, "the married ones especially, for they realise the responsibilities of [26] life, but the younger ones - the unmarried men and the boys - putters, as I believe they are called, seem terribly rough and uncivilized, and to delight in the profanest language. Still, young men even at Oxford are 'barbarians,' as we have been told, and I do not despair of them, for the warmth of heart their elders display is very encouraging, and leads me to hope that I may be able to do some good amongst them. Anyway," he added, "I mean to try, and though it may be uphill work at first I will not be discouraged."

"I am very glad," I replied, "you like them so well, for that is the only way to get at them. Convince them you are their friend and take an interest in them, and they respond readily enough. At the same time they are curiously suspicious, and if by chance one unwittingly offend them, - a single inappropriate word or action will sometimes suffice to raise a cloud of misunderstanding amongst them, - months may elapse before you can 'make it up,' as children say. Indeed they resemble the most primitive order of children in [27] many ways, - sensitive, unruly, and terribly stubborn when roused; - their very warmth of heart is oft-times an obstacle to peace, for they persist in forming their judgment on the most sentimental grounds. They pretend to an extreme radicalness, believing they have been robbed of their rights in some mysterious manner, though in their own particular line none can be more conservative. Introduce new machinery into the pit, and Geordie forthwith clamours for a strike.

I overheard the other night two of them conversing. It was pay Friday night, and I think they had had what they call their 'gills.' One says to the other, 'Aa's as guid as anyone i' the world, Geordie,' and his marrow, with a truculent wag of the head and a lift of the elbow, responded, 'Ay, an' so's aa.' 'Aa divvn't care for nobody nor nowt,' says the former. 'An' aa divvn't neither,' replied the second philanthropist.

"Of course," I said in conclusion, for I saw the light was dying down from my companion's cheek, "I come across them in an official capacity, and [28] they rather resent officials as a rule, but

after all 'tis a case of much crying and very little wool. It should be remembered, however, that I cannot speak with any very great experience, for, though I have been in the north before now, I have only been settled here about six weeks, and I can scarcely claim to have got to know them yet."

"Well," replied my companion, smiling once again, "you must not discourage me too much, and then, with a little management I trust to be able to repair some of the lamentable damage wrought by my predecessor in the parish."

"Yes," I replied, "I believe he did a great deal of harm in a way, for though he was not vicious, so far as I understand, he left behind him the stain of a bad example to which any ill-wisher can point with the easiest effect. They are used to generalize from a particular instance, and they love a 'score.'

They move so entirely in their own class that their intellects, though active enough, remain like oysters in a shell. On the pay Saturdays they will [29] go up to the town to see the sights; will toss their 'brass' right and left, and often take stalls at the theatre, but even there they move in company, and come back home again heartily despising the 'dorty little cheps i' the toon.'

Yet considering their strength of character, quaint idiosyncracies, and encrusted prejudices they are really at heart a fair minded set of men. The pity is that they rarely are allowed to see the whole aspect of a question: their Union bullies them, politicians flatter them, farmers and tradesmen are frightened of them, and hence their attitude is too often that of the thistly Scot with his '*Nemo me impune lacessit.*' But I fear I bore you," I added, bethinking me that I was monopolising the conversation.

"Non a bit, non a bit," he replied, "what you say is very interesting, and should prove helpful to a stranger like myself, new come amongst them.

After all, as their heart is in the right place I do not think I need be afraid, and I shall gird up [30] my loins to try to efface the memory of my predecessor, and fill the church with worshippers."

"I hope you will," said I, as he shook hands and prepared to depart, "but you must not, if I may say so, be too impatient to begin with."

CHAPTER II

Episode the first

Two or three days after this, and just as I was preparing to go out for my first stroll, Mary came in to announce that the Heckler was below, asking after me.

"Show him up," I said at once, for I felt that a "crack" with him would be very refreshing after three weeks spent indoors.

"Hoo are ye, Sor?" he said, as he came in after a most elaborate wiping of his boots on the mat outside.

"Rather dicky about the legs," I replied, as I timorously inserted my fingers into his brown clasp. [32] "Ay, yor aal that," he responded cheerfully, "aal that," and he stood back a pace or two viewing me critically, as though I had been a horse, "but yor clay's not so bad,"⁴ he continued, "and in another week, if ye divvn't have a relap, ye'll be lookin' yorsel again. But, mind ye, divvn't ye dose yorsel ower much wi' that doctor's muck," and here he pointed disrespectfully at some bottles on the mantlepiece, "but just take plenty o'mutton ti eat an' a good sup castor oil between whiles. That's what I elwis gives the dogs when they're sick, an' thor's nowt like it i' the world. Wey, thor wes a saplin' o' mine oot o' the aad bitch that wes lookin' as shabby as ever I've seed; sae the lad sends for the bet, who gied her a proscription, as he caa'd it, an' efor that she wes warse than ivvor, an' aa says ti mysel, 'she's a deid pig.'⁵ [33] Sae I takes her in hand mysel, an' properly drooned her wi' the oil, and plugged her up wi' mutton, an' in a week she wes as gay as a two year old again.

⁴ Clay, complexion, bodily health, the body. This was one of "Temple Tommy's" additions to the dialect. See note to "The Flight of the Lodger."

⁵ An expressive phrase, denoting a hopeless case suggested, probably, by the aspect of a deceased porker. "Noo, canny Judge, play the right card, and its a deid pig" is the reported utterance of a former worthy Novocastrian Mayor to his guest at a critical point in a game of whist.

"Wey, ye might as well toss yor brass inti the sea and hev done wiv it, as gan ti them doctors and veteran surgeons, as they caal theirsels, that's just in league wi' the undertakers.

"No, no, I've nivvor ailed any in my life, an' that because I've elwis steered clear ' the doctors, an' drugs an' aal," and with that he spat heartily into the fire, evidently quite relieved of his preliminary shyness.

"I've no doubt they're both excellent things," I replied, with some haste, for I feared he would insist upon sending me round a cargo of these medicaments, "but I'm all right now, all I want is some fresh air and exercise every day for a bit. And now, tell me the news, for I have heard nothing lately. How, for example, does your friend, the rector, get on? Has he made a good start towards filling up the empty pews?" [34] "He's made a baddish start," replied the Heckler gloomily, and I could see that his mind was running on his bet, "he's not showed hissel clivvor at gettin' off at aal. Wey, th' other night he wes takin' the chair at a concert on behalf o' the Bible Society, an' wiv its bein' pay Saturday thor wes a good cumpany at it, an' he says i' the course ov his remarks that they wes that liboral i' their ideas that they wud even print bibles for the Romans, who insist upon hevin' sartain things put in and other things left oot wi' a view ti sippotin' their own particular doctrine. It's just like Tom Hedley, the Conservative agent, I shud fancy," continued the Heckler, thoughtfully, "who's elwis gobiin' on that trades bettor under the Conservatives than under the Liborals, an' gans about wiv a coloured barometer an' a map o' stattysticks ti try an' prove it, but aal the while it's a mock'ry, for he elwis chooses oot the best year o' the Tories an' the warst o' the Liborals.

"Weel, thor wes a local preacher there, an' he cudn't sit still an' listen ti that wivoot making' [35] his objections, sae up he gets, an' he says, 'Aa'm fair surprised,' says he, right off ti the priest, 'that thoo, who is a monyment i' the Chorch ov England, shud stand up there on a public platform an' back up the Romans i' their false doctrines an' aal, who, as aal folks kens, worships a man for their God, an' bow down ti graven imiges, an' ti gan an' alter wor English bible for the like o' them is just fair sack'ledge,' says he. 'Isn't thoo ashamed of thesel, an' disn't thoo mind hoo it is written i' the Revelations that not even the littlest word i' the book must be altered or changed wivoot the sartinty o' damnation?'"

"And what did Mr. Pulleyne say to that?" I enquired.

"Wey, he justifies hissel in it, an' says that thor wes a good Christians amongst the Romans as amongst Protestants, an' that he hoped some day the two classes might worship side by side i' the same cathedral. Then the local preacher, he lous up tarr'ble vext at this, an' he says for his part he wes born a good Protestant, an' he'd die [36] that same, an' wud sooner gan ti the gallus than bow doon ti the Pope, whe wes just a man like hissel, an' yet gives hissel oot ti be a God."

"But the local preacher was mistaken," said I, "and surely he ought not to have interrupted the meeting in that fashion?"

"Wey, I divvn't knaa as ti that," replied my companion, "I's no theologyan, an' mevvies the preacher wes i' the wrang i' makin' sic a hurly-burly about it, but the priest sartinly made a great mistake i' justifyin' hissel as he did an' backin' up a furrinor like the Pope, who's just a nowt, as I b'lieve, like the most o' thae furrinors; no, no, he's made a bad start, I tell thoo, for thor's a many folk believes that the priest's half a Roman hissel."

"Well," said I, "I think it is very unfair to Mr. Pulleyne, but I don't suppose it will really make very much difference to him in the long run, for he's a nice fellow, 'a canny man,' as you say hereabout, well meaning, and with his heart in his work, so you needn't look so glum, for he may [37] still fill his church sooner than the Methody his chapel, in which case your brass will be safe."

"Thor's lots o' cheps," replied the Heckler gloomily, "who mean well, an' yet clag their foot into everythin' that comes nigh them, an' thor's anuther thing that stands i' the way ov his success, an' that's the Methody. It's a hearsay," he continued, "that him an' the priest wor up at the college tegither, an' that the priest took the advantage over him, an' got him given the bag, an' sae t'other night when they meets for the first time, an' the priest recognises him, an' holds oot his hand for a shake, sayin', 'Hoo air ye, Mr. Pearson? I trust we may both work amy - amy-' suthing o' nuther, I divvn't ken the exact word," broke off the Heckler, "but" -

"Amicably, perhaps, but we'll say like two marrows, for the sake of clearness," I said, suggesting an alternative reading.

"Ay, that's right noo," responded my companion gratified, "thor's sense i' that, 'like two marrers' says he, but the Methody he claps his [38] hands behind him, and just turns his backside tiv him."

"Well, it was shocking bad manners, and it ought to help the rector at the Methody's expense," said I.

"I divvn't knaa," responded the Heckler, in that curious unconvinced manner of his, which was largely responsible for his nickname, "aboot that, for if the priest behaved shabby tiv him at the college what for should the Methody not gie a bat back again when he gits a fair chance for it? I knaa I wud if any chep misbehaved hissel ti me."

"Well, anyway," I said, as I moved from my chair to get my hat and coat, "I hope you ain't going to desert him, after backing him as you said you had done the other day."

"No, no," replied he decisively, "I nivvor hedged a bet i' my life, an' I nivvor will, an' I'm gannin' ti do what I can for him, but I doot that my marrer picked oot the winner this time: [39] that Methody's a powerfu' sort ov a chep, an' an ill man ti hev for an enemy."

"Well," said I, "we must hope for the best; but now I must be going out for my walk, or it will soon be too chilly for me."

"Ay, ay," responded the Heckler, again seizing my sore fingers in token of his good-will, "you ought ti gan oot an' get a taste o' sunshine before it's too late, an' mind an' hev a good sup o' the oil at bedtime, an' we'll soon hev ye ti work again."

"So long," said I, as we parted at the door. "So long," he echoed as he turned away, then, stopping a moment, shouted after me as a parting injunction, "divvn't forget the oil; it's champion for the influenzie!"

As I walked along at as brisk a pace as my weak legs would permit, I reflected upon his report of the scene at the Bible Society's meeting. "Of course," I thought to myself, "it is exactly what might have been expected to happen, but to a stranger, and one brought up at Keble College, [40] Oxford, in a wholly alien atmosphere, such an interruption must be extremely offensive.

I havn't the least doubt that the local preacher thought he was testifying to the truth by urging his objection: his very ignorance probably fosters his ardour, and upon the generality heat of conviction, even if absurd, operates far more powerfully than intellectual toleration.

As to the Methody, I wonder if there is any truth in the Heckler's 'hearsay.' In the first place, I should not have suspected him to be an Oxford man, and in the second it is scarcely likely that he would have been at the same College. However, if it is true that he is his enemy, he will doubtless have more chance of doing him an ill turn there than anywhere else in England probably, for the Rector's heart is evidently set upon his work, and failure or even no-success would grieve him terribly. The Methody, knowing probably the bias and temper of the men's minds is much less likely to 'clag his foot' into it, as the Heckler says, than the priest, and if the latter [41] makes a mistake 'twill be easy for the former to turn it to his disadvantage."

I was thus thinking over the matter, when a poster caught my eye with Mr. Pulleyne's name prominently displayed upon it, and, stopping to peruse it, I found it was an advertisement of a lecture to be given the next night in the Co-operative Hall upon "Evolution, and its bearing upon Belief;" - the Rev. Mr. Pulleyne in the chair.

"If I'm well enough, I'll go," thought I to myself, "and see how he comports himself. It's ten to one that the local preacher will be there again, lynxeyed for an opportunity to 'have at' the Rector again. Probably his friends have heard how he 'battled the priest doon' the other night, and will be there in force in the expectation of another encounter."

The next evening, as the weather continued warm and I felt stronger, I sallied forth, regardless of the doctor's orders, and made my way to the Hall to hear the aforesaid lecture. There was already a good company assembled, though it was [42] still five minutes from the hour appointed, and, looking

around I could see a number of the more sedate and earnest order of pitmen there, several Methodies, the Heckler, the Rev. Mr. Pearson, and, finally, the bushy head of "Red Tom".

Now as Red Tom had always been a stalwart freethinker, and latterly, having lost his wife and only bairn (to whom he had been absolutely devoted), by some terrible accident with a parafin lamp in his absence - a pronounced atheist; I foresaw that the Rector might again encounter unexpected opposition.

A minute or two passed away, the audience sitting silent and stolid after their usual fashion till something should stir the hidden seeds of fire to life.

Presently the door at the back opened, and one of the Churchwardens entered on to the stage above, and carried out the usual preliminary of first altering the position of all the chairs on the platform, and then setting them in their old places again. [43] This successfully accomplished he returned to the side door, and, a moment after, the Rector made his appearance followed by another cleric and a lady, the lecturer presumably and his wife, the rear being brought up by the people's warden - a stout, red-faced farmer of the neighbourhood, clad in a heavily creased black tail coat, and bearing a large geranium in his buttonhole. "It's both Chorch *an'* State the neet," one fellow near me muttered to another, nodding his head satirically in the direction of the farmer.

As they sat down there was a feeble flicker of applause from below, and a voluminous outburst from the farmer on the platform. Then the Rector stepped forward, and introduced the Rev. Mr. Chrysostom Smith to us as an Oxford parson with a distinguished College record. Mr. Smith would treat the question, he said, largely from the scientific point of view, and he himself would eventually add some few words dealing more particularly with the religious aspect of the question. Mr. Smith had not been embarked very long upon the [44] sea of evolution before I was satisfied that he was a very able yet dull gentleman - one of those born to attain distinction in the 'Varsity schools, then never to be heard of again, but to be met with in the country, pedestalled as paterfamilias, and pointed out with distinction as 'having once written an article for the Encyclopedia.'

"I know that man," I thought to myself, as he forged ahead into the swell of chafing disputations as to the world's age wherein mathematicians and geologists sport like dolphins, "he comes from St. John's, Cambridge, or Balliol College, Oxford, to adopt the language of the man in the play."

Whereupon -and the room was close moreover- I believe I fell asleep; at any rate I remembered no more till I suddenly saw the lecturer sitting down, and helping himself largely from the decanter of water on the table beside him.

Then Mr. Pulleyne got up, and, after thanking Mr. Smith for his varied and interesting lecture, [45] commenced to make religious annotations, as it were, upon it.

Commencing with the Old Testament History he pointed out that it was not fair to judge of it in the scientific critical spirit which we might rightly apply to a modern book, dealing with religion or metaphysics; for the world was in its childhood then, and had neither the knowledge, nor the accumulated stores of experience which some three thousand years had left as their heritage to ourselves.

Antagonists, he said, as also half-hearted friends, were continually seizing upon details, and triumphantly enquiring "What can you say to that?" Delighting in the scientific learning of the day, they call for facts, and again for facts, in a domain which lies outside the sphere of mathematical proof. Then, on the other hand, if one applies to them for an explanation of the deepest and most wonderful things of life they have none to give; one asks for bread and they give a stone.

Next he proceeded to deal - and in a larger [46] spirit than I should have expected of him - with some of the recorded miracles of the Old Testament. The details, he said, might seem strange to modern minds, but the substance was beyond the alchemies of science. In some cases it was possibly a mere question of literary treatment, of style it might almost be said, or at least of forcible presentment; in others the subject might be treated allegorically in order that a wider view might be attained. Then, gradually losing his first hesitancy, and growing more impassioned, he dealt with the question of ideals, and quoted instances of great attainments under the stimulus of high purpose.

No nation ever yet, he continued, quoting from Mr. Froude, attained to greatness save under the fear of God, then after a fine passage out of Tennyson, he added to the splendid boast of Glaucus, that we are better than our fathers, the noble prayer of Hector that our sons might be better than ourselves, and finally looked forward, he said, to an evolution that would bring peace to [47] the warring instincts of mankind, and draw the whole world slowly nearer to the sky.

Finally, he emphasised as a fact borne out by the hard won experience of mankind through countless ages, the saying of King David, that it was but the fool who said in his heart, "There is no God."

Therewith he sat down, and I could see that he was trembling with emotion.

After a moment or two he rose up again, and enquired if anyone would like to ask the lecturer any questions that might have occurred to him during the discourse.

Save for a shuffle here and there, not the slightest interest or emotion seemed to have been aroused.

The men sat like a wall, impassive, silent, stolid; some with their caps still slouched over their eyes, and hands in pocket as they had been at the very beginning.

'The parson's scholarly eloquence was over their heads,' I reflected; 'quotations from Tennyson [48] and Froude they cannot comprehend, I suspect; what they require to stir them from their lethargy is the untutored eloquence of a "Temple Tommy" pulsing from the heart, and borne forth upon a tide of personal experience.'

There was a slight movement on the platform which seemed to signalize a departure, when I saw Mr. Pearson nudge his next door neighbour, who thereon sheepishly rose to his feet.

"What aa wud like to ask at the chairman, is this," says the man, "hoo is it that the Chorch is sae intolerant tiv others ov a different persuasion! Noo, aa'l gie ye an example o' what aa mean," he continued, "for aa's a fair man, an' wudn't tak the advantage ov anyone wivoot givin' him due notice o' the fact. Weel, th'other day aa wes travellin' on the railway, an' thor wes a priest in the carriage (a

Chorcho ov England priest just the same as thoo is): it wes a smoker, by the ways, an' the priest hissel wes smokin' his pipe, an taalkin' tiv his neebor aboot religious mattors, an' aa owehears him say, "Whenivvor aa meets wi' a [49] Roman or a dissenter aa gets taken wiv a shiver doon the back," says he. Ay an' noo aa'l gie ye anuthor," continued the spokesman, warming to his work, as he saw the Rector rising from his chair to reply. "Aa hev a sister that lives i' the next parish, that's tarr'ble ill off, for her man, 'at she wes married on, wes killed doon i' the pit, an' left her wiv a big fam'ly; weel, one tarr'ble hard winter she wes nigh done for want o' warm clothin' an' meat. Sae she gans ti the priest, whe had the dispensin' o' charities for the poor o' the village, an' she says, she wud be main thankfu' for a blanked for her bairns an' a bit soup or meat ti feed them wi'. Are thoo a Chorchwoman? says he. "No," says she, a bit proud-like mevvies, "Aa's a purebred Methody like my feyther an' mither afore us," says she.

"Then," says he, "thoo gets ne blanket frae me, nor ne sup o' soup neether," says he, an' therewith he claps ti the door iv her face.

"Noo, tell me this," said the orator, now worked up to a pitch of excitement, "hoo can [50] thoo justify that? is that Christian or Christlike ti gan an' treat a poor weeda woman that gait? Isn't it the Chorch itsel that stans i' the way o' peace an' harmony?

"Aye, it is," said the orator hotly, answering the question for himself, "nobbut the Chorch, an' what's the need talkin' ov Evolution, an' sic like nonsense, when what we want is a Revolution; ay, an' we'll hev it too, aa's warned, an' then mevvies the poor will get what belongs ti them wivvot any distinction o' sexes". And therewith the speaker plumped himself down on the form, red hot with indignation.

There was an unmistakable murmur and undercurrent of applause and sympathy throughout the conclusion of the harangue -- for question it could scarcely be called -- and I saw from the way in which the men about me were straightening their backs and sitting up, that their interest was now thoroughly aroused, as the prospect of a hot discussion grew imminent.

The Rector, in replying, laid stress upon the [51] fact that matters in connection with charities were often unfortunately misrepresented, and that it was to be feared intolerance was to be found in all classes of society, but he believed, and here he quoted some statistics, that the Church had made greater progress in the affections of the people within the last few years than all the other sects together. He added that local charities were often so small, that only some half-dozen individuals each year could be relieved by them: and that it was perhaps but natural, where they had been left by Churchmen for Churchmen, that members of the Church should be the first to be taken notice of.

In conclusion, he pointed out that it was surely not fair to meddle with the bequests of Churchmen, when Dissenters were left to dispose of their own property at their own free will.

Finally, touching upon the question of Disestablishment, (the introduction of which, as he truly pointed out, was quite alien from the issues of the lecture), he grew warm in his turn, and [52] opined that such an act would be a stain upon the national records, and he hoped, please Heaven, he might never live to see that day.

As soon as he was seated Mr. Pearson got up, (and my previous suspicions that he had prompted his neighbour to ask such a question as might lead to a political discussion at once received confirmation), and enquired in suave tones which contrasted favourably with the heated manner of the first questioner, whether the Reformation was not itself a "stain upon the national records," when it was borne in mind that the State then confiscated the bequests of Roman Catholics and transferred them without compensation to the Reformed Church of England.

The Rector, in replying, pointed out that the last speaker was surely under a misapprehension, for that all the State had done in the sixteenth century was to dissolve the monasteries which had notoriously failed in their duties and become corrupt, so that in the interest of general expediency and morality it was a wise, wholesome and [53] most justifiable action. So far indeed was it from the truth, he continued, to say that a new Church had been set up at the Reformation, that it was well known that Roman Catholics and Church-men continued to worship side by side for some years afterwards -- until indeed the Pope formally excommunicated Queen Elizabeth. In conclusion he

would add, the only real change effected was to transfer the supreme Headship of the Church of England from the Pope to the English Monarch.

The Methody again rose, and in the same suave manner as before, pointed out that there was a division of opinion on the matter, and here he insinuated that the Rector was deficient in his historical knowledge, for many of the old observances of the ancient Church were pronounced to be "superstitious," and many new innovations made, as for example in permitting priests to marry. There could be no manner of doubt, he continued, that the case of those who wished for disestablishment and disendowment nowadays was exactly on all fours with the Reformation procedure. [54] It was a certain fact that the State had taken away the endowments of the monasteries of the ancient régime, and given them to whom it would and what was to prevent the State of to-day acting in like a manner? There were numbers who thought the Church was still deficient in performing its duties, and wholly unjustified in withholding from the community at large what had been meant to be left to that community. The various flourishing bodies of Dissenters of to-day had seceded from the Church because of her notorious neglect of her duties in times past, and because of her apeing the ceremonies of the Roman Church, to which it was asserted that many of the so-called Anglican clergy even nowadays visibly inclined. There was a titter here through the audience, and it was evident that the speaker was deftly turning to advantage the episode of the Rector's "heckling" at the Bible Society's meeting recently. Finally, he demanded the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church in the "interest of general expediency and morality, [55] "and quoted, amidst a general applause, the dictum of an eminent Churchman, "that the day of Establishments was past and gone."

No sooner had he resumed his seat than the stalwart form of "Red Tom" was seen to rise.

And now indeed the gradually growing interest gathered to a head, and, like a breaker as it nears the bar, seems to carry overwhelming impulse with it. The air had grown electric suddenly, and I myself, though on a fairly cool temperament, felt the strange feeling of excitement creeping up my back.

Some men further away had now risen to their feet, those nearer craned their heads forward to catch sight of the speaker's face, and a cry even now rose from some of the rougher looking men behind, of "Gan on Red Tom; howay wi' thoo."

Taking no notice of those about him, but keeping his eyes fixed steadily in the direction of the Rector, Red Tom commenced to speak quietly and in a subdued manner, but signs were [56] not wanting that he was but preluding till he had gathered his strength for an outbreak in full force.

"Whiles thoo wes speakin' 'enoo thoo quoted the words o' King David, that 'twes but a fool whe shud say, 'Thor is ne God.' Then thoo went on ti say as hoo 'twes wrang ti criticise the Bible, for that it wes written in an ignorant age when folk wesn't as clivvor as they be 'enoo. Ay, but I ax thoo this, isn't facts the same yesterday as to-day, three thousand years syne as in 1890, an' what hes thoo for answer ti this, that just as fast as knowledge increases sae belief iv a God gans back. Is Herbert Spensor a fool as ye caal him? an' Huxley? an' Tyndall? an' Darwin? an' aal the great scholars o' the age? What right has thoo or the Jew King nowther, ti caa men ov sic a calibre as them is, fools. Wheor's yor grounds for't, aa wud like ti ask? Wey, it's just an impittence, a barefaced impittence ti clag sic epithets ti men like that. An' noo agen, what's the explanation you priests gie o' the world an' the life o' man i' the world? It's just a nowt; at [57] the best it's but poetry, an' at the warst it's degradin' morality. Hoo dis a priest comfort ye i' yor affliction an' distress, think ye?" and here he turned round to the men about him, "wey, he comes an' he says, 'Thoo's a sinner, my friend, an' the punishment is sent thoo ti fetch thoo inti the narrer path.'

"Ay, an' what dis the Chorch dee when a man, 'stead o'behavin' hissel an' puttin' the curb ontiv his passions, just gives hissel aloose an' brings mevvies a dozen or more mouths inti the world wi' nowt ti feed them on? Wey, the Chorch sits still wiv it's hands iv it's lap, and says, 'The Lord will provide.' "Ay," he repeated slowly with a pitiless precision, "'*The Lord will provide.*' 'Tis a pretty sayin', ne doot, ay, an' dootless it's fine poetry, but what's the prose on't? Wey, aa'l tell thoo: the half o'those bairns will be starved or beaten ti death mevvies, an' th'other half will find their way at the

finish ti the Bastile⁶ or the gallows, an' aal the while priests are gannin' about [58] wi their eyes aal shut ti the facts o' life, quoting this an' quotin' that, an' saying wiv a solemn air:

"Aa hev been young an' noo am aad, yet nivvor hev aa seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed beggin' bread.

"For what dee priests knaa o'life? Look at their hands, an' ye'll ken that they've nivvor done a handstir o'wark, frae the cardle ti the grave. They gan up an' doon wi' their wife an' their bairns, an' hev aal the divarsion i' the land, fed by the State an' well nourished, an' ivvory noo an' agen ye may hear them say, like the sentry cheps i' the barracks, 'Aal's well.'

"Ay, but aa ken what thoo'll say," he continued with a still more defiant ring in his voice, for the Rector here made a movement as though he were about to interrupt, "thoo'll say aa's in danger ov Hell-fire for what aa's sayin' noo. Ay, but hoo dis thoo ken that? When maa time comes, an' aa is put unner the sod, is aa ti be resurrected an' made inti flesh an' blood agen, an' aal ti be burnt wi' fire an' brimstone? Na, na, [59] tell that ti babes an' women folk ti steer them wi'; not tiv a full grown man whe cannot swallow sic an aad wife's tale as that.

"An' whe is a priest that he shud say this tiv a man mevvies as good or even bettor than hissel?

"Look at the last priest we had here," he continued with mighty scorn, and here I saw Mr. Pulleyine shiver like some delicate woman insulted on the open street, "he wes a fine example tiv his flock, aa's warn'd, aye clartin' on, an' clartin' on, wi the beer --and carryin' on forbye wiv his fightin' cocks an aal-- a fair disgrace, not alone tiv his cloth, but tiv aal manhood as weel aa maintain."

He paused here for a moment, then, with a wonderful self-restraint, for the most ferocious satire was painted on his gleaming face, "Ay," he said quietly, "*but he wes a man o' God, an' aa's but a faggot for hell.*"

⁶ Workhouse.

Then, without once having to stop even for an instant for the word or metaphor he wanted, he commenced to give some details of his life, and [60] the reasons he had for his opinions, and his views for the bettering of the world.

The man was a born orator, and as I listened to the smooth stream of burning words I could not but bethink me of the tapping of some steel furnace when the fiery white-hot metal streams swiftly, silently, irresistibly to its close.

It was not the Church we must look,' he maintained, 'but to the State for any amelioration of the world, for the Church preached nothing but dry-as-dust Toryism, insisting on the out-worn feudal doctrine that a man should live contented in that station of life to which God had called him; but if a man did not hold with that, but rather tried to better himself and get knowledge to himself, how did the parsons treat him then?

Why, they said he was a Socialist, and an Atheist, and a dangerous person, and passed by on the other side with a text on their lips and the white of the eyes showing, and left him to battle it out for himself against the world.

As for himself if he had lived contented, [61] he would have been a drunkard like his father before him, who died through being always 'on the beer.' Many a struggle too he had against his temptations, and many a fight for the control over himself, but he always behaved himself, and did his duty by his work and his masters, knowing full well that he had none other to depend upon but his own self. Everything he had done he had done at his own cost, had turned scholar, and bought books, and books had taught him this, that Christianity had been the greatest clog of all to progress, for it had fostered superstitions and nurtured ignorance.'

"An' what d'ye think the priest tell't me?" he continued hotly, "him that wes here as Depity before thoo came inti possession" --and here he shot forth his words like arrows at the Rector fronting him on the platform -- "when the dear wife died an' the bairn wiv her aal iv one black day. Aa hed come back frae my shift, an aa wes delightin' mysel i' the thought o' seeing her bonnie face agen, for she wes bonnie," and here his proud [62] voice broke for a moment, and his lips quivered, but with a

wonderful effort he regained his self-control, and continued in subdued tones which were even more effective than his former heat.

"Thor wes nivvor anuther face for me i' the warld, an' often times aa swore ti mysel that nowt shud part us, nor nivvor sae much as a cross look or word frae me shud come atwixt us frae wor courtin' ti' the grave, an' sae it wes, an' aa kept maa word till that day came when on enterin' the hoos aa found maa darlin' lass an' baby bairn just blackened corpses lyin' on their beds.

"Ay, an' when aa wes i' the thick an' torment o' maa misery whe shud come in but the priest, an' he lays a hand on my shoulder, an' he says, 'Thoo musn't repine ower much, for 'tis a judgment frae God, an' thoo knaas that whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' Love", he echoed with a bitter scorn, "love he said, an' talked o' love, but 'tis little he knaas o' love that can speak like that." Here he paused for a moment, then with a [63] strangled sob he added: "*Wey, aa cudn't even treat a poor dog like that*".

"Eh, maa dear lassie, but thoo knaad how aa loved thee, ay, an' the wee bairnie too, an' that aa wud ha died for thoo wiv delight if aa might. An then for a white-faced priest wiv his mincin words thinkin' ti set aal reet --wey, it's a mock'ry," -- and here the strong man's utterance broke to a groan, and there for the space of a minute he stood, fairly battling with himself, then flung himself round, and strode forth from the Hall, brushing the men aside from his like flies, as he walked straight forward with his eyes like burning coals in the dark caverns that grief and despair and misery had hewn in his deep brow.

For a minute or more there was a dead silence. Then the Rector rose, and I could see that his face was pale with emotion and his whole frame was trembling, but whether from nervousness or indignation at the attack upon himself and his profession I could not determine.

There was a general movement as he rose, [64] and it was evident that after the impassionate oratory of the last speaker the men would not be ready to listen to any further utterance.

Mr. Pulleyne indeed had not got very far, before he was interrupted by various exclamations from below. Whilst being greatly grieved, he said, at the terrible domestic misfortune that had lately befallen their comrade, he could not sit there silent after the fierce attack made upon his religion and his cloth.

The question of the eternal truths of Christianity could not be disposed of by reckless assertions which to his mind were little short of blasphemous. For himself, he would have been glad to have met quietly with the speaker, and to have endeavoured to bring him into a better frame of mind, but he feared, -- Here one interrupted crying, though in no unfriendly manner, "Thoo'd best leave him alone, he's ower strang for the like o' thoo," and immediately after another rudely shouted, "Hurroo, for Red Tom, he's bested the priest oot an' oot." [65] "Keep a civil tongue i' yor heid, thoo b-----," growled the Heckler from near beside me, and in a word, the meeting broke up in confusion.

CHAPTER III

"Twa cracks"

[66] As I opened my window after breakfast the next morning I saw the Heckler in the distance leading some four or five greyhounds in leash evidently with a view to exercising them.

I remembered then that I had heard the "buzzer" blowing at 7.45 the previous evening, so that the pit of course would be lying idle that day, and my friend as a consequence would have plenty of leisure for a "crack". The sun was bright, so I determined to take my constitutional earlier than usual in the hope that I might fall in with him, and so have a chance of discussing the [67] events of the previous evening while they were still warm in his memory.

I was concerned for Mr. Pulleyne, because I knew instinctively how keenly he felt on such matters. In the first place his religion was no mere formula, but a living thing for him, and he would resent any insult or slur cast upon it as keenly as another man might an aspersion on the character of his bride. For he was not the type of man who, when thrown by hostile circumstance, will

comfortably accept defeat, and like Pontius Pilate of old, throw off all responsibility by the method of public ablution.

An idealist in the temper of his mind, and of a sensitive, eager, bodily habit, the Rector must always be pressing onward to some new scheme or plan, or he would inevitably sink into despond's slough and the morass of the hypochondriac.

Your idealist, thought I, is always in the right of it, and his influence enormous, though 'tis often somewhat in the nature of an after-glow; but for "quick returns" give me a sound, stupid, practical [68] man, with lots—"Hullo", I exclaimed abruptly, for half-a-dozen greyhounds here leapt upon me as I turned the corner.

"Down then, down," cried I, as I bestowed a hasty pat here and there upon the eager, quivering forms of the Heckler's "saplings," endeavouring to assume that firm yet affectionate manner which is the heritage only of the born dog-fancier. A whistle, however, here sounding suddenly, away shot the pack with backs bending like a bow, to where their owner stood some 200 yards off in the roadway.

I followed slowly, and no sooner had we exchanged greetings than the Heckler remarked:

"Well, an' what's yor opinion o' the last night's performance, for I see'd thoo wes there?"

"I believe," I replied, "that the Methody was at the bottom of the row, for I saw him give a nudge to the first questioner, and it was evident from his speaking that he opened out the path for the tirade that followed, for if he had not played the part of finger-post, the meeting would have [69] broken up with a vote of thanks to lecturer and chairman, and a growl or protest only from Red Tom.

"Ay, yor right, yor right there, for that's what I says myself," replied the Heckler with emphasis, "an', sink me," he continued warmly, "but I think it wes a dirty trick o' the Methody's, for what wes he doin' but backin' up a chep who wes battlin' doon aal religion tegithor, Chorch, an' Chapel, an' aal? No, no, a chep shud stick up for his perfession, whativvor it may be, for a man's only half a man whe doesn't stick in tiv his perfession wiv aal his poo-wers. Wey just look at the aad

bitch! D’ye think she’d ever hav win all her cups and prizes if she’d hedn’t stuck her whole soul inti the coursing?”

“The Methody gies oot o’ course,” he continued more slowly, “that he’s a Radical, an’ the priest’s a Conservative, but I divvn’t see that that has much ti do wiv it, for the lecture had nowt to do wiv politics at the start, an’ after all even if a [70] chep is a Tory he hes a right tiv his opinions, though they mevvies are as rotten as a paste-egg.

“I’s aal for the disestablishment o’ the Chorch myself, for I divvn’t see whey I shud pay for aal these priests, an’ their wives, an’ families; an’ forbye that, I wud like that big stone ower the Chorch porch for my pigeon-ducket, but I divvn’t see wey that Methody chep shud play the candyman⁷ aal the same, for he gets his wage from his ‘flock,’ as they ca’al their congregation, an’ I’ll lay odds he’d skin them if he didn’t get his pay reg’lor – an’ it canna matter tiv him, like it does ti my marrer an’ me, whether the Chorch is disestablished or not. I’s not a religious man myself,” resumed my companion meditatively, “I’s ower fond o’ dogs for that, I doot. Wey,” he added, as he gazed fondly down upon one of his silver-coated ‘saplings,’ “wivvoot a dog I’s warned I shud feel just properly stark naked. No, no, there wes Temple Tommy, he tried his hand at convartin’ ov us, but I says tiv him: Will [71] I hev ti gie up carryin’ on wiv dogs, an’ coursin’, an’ gamblin’ an aal? “Yes,” he says, “I doot thoo must, for thoo’s far ower much ta’en up wi’ thae things; they’re worldly blandishments,” he says, “an’ a tarr’ble hindrance on the narrer path. Hoo can thoo listen properly tiv a call frae the Lord when yor ears is full o’ the yow-yow o’ greyhounds, and the chink o’ schoolin’⁸ dollars,” says he? There wes but the one chep I’ the Bible,” he said, “who, after he had once given hissel ti the Lord, was allowed ti keep on at his former ways, an’ Tommy wes’nt sartin, so he said, that even he’d been properly converted. I cannot mind the chep’s name, but I b’lieve it wes Rum’un, or suthin’ o’ that kind. Mevvies he wes a dog-man like myself, an’ cudn’t gie up the coursin’.”

⁷ Bum-bailiff: the man who serves notice of ejectment.

⁸ “Schooling” gambling by way of pitch and toss. Two coins are usually thrown up, and bets are made on the chance of both coming down “heads” or “tails”.

Here the Heckler paused for a moment, and looking down at the “worldly blandishments” gamboling at his feet, heaved a sigh, then shaking his head slightly, again took up his narrative.

[72] “Its surprisin’ ti think how different folks is. Wey, thor’s Tommy hissel, just wiv a proper gift for religion; its just meat, an’ drink, an’ baccy tiv him, I b’lieve. Then thor’s myself, an oot an’ oot dog-man, wiv a reg’lor passion for greyhounds an’ a tarr’ble inkstick for a gamblin’. Then thor’s yorsel, mevvies thoo hes a sly eye for the lasses, or a weakness for the beer, or — “as I made haste to protest, “cares nowt for owt but books. Then there’s Red Tom, who canna abide religion at aal, but is aal for makin’ folks better by the help o’ Parlyament an’ eddycashun. By!” he exclaimed abruptly, “when one has a bit time for a turn o’ pheelosophy, as Red Tom calls it, what a queer world it is now — a tarr’ble queer affair like one o’ thae riddles the eldest lassie was askin’ at us t’other day. ‘Does thoo gie it up, daddie?’ says she, wiv her eyes pokin’ fun at us aal the while, as I sat there on the tub, half washed. ‘Yes,’ I says, after a bit wrestle wiv it, ‘I does,’ ‘Ay,’ says she, ‘an’ so did t’other cuddy.’ Wow, but she’s a clivvor one is wor Jeannie!” [73] concluded the Heckler, and straightway, forgetful of “pheelosophy” became absorbed in a retrospective admiration of his daughter’s wit.

“So you don’t think, then that the Rector need be much discouraged because of last night’s performance?” I enquired, for I was anxious to discover how public opinion tended.

“No, no, he mustn’t take it ower much tiv heart,” replied the Heckler, “for though he didn’t come quite first-class oot i’ the set-to, yet, at all events, he stuck up for his perfession, which is mair nor the Methody done. Mevvies he held his head a bit ower high, sort o’ givin’ oot that Red Tom had no right iv any opinions ov his own at aal, but it’s a free country an’ a chep can hold what opinions he likes, I maintain, sae lang as he behaves hissel properly. Thor’s nae doot that Red Tom bested the priest last night, but then, Red Tom cud best most o’ folks at an argy, for he’s a tarr’ble powerfu’ orator, an’ once his steam’s up thor’s no stoppin’ him. No, no,” he concluded, “Mr. Methody cam worst oot o’ the show last [74] night, an’ I still backs the priest to fill his church sooner than him, an’ to fettle him proper at the finish.”

“I am glad to hear you say so,” I replied, “and now I must be moving, for the doctor says a fresh cold might set me back again.”

“Ay, ay, that’s right now, tak’ care o’ yorsel, an’ divvn’t have a relap,” replied the Heckler, “a relap is a bad job always, an’ the warst part o’ the whole business i’ ‘the influenzie’.”

So we parted, and as I returned homewards I determined I would go and call upon Mr. Pulleyne that afternoon, and find out whether he was cast down or no by the discouraging circumstances of the previous evening.

The fact that the Heckler thought the Rector had borne himself better under the onslaught of Red Tom than when replying to the heckling of the local preacher on the subject of Roman Catholicism, was certainly encouraging, though in the first instance rather surprising to me. Yet, after all, I reflected, there are very few atheists in the world, [75] and what the men like in Red Tom is the genuine humanity of the man, his sympathy with the poor, his hatred of the smugness and hypocrisies of the well-to-do.

His vision is limited, his experience small, but he knows of the struggles and the hardships of the poor, and when he speaks his words are winged; he shoots his arrows into the air, as the song says, and straight they fly into the hearts of his friends.

When I called in the afternoon I found the Rector in, and after he had given me a cup of tea he offered me a cigarette, and very shortly, after a few indifferent remarks, we found ourselves in the thick of an argument.

I had begun the conversation by offering my sympathy concerning the events of the previous evening. I added an apology for my own inaction in the matter, by saying that so far as my own short experience of the men went, it was better to let a man have his say out than try to stop him, for in that case they inclined to believe that you did so because your side was getting the worst of the [76] encounter, “and finally, to be quite frank,” I added, “the man’s eloquence kept me spellbound, as it were, for last night I understood, for the first time what oratory, even in a rough form, really is.”

He bowed to me slightly, then pausing for a moment, asked almost abruptly, "but you cannot surely defend the man?"

"Oh no," I replied, "not for a moment, but I do think this, that he is a genuinely earnest man, and, therefore, almost certain to be misunderstood. I mean," I added hastily, for I saw the creases gathering on the rector's boyish brow, "that apart from the absolute inappropriateness of the attack in the first place, and the total want of anything approaching to politeness to yourself, and the gross unfairness of his attitude in making you a peg, as it were, upon which to hang his tirade, --apart from all these, I think there was more fault to be found with the Methody than with Red Tom, for the Methody paved the way [77] for the other's attack;--that, I think, was quite evident."

The Rector said nothing, but I thought I caught the sound of a sigh, and then I suddenly recollected the Heckler's story of an old quarrel between the two. Mr. Pulleyne volunteered no remark, however, so I went on again with my reflections. "Of course I do not wish to be thought to endorse his opinions either, but I have had some conversations with him previously, and I have even lent him various books, and I can say this, that he is really, I believe, a seeker after truth in his own fashion, and largely partakes of the genus reformer. I even believe that had he lived some two hundred and fifty years ago he would have been one of the most earnest of the Puritans, a Sectary or Independent, of course, and would have fired his hearers with enthusiasm for a godly life, and terrified them with his revelations of the wrath to come.

"For it is evident that here is a man with 'fire in his belly,' to use an old but suggestive phrase, [78] who cannot but half believe, or disbelieve, as so many do nowadays, but must put his whole heart and soul into everything he says and does. One may even doubt whether he really is genuinely an atheist or freethinker. No doubt he thinks he is, yet, from what he said, it is evident that heaven and hell are very real things to him, not quite in the ordinary sense perhaps, but looking at the matter in a broad light, he has a real love of righteousness and virtue, and what he hates is lukewarmness and the complacency of the comfortable many. Most people are perfectly happy if they get so much to eat and so much to drink per diem; and they go to church on Sundays because Mrs. Grundy still continues to uphold church-going, but how genuinely they love righteousness and hate vice is a

difficult question to answer. They call themselves orthodox, of course, but what precisely is orthodoxy? Is it not outward acquiescence in traditional routine? ‘As it was, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, amen,’—and so home to dine on roast beef and [79] plum-pudding, with portly burgher and satin rustling dame.

“Some again are practically freethinkers, but would be horrified at the accusation, and why? Because they are not sufficiently courageous or intellectually consistent enough to definitely thrash the matter out for themselves; they are cowardly, and prefer to take refuge in a ‘facing-both-ways’ attitude, neither wholly believing, nor disbelieving. It is only a few years ago since free-thinking was a bar sinister socially, and though that has largely ceased to operate, there is always the satisfaction of being ‘on the side of the largest battalions,’ and the comfortable feeling that after all if there is such a thing as hell-fire they are sufficiently orthodox to escape it.”

“Then after all,” here broke in the Rector, “you do defend the man who spoke so fiercely last night?”

“I don’t uphold his doctrine,” I replied, “but I sympathise somewhat with the man himself, for here is one who has suffered, and suffered terribly, [80] and for another, to take his own instance to whom probably such depths of feeling were absolutely unrealizable, to think to comfort him ‘in the thick and torrent of his misery’, by a glib quotation, was, I think, something of a mistake. I mean”, I continued hastily, for I again saw the Rector’s brow contracting, “it is too soon to judge of Red Tom’s attitude, for if one should not call any one happy till he is dead, as the old Greek sage held, so one should not condemn any man’s attitude or opinion till one knows what ground he has for assuming the one or holding the other. Again, it is premature to assume that Red Tom’s convictions are settled, and for my part I shall hope you may yet see him attending your services in Church.”

Mr. Pulleyne’s face brightened for a moment then as the cloud descends once again answered slowly.

“I thank you for your kind wish, and I trust it may be verified, but what chance is there of it? For how can I approach him, after what he said [81] last night? I cannot, really I cannot, be the first

to make overtures, for, putting the question of any personal attack on myself out of court, there is still left a genuine, really a genuine hatred, I think—for all your sympathetic explanation on his behalf—of all revealed religion.

“It may be pride, perhaps, but I should feel I was deserting my standard if I were to argue with him upon the reality or the unreality of the Christian faith.

“A soldier who is ever temporizing with the enemy is but a coward at heart, and never yet won victories.”

“Ah but,” I replied, “I wouldn’t go and see him, I would leave him entirely alone, and eventually perhaps, when you have filled your church, you may come across him on a side wind, and then will be your opportunity.

“You see,” I continued,--“if you’ll permit me to go on with my defence of him, as it were;--the modern tendency is towards the practical and actual, and your warm-hearted, self-taught, but [82] withal ignorant socialist thinks that science and legislation combined may make a new Heaven and a new Earth for him. Again, I doubt very much whether the English people ever had much reverence, if I may say so without giving offence, for the priesthood, per se; they have greatly admired certain great ecclesiastics, and been devoted often enough and very rightly too, to their parish clergyman, but they are of too independent and critical a turn to accept what a man says unless they see what a man does. After all, from the Reformation onwards, Puritanism in the best sense has made England what she is, and the old doctrine still holds good that each man must ‘dree his weird,’ and work out his own salvation for himself.

“I must apologise,” I here had the grace to say, “for inflicting this long tirade of mine upon you, but I have had to live amongst the working classes the last few years, and I think I know the general tendency of their thoughts and feelings on this subject.

“I have kept you quite long enough, however,” [83] I said, as I rose to go, “and it is high time for me to off.”

“It was very good of you to call,” Mr Pulleyne responded, as he too rose and grasped my hand, “and I hope you will often find time to look in on me, and give me the benefit of your experience amongst working men. They take life more seriously in the North, than in the South, which of course is a good point, but then again they have a more rugged or stubborn strain of temperament which renders it difficult to make an impression upon them. I have a call or two to pay,” he added, as he took his hat from the peg, “and will walk so far of the way with you.”

As we paced slowly along in the direction of the village talking as we went, we presently came to the corner by the end of the pit heap, and there on the little eminence of red slag stood Temple Tommy, appealing to a small group consisting of sundry of the older men, several women, and an uneasy lad or two who had evidently come to jeer, but having been overawed [84] by the speakers earnestness knew neither to go nor stay. He was pleading with them for their souls as we passed, and I could note the tremor of his voice vibrating to the emotion that possessed him as a violin to the passion of its player; his head was bare, and from his trusting, child-like eyes, shining like liquid sapphires, stole unobserved tears. “Why should they ever harden their hearts and stop their ears, and torment themselves with daily cares, when underneath each one of them ran the deep current of unchanging love which, did they but trustingly commit themselves thereto; would bear them over all the rocks and perils of life to their desired Haven. Though invisible, it was yet nearer to us than breathing, and closer than hands and feet.” Then, with a sudden change from the highest mysticism to the plainest of prose, so surprising to one of higher education, but so natural in a self-taught theologian, the speaker turned from quotation to explain to his audience, in their own and his primitive phraseology, the doctrine of the Trinity.

[85] He had seen, he said, that very morning a shop-boy washing the window panes of the shop-front with water from a “scooter,” (squirt) and it had been at once borne in upon him, as he stood a moment to gaze, that here was the illustration he had so often sought for of the working of the “Three in One” and “One in Three.” The water was the cleansing power o’ the Holy Ghost, the “scooter” was the Lord Jesus, an’ the boy—“Here an exclamation almost of disgust from my companion diverted my attention, and turning quickly I caught an expression as of physical pain on

his face. "I suppose," he said, after a pause of a moment or two, "that the man is really a good Christian, and does good in his way, but to reduce the great mysteries of the Church which require the carefulest exegesis even at the hands of the most erudite and highly-trained Christian intelligences to such crude and uncouth metaphor appears to me to be little short of blasphemy."

"What will you have?" I responded, "the days of the ancient 'economy' are over. 'Tis the [86] era of democracy, and so long as the spirit be reverent, one must be content to put up with an external roughness."

"I fear," he said, with a sudden flash of light into his own character, "I fear I am too mediæval; either that, or too premature perhaps, for I feel strongly that the present state of doubt and unrest, evil speaking and open blasphemy, cannot endure, and the twentieth century may, as I have often dreamed and prayed, open out with an ampler horizon and a clearer faith."

"We can but hope so," I replied, "but even in the present the out-look is not so dark as many insist. There never was a time when people felt so keenly for the sufferings of others, or displayed so much charity both in thought and in act. Grant that it is possibly the result of indifference, or lack of faith, but for my own part I welcome the effect when I think of the burnings, brutalities, and blasphemies of the ages of Faith."

We had now come to the point where our [87] paths diverged, so without further conversation we bade each other "good night," and proceeded on our several ways.

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH THE HECKLER APPEARS LIKELY TO LOSE HIS BET

[88] I FOUND so much to do on returning to my work again, both above and below ground, that I saw but little of Mr. Pulleyne for the next few weeks. From two or three indications, however, I

gathered that he was not making progress: that the Methody on the contrary had so far altogether eclipsed him in popular favour and general esteem.

I was returning home from the office later than usual one evening, and as I passed the Chapel doors I noticed a crowd of people were collected, and my ears caught an echo of the [89] weird and harrowing sounds that invariably accompany the tuning of a brass band. Staying my steps for a moment I enquired what performance was going to be held that night. "We're gannin to hav a gran' concert an' ora-tory-o I' wor Chapel the neet," was the ready response from a high-waisted, red cheeked 'wife' standing near me, "an' wor Wull's gannin ti play the sarpint. By! An' he can make a noise on her too; ay, aa's warn'd but he's a gran' player."

The Methody, though I to myself as I walked slowly onward, has certainly got a good start, and as far as an immediate success is concerned he has assuredly outstripped the Rector.

He's a clever fellow undoubtedly; knows the temperament of the people, and has the right democratic twang. Novelty is the desire of the day, and here in a pit village is Novelty with a capital N.

Fancy "Israel in Egypt" in a small pit chapel! 'Tis small wonder if he fill his seats.

A few days after this again I chanced to overhear [90] a conversation down the pit which bore another testimony to the progress Mr. Pearson was making in the village; which abundantly showed moreover the instinct of the "good man of business" so necessary to worldly success in the present commercial age.

I happened to be squatting close into the corner of a rock, waiting for a "shot" to be fired, and I could not have avoided hearing, even if I had wished to do so, the conversation of two men chaffing a third, whom I eventually discovered by his voice – as well as by what transpired in their converse – to be Jim Nicholson, a rolleyman down the pit, but above ground, and in his spare hours, a painter to trade.

“Sae thoo’s gan an’ deserted the Chorch, an’ turned Methody!” said one, and from his intonation I felt sure he was bent on raillery. “An’ hoo she’ll do then, I’m wunderin’? Is she gannin’ ti close her doors same way as a Bank when folk hes lost confidence I’ the consarn, or does the priest want a vote o’ confidence, like the Prime [91] Minister i’ Parleyment, noo that he’s lost one ov his most influential supporters? By the ways,” continued the voice with a chuckle, “wes thoo ivvor inside o’ the Chorch? Aa ken thoo’s a Chorchman, because thoo’s elwis said sae, but wes thoo ivvor inside o’ the buildin’, that’s what aa want ti be at.” Another low chuckle sounded in the darkness, and I knew the last speaker had nudged his marrow and awakened his expectation for a ripe display of wit.

There was silence for a moment or two, then after a rasp of expectoration, another voice replied gruffly from further away. “Ay, a awes a Chorchman, tho’ aa divvn’t exactly remember noo ivvor havin’ been there lately; aa mind a awes there when a awes baptized as a babby.” “But thoo canna mind that,” expostulated the first voice, “for thoo canna have been mair nor above three weeks old, an’ yor eyes were liklies still closed then, same as puppies is when they’re born. Does thoo mind being born blind?” continued the voice suggestively.

[92] “Ho-way,” was the reply, a trifle gruffer than before, followed by a chunk of coal aimed blindly through the murky atmosphere, “divvn’t thoo try ti play the comic ower me. Maa mither wes a tarr’ble shy woman, sae dootless aa may hev been born wi’ the blinkers on, for aa’ve elwis been notorious for the quality o’ maa manners. But what aa says aboot tornin’ Methody’s just this. Aa gans where aa’s weel treat. The Methody, he comes alang, an’ he speaks us civil, an’ he gies us a job, an’ efter aa’d painted his chapel an’ his hoose for’m, aa says tiv him: ‘Thoo’d like us ti torn Methody, noo,’ ‘Aye,’ says he, ‘aa wud, an’ I’d like that bairn o’ yors that sings sae weel ti cum ti Chapel also.’ ‘Weel,’ say I, ‘thoo’s treat us weel, sae aa’ll torn Methody, tho’ maa fam’ly’s elwis been pure bred Chorchmen up till noo, an’ the lad, he shall gan ti Chapel, an’ sing till he’s black I’ the face, an’ he’s the best singer i’ the districk, search here and there. Wey, aa’d back him ti beat—”

Just at that moment a low rumble sounded [93] and in a moment leapt into a roar; a crash of falling coal shook the uneven floor, --a shower of debris fell like light rain far and wide, whilst a thick and choking smoke blindly crawled overhead.

The "shot" had been fired, and Jim Nicholson's challenge was forgotten.

This was only one amongst several bits of gossip that chance had put in my way, and as pitmen always talk more openly down the pit than anywhere else I had no doubt that this represented an actual occurrence.

Shortly after this I met Mr. Pearson himself, and the impression I took away with me after our interview, abundantly confirmed the opinion I had previously formed on his character.

There was to be a demonstration shortly in connection with the Jubilee of one of the Miner's Funds, and both he and I had been asked to take part in it.

The Rector, on the other hand, I found, was not invited to share in the proceedings, and I [94] gathered from Mr. Pearson's veiled allusions that he regarded the incident as in some sort of a triumph for himself.

Our talk, which had at first been merely concerned with the details of the demonstration, became gradually more general, and it was evident that Mr. Pearson was very well satisfied with the progress he had already made, and inclined to rate the ability of Mr. Pulleyne (against whom it was easy to see he had a distinct prejudice) very low.

The rumour that the Rector and himself had been at Oxford together was quite correct he said, but their connection had not been a pleasant one, he hinted indeed that he had not received very generous treatment from him, and so, as it was evidently a distasteful topic, I forebode from further curiosity at the time, though I must confess I took measures to gratify it later by mentioning the matter to the Rector, and extracting some particulars from him which did not at all, I was pleased to find, bear out Mr. Pearson's narration.

Mr. Pearson, as our talk progressed, proclaimed [95] himself a “modern of the moderns,” stigmatizing the Anglican ritual as reactionary, and asceticism as the “cast clout” of the mediævalism, totally unbecoming to the mood of to-day. He was all for organization: for bringing the Churches into closer touch with the people; for democracy, in short, in connection with all institutions whether lay or clerical. He advocated disestablishment and disendowment, he said, because with its specious air of antiquity, its feudal endowments and ordered hierarchy, the Church of England was to-day a clog to progress and a hindrance to reform.

He was an ardent co-operator, moreover, and when finally I took my leave of him I could not but feel impressed by the energy and practical directness of the man, though I confess I felt a certain regret at his choice of a profession, for the self-sacrificing view of life which one looks for in a clergyman – no matter what denomination he may be of – was in him vastly conspicuous by its absence. I should mention, by the way, for it was [96] of importance subsequently, that he lent me a book that same evening bearing on one of the many subjects touched upon in our conversation. This book I still have, for I never had an opportunity of returning it to him.

CHAPTER IV

EPISODE THE SECOND

[97] WITHIN a day or two after the interview recorded in the last chapter, I was unexpectedly summoned home on account of the serious illness of my father. He had been ailing for some time, and at last, when it was too late, had allowed my mother to send for the doctor. ‘Angina pectoris’ had been the report, and though he might linger on some months longer, death was possible at any moment.

Contrary to the physician’s opinion, however, my father shortly made a wonderful rally, and actually persisted in coming down stairs again, so [98] that I had even packed my portmanteau to return Northward, when a sudden swoon on his part revived our gloomiest anticipations.

He was carried upstairs unconscious, and died within an hour. As one of his executors I was busily employed for some considerable period afterwards, and five months had elapsed before I could again think of returning to my work in the North.

All through this long period of care and anxiety my thoughts frequently recurred to Mr. Pulleyne. I wondered how he was progressing, whether he was still as much in love with his work as ever, or whether discouragement had continued to blight his early hopes.

Just before I left I received a ragged, ill-written epistle from the Heckler, from which I gathered that matters had not gone at all well with the Rector lately, and that physically his health was much impaired.

The note, however, was so full of extra matter about the pit, his “saplings,” a recent reduction [99] of wages, and the probability of a strike, that exactly what had brought matters to a head, and how far the Rector was blameworthy was beyond me to determine.

The first person I saw, however, on arriving at the station was the Heckler himself, who was apparently seeing a greyhound off, not come to greet myself on my return.

I think I was mistaken on the point, though, for I was not more than about twenty paces from the station when I was suddenly accosted by him from behind.

“I’s come ti meet thoo,” he cried, as he grasped me by the hand, “ti gie thoo a bit o’ welcome back again, for thoo’s almost a stranger here noo, but I was bound ti see that the guard was takin’ proper care o’ that greyhound pup, for he’s easy worth £50 ye ken. An’ hoo’s aal wi’ thoo?” he enquired as he wrung my hand again.

Having duly replied and made the proper enquiries in my turn, I asked for some news of the Rector.

[100] “I was just coming ti that,” he said, as he drew me somewhat aside, his face assuming his expression of mysterious responsibility, “an’ it’s a bad business for him – ye ken whom I mean, the priest,” and he nodded vaguely in the direction of the rectory.

“I divvn’t mind lossin’ my brass ower him, an’ that’s clean gan noo any ways, but I do object ti not hev’in’ had a run for my dollars – an’ a canny lad like him too.”

“Thoo’s been awa’” continued he in explanation, “an’ mevvies thoo disna ken, but thoo’ll be properly horrified – same as I was myself—when thoo hears that thor’s a lass inside ov his hoos wiv a bairn. I divvn’t suppose that the priest has ivvor had ony dealings wiv her; in fac’ his hoos-keeper tell’t my missus that he’d nivvor clapped eyes on her before, but findin’ her leanin’ on his gateway late one afternoon four or five days back, lookin’ tarr’ble faint-like an’ strange seemin’, he takes her inti the hoos ti gie her a bit rest an’ some refreshment, when doon she flops on the floor, an’ [101] sae at the finish there was the doctor sent for, an’ anither little stranger brouth inti the world. It seems from what’s said that the poor lass was come here on her ways seekin’ the lad that done her the harm, an’ as she’s better quality than what the lads here ‘ud be after, folks’ tongues is waggin’ and scandalizin’ the priest. She’s a furrinor seemingly, from her way o’ talkin’ – mair like yorsel an’ the priest than us hereabout, an’ hes come a lang journey from the South somewhere. Ay, an’ aal the wives will be at it noo, I’s warn’d, clockin’ awa’ like a passel o’ hens. But what stirs me the most is to see the Methody gannin’ prancin’ roond like a warhorse, his nostrils just liftin’ wi pride.”

“It’s unfortunate, perhaps,” said I thoughtfully in reply to his narrative, “and very unpleasant, but in a week’s time she will be able to be moved, I suppose, and there’ll be an end of the talk, I hope, when she goes away, poor thing. It seems to me disgraceful,” I added, “that a man cannot act like a Christian gentleman without [102] all the senseless people of the place making a scandal out of it.”

“It’s human natur,” replied the Heckler, sententiously, “just human natur – a tarr’ble curious kind ov a cattle, but the little priest, he’s ower kind an’ good for this world, an’ not near aad-fashioned enough, an’ that’s the truth. Wey, if he’d been clivvor noo, he’d ha’ just waved his hand at the lass hangin’ on the gate, an’ shouted oot, ‘Hadawa my canny lass, hadawa; if thoo wants any assistance gan ti the Methody, who lodges I’ the big white hoos, an’ he’ll help thoo.’ If he’d done that noo, he’d hev trapped the Methody nicely, I’s warn’d, an’ then mevvies,” continued he with a sigh, “I’d hev wined my brass back after all.”

This extremely practical suggestion fairly set me smiling. "Well," I said, "it's too late now, but I must go in and have a talk with the Rector, and see what can be done."

Bidding the Heckler adieu for the present, I set off for my lodgings, bethinking me that I had [103] better have something to eat, and rid myself of travel stains before calling upon Mr. Pulleyne.

It was nearly dark as I approached my old rooms, and I was just in the act of putting down my bag in order to open the door, when I was accosted from behind. "Good evening," a keen voice said, and turning I recognized Mr. Pearson. "Good evening," I replied, thinking he was looking unusually belated. "Perhaps you will be going along to the Rectory shortly," he said, "Mr. Pulleyne's not been at all well since you've been away apparently, though 'tis said he refuses to see the Doctor or anyone else. I wonder what is precisely the matter?" and he peered at me meaningly.

"He's knocked himself to bits with overwork and worry," I answered shortly, "he's a saint, or next door to it, and that's what's the matter with him". "A curable disease, though, a man of the world might say," sneered my opposite, and a very nasty and triumphant smile shewed in the gleam of his eye, "and indeed, it is publicly [104] reported that he has recently taken speedy means of curing it." "Good-night," said I abruptly, as I stepped inside and shut the door to with a slam, for had I stayed without I feared I should have had to strike him in another moment.

I sat myself down to supper, fuming with an indignation which soon gave way to a great uneasiness concerning the condition of my friend, for soon I had come to consider him in spite of the slightness of our acquaintanceship, so much had the charm of his personal goodness appealed to me, and so greatly had the thought of his unmerited isolation affected my imagination.

After washing, and changing my clothes, I sat down to partake of some supper, wondering all the while what I could say to Mr. Pulleyne, and how I might best advise him in the somewhat awkward circumstances of the case.

I had addressed a query or two to my landlady, who was, as I was well aware, one of the greatest gossips of the village, and she had at once overflowed with a pent up steam of general

hearsay [105] and vulgar talk. “Everybody,” she averred, “was ‘scandalizing the poor young man;’ not but what she thought he was being unfairly treated, but he wouldn’t listen to no reason in the matter, and him being unmarried, it wasn’t in human nature not to talk about the situation. One of the Churchwardens had spoken to him about the woman, and all he got for a reply was the question, ‘whether he was a Christian man?’ Even the ‘commoner sort’ had begun to revile him, it seemed, and she couldn’t make out what would be the end of the matter.”

It appeared that the Rector had been passing through the village late one night, and had endeavoured to separate a drunken pitman and his wife—both well-known ne’er-do-wells and drunkards—who were fighting out their differences in the open air.

All he got for his zeal, apparently, was abuse from both of them, and the woman had yelled after him, as he sadly gave up his attempt at peacemaking. “Thoo’d better gan hame thyself, an’ [106] mak’ that poor hussy o’ thine an honest woman afore thoo cooms setting up thy gob ‘twixt a wedded man an’ his wife. For shame o’ thyself!”

All this of course furnished me with additional food for reflection, and I sat thinking on all I knew of the Rector and Mr. Pearson at great length. I should say that I had extracted at one time and another some details of Mr. Pearson’s career at Oxford which appeared to have been somewhat summarily terminated at the end of his 3rd year. There had been a woman in the case, and I gathered that he had been sent down, though it appeared he had married her afterwards, (at any rate the Rector, determined to put the best aspect on the affair he could, believed he had done so) and taken to teaching in the first instance for his livelihood. What happened to her afterwards; whether she had died, or, the union proving unhappy, they had separated, the Rector did not know, nor indeed did he vouchsafe more than the barest information to me, for he was evidently very desirous that nothing he might let fall should [107] damage the Methody, but I had put two and two together, as the saying is, and some vague remarks of Mr. Pearsons himself had corroborated the result I had arrived at.

It was likely then in the present unfortunate condition of affairs that Mr. Pearson would make the utmost use of his opportunity. I had even gathered that Mr. Pearson and the Rector, though of

different Colleges, had had rooms in the same set of lodgings at Oxford, and that the latter had been in some way connected as a witness presumably, in the charge against him. This was only surmise on my part, however, but if true, it was clear that the Methody would be likely to make the utmost use possible of the present scandal and make matters as disagreeable as possible for Mr. Pulleyne. By stealthy hints and dexterous whispering he might be able to do a great deal of mischief: eventually perhaps he might even force him to exchange his living. The Rector, as I knew full well, was far too good a Christian to retaliate, witness his having extorted [108] a promise from myself of secrecy on what little information he had accorded me.

I sat so long reflecting on all this that I had quite forgotten my intended visit to the Rectory; suddenly, however, a hurried stumbling sounded on the stairs, and I felt instinctively it must be the Heckler come round to enquire what I had learnt from the Rector, and what was my view of the general situation.

He knocked, but without waiting for a reply, burst hastily into the room. “Ho-way,” he cried, as he saw me still sitting over the supper table, “ho-way wi’ thoo, an’ gan an’ see him, for he’s terr’ble bad the neet, warse nor I’ve seen him yet. I’ve constitooted myself sort ov overman tiv him lately, but I’ve never seen him sae bad as he is the neet. He keeps the windie ov his libiarie open, ye ken, ov an evenin’ sae that I’ve had a good look at him frae the outside noo an’ again to see hoo he’s keepin up. But the neet he was warse than ever before; he cudn’t bide still an instant; noo he wud try to calm hissel wiv a [109] bit o’ readin’, but twes no use – doon the book wud drop on the floor, an’ there he wud leave it lyin’; then he wud start up an’ walk about again, then sudden like stay dead still I’ the middle o’ the room as tho’ he’d fallen intiv a sort of dwam, but stannin’ up aal the while like a satty, an’ at the finish he started taalkin’ tiv hissel – such strange-like talk too, as wes quite uncanny.

“At one time it wes that he wes a puir, weak, hirplin’ creature, no bettor than weeds an’ sic-like uselessness; at anither he said ‘at it wes sair, sair on him—he hevin’ done his vary utmost, an’ yet accomplish’t nowt; an’, lad, the tone o’t wes fearfu’ sad, right frae the heart ov him,” and here the firm curve of the narrator’s mouth trembling into softness, he turned towards the window for a moment.

Before I could say anything – with a quick impatient shake of his head he had turned towards me again, and continued: “Ay, it wes sair wark ti hev ti stand an’ listen, an’ be able ti do nowt; [110] it wes jist like the time when the wife an’ I lost wor first born bairn – for then the poor wife lay tossin’ an’ turnin’, an’ turnin’ an’ tossin’ the neet through, noo grettin’ tiv herself, noo spreadin’ her arms aboot searchfully, then moanin’ “Gaen, gaen,” an’ whiles, “deid, deid.” I cud do nowt I’ the way o’ comfort nowther time, but had just to bide quiet, sae there I stayed watchin’ him, an’ watchin’ him, for I feared he might do hissel a mischief at the finish. Weel, at the last he sits hissel doon a bit quieter like, an’ when he gets up again he lights a candle, an’ heavy-footed gans ti his writin’ desk an’ sits hissel doon quiet like. But I hev a grave doot,” said the Heckler, with a shake of his head, “that anither evenin’ ov it alone will finish him off aaltegithor.”

I stood reflecting. Some lines of Browning were haunting me. I could not put memory’s finger upon the passage for a moment or two; then I recollected, and stepping to the bookshelf took down the volume which curiously enough opened to my hand at the very passage.

[111]

The trial test

Appointed to all flesh at some one stage

Of soul’s achievement – when the strong man doubts

His strength, the good man whether goodness be,

The artist in the dark seeks, fails to find

Vocation, and the Saint forsakes his shrine.”

“Come then,” said I, putting the volume in my pocket, “we must be going,” and so saying I led the way downstairs, “I wunner,” said the Heckler thoughtfully as soon as we were out in the open air, “whether it wud be ov any use my givin’ him one o’ my aad bitch’s pups noo. She’s just had a gran’ litter o’ pups, has the aad lady, an’ there’s one o’ them that for size an’ quality is a proper marvel, -- just perfection, nae mair, an’ nae less. Mevvies it wud divert him a bit ti hev the pup ti play wi’, an’

work on wi', an' distract him frae thinkin' ower much ov hissel. Wey, it'll mevvies turn oot gud enough ti win the Waterloo Cup in anither three years. What does thoo think?" he enquired of me tentatively.

Even in that moment of anxiety I found it difficult to control a smile, as I replied: "I'm afraid it wouldn't be of much avail just at the [112] present time." "Mevvies no," he replied slowly, "I divvn't believe he's ower much ta'en up wi' dogs nowther, for I divvn't think he's ivvor got so much as a fox terrier pup about the place, an' yet it's a pity too, for I'll lay odds there's not anither pup I' the whole ov England that can marrow that yen o' mine."

"By the way," I said as we walked slowly onward, "what's happening to that poor woman? Is she still going to stay on at the Rectory?" "Ay, it would seem sae," replied my companion, "for my missus was up last night hevin' her tea wi' the hooskeeper—she's tarr'ble thick wiv her, ye ken, an' wes axin' about the furrinor woman, an' the bairn, an' all, an' it appears she'll not be gannin' for a bit. It seems frae what she's let oot when delirious, an' what she's said ti' the hooskeeper, that she's searchin' for her man, an' she believes he's somewhere about here i' the North. His name's Edward Fairchild, seemingly, an' he's a schoolmaster, or Methody, or such-like, but there's no one about here that hes a name like that as I ken ov."

[113] "Edward Fairchild?" I echoed, "Edward Fairchild, why I know that name somehow. A schoolmaster? Methody? Why, yes, stay a minute, no,"—for my brain was not yet done with wonderment—"yes, yes, it must be." For all at once, and in a glare of light as it were, memory waved before my eyes the open fly-leaf of that book about 'Co-operation' which the Methody had lent me. The whole scene, totally obscured in my mind for the time, was now lit with light as though on a theatre's stage, and I even remembered the exact words which had passed between us.

"I hope," I had said, "that you have written your name in it, for a book collector is notoriously careless of another's rights, and the absence of your name might eventually prevail over a bad memory."

“Oh, yes,” he replied carelessly, “my name’s in all my books.” I had my finger upon the flyleaf at the moment, and I looked upon the page, “Edward Fairchild,” was all I saw in the way of an inscription. I mentioned the matter, and he, [114] slightly confused, had quickly answered, “Oh, that was my name formerly, but I changed it to Pearson, my mother’s name, for family reasons.”

“Mun be what?” enquired the Heckler gazing at me half compassionately, as I stood still in the endeavour to piece the puzzle together in my mind. Carried away by the strange coincidence of name and profession, I momentarily forgot all caution, and jumping to an immediate conclusion, replied, “Why, the same as our Methody himself! But look here,” I added, peremptorily checking exultation’s flight, “not a word of this at present. I may be mistaken after all. Several points must be cleared up first, and I think the best plan will be for me to see the housekeeper, and persuade her to let me have an interview with the poor woman herself. So I’ll just leave you here for the present,” I continued abruptly, as I opened the Rectory gate, “and I hope it may be good news I’ll have to report when I return.” So saying I turned and walked hastily up to the back door, leaving the Heckler scratching his head and [115] muttering to himself: “By! But this beats me oot an’ oot. Wow! But she’s a puzzlor.”

Having knocked at the back door I was admitted by the housekeeper, who shook her head woefully as I enquired after the Rector’s health. “He’s just a picter of what he shudn’t ought to look like,” she replied sadly, as she fumbled for the corner of her apron, her lip dipping tearfully, “Sakes alive, but I wish he’d never come to these cruel, outlandish parts o’ the world!” “Look here,” I said suddenly, for I felt there was no use in beating about the bush, “I have an idea I can be of some use to your master, but first of all I must see the young woman upstairs for five minutes.”

“You’ll not be for doing her any harm?” she said dubiously, eyeing me suspiciously over the corner of her apron, “for though she’s been the cause of ill being spoke about the master she’s none so bad herself, poor thing, and the baby’s a blue-eyed jool, that he is”. “No, I certainly intend her no harm,” I replied, “in fact, I think I may [116] possibly be of help to her, but in the first instance, I am hopeful of being of some real use to Mr. Pulleyne.” “Well,” said she slowly, “Ill go and tell her a gentleman would like to speak with her, and if she’s agreeable you can go upstairs, for she’s up and

about, and putting on flesh everyday now. But what is it you will have got to say to her?" queried the housekeeper, starting to go, but halting again as she remembered her curiosity. "That's too long a story now," I answered, "and Time's precious."

After a few minutes I was admitted to the room upstairs, and found a pale-faced, wistful-looking woman, who was evidently awaiting my arrival with some nervousness. After apologizing for my intrusion, I plunged boldly into the object of my visit, and this was briefly what I elicited.

After sundry questions asked and answered, it became clear that Mr. Pearson was really the man she was in search of. I learnt, somewhat to my surprise, for I had scarcely believed that part of Mr. Pulleyne's information, that she had been [117] actually married to him, shortly after his expulsion from Oxford, at a registrar's office, but that he had always regarded her as a clog upon himself, as having in effect, spoilt his career, and had kept the marriage as secret as possible.

Finally, they had had words, and the quarrel had terminated in his suddenly deserting her.

She thought she had been querulous perhaps, for after her boy had been born she had never regained her strength, but it was cruel to leave her as he did. Money she had from time to time received anonymously through letters directed to her mother's house at Oxford, whither she had returned after his desertion of her.

Her mother, however, had not been kind, had constantly urged her to set out after her runaway husband, and finally, when the beginnings of another life stirred within her, she had followed up what clues she could obtain, set out upon her travels, and was stricken down just as her last money had run out.

She knew that her husband had thought of [118] becoming a minister in the Methodist connection, if it was possible, but was not aware whether he had succeeded. All she had gleaned in the way of information was that he was living somewhere in the remote north-east of Northumberland, either teaching or engaged in some ministerial work or other. This was all so circumstantial that there could no longer be any doubt. I thought, as she concluded her story, and,

wiping the tears from her sad, care-worn eyes, asked me if I could give her any news of her husband, and “oh, did I think he would be glad to see her, and would he be kind to her again?”

I passed hastily over her interrogatory, for I feared I could scarcely answer in the affirmative, but I could safely assure her that I thought I knew where her husband was to be found, and that I would do my best to bring him to her, though first I must have some talk with the Rector on the subject.

Therewith I slipped away, and descended to the library below, where I found Mr. [119] Pulleyne seated at his desk, apparently employed in writing.

As I approached him I saw that the paper in front of him was quite blank, and that his complexion, save for a sallow tint, might well have matched it in colour, but with the joy of my discovery hot within me I recked little of that now, and I barely restrained myself in time from giving him a hearty smack on the back.

“Look here,” I cried impetuously, after our first greetings were over, “I’ve made a discovery. That poor girl upstairs whom you have been so good to, is none other than the young Oxford woman on whose account Mr. Pearson was sent down, as you told me yourself. By the way, his name is Edward Fairchild, not Pearson, though you left me to find that out for myself. It’s a rare find,” I cried enthusiastically, “ain’t it? I never knew a man better hoist with his own petard.”

“My friend,” he answered slowly, as stretching out his thin hand, he turned his ringed, lacklustre eyes upon me, “I thought it must be her, [120] yet I did not like to press her for her story, nor indeed did I want it to be known.” “Not want it known,” cried I in astonishment, “and why not? After all he did marry her, so he needn’t fear dismissal from his office. It will be a fine lesson for him, and can’t help but teach him humility, and altogether do him a world of good.” “But you forget the poor woman,” he admonished me gently, “I fear he scarcely regards her with any great affection. That is the terrible result of such a sin as his, that it kills love. Now, if she becomes the innocent means of his reputation being injured, and himself hindered perhaps in his profession and career, any affection he may still possess for her will probably die down and come up again as hate.

“On the other hand, if we wait till she has grown quite strong and has regained her looks, then quietly and secretly bring them together to a conference, I believe all may yet be arranged and turn out for the best. She can go South again, and he quietly follow; their separation and subsequent [121] reconciliation can easily be accounted for and explained away, and when they return together here, no one save yourself and myself need know anything against them.”

“Oh,” cried I, distressed to think that the opportunity of revenge was to be let slip thus, “but think of the good a public exposure would do him. I’m not sure that he wouldn’t even think from your acting in that manner that you were somewhat afraid of him.

“Calamity’s good for that type of man; it would be the making of him, just think,” –I was continuing hotly, when a sudden disturbance sounded at the window, and amidst a rattle of window blinds, a burly form was seen to thrust itself through the open sash. In another moment the Heckler stumbled headlong into the room, evidently labouring under a great excitement. “Hurroo for thoo,” he cried joyously, “hurroo for Maister John, he’s gotten him; he’s fixed up that Methody chap properly! I’ve heard the whole [122] thing through, an’ I ken aal about it, never fear for that.”

He advanced straight towards me, as he spoke, laid his left hand encouragingly upon my shoulder and with his right searched for my hand, which, having found, he wrung pitilessly, exclaiming joyfully the while, “Ay, thoo’s cotched that beggor ov a Methody fine, by gox, an’ noo we’ll just warm him; ay, we’ll pay him for his impittance. Just thoo leave him to me, sor,” he cried, turning to the Rector, whose hand, notwithstanding a little preliminary adroitness, he soon possessed himself of, and gave a hearty shake too, “nivvor fear,” he said, as Mr. Pulleyne faintly endeavoured to relieve himself, and commenced to plead again on the Methody’s behalf, “nivvor fear, I’ll skin him for thoo.”

“But, my friend,” commenced the Rector, in that low appealing voice of his, “for you are my friend, as I am well aware, and I thank you for the interest you have shown on my behalf, suppose now, you yourself had done something you were [123] ashamed of in the past,” –“ But I hev’n’t,”

retorted the Heckler, quickly, "I hev'n't, I'll stand by it aal, thick and thin, --ivvor since I got marrit on the aad missus I've thought o' no one else."

"But suppose you had done something of which you were ashamed," insisted Mr. Pulleyne, "you must know of others, for example, who have spoilt their lives in some manner, and are you not sorry for them? Would you not help them if you could? Is it not better to set a broken leg than to cut it off? To save a life rather than see it drown?"

The Heckler began to look uncomfortable, he shifted his weight to one foot, and scraped the back of his calf with the other.

"Again, consider the evil effect it might have upon other," continued the Rector. "Suppose it were known that he had behaved very badly to the girl upstairs before he made her his lawful wife, do you not think that it would have a bad effect upon his congregation? Upon those who [124] have been used to respect him, and to regard him as an example of a godly life?"

"Mevvies," replied the Heckler, showing signs of recovery at the prospect of an argument, "mevvies, but what then? Wey, I'll tell thoo; the story'll get oot, thae sort of things always does, an' then where will thoo be wi' yor example ov a godly life? Wey, thoo' 'll just be done, it'll be warse nor ivvor for hev'n' been kep' secret an' not let gan into the newspapers an' things, for that's what terrifies the most o' folks, an' keeps em' straight, newspapers, publicity, an' the pollis.

"No, no, let it alone; leave him ti the Heckler ti fettle, an' I'se warn'd but I'll hammer him properly."

The rector looked appealing at my companion, who forthwith by a folding of the arms, and a tilting of the head backward, assumed a position indicating the most truculent obstinacy.

No one spoke for some seconds, then the Rector broke the silence, as, leaning forward and [125] touching the Heckler gently on the arm, he made a last appeal.

"My friend, I am not strong at present, and I cannot contend with you in argument," —here I thought I perceived the Heckler's rigidity to relax somewhat—"but I would be infinitely obliged if

you would keep silence on the matter for at least twenty-four hours. In the meantime I will write Mr. Pearson a note, and will be much obliged if you will kindly leave it at his lodgings in passing.

“Weel,” replied the Heckler slowly, “I divvn’t mind haudin’ it in for twenty-four hours, if that’s aal, an’ I’ll leave the “billy-doo” fast enough if thoo’ll sit doon an’ write it straight away, for I canna bide to think o’ that chep ower there thinkin’ he’s got the bettor o’ the lot ov us, an’ aal the time I have him i’ the hollow o’ ma hand.”

“Thank you,” said the Rector simply, and forthwith, dexterously escaping a second visitation of hand-shaking, sat himself down to write the note. He sealed it, and handed it quietly to the Heckler, who took it gravely, acknowledging the [126] receipt with a salute, then with an anxious glance at me which plainly said, “Ho-way outside, an’ talk this job ower wi’ me,” he backed out of the room.

I did not remain long, for I could see that Mr. Pulleyne was worn out by our interview, and that rest was of supreme importance to him, and moreover I was now longing for some conversation with the Heckler, so after a few words expressive of my sympathy and admiration I said “good-night,” and hastened after him. “Anyway,” thought I to myself, as I walked swiftly down the drive, “the Rector must benefit from the discovery, for something must out, and whatever else results his reputation will be enhanced and the other’s diminished. He’ll soon pick up now; no doubt of it; -- even a saint must feel relief when an enemy’s malice misses fire. By Jove, I’ve forgotten to leave the Browning! After all, perhaps, I don’t know that I could have presumed”—

“Halloa!” I cried, suddenly startled from my [127] reflections, as in the gathering darkness I found I had almost trodden upon the Heckler, who was “squatting on his hunkers” with his back against the trunk of a felled tree, endeavouring apparently to write a note with a quarter-inch stump of lead pencil.

“Look here,” said I, “how was it you knew all about the matter? I suppose you were listening at the window all the time, eh? “Ay,” he replied, unabashed, diligently moistening an inefficient point of pencil. “I wes that, an’ I’ll tell thoo hoo it wes noo. I thought I’d watch ower the priest like a deputy while thoo wes awa, sae I’ve squatted myself for two or three times before now down on my

hunkers below that same windie I cam' in thro' at the finish, an' there I stayed the night, right thro' yor discovery an' aal, till I had the hang o' the whole business. Yor ower young, thoo sees, for a job o' this calibry, an' I wes dootful he would torn thoo roon' his fingers just as he liked."

"Well," I retorted, "and what's he done [128] with you? It didn't take long to make you 'sign the pledge.' "

"Canny, lad, canny noo, bide a wee," replied the Heckler, accompanying his words with that quaint contortion of his left eye-lid that did him service for a grin, "mevvies I give in tiv him on the matter ov haudin' my tongue for fower-an-twenty hours, but I didn't say nowt about not writin' a "billy-doo" as weel's himself. No fear, lad, thoo doesn't catch the Heckler wiv a bit salt on the tail; he divvn't run straight for the gate like puss⁹ on a dark night." "What is it you're writing?" I asked curiously, peering down upon a dirty half sheet of paper evidently torn off an ancient letter of his own. "I's just preparing' ov him for the surprise like, an' sae I've just wrote down a quotation frae a tale Geordie Smith, that lang-nebbed devil, ye ken, him that wes across in Ameriky a while back—wes tellin' tiv us the other [129] night about a sartin place oot west where the priests wes aal on 'em a bad lot. Some man or anither—an' he mun hev been a proper comic that feller—just sent the lot of 'em a "billy-doo" wi' but these words written i' th' inside, "Aal is dis cuvvor'd—fly!" an', by gox, the next Sunday as ivvor wes there wesn't a single priest ti be found i' the whole place, nowther High nor Low, nor tall nor short, nor Roman nor Methody, nor nowt avai' the black coat line, an' I's warn'd but the Heckler will hev the Methody oot o' this i-dential village before nex' Sunday the same fashion." Here handing me up the scrap of paper he winked at me once again with the slyest gravity, and began to whistle softly.

I opened the paper carefully, and therein found the following misspelt, enigmatic message, "Aal is discuvvor'd – fly! Thoo'd best gan hyem an' tak thy wife an' bairn. Signed –Anti-hum-bug. Hooray!—

⁹ Puss, a hare, always runs for a gate when startled at night in a field; being White it probably attracts her attention. "The Heckler," being an old poacher (vide "Hoo 'twes" in "The Mark o' the Deil") was well aware of

“That’ll do the trick for him, eh?” chuckled my companion, intently noting the expression of my face, while I read the “billy-doo.”

[130] “It’ll make him feel uncomfortable, anyway,” I replied, smiling, as I handed him back his paper. “Ho-way then,” cried he, as he commenced to stride along the drive, “an’ we’ll drop these two valentines on him as we pass by his hoos, an’ if these divvn’t shift him, wey, either I’s not the Heckler, or there’s suthin wrang somewhere or anuther.”

“By the way,” I said, “I thought Mr. Pulleyne was looking a trifle more cheerful, in spite of his tiring interview with ourselves, when we left him to-night, and much better surely than when you saw him last night to judge from your description.”

“Ay, he’s picked up hissel wunnerfu’,” assented my companion, “well-plucked folks is just the same as well-plucked dogs, yence past the crisis, they’re aal right, an’ put on flesh wunnerful. You an’ me noo, we wes a sort ov a tonic tiv him the night, but I b’lieve that if we hedn’t dropped in on him sudden-like, an’ persisted on the right thing bein’ done—wey, I axially b’lieve [131] he’d hev left the Methody ti gan on as before, an’ tread on him the same’s ivvor. By! What a religion the priest’s got, hesn’t he noo? He’s like the martyr chap i’ the colored glass window i’ the church wiv a sort ov a yallow bonnet on his heid an’ the bonniest o’ smiles on’s face.”

“Yes,” I replied, “he’s a saint.”

My companion left the two notes at the Methody’s lodging with the most impressive injunctions to the servant girl that she should put them into Mr. Pearson’s hands at once.

“If you do shift the Methody, by the way,” I said, as we walked on, “you win your bet after all.”

The Heckler stood stock still for a moment, then, “Sink me,” he cried vociferously, “but sae I do! Hooray! Gie us yor hand,” he demanded swiftly, and, seizing it forthwith, conveyed his thanks in his usual unmistakable manner.

“But look thoo here noo,” he continued more calmly, “look thoo here. I didn’t gan ti shift him ti win my bet, but just because it wes [132] right an’ proper, an’ the fair thing ti do by him, when he’s behaved hissel sae shabbily by the priest that’s worth a baker’s dozen ov us aal rolled inti one. Thoo’ll bear witness ti that noo, if the priest hear tell owt about it? He enquired anxiously.

“Yes,” replied I, “I can certainly do that,” and therewith I said “good-night,” and went straight to my bed, for I was tired.

I slept so long and soundly that it was past ten o’clock before I descended to my sitting-room. As I came in through the door the first thing that caught my eye was a crumpled note placed conspicuously on the top of my loaf of bread, and at once the memory of the previous night came flooding through my sluggish brain. I opened it, and read in a glance the following telegraphic form of sentence. “Good morning, Sir, Horray! I’ve shifted him. He’s gan, wife an’ bairn an’ aal.”

“I’m glad he’s gone,” I thought, as I sat down to breakfast smiling over the Heckler’s tumultuous self-satisfaction, “and yet I’m sorry [133] for him too, in a way, for worldly success is all in all to a man of that stamp, and what he will find to do now I really can’t imagine, and I fear that poor little wife of his may have to suffer for his faults.”

After breakfast I went round to the Colliery Office, and was then at once occupied with business till late in the afternoon. On coming out I encountered Red Tom, and after an exchange of “good-evenings,” was passing on, when a sudden thought struck me, so I turned and enquired of him, “Well, and what do you think of the disappearance of the Methody, for I suppose you know he has bolted?” “Ay, ay, aa ken that,” replied he gruffly, “and aa cannot say as how aa’s owermuch surprised at it. Folks hes to get their livin’ as best they can, aa suppose, an’ if they hev’n’t got any intellecks, wey, the black-coat business gies ‘em bread an’ butter easier than most trades, but as for the gob they sets up about bein’ se much bettor than the rest o’ the world, wey, its aal doon-right foolishness, [134] an’, what’s warse, it’s lies –an’ here’s an instance to hand.”

“Well, the priest at any rate has shown himself superior to the general run of people,” I replied, “for there are not many men in the world, black-coated or otherwise, who would spare a vindictive enemy when chance has put him into their hands.”

Red Tom looked at me suspiciously from under his rugged brows, then answered slowly.

“Ay, aa heard the Heckler gobbin on about that an’ aal, but aa ken he’s his money on the priest, se natterally he cracks him up, but thoo, noo, mevvies thoo kens the right way o’t, an’ what aa wud like ti be at is this. Did the priest ken for sartin when he took the woman intiv his hoos that she wes the Methody’s wife, an’ did he still stick in, an’ nivvor let oot anythin’ that might damage the Methody’s trade? Mevvies the priest didna ken that folks were scandalizin’ him outside aal the while?”

“I can truthfully say “yes” to both enquiries,” [135] I replied, “he knew if not at the moment he let her in, at any rate within a day or two, that she was the same woman he had seen Mr. Pearson with in Oxford, formerly his mistress –afterwards his wife, and he told me himself how much pain, nay, almost torture, he had undergone because of the false and malicious reports that were spread about concerning him.”

“Then how does thoo account for it?” returned my companion with a near approach to heat, determined not to be foiled in his sceptical enquiries.

“Ordinarily speaking,” I said slowly, looking him full in the face, “I should, like yourself, seek for some explanation or motive in a case of such quixotic self-sacrifice as this, but as I have the privilege of knowing Mr. Pulleyne slightly, that is not necessary here, for in a word he is that rarest of men in this modern world – a Christian gentleman. Here, strange as you may think it, you have a man who actually believes, and has carried [136] into week-day life the tenets so many of us idly repeat on Sunday.”

I turned, as I finished speaking, for I was determined not to be drawn into an argument, and left Red Tom ruminating, and even impressed I was pleased to think, by the picture I had tried to draw.

CHAPTER V

LAST SCENE OF ALL

[137] THE magnanimity of the Rector as contrasted with the unscrupulous self-seeking of the Methody was at once the general topic of conversation in the village, now that the real state of the case was known, so that it was a real pleasure to me every evening to drop in at the Rectory and congratulate Mr. Pulleyne upon some fresh token or other of the esteem in which he has increasingly held.

His church on a Sunday evening, from being nearly empty, became almost crowded, and it was very natural under the circumstances that the colour should return to his cheek and the light to his eye.

[138] His progress, however, to physical recovery was but slow, for what he had gone through had overtaxed his strength, but he was perfectly happy, and when, shortly after the disappearance of Mr. Pearson I was offered a good appointment in the South of England, I did not feel in accepting it that there was any longer any need, so far as the Rector was concerned, of either myself or the Heckler to watch over him as we tried to do in the past.

It was hard, however, to say "Good-bye;" hard also to part with my old confidant, the Heckler, but I was resolved, as I told them both, to revisit annually the scenes of my apprenticeship in the season of my holidays.

The Heckler insisted on seeing me off at the station, and as we walked up and down the platform, waiting for the train, he beguiled the interval with confidential talk.

"Red Tom's properly stagnated at the priest's behaviour to the Methody," he began, "not that he holds wi' forgivin' a chap that's gone wrang, [139] for he says his motty is, punish a chap that's done the wrang thing, an' he winna do it again, an' that's the way ti cure wickedness, an' cruelty, an' the seven deadly sins an' aal. If a chap gans doon the pit wiv a Lucifer in 's pocket, or carries a

naked light i' the fiery parts, or 'shuts fast,' wey, gie him the sack for't, says he, straight oot, an' a skelp i' the lug foreby that. But still, he says, it wes a fine action on the priest's part, an' I b'lieve he hes got to hev a bit ov a respect for him, though its tarr'ble against his will, an' bang opposite tiv aal his principles.

"In fact, there's not a man i' the village noo," he concluded enthusiastically, "but says that the priest's a gran' fellow, an', by the way," he added in a lower tone, "I'm thinkin' I'll hev ti torn roon' an' gan ti Chorch myself. I wins my brass on him, thoo sees, i' the first place, an' one good torn deserves anuther, says I, an' in the second I think it'll please him ti see us i' Chorch."

The porter here shouted "train," and the station was at once alive with bustling people.

[140] There was no time for more conversation, and so with a last handshake I bade farewell to a sterling friend.

For the next few months I was kept so busily at work that the prospect of seeing the Rector again receded into distance. I corresponded with him, however, and also occasionally with the Heckler, so that I knew matters were steadily progressing in the right direction. The one point on which I was left in doubt was the state of his health; here he was absolutely silent, but some vague words in a letter from the Heckler had given me an uneasy feeling.

A warm letter from Mr. Pulleyne, however, suggesting a week-end visit, made me cast about in my mind for some means of again visiting the North: a Bank Holiday was approaching, I remembered suddenly and at once wrote and accepted his invitation.

He was waiting for me on the platform as the train drew up, and I could not fail but notice, notwithstanding the bright expression [141] of his face and the untroubled eyes, that he was looking exceedingly thin and frail; his garments seemed several sizes too large for him; as the Heckler remarked to me afterwards, "it was just as if he was wearing his big brother's clothes."

We had a long talk of old times that night, as also of the future, and I once more insisted on his taking a holiday. "It's all right now," I expostulated, "you've everything in capital order, nothing

could be better, and if you don't take some rest at once you'll be properly knocked up, and who'll be the better for that?"

"There were just some two or three little things he wanted to get done first," he pleaded, "and then he would think of it." I saw it was no use saying more, and with one so frail and gentle it seemed quite brutal to argue and insist, so I gave it up with a sigh, and turned the conversation.

"By the way, what about Red Tom?"

"Oh!" he cried almost eagerly in reply, a [142] flush of pleasure showing on his cheek, "I really believe he has lost his hostility, that is, to me personally. The Church he still regards with grave doubt and misgiving, but his tone has changed greatly, and there is much to be thankful for in that, for he has a good deal of influence with the men. We were brought together in the first place through my being placed on the Lecture Committee of the Mechanics' Institute: he threatened to reassign at first, but after I had been to see him, and explained that the lectures were entirely on social and industrial subjects, he consented to serve, and now he actually comes here occasionally to borrow books."

"Capital," said I, "that is indeed a good hearing, as they say over the Border. That is the greatest triumph of all, and I know how nobly you have earned your success."

"Thank you, dear friend," replied the Rector, as he stretched across from his chair, and shook me by the hand, "you know, perhaps, for without [143] out of your encouragement perhaps I might have at one time despaired of ever succeeding at all."

"Not a bit, not a bit!" I replied, "and, come now, I must not keep up an invalid any longer," so saying I marched him straight off to bed.

The next day was a Sunday; there was to be no sermon at the morning service, but there was nevertheless a good attendance. At the evening service the Church was almost crowded, a phenomenal circumstance in so far as my own recollection went, and the people most attentive.

I almost started as he gave out the text of his sermon, for it was one of two I had once made mention of to him, and I recognized at once as improbable that it was a mere coincidence, but rather a choice made by himself in his wonderfully thoughtful manner to convey to me his appreciation of what he was pleased to consider his obligation to myself.

The sermon was indeed a model, so simple, earnest, and direct. He held the people spellbound; [144] no movement broke the stillness, as his gentle, soft voice pleaded on behalf of righteousness, humility, and love, and when in conclusion he knelt to pray, from here and there I caught the sounds of quite sobbing from the women folk, and could plainly see a soft and a faraway look upon the harsh and toil-worn features of the men around me.

Mr. Pulleyne still continuing to kneel, long after we had all risen from our knees, a vague alarm spread through the Church. We looked at each other uneasily, then at the kneeling figure in the pulpit. Finally, two of the Churchwardens rose up and went slowly to the bottom of the stairs; there one of them tapped gently on the woodwork, but still there was no response. "He's dead," cried a woman near me, and at once went into hysterical sobbing. All rose up from their seats dimly possessed with this secret fear that the women had given voice to. A panic seemed almost imminent, when the Rector was seen to make a movement: opening his eyes, he looked [145] about him vaguely, then half rose up, and would have fallen had not one the Churchwardens mounted the steps nimbly, and supported him in his arms.

We carried him gently into the vestry, and sending at once for the doctor, stood about helplessly, having done what we could to make a couch for him on which to lie. He was terribly weak, his face thin and exhausted, but shining with a wonderful light beautiful to behold, and as I looked mournfully upon him I knew he was slowly and surely gliding away beyond our vision. He held out his hand to me, and said softly, "good-bye, dear friend," then closed his eyes like a tired child, and so passed peacefully away.

On the day of the funeral the pit lay idle, and the men from far and near attended at the grave side. The faithful Heckler was a pall bearer, and I saw Red Tom himself amidst the crowd of

mourners, in comparison with which the massed wreaths of white flowers, the “posies of pitmen’s pinks,” were but a feeble testimony of the respect [146] and love which the departed had so hardly won for himself by his patient persistence in well-doing.

On the simple tombstone erected to his memory by public subscription, the text of his last memorable sermon was carved by general consent, “What else is required of thee but to love mercy, and to shew justice, and to walk humbly with thy God.”