

Women of the Country eBook

Women of the Country

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WOMEN OF THE COUNTRY

CHAPTER I

When I was a child I lived in a small sea-coast town, with wide, flat sands. The only beautiful thing in the place—a town of no distinction—were the sunsets over this vast, level expanse. I remember them at intervals, as one recalls things seen passing in a train through a solitary landscape. I seem to see myself, a child with a child's imagination, standing on those wet sands, looking out over their purple immensity to the glittering line of the tide on the horizon, and to see again the sun in such a wide heaven that it seemed to have the world to itself, and to watch the changes in the sky as it sank, drawing with it the light. These great sands were dangerous at times, shifting in whirling and irresistible rushes of water, and changing the course of the channel, which was unaltered by the tide and which always lay out a gleaming artery from the almost invisible sea.

It was Sunday morning—a day observed with such precision in that little town that I was almost alone out of doors. A string of cart-horses, their day of rest well-earned, were being led across the sands from the level tide. The sand, uncovered by the sea for weeks, was bleached to an intolerable whiteness, but there was no wind to lift it, and the sea was tranquil, its little waves all hastening in one direction, like a shoal of fish making for a haven.

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The sun was already changing its early glory to heat. All the erections for amusement on the shore looked a little foolish in that solitude. I returned to the town along the empty asphalt roads and went with my companions to church. It was a church whose pretensions were high and genteel. Nothing of a personal nature was ever heard from its well-bred pulpit. The hymns were discreetly chosen to avoid excitement, and a conversion would have given offence. The minister for that day was a young man from the poorer end of the town, and I remember, even as a child, being disturbed by the announcement of his first hymn, "Rock of Ages." Even the organ blundered as it played so common a tune as Rousseau's Dream, and I, who learning counterpoint, feared to be seen singing so ordinary a melody, lest it should set me down as unmusical for ever. But soon my concern was with the unfortunate young man, for he was, I felt sure, quite ignorant of the habits of such congregations as ours, and would certainly offend our best people. For after that we read the parable of the Prodigal Son and sang, "The Sands of Time are Sinking." Then I forgot even this curious lapse from our Sunday custom, so clearly did the tale now begun by the preacher bring again before my eyes those inhuman sands, that lonely sky, and the unstayed power of the sea.

He had chosen, so he said, for his service this morning the favourite hymns, Scripture, and text of an obscure member of the congregation taken from earth in a strange manner the day before. For more years than he could remember, there had come and gone in that congregation an old blind man. He had heard him spoken of from time to time in a kindly contemptuous, way as "Old Born Again," and it was by that nickname he would speak of him this morning, but he could find no place in his intelligence for contempt, for Old Born Again now saw and knew the things which prophets and kings desire to look into.

He had lived for many years thus. He was a widower living with a married daughter, whose husband was a fisherman. She herself kept a greengrocer's shop of the poorer kind. She had five children, the eldest, a boy of thirteen, earning his living with her in the shop. He and his blind grandfather went round the district every day with a small cart and horse, selling their vegetables from house to house and thus enlarging their custom. The boy guided the horse and his grandfather helped with the selling and the money. In the early morning at the end of each week they drove the horse and cart to the sea's edge to wash them, making always for the steady channel which ran unaltering through the empty sand, when the tide was down. This morning they had gone as usual, and when they reached the water (the old man was blind you will remember, and his companion a child), they knew no difference in its appearance. A man who was gathering cockles at a distance knew and called to them, running towards them, but the old man did not see and the boy was intent upon guiding the horse and cart into the water.



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That night the sand, so unstable, had moved beneath the pressure of an unusual tide. The course of the channel had changed, and when the horse, treading confidently, had approached the edge, it stepped straight into deep water and, losing its balance, being also impeded by the cart, dragged with it the vehicle, the old blind man and the child to unavoidable death. Their bodies had been recovered but too late. "Let us pray," added the minister, "for the mourners."

To a child the fact of death is not very terrible, because the fact of life is not yet understood; but I never see in imagination the level and sad-coloured country of my childhood, stretching out of sight to the sea across an expanse of sand, a country whose pomp was in the heavens, whose hills were the clouds, without seeing also, journeying across it, an old blind man, a child, and a dumb creature, to disappear for ever under the wide sky, beneath the sun, within that great waste of waters.

The life of the poor, coloured outwardly with the same passivity and acceptance of their lot as the rest of visible nature, disciplined by the same forces which break the floods and the earth, remains for most of us querulous, ignoble, disappointing. What can be said suggestive or profound of the life that is born, that labours its full day with its face to the ground, from which it looks for its sustenance, and at last is carried, spent, to the square ground which holds the memory and remains of the dead.

Yet one day the sun which has risen, stirring the only emotion in the landscape, will rise upon a tragic, significant, or patient human group, for whom sun and seasons and the wide heavens are small, whose emotion is yet contained within the room of a mean dwelling and whose destiny is accomplished within a tilled field.

Under a sky that is infinite and a heaven accessible to all, the poor "work for their living," bowed always a little towards tragedy yet understanding joy, from the bitterness of life and death and the added anguish of ignorance drinking often their safety.

CHAPTER II

It was evening in the country at harvest-time, at that moment towards sundown when the light, about to be withdrawn, glows with a fulness of gold which makes it seem impossible that it can ever die. The earth was heavy with fruition, every square field brimful of the ungathered harvest. The heavy corn swayed almost by reason of its own weight. A thunderstorm would beat it prostrate in an hour. All the crops were full and good, some almost level with the low hedges. Heat seemed to radiate from the yellow mass, that scorching heat which in autumn never seems to leave the earth, but to linger about the ground, surrounding the responsive and standing corn. But the day had brought no heaviness to the sky, blue without a cloud, only a grave and increasing heat, a sun which blinded the eyes and seemed to take no account of anything save its steady purpose of ripening the fruit and grain.



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Looking round one saw that it was not an impressive country. There were no hills, no grandeurs, no proximity to the sea. It was a country whose pageants were made, not by great heights or sombre woods, but by the orderly and coloured procession of the harvests; where one recovered the preoccupied sight of little children, seeing so much to absorb one near the ground that one did not seek the horizon; where matters were measured and done not by the clock but by the sun's height, by midday heat and darkness, by the lowing of cows or the calling of lambs.

A woman, well on the way to middle age, sat in the house-place of a small cottage on the white high-road. Everything had been done for the night, the pigs and pony fed; the cow milked and the milk strained; the churn cleaned and the cream standing. The hens had been driven in and were almost asleep on their perches. The wood was ready for the morning and the clock had been wound up. She had not had her supper yet she did not remove her sun-bonnet or yard-boots. She cut herself a slice of stale bread and a large piece of cheese, dipped a cup in the barrel of buttermilk and sat down on a low stool with the bread and cheese in one hand and the cup of milk in the other. She was evidently in great perturbation, for at times she forgot to eat altogether and sat with the bread and cheese suspended in her hand while she thought deeply. Her rather large plain features had a dignity of expression which was pleasing, though it betrayed a tendency to melancholy. She had no frown, for her blue eyes were of excellent strength and one does not sit up late in the country. She was tall and rather bony, a strong peasant woman.

Presently she rose, her supper still unfinished, and took from a shelf, from among a medley of herbs and medicine bottles, a penny bottle of ink with a pen sticking in it. Searching in a drawer of the round table she found a large envelope on which was written, "Giant pennyworth of note." She took from it one of the thin bluish sheets of paper, and sitting at the table, her sun-bonnet making a grotesque shadow behind her, she began to write. She wrote with little hesitation, urged by the strength of some feeling. Her handwriting was large and she made long loops to her g's.

*"Dear sir,—*Though you passed by my cottage yesterday you are so unknown to me by sight, that I have only just discovered who it was that was brought to such a pitiable condition before me. First, sir, let me describe to you what a sight I saw before me, when, hearing a great plunging and shouting in the road, I came out from the shippon to see what was the matter."I saw, sir, a strong, well-looking, well-dressed young man of twenty-six lying in the mud of the road, his foot in one stirrup of his horse, he, mad with drink cursing, first the poor horse (a very quiet stallion), then the road (a very easy one) and last, the Almighty God of love.

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The horse, dragged everywhere by the efforts of the young man to gain a footing, was rewarded for its patience when its master at last, by my help, regained his feet, by severe kicks in the belly, and I, a poor woman, was abused and called evil names. "Sir! if instead of cursing the good-tempered beast or the God of love above you, you had cursed the origin of such a spectacle as you then were, your clothes covered with mud, your mouth full of blaspheming, staggering about the road pulling at the mouth of your horse—*strong drink*—you would have been a more reasonable being. "What, sir, had the horse done to you? What had this poor woman done to you? What, sir, had your heavenly Father done to you, that you should fill your mouth with curses against us all? Your enemy was none of us, but that viper, *strong drink*." "O sir! shun your enemy I beseech you. I am a woman who has had no children, but, sir, if I had been the mother of so strong and good-looking a man as you, it would have broken my heart to see you lying there muddy and cursing, a poorer sight under God's sky than the poor dumb beast that bore you.—Your obedient servant,

Ann Hilton."

The woman folded and fastened the letter and then wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron. She looked round the room as if to see that everything was done and went to shut the door for the night. She looked out into the lane. The cottage a little lower down had a light in the window and here and there lights shewed along the road. The night when one can no longer work out of doors matters little in the country, yet the ample stillness with distant rustling sounds pleased her and she lingered. Two young men carrying shapeless bundles on their shoulders wished her good-night as they passed home from work. Everyone seemed to have finished with out of doors. Even the cat from the yard rubbed against her as it ran into the house, stealthily and crouching as if in fear. She turned indoors and lit the lamp, fastened the door with a wooden bolt and drew the blind before the diamond-paned window.

CHAPTER III

Anne Hilton was one of those women who have so little knowledge of the practical thoughts of those round about them, that they pass their lives half-disliked, partly respected, and mostly avoided. She had lived alone now for two years, her father, whom she had nursed, having died of the saddest human malady. He had ("as anyone might have had with such a daughter," declared the neighbours), harboured a great contempt for women, and though, being uninclined to tread the heights himself, he feared his daughter's uprightness of character, he had never lost an occasion of pouring scorn on her unpractical ways.

"Can you take it home for me, James?" would ask a neighbour, handing up a case of eggs to the cart, where James sat preparing to leave the market.

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“There’s no women in the cart,” James would reply, and supposed he had given the required assent.

The “round-about ways of doing things,” which had been the butt of her shrewd old father, had brought upon Anne a customary air of half-readiness, so that going in suddenly, she might be found with her bonnet on and her handkerchief on the table, but one perceived she was still in her petticoat, and was making a pie for dinner. Meals, indeed, she considered as things to be got out of the way, both her own, and, to their expressed discomfort, those of other people. She herself often ate them as she went about her work, pausing to take a spoonful from a plate on the table or from the saucepan itself.

Taking the Scripture as the literal rule of the smallest details of her life, she never wore a mixture of wool and cotton, as that was forbidden to the Jews, nor would she wear any imitation of linen for the same reason. In consequence, her clothes, which were of sound material, never looked common, but always out-of-date.

She could be got (not that many people had tried to do so) to do nothing quite like other people, not from perversity as some readily declared, or a desire to “be different,” but from inability to acquire the point of view from which the most ordinary actions are done. She took no money on Sunday, and this becoming known to her ne’er-do-well neighbours, they made a point of forgetting to come for milk on Saturday.

“You must tell your mother I never sell milk on Sunday.”

“Yes, Miss Hilton.”

“I’ll give you a little to go on with, but next week you must come for it on Saturday.”

And the child, having got what she wanted, would run off with the jug of milk and the money which should have paid for it, to repeat exactly the same offence the following week. Her reputation for queerness let her be considered fair game, and so convinced is the ordinary person that queerness is of necessity contemptible, that when she did anything which was unusual, its reason was never examined, nor did the possibility that it might be better done in that way occur to anybody. It was merely a new evidence of her oddity.

But it was especially in those points in which she felt herself moved by her religious convictions that she was most suspected. For in spite and over all her eccentricities of belief, she was genuinely religious, having the two great religious virtues, charity in judgment and sorrow for the failures of others. But again she was “different,” as it is evident in this world that the failures of other people are entirely their own fault, and to be gentle in judgment is more than other people will be to you, and therefore unnecessary. So that, without being in intention a reformer, she suffered the suspicion

and dislike of the reformer, being, in fact, however she might disguise it, “different” from other people.



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This constant clashing with the steadfast ideas of every one had in time produced a timidity and secretiveness in the most ordinary actions, though where she believed herself to be directed by the Spirit, she had no lack of confidence and determination. If her movements could be kept secret she would do her utmost to make them so. She would send the reply to an invitation to tea half over the country before it reached its destination. Yet she would often pray in the prayer-meeting, and had been known to do unusually bold actions as a matter of course.

When it became known that she had written a letter to the son of Squire Nuttall asking him to give up his dissipated habits, which were the scandal of the country, no one was surprised, though many were shocked, and the poorer tenants of the estate alarmed lest some indirect wrath might fall upon them. When neither Squire nor son took the smallest notice of the letter she was blamed universally as having gone too far, as if this chorus of subterranean condemnation might somehow reach the Squire, who would know that the rest of his tenants had no hand in the matter nor sympathy with the writer.

On the contrary, though she was secretive with her near acquaintances, she would become greatly communicative with a casual vendor of books, or even a vagrant to whom she had given a cup of tea, that English equivalent for a cup of cold water. She was so fearful of falling behind in sympathy with sinners that she fell into the unusual error of treating them better than the saints. She was fond of doing small generousities, especially to children, who were half afraid of her but who would eat the big Victoria plums she gave them (leading them stealthily round to the back of the house to do so), and recognize that in some sedate and mysterious way they had a friend.

She would send presents to young people whose conduct had pleased her, gifts which always excited surprise and sometimes derision. Once she sent the substantial gift of a sack of potatoes to a young husband and wife, but the present became chiefly an amusing recollection, because, not having string, she had sewed the sack with darning-wool, with the result that it burst open on the station platform before it reached its destination.

A number of books, some of an old-fashioned theology, had been left to Anne by an aunt who had had a son a Methodist preacher. This aunt had also left her a black silk dress, which Anne had received with the joyful exclamation that she knew she was really a king's daughter. The books she read ardently and critically, underlining and marking, and with them also she embarrassed the vicar to whom she lent them. He, being a kind man, took the books and her comments in spite of his wife's indignation. They had formed the standard of her conversation, which was in ceremonial moments antiquated and dignified. Young women, and older men with wives to guide their perceptions, thought her absurd, but young men seldom did so. Perhaps that was because she seldom thought *them* absurd, and understood something of the ambitions with which their heads were filled. They were not, indeed, unlike those with which her

own was overflowing. Whenever she was angry it was at any meanness or injustice, which seemed to arouse in her a Biblical passion of righteous fury.



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A small meanness in another depressed her as much as if she had done it herself. Once she had walked five miles to deliver some butter and returned utterly dejected, not alone from fatigue, but because she had been offered nothing to eat or drink after her long tramp. It would have been useless to point out to her that she had gone on a purely business errand. It was one of those small meannesses of which she was herself incapable, and a proportion of warmth had died out of her belief.

"You know my sister Jane's son?" said a farmer's wife, who had stopped her trap at the cottage to pick up a lidded wisket in which some earthenware had been packed. "He's getting a good-looking young man and he's all for bettering himself. Well, he went and got his photo taken at Drayton and brought them in to show his mother. She was making jam at the time, and she's not an easy tongue at the best o' times. 'What's that?' she says; 'you don't mean to say that's a likeness o' thee? It looks fool enough.' She says she never saw 'em again, he went straight out and burnt 'em."

"He chose the wrong minit," said her husband beside her. "If he knew as much about women as I do, for instance."

"Just you mind," said his wife, warningly. "Why, Miss Hilton, whatever's the matter?" she added, catching sight of Anne's face.

"It is such a painful story," rejoined Anne. "I cannot bear to think of the poor young man's discomfiture."

"Well, I never!" ejaculated the farmer, as they drove away. "She's very good, but, my word, she's very peculiar."

"If she was *really* very good she'd try not to *be* so peculiar," retorted his wife, nettled at the failure of her story. "Did you ever see such a figure, with her dress all unbuttoned at the back showing her stays."

"She's not got a husband to fasten the middle buttons," said the farmer slyly. "She can't very well ask the pig, you know."

"Well, no, she can't," said his wife, good-naturedly; "but she tries my patience pretty often."

"That's not so hard as it sounds," said the farmer, looking innocently in front of him.

"Now, then," said his wife, "who wanted a potato-pie for supper?"

"I expect it was our Joseph," said the farmer.

"Not it," retorted his wife.



“Well, myself, I prefer women who aren’t so peculiar,” said the farmer. “Even if they’re not so good,” he added.

“Take care,” replied his wife. “That potato-pie isn’t in the oven yet!”

CHAPTER IV

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Anne Hilton got up when the sky was tinged with the sunrise, feeling anew the security of recovered daylight after the stillness of the lonely house during the night. There was little to put in order about her house. "Where no oxen are the crib is clean," she would often quote. There was absolute silence in the cottage, and as she opened the windows she saw the first thin smoke, the incense of labour, rising from other houses. The garden was fragrant with flowers, soon to be gathered and made into bunches for the market. The increasing glory of the sky promised another fine day for the harvest. She read the text on the Calendar and made it the subject of her prayer, which she uttered aloud with great fervour. Then she went down the stairs, which entered directly into the kitchen, and lit the fire for her breakfast. The day following was market-day, the day on which she depended for her living, and to-day the butter for which she was justly celebrated had to be made. Beyond the kitchen was a dairy with a stone shelf round three sides of it, a churn in the middle, large earthenware mugs of cream, and a great tub of buttermilk in the corner. The sunlight never fell on this side of the house until late afternoon, so that, though the day was already hot, the shadow of the dairy and the yard beyond with its shed for tools looked tranquil and cool.

Taking one of the tin pails and a milking-stool, she set off across the fields to the pasture in which her two cows were grazing. Everything within her sight as she passed—hedges, grass, corn, even the trodden path across the field—gleamed with the radiance of the risen sun. The sky, intolerably splendid and untroubled by clouds, was filled by the sun. Even the thin smoke from the cottages flickered and was illuminated. The trees had the leaves of Paradise. The world seemed to hold nothing but the sun, and to be bewildered.

At the end of two fields' length she stayed by the pasture-gate and rattled her can loudly. Two cows, gigantic against the sun, came slowly to the gate. She tied their tails in turn, and settled on her stool beside the dripping hedge. When her pail was full and frothing she set them free, and with a flick of her apron sent them from the gate, which she opened, setting her can down while she tied the hatch. Then she returned over the two fields with the full and heavy can. The pony snickered as she came into the yard, and the hens ran in a foolish crowd across her way. She scattered them as she went, setting down her burden within the dairy. She overturned the stale buttermilk into the pig's trough, fed the hens, and drove the pony into lane, throwing stones and tufts of grass after it until she saw it turn into the open gate of the paddock. It would be joined soon by others, and the boy who brought them would shut the gate. Then she scalded the churn anew, filled it, and settled to the slow turning which was to occupy the greater part of her morning. The churning became heavier and heavier. She raised the lid to scrape the butter from its sides, and as she did so heard footsteps coming across the yard, footsteps a little unusual in sound, each seeming to be taken very deliberately, and going straight forward without discrimination of the path.



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"Here's Mary!" said Anne Hilton aloud, turning towards the door and moving a chair. A woman of about forty-three, with a basket on one arm and walking with a strong stick, came steadily towards the door. She would have been comely if it had not been for a fixed frown which seemed odd on her pleasant, good-tempered face. She wore a print bodice, with a point back and front, and a short bunchy stuff skirt. Though Sarah was well in sight she took no notice of her, but walked straight on towards her, until the latter said with evident pleasure—

"It's you, Mary!"

"Yes!" answered Mary, with a slight start.

"How are you?"

"Quite well," said Sarah. "Here's the door." She laid her hand over that of the other woman and set it on the side of the post, at the same time taking her basket, which was full of eggs, and only partially covered by a cloth.

"How many?" she asked. "Have you counted?"

"Four dozen," replied Mary. "Have you finished your butter?"

"It's coming," said Anne, taking the handle again.

"Let *me* try," said Mary. "I often think I could manage butter nicely."

"Don't get too clever," said Anne. "You do a wonderful lot already. Stop and sit a bit, won't you? Let me see if you know where your chair is."

The woman stepped into the dairy, turned to the left of the door, and sat down without hesitation in the chair which Sarah had moved on first perceiving her approach, and as she did so one could see that the frown, so out of place on her steady and tranquil face, had an origin of tragedy. She was blind.

CHAPTER V

Mary Colton was one of the most esteemed women possible in any country-side. She had scarcely been beyond the few miles which surrounded her home, and since she was a girl had never set foot in a train. She had not been born blind, but had had her sight until she was seventeen, when an illness darkened the world for ever. "A pretty girl she was too," said those who remembered. Of the prettiness she retained now only the essence, that of her pleasant goodness, yet her appearance was still attractive in spite of her thick figure and contracted brows. She had not that unearthly exalted expression so familiar to one in the blind, who look upwards for the light and search in



vain. Rather, unless one looked narrowly, one would take her for a middle-aged woman of good health and steady temper, who was a little short-sighted. She used a stick out of doors, and when she went very long distances she took with her a small terrier, which warned her of the difficult parts of the road. But indoors she moved about freely, knowing to an inch how much room each piece of furniture occupied, and seldom knocking against anything as she moved about her work.



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She lived entirely alone and supported herself, not by any of the special kinds of work which are supposed generally to be possible to the blind, but by exactly the same means as other women of her age and class. All the work in the house was done by herself, even to the making of the toffee and bulls'-eyes, which she sold at the cricket-matches and fairs of the districts. She kept hens and turkeys, and worked in her garden, feeling her way about the beds and bushes with her feet. She sold the vegetables and the currants and gooseberries which grew in the little patch of garden, and her friend, Anne Hilton, carried her eggs to the market-town for her every week, where she disposed of them to a provision-dealer of the same denomination. Even the hen-run had been made by the blind woman, who was a continual source of astonishment and questioning from the neighbours. But in this wonder, she not unnaturally found a pathetic pleasure.

"How do you know when you've got all your hens in?" asked a child once.

"I count them at night when they're asleep on their perches," answered Mary, with a joyful little chuckle.

"But it's dark!" objected the child.

"So it is," replied Mary. "I didn't think of that."

She never referred to her blindness, and so complete a victory over misfortune and circumstance gained its fit respect in the country. No one considered that it was "doing a charity" to Mary to drive past her cottage on the way from market to give her news of a football match or fair about to be held in the district. Women would send their children on their way to school to give similar news, and the boy who brought her the roll of newspapers, which she sold at the station every morning, would often wheel her barrow for her. She had a large, clumsy chest on the frame of an old perambulator, in which she wheeled about her store of aerated waters, toffee, and newspapers. She would place herself at the gate of the cricket ground on Saturday afternoon. The sliding lid of her chest made a counter on which she set her scales and her neatly cut pile of paper for wrapping up the toffee. She had no rivals in the district, for the most avaricious small shop-keeper would have been ashamed to confuse or trouble the simple, good, courageous woman. Perhaps the most complete sign of her triumph over her disability was, that no one dreamed of calling her "Poor Mary." Like her friend, Anne Hilton, she was a member of the little wayside chapel, which, with all that it meant, made a centre of warmth and fellowship for both lonely women.

CHAPTER VI



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So placid and unimpressive was the country which lay about Anne Hilton's cottage, that in the lanes which branched from it one seldom thought of any other season than that of spring. Even in winter, when a few shrivelled berries clattered in the leafless hedges, and the old beech leaves dangled until the new ones swelled in the stem, one thought of the beauty of spring, when the hedges would be full of hawthorn, and the banks of cowslips, when cherry-blossom would fill the orchards, and the young lambs and calves lie about in the low, green meadows, and the sky would be great and vigorous above the quiescent earth. On the same day, a week later, Anne was in the dairy in the evening, packing her butter for the following day's market. The day just withdrawing had been golden from beginning to end. The sun had risen without mist and set in a sky without a cloud, seeming, as it sank, to draw with it all the colour from the heavens, as if it had cast a golden net in the morning and now drew it home again behind the hill.

As the warm light ebbed, a coolness, as of an actual atmosphere distilled into the cottage, became apparent in the kitchen. Now that the sunlight had gone, one could see the objects in the room with a new distinctness. It was serious, quiet, and orderly in this grave light, like the room of some saint shown in piety to pilgrims.

A tall, half-grown youth came to the kitchen door, and, knocking twice, entered and sat down lumpily on the wooden armchair, slipping a basket from his arm on to the table as he did so. He looked round him, pleased unconsciously by the grave light and the orderly room.

"You've a quiet life of it here," he said, rising to shake hands with Anne, who came into the room at the same moment, bending a little as she walked with the slightly anxious expression of one preoccupied with pain.

"Yes," she replied, "it's very pleasant in the kitchen when the sun goes off. Nearly every evening at this time something about the room brings to my mind the hymn—

"When quiet in my house I sit,
Thy book be my companion still."

The youth looked uncomfortable, thinking that he had brought upon himself a sermon unawares, and that being actually inside the house, and having sat down, he might have difficulty in extricating himself. So he said, rather to turn the conversation from its personal character, than from any sense of the fitness of his remarks.

"It's sad about Jane Evans, isn't it?"

"What's sad, Dick?" asked Anne, still standing, and resting both hands on the table. "Excuse my not sitting down, I've got a bad turn of rheumatism."

"That's bad," said Dick. "I once had a bit in my back, and it was as much as I wanted."



“But what about Jane?” asked Anne. “I’ve scarcely seen her or her sister since the old grandmother died. I seldom get so far away. The Ashley road doesn’t go near that side, and that’s the one that sees me oftenest.”



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“Well, it seems,” replied Dick, finding it, after all, an awkward subject to talk of to a woman, “she’s gone to live with that horse-breeder who’s taken Burton’s farm.”

“But he’s a married man,” said Anne, not comprehending.

“Yes, I know,” said Dick, with an embarrassed laugh, but Anne did not hear. She had understood.

“She was a good, respectable girl,” she said. “However can she have forgotten herself like that? Where’s her sister Annie?”

“They do say she’s nearly as bad,” replied Dick. “He’s rather a taking man—good-looking and hearty, and dresses better than the farmers, and his wife went off with a trainer too.”

“Her grandmother’s only been dead two years, and she’s been allowed to go wrong like that,” exclaimed Anne, with condemnation of herself in her voice.

“Well, you know,” expostulated Dick, “I don’t know as it’s anybody’s business. Everybody’s got their own affairs to attend to.”

“Oh yes! I know,” said Anne. “It’s never anybody’s business to try to prevent such things, but it’ll be everybody’s business to throw stones at the girl very soon, if the man tires of her.”

“I don’t know about preventing,” returned Dick; “she seemed pretty set on him herself. I think myself it’s a pity. Here’s the eggs from Mary Colton, Miss Hilton—three dozen,” he added, as a diversion from the conversation, which he found more embarrassing than the sermon he had successfully avoided. With that he escaped from the chair with a jerk, scuffled his feet once or twice on the floor, took his cap out of his pocket, and ejaculated “Good-night.”

“Good-night,” replied Anne, still preoccupied. “Thank you for bringing the eggs;” and she sat down with a slight groan.

“Why, it might be herself,” reflected Dick, looking back at the dejected figure in the darkening room. Being a simple youth, he felt vaguely uncomfortable at the sight of such trouble over the doings of one who was no relation, and began to take a little blame to himself for thinking lightly of the girl’s downfall.

“Well, she’s very good,” he concluded in his thoughts, “but she’s peculiar;” and he tramped heavily through the yard into the lane.

Anne did not stir. She was so shocked that her bodily faculties seemed to have ceased, and her mind to have remained sorrowing and awake. This lapse was even worse than



that of Sir Richard's son, because it seemed irretrievable. Then, too, it had happened before she knew anything about it, whereas, in the other case, she had been active, and able to expostulate and screen the young man's fall. And then, too, there was the surprise of a middle-aged woman at the lapses of "young, strong people," just as, if one of more maturity had fallen, the comment of the young would have been equally certain, "an old thing like her."



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To Anne, whose temptations were of the kind that betray rather than assault, all faults of the flesh seemed of equal gravity—a man's gluttony or drunkenness, or a woman's misdemeanour. The one did not shock her more than the other. She thought of her old friend, the grandmother who had brought up the girls, denying herself sleep and ease that they might not run wild as many girls do, but might grow up girls of good character. Since the grandmother died, Jane, who was young and pretty, had tried to support herself. Anne did not know Richard Burton, but he was older and a "married man," which, of itself, implied responsibility to her mind. With the passion for justice, in which her intellectual faculties found material for exercise, she declared that Burton must be more to blame than Jane. He had money and position in the country-side. But equally as he was more to blame he would be less blamed. No one would dare to tell *him* he was wrong. They would wait, stone in hand, for the girl who had been a child among them, and when she was forsaken and alone would throw and strike. Anne lived apart, but she knew *that*. "It will be visited on the girl," she thought; and indignation at Richard Burton rose steadily in her thoughts.

After a while she stirred, and, lighting a candle, slowly stooped and raised the lid of the bread-mug. Pulling out half a loaf, she cut a thick piece for supper. She ate it slowly, with a piece of cold bacon, then, taking the candle, her shadow growing gigantic behind her, she fastened the door without looking outside, and climbed the stairs, heavily and sorrowfully, to her solitary bedroom, her shadow with one jerk filling the whole room.

CHAPTER VII

There was no covered market even in so considerable a town as Haybarn. From end to end of the rectangular market-place were set wooden tables on movable trestles, and over these were stretched frames of canvas, the whole assembly looking like a fantastic toy village set in the middle of the substantial brick houses, banks, and inns of the square, or like a child's erections amid the solid furniture on a nursery floor.

On each side of the square, with their backs to the stalls and facing the shops whose goods and attractions overflowed to the pavement as if offering themselves at the feet of the passers-by, stood a row of countrywomen and girls with market baskets of butter and eggs, plucked fowls, red currants, plums, curds, tight nosegays of pinks, stocks, wall-flowers, or anything else saleable or in season which a cottage garden produces. In and about among these, pushed women of all degrees and ages, tasting butter, holding eggs to the light, or placing them against their lips to test their freshness, stopping now and then to feel the wearing quality of some piece of dress-stuff or flannel, draped and ticketed alluringly at a shop door; all moving with the slow, ungainly pace of those unaccustomed to walking



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and impeded by bundles and purchases in both arms. Here and there a younger woman, dressed in the fashion of the best shop in the town, with a basket of rather more elegant shape, went about her marketing with equal decision, if more fashion: the wife of some tradesman who lived in one of the numerous new villas with small gardens increasing every year on the fringe of the old town, who still liked the stir of the market and a bargain, but whose chief reason for marketing herself would be given to a friend as, "you can't trust those girls. They'll take anything that's given 'em and pay double."

Farmers with that curious planted-and-not-to-be-up-rooted air which distinguishes a man brought up to farming everywhere stood about the corners of the market in groups, or greeted friends on the steps and in the passages of the inns. The cattle-market was on the outskirts of the town, and the business there was over early in the day. For the rest of the day they exchanged and completed their bargains, or, supported by a friend and with an air of determination not to be cheated, entered the shops of hatters and tailors, or examined the bundles of canes and walking-sticks hanging by their heads at the shop door, fingering stuffs in the same manner as the women, but with a more helpless air, as if hoping that some good fortune beyond their own fingers would make clear to them the difference and wearing quality of each.

Older men, with the solidity of girth which successful farming produces, stood planted on the pavements with the air of spectators who enjoyed everything, being free from the embarrassment of the younger men, who found themselves after a week of solitude in the midst of a crowd of their fellow-creatures, who, all and any, might happen to look at one critically, giving rise to a red flush which in its turn might provoke the jokes of one's companions; ordeals which made for many a young countryman a day of adventure and perspiring, but one to be recalled during the remainder of the week as a day about town spent suitably by a man of spirit.

In the market Anne was a woman reputed for the excellence of her butter. She had even taken prizes at local cattle-shows. She had an established stand at one of the covered stalls, and her regular customers appeared one by one as they were at liberty. It was largely a matter of waiting through the morning till all had been supplied. To-day she had placed mechanically in the cart a basket of Victoria plums, which had been ordered by the wife of a neighbouring farmer, and as she found her butter and chickens sold, and was about to collect her baskets together, she saw this, and remembered that one of the servants at that farm had sprained her wrist in lifting a cheese, so that the mistress, not having appeared earlier in the day, might be safely assumed not to be coming to the market. Anne stowed her empty baskets under the stall of a woman who sold smallwares, and began to make her meagre purchases for the week. Then she took her baskets and made for the yard of the inn behind the market-square, where she had left the pony and cart.

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The farmer's wife to whom Anne had arranged to carry the plums was known among her acquaintances as a "worry." She had two daughters, one of whom was delicate, and the farm was neither large nor productive. Her husband also was reputed to be stingy.

Anne found her sitting sewing with the two girls, who were making a rag hearthrug. With the nervousness of women of anxious temperaments she began to explain their occupation, talking quickly in a voice with a shrill recurring note.

"There's no waste in this house you see, Anne, and no drones in the 'ive. This bit of stuff was my grandmother's." She took up a fragment of striped linsey, which one of the girls had just laid her hands upon. The girl's sulky expression did not escape her.

"Now then, what's the matter? *You're* too proud, Miss. Keep a thing seven years and it's sure to come in, *I* say, and keep girls working, and then they'll not get into trouble. Did you ever hear of anything so disgraceful as that Jane Evans? She ought to be sent out of the place with her servant and all. If it was a daughter o' mine, she'd travel far enough before she saw her home again."

"It's very sad," replied Anne, "She's been led astray;" but the woman interrupted, full of her virtue.

"Astray! She didn't want much leading I should think, sly thing! I know those quiet ones. They're generally pretty deep. No! I've no consideration whatever for a girl who gets herself into trouble. She's nearly always to blame somewhere. You just take notice of *that*," she added, turning to her daughters who were listening eagerly for details.

"I wonder she's the face to go about," said the elder girl, a very pretty young woman of twenty, who, being engaged to a young carpenter, assumed the virtue of a girl who'd no need to seek about for lovers, and of a class whose sensibilities were shocked by this lapse. Her mother looked mollified, and gazed at the girl's pretty face with satisfaction in its comeliness for a few moments in silence. She was a delicate woman, fretted by her nerves and the difficulty of making ends meet, but she had real pleasure in her two girls, whose good looks and clever taste in their clothes, made them always presentable.

"Some one ought to go and tell her what people think of her," said the younger girl, who already showed her mother's nervous expression.

"Do it yourself," said her sister with a careless laugh.

"Nay, *I* shan't interfere," replied the girl.



“You’d better not,” said the mother. “You keep out of such things and it’ll be better for you. Well, here’s Anne sitting with her plums. You’re very lucky to have a good tree like that,” she added, as she uncovered the basket. “We haven’t a single good tree in the orchard. I often say to James that we shouldn’t have much less fruit, if they was all cut down to-morrow.”



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Anne emptied the basket of plums into a basin the elder girl brought, and received the money mechanically. She was thinking all the time of Jane Evans and the careless laugh of the elder girl. Some one should tell her. That was quite plain. But it was nobody's business. She shook hands with the fortunate girl and her delicate sister, and, accompanied by the mother, made her way through the yard to the gate, where the pony had been eating as much of the hedge as he could manage with the bit in his mouth. Before she had taken her seat Anne was aware of the weight on her mind, which told her that she was "appointed" to go and reason with Jane Evans, and, if possible, to persuade her to leave the man.

She was discouraged by the unstinting condemnation of the mother and girls, and began to be sore that she had not received a word of sympathy for the girl.

"There'll be a good many to throw stones," she said, as she drove into her own yard and set about feeding the pony. When she had finished, her mind was so overcharged that she had recourse to her usual outlet. She began to pray aloud, not removing her bonnet or necktie, and seated as always on the stool at the fireplace.

"O God, my heavenly Father, I thank Thee that I may come to Thee however full of sin, and find Thee always ready. And I come to Thee again to-night, repenting of my sin of omission in Thy sight. For, O God my Father, I have not prayed for souls as I ought, and one soul who had little earthly guidance has gone astray from the flock. If Thou hadst left *me*, O my Saviour, in what a state of misery I should be found to-night. Yet I have been over-anxious about my own salvation, and forgotten those who are in temptation. Have mercy upon me, and save them. Give me, O loving Father, a mouth and wisdom. Help me to point out to this soul the error of her ways. Help me, more than all, to 'hate the sin with all my heart, but still the sinner love,' and grant that there may be joy in the presence of the angels of God over a returning and repenting soul, for Thy mercy's sake. Amen."

CHAPTER VIII

Next day Anne arose to be at once aware of the heavy task before her. As she set her house in order she would stop abstractedly and sit down to think what was best to be done. Then she would work feverishly as if *that*, at any rate, was a thing that could be accomplished.

It was a wet day, chilly and rueful. There were not even clouds in the sky to vary the steady grey, and the heaven itself seemed to have slipped from its height and to be close upon the earth. Trees, grass, hedges were drenched, and remained motionless with leaves drooping under an added weight. The ditches were noisy, but beyond the occasional rattle of a cart there was no other sound than the rain, a sound so unvaried

that it presently became as a silence, and one imagined that the world had ceased to have



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a voice. Anne opened the door many times and looked out to see always the same grey sheet before her. The gutter on the shippon splashing its overflow on the flags of the yard, the hens crowding dejectedly within the open door of the henhouse, and the water lying green between the cobble-stones of the path. Nothing could be done in the garden. The sodden flowers would not be fit for to-morrow's market. The pony had cast its shoe and must be shod before next day.

"This is more important than the pony," Anne said to herself, putting on her market-cloak and drawing on with difficulty her elastic-sided boots. She fastened her skirt high with an old silk cord and took her umbrella. Remembering that she had not covered the fire, and that it would have burnt away before she returned, she took a bucket out to the coal-house. The wet dross hissed and smoked as she covered the fire. She drew out the damper to heat the water, turned back the rag hearthrug lest a cinder should fall on it in her absence, and once more taking her umbrella, and lifting the key from its nail on the cupboard door, went out into the rain. She locked the door on the outside, and hid the big key on the ledge of the manger in the shippon. Then she was outside in the steady rain, on the gritty turnpike road washed clean to the stones. As she set off, it was a small relief to her that she would not be noticed, unless when she passed the cottages, because there were few workers in the fields, and none who could help it out of doors.

It was a walk of five miles which was before her, and soon the sinking of heart with which she had set out, began to disappear before the necessity of setting one foot before the other in a steady walk. The irritating pain of rheumatism began, too, to vex her and distract her thoughts. It was not a very familiar country to her after she had passed the Ashley high road. There were fewer houses. The farms were larger, and portions of an old forest remained here and there uncut. But there was no variation in the gloom of the sky or the folding curtain of rain. She grew tired and hot, and a little breathless, and as again the dryness of her throat and tightness of her lips reminded her of the humiliation of her unsought and unaided errand, she saw before her about a quarter of a mile on the high road which led to Marwell, the new red brick house with stucco ornaments, built by the horse-breeder, Burton. She went towards it with lagging feet.

It was a prosperous and vulgar building, with a beautiful garden, for his garden was Burton's pride. Even in the sodden wet the flowers, not wholly beaten down, showed how well cared for and excellent their quality. The sward was even and trim, and the fruit-trees on the side of the house had yielded prizes to their owner. The path to the door was of new red tiles, and two large red pots held standard rose trees on either side of the stained-glass entrance. Anne rang the new bell which clanged loudly and followed



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the servant (a girl from a distance), to the showy drawing-room, chilly and unused in its atmosphere. It was the kind of house which impressed the country people by its "improvements," and at which Anne went to the side door to leave her butter. But she was so absorbed in her duty to the girl that she gave no thought to this, which at another time she would have considered to be "taking a liberty." She alone of the girl's old friends seemed to have this burden laid upon her, and as she entered the house she was overwhelmed with the blame of its having happened, and the difficulty now of recovering innocence lost.

CHAPTER IX

She had scarcely had time to recover breath before Burton, the horse-breeder, came into the room—a big-bearded man, of heavy build, with a familiar loudness and fussiness which would have been better in the open air, than even in the new vulgarity of his drawing-room. His weight was the first thing one thought of. It would have taken a powerful horse to carry him. He always wore his hat, whether indoors or out, and bright tan leggings, with riding-breeches. Among his men and the neighbours he passed as a good master, and free with his money, standing for local purposes (as, indeed, he himself considered), in place of the lord of the manor who owned a more interesting house in another shire of the country. Like the rest of mankind he earned a reputation for generosity by being liberal with those things by which he set little store. He was neither avaricious nor surly, and, being in full health and vigour himself, was able to spare a rough chivalry to women which made allowance for their weaker bodies and greater difficulty in coping with existence. It was probably this soft-heartedness which, in the first place, had stirred a vague pity for the pretty blonde dressmaker, and this quality which the pliable girl had interpreted into the hope that he'd do her justice. He had, indeed, often stood up for Anne Hilton herself when her peculiarities had been discussed, and it was with the warm feeling of being rather a friend of hers, and not being the man to hear a single woman abused, that he came into the room and shook hands noisily.

"Well, Miss Hilton! I am very pleased to see you. You've come a long way in the wet. You must have a glass of something hot. Jane! Jane!" he shouted, stamping to the door and looking up the staircase. There was a sudden clatter, and Jane appeared in the doorway laughing, because she had run downstairs so quickly that she had almost fallen.

"That's smart work," said Burton.

"These stairs is so steep it's the easiest way of coming down 'em," said Jane with an air of proprietorship, with the familiarity and importance also of one who knows she is

welcome, and, whatever other people may think, has a power which no one else present has with the only man in the room.

“Well, you have chosen a wet day to pay us a visit, Miss Hilton,” she said, with a hospitality too effusive to be spontaneous.



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She was a very attractive girl, with fair hair and pretty eyes, made for affection and to take a spoiling prettily. At present she had no misgiving about her lover's good intentions, and this gave her the confidence which naturally she lacked. Besides, she had never thought Anne Hilton important. Anne, seeing the handsome room, the gaiety of Jane, and affection of Burton, found herself wishing that there were no reason why it should not continue so, to all appearance a happy home of newly-married people. She saw none of the signs of shame in Jane which she herself had suffered.

"I've not just come to pay you a visit, Jane, my dear," she said. "I've come in the place of your grandmother who's dead, to take you away with me."

"Whatever for?" exclaimed Burton, loudly. "Do you think I can't make her comfortable? She's never been so happy in her life, have you, Jane?"

"No!" returned Jane, very red. "And I don't see what Miss Hilton's got to do with it anyway."

"No more don't I," returned Burton, with a laugh. "But let's hear what she's got to say about it. So you want Jane to go back to starving at dressmaking, Miss Hilton? She's a lot more comfortable here, I can tell you. She's got a servant, and she can have her dresses made out. She's no need to do anything but fancy work."

"It's the sin of a good, respectable girl taking such things for a price," interrupted Anne, "and of you, Mr Burton, to entice her to it, and keep her like this. It's not on *you* the judgment'll fall, but on *her*. How's she to face the neighbours and everybody she's known from a child when you've done with her?"

"I've not done with her yet by a good way," said Burton. "Don't you worry yourself, Miss Hilton."

"You're a man of money and position, and a newcomer in the neighbourhood," went on Anne, "and the neighbours are afraid to say anything before you. But they say plenty about Jane, whom they've known all their life. Young people she used to play with talk of her with shame, and when you've finished with her she'll not have a friend to go to."

"But I tell you I've not done with her yet, and shan't for many a good while," repeated Burton. "I dare say she'll be tired first if it comes to that."

"Can you ever give her back what you've taken from her?" asked Anne breathlessly, trying to pierce the self-confidence she did not understand.

"Well, it was something like slaving all one day and then starving the next before," said Burton, "and she lives like a lady now. You should just see the fancy-work she gets through—no dressmaking now!"



Anne turned to Jane, who was sitting flushed and resentfully embarrassed in the satin armchair, looking expectantly to Richard to see her through, shocked, too, and ready to cry at this first contact and opinion of her neighbours upon her doings.

“Where’s your sister Lizzie, Jane?” she asked.



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“Out at service,” replied Jane, unwillingly, fidgeting with her hands and feet.

“So your coming here has meant that *she’s* got no home,” said Anne.

“She could have had one if she’d liked,” said Burton. “The house is big enough for us all.”

“Thank God for His protecting grace!” said Anne, “she was able to resist the temptation.”

“She’d have had to go out to service in any case,” said Jane, spitefully; “the neighbours was so very kind to two girls.”

“Jane, I knew your grandmother,” said Anne, “and I know how hard she had to work to keep you two girls respectably dressed and cared for. I know you think I’m an interfering, peculiar woman and an old maid, but your grandmother was no old maid. She lost your mother who’d have worked and kept her when she was old, and instead of having an arm to lean on, she’d to work morning, noon, and night, to give you two girls a home. She was working when other people was sleeping. It’s better even to go to the Union than to do as you’ve done.”

Jane, after twisting her fingers together, pulled out her handkerchief with a jerk and began to cry, thus rousing the indolent anger of Richard Burton, who, with a blustering tone, as though he wanted to shout down an opponent, burst out—

“Well, she’s here now and she’s not going away. And you can tell the kind neighbours that we can look after ourselves without their assistance. And as for them good girls that used to play with Jane, I know several who wouldn’t have been slow to take the place. *I’ll* look after Jane all right. And we’re much obliged for your visit, Miss Hilton,” he continued, ironically. “We can spare you for quite a long time now. You can save yourself the walk another time. If you want to be home for dinner-time, you’d better be starting, don’t you think?”

Anne rose stiffly, limping with rheumatism.

“Jane love, come with me,” she said; “I can shelter you for a time, I can give you—”

“No I won’t,” retorted Jane, petulantly, turning her back.

Anne went slowly out of the room. Richard Burton accompanied her with offensive heartiness.

“Well, good morning, Miss Hilton,” he said, opening the door with the stained glass window, and stepping into the red-tiled porch, he looked up at the sky. “I believe it’s stopped raining—all the better for your rheumatism, eh? Well! give my love to the neighbours you think so much of,” he shouted with a laugh, and shut the door. Anne



opened the wooden gate with brass nails, and shutting it behind her stood again in the dripping lane.

CHAPTER X

The stirring of anger at Richard Burton's callousness gave way almost at once to a feeling of fatigue and defeat as she started on her return home, and a persistent image of Jane, a little girl playing skipping-ropes in red stockings, kept coming before her eyes. One or two gigs passed her, splashing among the pools of the road. The birds began to sing with a clarity as sweet as that of the purified air. There was still a tinkling of running water from every side, but the clouds were in shreds, and patches of blue sky were uncovered here and there.

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Three-quarters of the way to her home she passed a fair sized cottage, in front of which a tall grey-haired woman was sweeping the standing water from the path with a yard brush. She stopped brushing as she heard footsteps and looked over the gate.

“Why, it’s Miss Hilton,” she exclaimed. “What a wet walk you’ve had. Come in and stop a bit before you go further,” she said, with the eagerness of an active, talkative woman, who had seen no one to speak to all day. She took the drenched umbrella and set it on its end in the doorway, and Anne, tired, hot, and discouraged, sat down gladly on the chair she offered her.

It was a comfortable kitchen, full of furniture, and bearing evident signs of men in the house. There were hats hanging behind the door and two guns over the fireplace. Such furniture as was placed there must have been long ago settled in its position. No one could mistake the room for that of young people. There was something in the multitude of worn objects, their solidity, their position in the room, each accommodating the other so that one could think of no other place for any of them, in the polish which had worn into the heart of the wood by constant rubbing which betrayed the presence and passage of many people through the room for many years; a used, comfortable, taken-care-of appearance, very pleasant to feel around one, a room from which one would not easily take oneself away at night and which seemed to Anne Hilton to set around her the company of many cheerful people.

Mrs Crowther was too much occupied with her own affairs, and too eager to talk to enquire what had brought Anne Hilton that way. She was a tall, spare, robust woman, the mother of nine children, all grown up and well placed. She was a “worker.” She had considered the bearing and rearing of her children as a piece of work to be done, in the same way in which she looked upon the spring-cleaning of her house. It had been done to her satisfaction, and done well. She had had little time for sentiment in her married life, but now, still active, strong, and with only the work of her house and garden, the meals for her four sons who still lived at home, and their mending and washing, she had leisure to express her opinions, and always having been obliged to hold her imagination within the visible realities of life and death, with which all her life had been concerned, she had arrived at a definiteness of judgment, and an honesty of speech which one frequently finds among women of her class out of reach of poverty, but not beyond the necessity of work. Her husband was not a country man, but had come from a town florist’s to work with a nurseryman about two miles distant. She began to tell Anne Hilton how they had first come to the country.



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“There was *my* mother first and then *his*, both at us. First *one* said, ‘You don’t know what it is to live in the country, you that have been used to going about under the gas-lamps at night’; and then the *other*, ‘You don’t know what it is to be shut in to the lamp at night and have no one but your two selves to look at.’ It was always the same. ‘You don’t know what it is,’ or ‘You’ll be lonely.’ And Thomas and I always said the same thing back. ‘Well,’ we said, ‘we can but try.’ Well, we *did* try, and we found that cottage up Somer’s Lane, and when I came with him the first day I began to think, what if my mother was right. It was so silent as if something was going to happen. I kept looking out of the window to see if it was, but nothing did, and the next morning his mother came down with the bedding and the five children we had then, and I’ve never felt lonely since. Nine children, all living, keep you on your feet.”

“Be thankful they’ve all turned out well,” said Anne, with a sigh, thinking of the house she had left.

“Trust ’em! that’s what *I* say,” returned Mrs Crowther. “Plenty of good, plain food, and plenty of good, warm, woollen underclothing, and there’ll not go much wrong with their bodies, and trust ’em for their characters. I was talking to Mrs Hankworth the other day—she’s done better than me, she’s had twelve—I never was one for much whipping,’ she said. ‘I never found you did much good by it. You can break the spirit of a horse by whipping, but you can’t change its character. Give ’em all plenty of occupation at home, and they’ll not want to go out in the evenings.’ I was glad to hear her say so, for I’ve always felt like that myself. There was Ted had his fret-saw, and William was always one for making collections of butterflies or birds’ eggs, and John was always one for politics. He’d sit reading any newspaper he could get hold of, and arguing with his father. I always knew he’d not stop in the country. He was always for the things that was doing in the town at meetings and unions, and he took no interest in farming or country work. It was always railways or politics with him. He was the first to go,” said Mrs Crowther, her face taking that fixed serious expression, betraying the inward attitude which in another woman would have meant tears. “You’ve a lot of work to do when they’re little, but you can shut the door at night and know they’re all inside with you; but there’s a day comes to gentle as well as simple, when you shut the door at night and some of them’s outside. Sometimes you wake in the night and you wonder if there’s anything more you could have done for ’em, and you vex yourself a lot more over them when they’ve gone from you than you ever do when they’re with you. You have a feeling when they’re at home, that if they want you you’re there. But it’s another matter when they can’t get at you for all their wanting or yours either for that matter.”



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“Be thankful you’ve been spared the sorrow of one going astray,” said Anne. “It’s a proud thing to have a lot of sons all honest, good men.”

As if she had divined Anne’s thoughts, or something in her words had suggested it to her, Mrs Crowther said suddenly—

“You’ve heard about that Burton getting hold of Jane Evans, have you?”

“I’ve just come back from there now,” said Anne. “I only heard of it the other day, and I went to see if I could get her away. I blame myself sadly for its having happened.”

“He’s a bad effect in the country, that Burton, with his horses and money,” said Mrs Crowther decidedly. “It’s bad for young men to see money got so easily. He doesn’t drink, I fancy. At least I said to Matthew, ‘What’s wrong with that Burton, does he drink?’ ‘No,’ he says. ‘At least, I don’t think so,’ he says; ‘but he takes it out in eating. He’s an easy liver,’ he says. And what a foolish girl that is to give away her character for a man like him. If she was in trouble she might have come to any of us, and we’d have done anything in reason.”

“I suppose that was just it,” said Anne. “He was there before we were ready, and the poor girl thought he was her only friend.”

“Well! she’s a foolish girl,” repeated Mrs Crowther, in the tone of one who having young people to protect could take no part in excuses. “Why, there’s that young Wilkinson, that’s booking-clerk at the station, said to our John, ‘I was a bit sweet on that girl myself,’ he said, ‘but if that’s the sort she is, I’m not having any.’ He’s a bit conceited, and thinks a lot of his clothes, but he’s steady enough. Had she the face to come and see you when you went?” she added with curiosity.

“I saw them both,” said Anne, sadly. “She’s quite under his influence. I can’t do much for her now. Perhaps she’ll come of her own accord if we show her we’re her friends.”

“Well, I don’t know as you can ever do much for people that will have their own way.”

“If she isn’t driven any further—” began Anne.

“I don’t know,” said Mrs Crowther, with emphasis; “you *must* make a difference. There’s plenty of girls kept themselves decent who were just as poor, and if everybody’s to be treated the same, no matter how they behave, it’s very hard on *them*. I don’t believe in that sort o’ thing. If you do wrong you must bear the consequences, or what’s the good of keeping honest. It’s confusing to young people to get such ideas, and it does a lot of harm, Miss Hilton. You never had any young people to bring up. It’s *that* that alters your mind about those things. There’s our William. He’s not one for saying much. He’s one of the old-fashioned kind. He’s a kind of serious way of talking. Many a time we laugh at him, and say, ‘For goodness sake, do stir up and laugh a bit.’ I says to him

privately, 'What do you think of it, William?' 'I've no respect for her whatever,' he says. 'If a sister of mine was to go that way, she'd have seen the last of her brother.' That's how they think you see, Miss Hilton, and you can't say they shouldn't."



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"I suppose not," replied Anne, wearily. "Nobody seems to get any nearer not judging their neighbours after all this time."

"Well, you can't make the world over again, however you try," said Mrs Crowther. "You've to take things as you find 'em, and make the best of 'em. It's hard enough for them that's kept straight without petting them that's weak and foolish enough to go wrong. You'll never be able to alter it, Miss Hilton, so you better take it so."

"I can't do anything more at present," said Anne; "but I must be getting home again. The pony'll be wondering what's become of me. I'm very much obliged to you for the rest, Mrs Crowther. You don't think it's raining now, do you?"

"No! I don't think so!" said Mrs Crowther. "How's Mary, Miss Hilton? She'll have been sadly hindered with all this rain. They put off two cricket-matches this week. They're not playing football yet, or else the weather wouldn't matter so much. They say the wet weather keeps their joints supple. It's the dry weather and frost that's so hard to play in. Ted's always one for a lot of sport, specially football. Such a mess as he comes home sometimes. 'You must clean your own clothes,' I always says to him. We have a joke at him, that when he wins one of these competitions (he's always one for going in for these guessing competitions that promises such a lot of money if you put in an odd word somewhere). He's always bound to win every time he goes in, and we tell him that when he wins it, he can keep a servant to clean his trousers after every football match. 'I shan't let any of you have any of it you don't take care,' he says; 'I'll be laughing at you before long, see if I'm not. Wait till you all come asking for rides on my motor-bike; what'll you say then?' he says. 'Eh!' says his father, 'I shall say there's more fools in the world than one!' Well Miss Hilton, good morning; I'm very glad to see you any time. I'm alone a good lot now, you know. It's not like it was once with children all round the kitchen. I'm glad of a bit of company now sometimes. Why, it's beautiful now!" she concluded, opening the door and stepping out in front of Anne, looking round the sky with eyes which blinked a little under the strong light.

CHAPTER XI

Next day at daybreak the country was whitened by a light mist. The birds sang incessantly with long ecstatic calling from throats which had drunk the air of the dawn and retained something of its quality. Coolness refreshed the day and strengthened the eyes, and one's ears were opened to hear from every side the chorus which in a more varied landscape one took as a part of the glittering moving world outside the house.

Anne unbolted the house-door. The dog rose from the hearth and stretched itself slowly, yawning and shutting its mouth with a snap. Then it walked to the door, waiting until it was dragged open grating on the sand of the floor. The cool morning air came in

like a visitor. The old dog pushed against Anne as she stepped outside, sneezed, yawned again, and lay down in the sunshine to finish his nap.



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"Haven't you had enough sleep yet, Lion?" said Anne. "Look, what a beautiful day it is! Why, there's Mary on the road already," she added, looking over the low gate.

Mary was coming straight down the middle of the road, her black-and-white terrier sniffing on all sides and pulling the cord by which she held him. When he perceived the presence of the other dog he began to advance by leaps, uttering little yelps between each like a child's jumping toy. Lion, with the superiority of a larger dog, raised himself without hurry and advanced to meet the terrier, who excitedly whined and sniffed about him.

"Good morning," said Anne, "you're out early."

"Yes," replied Mary, standing quite still in the position in which she had halted. "I came over the fields. The grass is very wet though. There's a mist, surely."

"Yes, a thick one," said Anne, "but the sun's coming through. Listen to the birds. Did you ever hear anything like them?"

"I was out collecting the eggs at five o'clock this morning," returned Mary, "and I think I never heard them so busy. The earth was all a-hum with them. They seemed as though they *must* be listened to, whatever happened."

Both women stood listening.

"I came this way because I was going to leave my shilling for Lord Axton's wedding present," said Mary, after a moment's silence.

"Did they come and ask *you* for one?" said Anne. "I think they ought to be ashamed of themselves."

"There's been some grumbling about it," said Mary. "I think myself the agent should have left it to those who wanted. I suppose we could have said No, but nobody likes to. It isn't as if people like them want any wedding presents we can give them, and a shilling means a lot to some people."

"It's the agent that wants to make a show," said Anne. "I think sometimes that if those rich people knew how their wedding presents were procured," she went on in the stilted manner habitual to her when wishing to express a formal thought, "they would find little pleasure in them."

"Mr Burton's given L10," said Mary. "They'll have a good sum." She paused, distrustful.

Mary, who was known to all the country side, and who could do nothing secretly, seldom spoke of the affairs of her neighbours. Whether she was by nature a little taciturn, or whether her blindness, before which so much passed unobserved, which cut her off



from the possibility of forming a judgment, had increased her natural modesty and diffidence, she drew back into silence where others were discussed. But the actual difficulties of living, which she daily and silently surmounted, brought her so closely into touch with reality that she invariably saw, not the fault or its circumstances, but the practical difficulties issuing from it. But she had unthinkingly stumbled upon the scandal, and she went on, "I was sorry to hear of Jane Evans forgetting herself like she has."



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“Poor girl,” said Anne; “she seems so certain that it’ll last. What was so sad to me, was that a girl brought up as she was by her grandmother should have so little sense of her position.”

“She’s happy, I suppose,” said Mary, “and there’s no need to look further. She’ll find it hard to earn a living if he gets tired of her.”

“He’s not an ill-natured man,” said Anne. “You feel as though if he’d been brought up to have a respect for good behaviour he wouldn’t have got loose so easily. He thinks he’s doing a generous thing, and giving Jane a good time, without thinking what the result must be to her good character. He doesn’t like to see people unhappy, as he calls unhappiness. He hasn’t learnt the results of sin in his own experience, and won’t look at them in others. He kept on telling me she’d got a servant of her own, and needn’t do anything but fancy-work. They’d neither of them hear anything I could say. I can’t understand how they came to know one another at the beginning. It seems to have come about without anyone’s knowing till it was too late.”

“He seems a joking sort of man,” said Mary. “Once he came up to buy a paper, and gave me half a sovereign instead of sixpence to change, and when I told him he’d made a mistake he laughed a lot, and said he wanted to know if I could tell the difference. He never sees me now without speaking of it and laughing.”

“Yes,” said Anne; “he’s fond of rough jokes of his own making, and thinks that giving people material things makes them happy,” she continued in her bookish manner. “I remember just such another man as him, a boisterous sort of man, whose old father was dying, who took the old man out to look at a new grand-stand they were making. Poor old man! It was pitiful to see him in the presence of eternity, looking at a new grand-stand.”

“I suppose, being as I am,” said Mary, “there’s a lot of temptations been spared to me.”

“I wish we were all as kind and charitable as you,” said Anne. “I never heard you say a hard thing of anybody all the years I’ve known you.”

CHAPTER XII

Winter hastens his pace when the harvest is gathered, and it was one of those serene winter days on which, if one sat in a sheltered place full of sunshine, one might believe that the spring had begun; as if winter, secure in his domination of the frozen earth, could afford to relax his vigour and admit the approaches of the sun, like a playful child whom one could banish at will. A line of white clouds, with purple bases, were drawn about the horizon, standing like anger, as it were, within call. The sky on every side was of that deep transparency seen after many days of rain. The colours of the earth and



grass were deepened and intense from the same cause. In many places in the fields, sheets of water showed above the grass, vivid as a wet rock just washed by the sea and colour hidden at other times glowed from the steeped ground. Villages and houses showed from a great distance as if some obscuring medium had been removed, and the remote country lay a deep band of indigo beneath the horizon, like a distant sea escaping under a light and infinite heaven.



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Anne Hilton set off after the evening milking to visit a bed-ridden woman of her acquaintance who lived in a cottage in one of the numerous by-lanes intersecting the now bared fields. She was a woman who had lain many years in the kitchen, whose narrow, hot space was all she saw of the world. She was not a cheerful invalid, but peevish and querulous. The irritation with which she always lived, waking from sleep to be at once aware of it, and to know no pause during her waking hours, had worn away a temperament which might almost have been gay. At very rare intervals Anne had heard her laugh, and the laugh had such a note of gaiety in it that she surmised the nature that had been, as it were, knawed thin by this never-sleeping worm. It was pity for something imprisoned and smothered which made Anne a steadfast friend to the unhappy woman, whose other friends had long tired of her incessant complaints and down-cast mind.

Elizabeth Richardson had never any hesitation in expressing her opinions, and Anne had scarcely seated herself by the bed of the unfortunate woman, whose harrowed face told of the torment within, than she began to ask questions of the disgrace of Jane Evans, whom, she had heard, was to have a child to crown all. But contrary to Anne's expectations the bed-ridden woman was friendly to the girl. The habit of neglect and scarcely-veiled impatience with which she had for many years been treated, and of which she had been fully and silently aware, had produced in her tortured mind an exasperated rebellion against the opinions of her neighbours, who were unable to see anything beyond their own comfort. She knew that she had so much the worst of it; that even attending perfunctorily to another's human necessity was not so hard a task as to be there day after day in the company of a pain which never ceased, and beneath whose increasing shadow the world had slowly darkened.

"They're all afraid of the trouble to themselves about the girl," she said, with her bitter intonation. "They're afraid they'll be called on to do something for her sooner or later."

She turned over with a groan, lying still and worried.

"Have you tried a bag of hot salt?" asked Anne, after a few minutes' silence.

"Yes! I tried once or twice," replied the woman, "but you know it's a bit of extra trouble, and no one likes that."

"If you could tell me where to get a bit of red flannel I'll make one for you now," said Anne.

"The bag's here," said the woman, her face drawn and her mouth gasping. She tried to feel under the pillow.

"Lie you still. I'll get it," said Anne. She drew out a bag of red flannel, evidently the remnant of an old flannel petticoat, for the tuck still remained like a grotesque attempt at



ornament across the middle of the bag. The salt slid heavily to one end as Anne drew it out.

“The oven’s still warm,” she said opening the door and putting her hand inside. “I’ll just slip it in for a few minutes.”



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“Well,” said the woman, “there’s not many cares about a bad-tempered, bed-ridden woman, but you’re one of them that’s been kind. I don’t say much, but I *know*.”

“You make me nearly cry,” said Anne, drawing the bag out of the oven and feeling its temperature. Holding it against her chest, as if to keep in its heat, she drew back the bed-clothes and unbuttoned the flannelette night-gown of the invalid, laying the poultice against her wasted side. The woman gave a sob and lay still for a minute.

“It’s a lot better,” she said.

“Perhaps you could sleep a bit,” suggested Anne.

“I’d like a cup o’ tea,” said the woman, “but it’s a lot of trouble. Can’t you look where you’re going!” she broke out impatiently, as Anne, turning quickly, caught her foot in the chair, overturning it with a crash. “You made me jump so.”

“Well, I am sorry,” said Anne, humbly.

“Never mind,” said the bed-ridden woman, her impatience exhausted. At that moment the door opened with a bang and a stout, middle-aged woman entered noisily.

“What a noise you make!” said the bed-ridden woman peevishly. “You’re getting too fat.”

“Fat people’s better-tempered than thin ones,” retorted the other carelessly. “Good evening, Miss Hilton! Has she been telling you all she’s got to put up with more than other people?”

“Well now,” returned Anne with decisive heartiness, “I don’t think we’ve been speaking about herself at all, except to express gratitude for a very little service that I did her. We’ve spent a pleasant hour together.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” said the woman, going to the fire and rattling the irons noisily between the bars.

“You noisy thing. Can’t you make a less din!” said the bed-ridden woman, biting her lip.

“Other people’s got to live in the house besides you,” said the woman. “If you want so much attention, you know where you can get it.”

The bed-ridden woman shut her eyes and lay still at this threat of the workhouse, that confession of failure, in a world where ability to work becomes a kind of morality, and lack of physical strength to procure the means of subsistence a moral downfall. She was a burden, but a burden against her will, and her pride, the only luxury of the poor and the one most often wrested from them, rose in a futile resistance. It must come to



that she knew. She knew that she could not be less comfortable or more neglected, but her shelter would be gone, and she would be acknowledged publicly a failure.

When this last pride is taken away, there sometimes appears a kind of patience which is not really that of despair, but which is nearer to that attained by great saints after long effort and discipline—the mental equilibrium which is the result of desire quenched, of expectation for further good for oneself at an end. What the saints attain by a painful and mortifying life, the poor receive as a gift from the tender mercies of the world, receiving also the passionate pity of Jesus, “Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.”



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“If she could only work as she used, and be ‘beholden’ to nobody.” She sighed and lay still, her mind an abyss of bitterness.

The stout newcomer, step-daughter to the unfortunate woman, turned to Anne, jerking her head backwards to indicate the other woman in bed with an expression of satisfaction which said quite plainly, “That’s the way to settle *her*.” Then she ignored her totally, except that she moved as noisily, and spoke as loudly as she could.

She was a rather pre-possessing woman, with bold eyes and an obstinate mouth. There was, so to speak, “no nonsense about her.” She was one of those women of coarse fibre, whose chief diversion consists in annoying the sensibilities of others. They exist more frequently in the middleclass than among the poor, whose common dependence teaches them forbearance if not pity, but they exist also among the poor, more terrible if not more merciless. Such women almost always find material to torment close at hand. Sometimes in the form of a dependent relative, sometimes a servant-girl, sometimes a weakly daughter, and this constant wreaking of a contemptuous spite upon one object produces a self-satisfaction which is mistaken for cheerfulness, an inward pleasure in hatred, which appears outwardly as good-humour.

The indignation which always awoke in Anne at the sight and expression of injustice flared suddenly upwards. Facing the still satisfied woman, who now drew a chair across the flagged floor with the screech of its wooden legs upon the stone, she said:

“How can *you*, a strong, active woman, take pleasure in worrying a sick and ailing fellow-creature. Suppose you were in her place. How can you expect to find mercy from God in the day of judgment if you have no mercy on others?”

The woman stared incredulously, and then broke into a loud laugh.

“And I thought you was such a quiet piece. Fancy spitting out like that.” Then her brutality of temper asserted itself.

“I’ve nothing to do with the day of judgment. I don’t see why I should be called to look after a woman with the temper of a vixen that wants to be a spoiled darling. The Union’s made for such as her and she ought to be in it. It’s just her spite that keeps her out.”

“Have you no pity?” said Anne. “*You* may not always be strong and able-bodied. The day may come when *you* need help and comfort, and how will you deserve it from God, if you torment your unfortunate sister in this way!”

The woman’s answer was a laugh.

“You’re as queer as they make ‘em,” she said, with a slow, impudent stare from Anne’s out-of-date immense bonnet to her elastic-sided boots, as if looking for a point at which



she might begin to torment a new victim. But Anne's sensibilities lay far beyond her understanding.

"Have you wore out all your grandmother's clothes yet?" she demanded with her contemptuous, impudent look, "you're a proper figure of fun in that bonnet!"



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“Be quiet and be done with it, you coarse lump!” interrupted the bed-ridden woman in so loud and authoritative a tone that the woman turned slowly and stupidly round to look at her. “This time next week I’ll be in the Union and you’ll have no one to torment. You can make arrangements when you like, the sooner the better.”

“All right! it can’t be too soon for me,” retorted the woman with her incessant, stupid laugh, which this time did not hide the fact that she had received a shock at this taking of affairs out of her hands. “But perhaps you’d rather I didn’t do it since you’ve so many friends.”

“No, you needn’t bother yourself about me,” said the bed-ridden woman. “I’ll have done with you soon.”

“*Couldn’t* you?” said Anne, turning to face the woman and speaking with great earnestness, and as always, when moved, with great preciseness. “*Couldn’t* you for this last week do your best to be considerate and kind? A week is not a very long portion of eternity. It is so painful to think of two people separating for ever in hatred. You *have* one week left. Could you not make the most of it?”

“It’s a week too much!” said the woman, with careless brutality. “Are you always so fond of making long calls?” she added, staring at Anne.

Anne turned to the bed-ridden woman, saying, “On Thursday I shall be going in to market and I’ll call at the Union Infirmary and see the Matron. I think you’ll be better looked after there and have peace and quietness.”

“It couldn’t be worse than this,” said the woman. “I think perhaps I’ve been foolish to stay here so long.”

“I’ll see the Matron for you on Thursday,” said Anne. “Good-bye.”

“Good-bye, and thank you,” returned the sick woman, turning wearily away from her fellow-lodger and settling down to the silence and endurance in which she habitually lived.

“Good afternoon, Mrs Wright,” said Anne to the other woman as she opened the door. The woman stared in a way meant to put Anne out of countenance, making no reply, while Anne, going outside, shut the door gently behind her.

CHAPTER XIII

For three months Anne had prayed constantly for Jane. Living alone in an orderly and quiet house with one window open towards her Invisible Friend, she had spoken with Him of her desire for Jane’s recovery, until it appeared to her that He too must yearn as



she did for this definite thing. Elizabeth Richardson had been removed to the Infirmary and was at peace, so that Anne's thoughts were of little else than Jane and her reinstatement in the country. It was not the chagrin of the failure of her visit to Burton's house which troubled her, but her helplessness. If she went again she could do no more than plead as she had done before. But it might be that the girl had by this time felt her need of outside friends. It was fully three months ago. As

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Anne was returning from the nearest village one afternoon in the solemn winter sunshine, she determined suddenly to pay a second visit to Jane. And she would try to be less hard on Burton, which would perhaps draw Jane to her. It might be that she needed a friend by now. Half a mile from her own cottage she came to a three-cornered patch of the way where several roads met. By one side was a pond with two posts painted white as a mark for drivers at night-time. The sloping edge of the pond was trodden into mud by the feet of horses stopping to drink, and as Anne, crossing the road to avoid the mud, arrived opposite one of the posts, she saw a bill posted upon it announcing a sale.

"I must see what it is," she said. "Perhaps it's something for Mary." She read the heading. "Sale of Bankrupt Stock."

"It seems to be nothing but horses," she said as she read the list. Two men carrying forks on their shoulders came at that moment from the Ashley Road and joined her, looking over her shoulder at the bill.

"I heard about it this morning," said one. "I thought he couldn't last long at that rate. It was always spending and making a show."

"There was someone else in it," said the other. "They say Burton's done a moonlight flitting and gone to America."

Anne, whose thoughts had been engrossed by a new opportunity for Mary, became aware of calamity of a new sort. She turned to the men.

"What has happened?" she asked, though even as she spoke she had grasped it all. The man, a young, fair-haired man of twenty-six, with great breadth of chest and long straight legs, answered with the willingness of a countryman to spread news.

"Why, that Richard Burton's gone bankrupt and made a bolt. They say it'll take the house as well as the horses to pay it all up. The bailiffs was in to-day as I passed taking it all down. It's a bad job for *somebody*, I heard," he said winking at the other man. He, glancing at Anne, looked embarrassed and pretended not to see.

"Can either of you tell me where the girl who was living there has gone? Is she still there?" she asked the latter man.

"Not she!" answered the former.

"They say she walked in the night to Ashley Union," said the elder man. "She's there now and nobody saw her go, so I suppose she must have done. It's a good eight miles of a walk."



“Do her good,” said the younger man; and they began to discuss the list and quality of the horses for sale.

Anne walked on. It had come then, and sooner than it was looked for. Jane’s fancy-work and “lady-like” life seemed like the play-things of a baby by the side of a scaffold, as helpless and as foolish.

“I was going to the Union to-morrow anyway for Elizabeth Richardson,” said Anne, as she unlocked her door, trying not to see Jane Evans walking all alone, with no new house or protector, through the darkness of which she was afraid, to the formidable iron gate of the Union.



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CHAPTER XIV

In the afternoon of the following day Anne entered the common room of the Infirmary. In this large room, with high windows spotlessly clean, a fireplace at one end in which a sufficiently generous fire was burning, and before which were two wicker cradles; women for the most part in extreme old age of body rather than years were sitting in every possible attitude on the wooden seat which ran round the wall on three sides of the room. At the far end, near the fire, a blind woman was knitting men's stockings. Two very old women sat with their chins in their hands and heads bent, motionless, neither hearing nor seeing anything outward. Three others, their white pleated caps nodding at different angles, were making aprons. A young woman with a healthy but sullen face was nursing a large baby. Another, younger, but early-developed, as girls are in the country, sat nearest the fire, a shawl half off her shoulders, her foot rocking one of the cradles. There seemed no trace of coarseness in her face, refined now by illness and days indoors; only an infinite ignorance and bewilderment. She seemed not more than seventeen. The tone of the Matron in speaking to her was not unkind, but had in it the mixture of impatience and contempt, which sensible middle-aged women have for foolish girls who can't look after themselves. There was, too, unknown to herself, for she would have looked upon herself as a kind woman, a slight feeling of satisfaction that, though the silly girl was sheltered in this place and everyone was kind to her, she'd find out what it meant to get herself in that state when she went outside. In the meantime, being really kind, if sensible, she said.

"Keep your shawl over your shoulders, Maggie. You mustn't catch cold your first day out of bed!"

"She doesn't look fit for much does she?" said the other young mother contemptuously. "Ten days and then to be as washed out as that."

One of the old women, who had remained motionless, got up slowly and stretched out her hand, pointing at the girl vindictively.

"That girl's next the fire! That was *my* place before she come."

"Oh, you're all right, mother," said the Matron cheerfully, pushing her gently back to her seat. The old woman mumbled to herself as she sank back into the same stupor, in the midst of which she brooded on her grievance. The other old woman began in a hard, high voice without raising her head:

"That's the way they do in this place. Push out the old ones."

"Now you two don't begin talking and grumbling," interrupted the Matron decidedly. "You're as well treated as anyone else."



At this moment Anne made a movement in the corner where she had stood unnoticed. From every bench withered hands were thrust at her, some grasping her arm, some her mantle, some were held open at her face.

“Give me a ha’penny—just a ha’penny!” screamed a dozen old voices. “A ha’penny! Spare a ha’penny!”

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“Now then,” interrupted the Matron, taking two of the women and leading them back to their places. “What good would a ha’penny do to *any* of you?” She touched two other women, and they retired grumbling to their seats, all except one tall, bony old creature, with a frightful palsy, who kept hold of Anne by the arm, repeating in a voice which was more like an angry scream than the whisper which her deaf ears imagined it to be.

“Those other women’ll all beg from you. They’d take the bread out of anybody’s mouth. Give me a ha’penny Missis, only a ha’penny,” and her avaricious, bony hand pinched Anne’s arm tightly as though she already clutched the coin. The Matron, using both her own hands, unfastened her hands as she might have done a knot. The old woman shook with rage and palsy, and fell rather than sat down on her seat under the flowering geraniums in the window.

“Now, I *knew* there was somebody strange in the room,” said the blind woman. “Just let me have a look at her.”

She tucked her knitting needles into her apron-string. She had been for many years in the workhouse infirmary, where she knitted and repaired the thick stockings worn by the inmates. She had become a kind of pride of the ward. Beyond the misfortune of her blindness she had no defect, and her mind was alert and cheerful.

“She calls it ‘looking,’” said the Matron with a laugh. “Just you see her knitting, Miss Hilton. She’s re-footing those stockings. See if you can tell where she’s patched them.” She took up a bright blue stocking from the bench. The blind woman took the other end and felt it carefully.

“That’s not *my* work,” she said with amused contempt. “It’s too like patchwork. Here’s mine.”

Anne took the stocking and looked. “It’s beautiful,” she said. “I could never have told there was a join.” The blind woman’s hand touched her arm and wandered slowly upwards, over her face and neck and head.

“I’ve not seen you before, have I?” she said. “No, I don’t think I have.”

The Matron had already turned to leave the room. Anne, held by the blind woman, looked again round the big room with its clean floor and battered inmates. The uneventful peace broken by the bickering of the old women, the babies bringing a double burden to their mothers, the blind woman, to whom all days were alike, seemed to be imprisoned for ever.

She followed the Matron into the courtyard. Several men in bottle-green corduroys loitered there, and a tiny old woman shrivelled and imbecile, who ran to Anne the



moment she appeared, holding her skirts high to her knees, skipping on one foot and then on the other.

“I’ll dance for a ha’penny! I’ll dance for a ha’penny!” she whined.

“Go on! dance, old lady,” said one of the men who was carrying an empty drawer, which had just been scrubbed, to dry in the sunshine of the yard. He set it down, end upwards, and stood expectantly. The two other men paused also.



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“Go on! Aren't you going to begin?” said one of them.

“She's a funny old thing, this one,” said the Matron to Anne, stopping to watch, as the old woman, holding her skirts to her knees, her clogs clacking, and with a smile of imbecility fixed on her face, began to hop from one thin leg to the other, stamping slowly round on her heels in the artless manner of a child. All at once she stopped, and, pulling up her apron, put a corner of it in her mouth, hanging her head and giggling.

“They're all looking at me, all them men,” she giggled. “Fancy me dancing with all them men looking.” One of the men broke into a laugh, which was changed immediately into an attack of asthma.

“Dance again, old lady!” called a younger man, with the effects of hard drinking visible in his face.

The shrunken and pitiful figure revolved several times, stamping on her heels, then stopped with the same grotesque coquetry.

“She's a funny old thing, isn't she?” said the Matron to Anne. “She gives us many a laugh.”

“It's too humbling to look at. I cannot laugh,” said Anne. “Poor old thing, to have come to that.”

“She doesn't know, you know,” said the Matron. “You're wasting your pity. They're most of them better off in the infirmary here than they were outside. You've no idea what a dirty state *she* was found in for one.”

“It's the painfulness of such a sight—age without honour,” repeated Anne.

“I've no time to think of that sort of thing,” replied the Matron, as they began to ascend the wide stairs to the bed rooms, a woman, who was scrubbing the steps with sand, standing aside to let them pass.

Several women were sitting up in bed, with starched night-caps nodding at different angles. Over the fireplace was a lithograph of Queen Victoria giving the Bible as the source of England's greatness to an Indian potentate, and beneath it, sitting very still in a large armchair, was Jane Evans staring into the fire. She was very quiet, broken, and helplessly docile. Her stillness was alarming. She seemed to be already dead in spirit. Even the child soon to be separated from her scarcely concerned her. She was quite neat. Thin and fatigued as her face was, she did not appear to have suffered greatly in health.

“Jane, my dear, I've not come to blame you,” began Anne, “I've come to see if there's anything I can do to make it easier for you to face the future and what's coming. I only



heard of you coming here by accident or you shouldn't have been left alone. You mustn't think everybody's forsaken you and you've no friend left to you. It's often the case that you know your true friends in trouble," she continued sententiously. "And if only you could find the best Friend of all now when you need Him most." Her phrasing changed to earnestness. "There was a woman once that they dragged out in front of everybody for evil-doing. But He wouldn't have it. He put them to silence, and then when she was all alone with Him He showed her how tender He was to them that do wrong. If you only knew Him and His kindness, and how He can understand any kind of trouble. There's a good deal you think none of us can understand, but *He* can if you tell Him." She wiped her eyes. Jane did not seem to have heard.

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"I don't want to worry you," continued Anne; "you've got a good deal to bear and to think of, and you've got to keep up for the sake of the child. He'll need you to be father and mother both. Matron thinks you'll be better here for the present, but you mustn't give up and think you're to stay in the Union all your life. But try to think of the child, and how God'll help you if you try to do the right."

It was like speaking to a person a very long way off, and Anne desisted.

"She's very quiet, isn't she?" said the Matron. "That'll have to break down soon. The doctor thinks she'll be all right when the child comes. The labour'll give her a shock and rouse her. She comes of a better class than the usual ones. It's the disgrace she can't get over. She'll do anything she's told to do. I sometimes get tired of making the other women do as they're told, but I wish sometimes she'd be a bit more like them. You'll be ready for your tea soon, won't you, Jane?" she added in the cheerful professional tone intended to deceive the sick.

"Yes, please," said Jane, without looking round.

"Here's Miss Hilton come all this way to see you," said the Matron a little more sharply. "Can't you say anything to her? you may not have so many friends come to see you as you expect, you know."

There was no echo from the abyss of misery in which Jane was sunken. She neither replied nor stirred. With the flight of Burton all hope had been killed within her; and without hope she had fallen like a bird with one wing broken. She was defenceless, and her misery laid open to all. She could only keep still, lest it should be tortured by being handled.

"You must think of the child, you know," said the Matron. "He'll depend on you altogether, and you mustn't give in like this. She doesn't care," she added to Anne as Jane still sat without a tremor of understanding. "It's a bad sign. I can't even rouse her with speaking of Burton. She's given up hope of him. It's like as if something's dead inside her. Doctor says it's shock."

"I should say it's temper," said a voice from one of the beds. "Petting and spoiling all day long." The voice came from an old woman, with a soft, withered face and infantile blue eyes.

"Now then, where did you hide that thermometer?" said the Matron, with a good-natured laugh. "You know, Miss Hilton, this old lady's a famous hand at taking anything that's about, and keeping it for herself. She doesn't call it stealing, don't you see. Why, the other day she was having her temperature taken, and when the nurse turned her head away there was no thermometer to be seen. 'What have you done with it?' she says. 'Why, I declare, I must have etten it,' says this old lady. What do you think of that?"



The old woman turned over in bed, and her innocent eyes closed with a patient expression.

“I don’t know what people are allowed to come talking here for when it isn’t visiting day,” she said. “Nobody can go to sleep for such talking.”



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Anne sat down beside Jane and began to sing—

“I was a wandering sheep;
I did not love the fold.”

The Matron watched with an air of curiosity. Jane did not cease staring into the fire.

“It’s no use, Miss Hilton. I daresay the old lady’s a bit right. There’s a slice of temper in it too. But we can’t waste all day over her.”

Anne took Jane’s hand. “I’ll come and see you again in a little while,” she said. “And remember, there’s always One that’ll hear all that you can’t tell to any one else. He’s with you here waiting to hear and help you.” She lingered. There was no response. The Matron walked briskly towards the door.

“Well, the old ones are easier to manage,” she said. She led the way downstairs and left Anne on the doorstep of the big front door. The porter shut it with a clang.

The pony was pawing the gravel outside the gate and pulling hard with his head. He backed the cart vigorously into the road as Anne untied his head, and set off at a good pace towards the town.

“I’ll go up to-morrow and see Mrs Hankworth,” said Anne. “She’ll perhaps be able to say something to help.”

CHAPTER XV

Mrs Hankworth lived at one of the largest farms in the country, some three miles away from Anne Hilton’s cottage. The farmstead was, contrary to the usual custom, not placed near the high road for convenience, but on an eminence in the midst of its own lands. A road had been cut to it between cornfields, so that in the time of springing corn a man walking on this road seemed to be wading to the knees in a green undulating sea, which had risen and submerged the hill. The farm itself was large, with a garden unusually well kept, a sign that the mistress counted in the establishment. Old rose trees grew almost to the roof of the wide building, and the thick turf bore token to the richness of the soil.

Inside, the passage, the stairs, the rooms, were all spacious, and, in spite of the rattling of cans and the sound of voices in the kitchen, the place retained an atmosphere of quiet and tranquillity, not of isolation or desertion, but of that comfortable restfulness which one recalls as a child, when, having been ill, one is left at home when the others have gone to school, and remains in a quiet house, watching contentedly the leisurely cheerful movements of one’s mother.



Mrs Hankworth, the mistress of the best farm in the country, was an enormously stout but very active woman. Her husband, a man half her size and an excellent farmer, exhibited only one trait of nervousness, and that on her account. If she went to market without him he was uneasy until she came back lest something should have happened to her. In all the fifteen years of their married life they had never slept out of their own bed, and they had had no honeymoon.



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With the contentment of a woman of sound health and of active useful life, who was fully aware that her good sense and management were as necessary to the farm, her husband and twelve children, as his own knowledge of farming, she looked upon this as a just sense of her own value, as indeed it was, and the reward of the confidence which she so completely deserved from her husband. She was generous to her poorer neighbours even when they cheated her. Not taking it very deeply to heart nor expecting much otherwise, she was yet able to remember that her lot was an affluent one compared with theirs, and was ready to excuse even while being perfectly aware of human frailty. Who, when she had sent to an old woman of the village who lived discontentedly on such pickings as she could induce her neighbours to leave her, and who had constantly profited by the liberality of this well-established mistress, a ticket for a large tea, and was informed by some officious person that the husband also had procured a ticket at her expense, said, "He's a poor old crab-stick. It'll do him no harm to have a good tea for once."

She was a contented woman, entirely satisfied with the position which life had allotted to her, a position in which all her faculties had full scope, and were to the full appreciated by those with whom she had most to do, and being of a really kind heart she was a good friend to the poor. When Anne arrived at the door of the dairy, she found its mistress seated before a tin pail containing a mass of butter which she was dividing into prints. With white sleeves and apron, a bucket of scalding water on one side of her and a pail of cold on the other, her ample knees spread apart for balance as she sat on a low chair, her bulky and capable hands moved with decision and practice about her work. She looked up as Anne appeared in the doorway, but her hands did not cease working.

"It's not often we have to do this," she said, "but they sent down word that there was no milk wanted yesterday, so we had to set to."

"It looks nice butter," said Anne, with the judgment of a connoisseur.

"*You* ought to know what good butter is," returned Mrs Hankworth. "I've just been having a laugh over that Peter Molesworth. He wrote on his account, "17 pints." Did you ever hear such a thing! It took me quite a long time to know what 17 pints was. Him and his 17 pints!"

"He's not very clever, Peter," said Anne, "but I don't know what his poor mother would do without him."

"No," returned Mrs Hankworth, "he's hard-working if he's stupid, and that's better than the other way round."

"Mrs Hankworth," began Anne, "I know what a good friend you've always been to those that have got into trouble, and I came to ask your advice about that poor Jane Evans."



“I just heard of it the other day,” replied Mrs Hankworth, letting the butter-prints sink on her lap. “I don’t know how it was I came to know of it so late. I’d no idea till the other day that she’d ever gone to live with that Burton. I wonder how she got acquainted with him. There’s no men goes about their house. What’s she doing now?”



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“She’s in the Union,” said Anne, “and she sits there without speaking, staring into the fire. Nobody can rouse her. She seems to have no life left in her. It’s pitiful to see her, and to think of what’s coming to her.”

“She’s been foolish,” said Mrs Hankworth, “and I expect she’ll find plenty to make her pay for her foolishness. But I see no reason why she shouldn’t do all the better for a lesson. She’ll have to work though. There’ll be no sitting round in silk blouses doing fancy-work. You needn’t be troubled about her moping when she’s got the baby. They don’t leave you much time for that,” she added with a laugh of retrospection. “But your first baby’s as much trouble as ten. If she can earn a living when she comes out she’ll be better without that Burton. He’s no better than a child’s balloon. He’s up, and you prick him with a pin and he’s down! She’s provided in the Union, I suppose?”

“I think so, since they never asked anything about it,” said Anne.

“What sort of a place is it, Miss Hilton?” asked Mrs Hankworth in the tone of one who might be enquiring after a prison or worse.

“They’d a nice big fire,” said Anne, “and until you came to look at the people, it looked quite comfortable. But when you came to look at those poor things, and thought that that was all they had to expect, it made your heart ache.”

“She’s a good matron I’ve heard,” said Mrs Hankworth.

“She’s a kind woman,” returned Anne, heartily, “and I suppose it’s a good thing they’ve got such a place to shelter them. But it seems a poor end somehow, and not a place for young people. There seems to be no hope in it, and yet it’s clean, and they’ve got good food.”

“Other people’s bread doesn’t taste like your own to them that’s been used to having any,” returned Mrs Hankworth. “I expect, if you’ve never had any of your own, you’re glad to get anything. I suppose Burton’s out of the country.”

“Nobody seems to know rightly,” said Anne. “Jane says not a word. I don’t suppose she really knows anything.”

“She’ll come to see that she’s better without him,” said Mrs Hankworth, taking up the prints and working the butter emphatically. “But she must work like the rest of us. It’s generally the long clothes that gets left over,” she added, “the short ones get worn out by some of them, but I’ll look and see what I can find. It’ll be rather nice to be looking out baby-things again. There’s nothing you miss more than a baby, when you’ve had one or other about for a good many years. But she’d never do any good with that Burton about.”



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It seemed not so much the fact that a girl would give up her reputation for a man, that impressed Mrs Hankworth unpleasantly, but that she would give it into the keeping of *such* a man. She did not expect impossible things of anybody. No one belonging to her had ever made a slip, and such a happening seemed to be so remote a possibility for anyone "connected," that she could spare great charity for the rest of the world. Nor did she believe in "driving people." If a girl had made a mistake, that was no reason why everyone else should make another, and her good sense revolted against a perpetually drawn-out punishment for any fault. Her disgust at this fault, not very deep, being submerged almost as it arose, by the immediate necessity for doing something, and a reminiscent understanding of the timidity and dread with which the first child-bearing might be regarded by an ignorant and forsaken girl. Her position as the reputable and capable mother of a family being unassailable, no one could consider that kindness to the girl implied any countenancing of her offence. Anne, puzzled and baffled by the things which she had seen, felt herself in a larger sphere which could consider the fact of birth as a small matter for everyday occurrence and preparation, happen however it might.

"You can't do anything by worrying, Miss Hilton, you know," said Mrs Hankworth. "You've got to wait. There's nothing *anybody* can do but wait. There's our John. I think he gets more nervous every child we have. I always say to him that he can't help anything by worrying, and in any case *I'm* the person who's got to go through it; but it makes no difference. He can't be satisfied till he sees me walking about again. The girl'll be quite right when she's got the baby to work for. She's nothing to do now but wait and think about it and herself. You'll see when she's up and about again she'll be another thing. I hope the baby's a boy. It'll be sooner forgotten about if he is."

"I'm afraid," said Anne, growing expansive beneath the good sense which attacked every practical side of the matter, and dissolved difficulties as soon as they arose, "that she'll get little work to do when she comes out. People talk unkindly, and say that you must make a difference between her and other girls."

"Oh! there'll always be some clever folk like that," said Mrs Hankworth, drily. "The difference that anyone can see if they use their eyes is, that *she'll* have a child to keep and *they* won't. She's no idea where she'll go, I suppose?"

"She doesn't seem to know where she is now," replied Anne. "It's terrible to see anybody drinking such bitter waters as that poor girl. She thinks we're all against her, and I'm a religious old maid. So she shuts herself up, and doesn't say a word."

"Don't you worry, Miss Hilton," said Mrs Hankworth; "she'll look for friends when the baby comes. She'll stir herself for his sake, if she won't for her own. We're going to have Mr Charter to stop to-morrow night. You'll be going to the Home Missions, won't you?" she said, as if all had been said that could be.



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"It'll be a great treat to hear Mr Charter," said Anne. "He's such a kind way of talking about everybody. It's a season of grace and sweet delight when he comes."

"He's got such a way with children and young people," said Mrs Hankworth, steering away from "experiences." "There's my big lad William! He'll follow him round from place to place till he's out of walking distance. 'What do you do it for, William?' I says to him, and he stands on one leg and then on the other, and says 'I don't know,' he says. 'I like hearing him,' he says. He's a great attraction for him."

"I hope there'll be a good meeting," said Anne, rising to go. "Don't you get up. It's been a great relief to me to have a chat with you."

"I'll go down myself and have a look at Jane," said Mrs Hankworth. "Perhaps in a week or so she'll have got a bit used to her position, and see that she can't go on like that long."

"It'll be a real work of charity," said Anne earnestly. "Young people think a lot of married women. She thinks, you know, that I'm an old maid and don't know anything about it."

"Well, I'll go," said Mrs Hankworth, gratified. "Good morning, then. We shall see you at the meeting."

"God willing," replied Anne, and turned to go, comforted by the confidence and ample views of this well-to-do woman.

CHAPTER XVI

The little grey chapel at the corner of two roads was lighted and already hot with steam on the windows. The wooden pews, set on steps which rose evenly to the window-sill at the back of the tiny building, seemed to precipitate themselves upon the mean wooden pulpit. Three benches set endwise to the platform served for the choir, and there was a small harmonium. The girl (a daughter of a prosperous farmer) who played it was already in her place, and a group of children had taken possession of the front pew. These were playing under the book-rest and frequent giggles burst from their number. At last one of them threw a hat so much too high that it dropped into the next pew, and a preter-natural silence fell upon the group, who all wriggled themselves erect on their seats and looked apprehensively round. The girl at the harmonium bent back to look at the clock and then pulled out her stops and began to play. The door clicked, and burst open to admit a cold breeze and a big farm boy in his Sunday clothes, whose head and shoulders came in before the rest of him was ready to follow, and who held on to the door as he entered as if for protection. Every child turned its head and watched him while he ducked his head on to the book-board for a second, and then sat upright, adjusting his neck into his collar. The farmer, whose daughter played the organ, came



next with his wife, who made her way with an air of ownership to her seat, and having covered her face with her hand for a moment, untied her bonnet-strings



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and fanned her hot face. Every other moment now the door burst open, and admitted someone from the dark blue outside—a group of clumsy youths who flung themselves upon the pew doors as if they had formed the deliberate purpose of keeping them out, some girls in their finery nodding to acquaintances as they entered, some labourers in unaccustomed clothes, and last Mary Colton who walked with her calculating step to the nearest choir bench. Then a larger group hesitated at the door and the evangelist entered, mounting the pulpit with a confident tread, the minister taking a seat in the choir benches and the stewards sitting behind him. There was some whispering between the evangelist and the minister, then the evangelist remained seated and the minister rose and gave out a hymn—

“Rescue the perishing, care for the dying.”

Those who did not know the words knew and shouted the chorus. It was a rousing beginning. As the hymn came to a final shout, Anne Hilton in a black bonnet and old-fashioned mantle with a bead fringe at the shoulders, with one black cotton glove half on and the other wholly off, entered the chapel and sat just within the door.

The evangelist glanced round his congregation and found himself able to believe the report that the country districts were apathetic. He was an ugly little man with straggling brown whiskers and unruly hair, and had no great appearance of illumination, yet he was a true evangelist, labouring hard to pull souls from the pit of social and moral corruption. That was why he had been sent to the task of addressing the country congregations. He was not working with an eye to romance, nor for the glory which comes to those who work in the slums. He thought with the thoughts of those among whom he worked. He had known what it was to be hungry. He had known the crucifixion of standing idle when every limb ached to be working. He knew that pregnant women are sometimes beaten and kicked by the clogs of their husbands. He knew what little children felt like when they cried from cold. His heart was incessantly burning, but he had worked now for fifteen years and it was no longer burning with indignation. He had found others, not Christians, as he thought, who would be indignant, who would plan with pity and sympathy and with more efficiency and foresight that he could ever control, build up and organise ways of escape for much that he saw. He could meet them too. But his work was to understand, and from his understanding to attract and heal. The others had nothing to say to a woman whose husband died, or whose son became crippled at work, to a man who lost his right hand, or a girl whose sweetheart was drowned two days before the wedding, and these things were always happening.



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He looked round. He thought of his various speeches. It was no use telling these people how many more women were arrested for drunkenness in the streets this year than last, nor how many families lived in cellars, nor how many men were without work. Their imaginations, never straying into large numbers, would be blank. He would tell them stories of men and women like themselves, and of how *they* managed when calamity came. He had sheaves of such stories and a ready tongue. He might strike a spark of understanding. His voice, as he began to speak, belied his appearance. It was sonorous and beautiful and it immediately controlled his audience.

“My dear friends! Just round the corner from the house where I live, there’s a street called ‘Paradise Street,’ but I can tell you as I came along here this morning in the lanes by the chapel, it seemed to me a good deal more like Paradise than that street. It was a treat to smell hawthorn hedges again, and to see some clear sky again, after the foundries of stone-work, and I don’t know what it is that makes people give names like Angel Meadow, Paradise Row, Greenfield Street to the dirtiest and smelliest streets in all the town. But I’ve got some very good friends in this particular Paradise Street I was talking of, and if they don’t get an abundant entrance into the Paradise of our Saviour when their time comes, I’ve mistaken His loving-kindness very sadly.

“Now, you’d hardly think that an old woman could be very happy living in a cellar, without even a proper window to put a plant in, and six steps to come up and down every time she went out and in, and drunken men cursing and blaspheming up above in the street! Well! I’m going to tell you a tale of one of the happiest old women I know, but I’m afraid it’s got to be about a day on which she wasn’t happy at all.

“Her name’s Jane Clark, and she lives in that cellar I’m speaking of on 2s. 6d. a week she has from the parish. She’s a widow, and some of you women know what that means. She pays 1s. 3d. for her share of the cellar, for you know in towns such as I come from, we’re building so many factories, and railway sheds, and what not, that we’ve no room left to live in, so Mrs Clark had to share even her cellar. Many a time when I passed down that dreadful street and hadn’t time to go in, I’d just shout down the cellar and she’d have an answer back in no time. I used to go down for a few minutes, just to cheer myself up a bit, for there’s a lot of discouraging things happen in our sort of work, and she always made me ashamed. She was so content, never wanting more and always thankful for what she had.

“Well! one day I was in Paradise Street. It was wet and cold, and the beer-shops were full of drunken men and women, and even the children were shouting foul language.

“‘O God,’ I said, ready to cry out in the street, ‘How long will the power of the devil last in this town?’ However, I thought of Mrs Clark down there, and how she had to live in it all, so I went down the steps, and there she was, but I could see that even she had been crying.



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“Now, Mrs Clark!’ I said, ‘you don’t mean to tell me that it’s your turn to be cheered up?’

“No!’ she said, ‘not now! I’ve got it done already!’

“Well, now!’ I said, ‘it’s so unusual to see you with those red eyes that you make me quite curious. That is, if it’s nothing that’ll hurt you to tell,’ I said.

“No!’ she said, ‘it’ll not hurt me. I’m a silly old woman,’ she said. She didn’t speak for a minute, and then she went on:

“You know it’s my birthday to-day, Mr Charter. I’m sixty this very Friday. Well, you know, I always say to myself, “Short commons on Friday,” I says, “because 1s. 6d. won’t last for ever.” But somehow, with its being my birthday I suppose, and me being sixty, I got it into my head that the Lord would perhaps remember me. I’ve gone on loving Him for over forty years, and it did seem hard that on my birthday and me sixty, He should have left me with only a crust of bread to my tea. However, I sat down to eat my crust, but when I began to say a blessing over it, I just began to cry like a silly child. Well, what do you think! I’d just taken the first bite, when a child, whose mother I know, came running in and put a little newspaper parcel on the table. “Mrs Clark,” she says, “my mother was out working to-day, and the lady gave her a big pot of dripping, so she sent a bit round for your tea!” She run straight away, and when that child had gone, I cried a good bit more, and then I laughed and laughed, and says over and over again to myself, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.””

The evangelist looked at his watch, and took a drink of water. One or two men shifted their attitude from one side to the other, and all waited as children do for an absorbing story. A momentary look of satisfaction came over the face of the evangelist, and he began again with zest.

“I’m afraid the next tale I’ve got to tell you will take a good deal of time.” (“We’re here to listen,” interrupted the minister.)

“Thank you! but you don’t know me when I begin to talk! I can hardly tell this tale in a public meeting, it comes so near home. It’s about a friend of mine, we’ll call him Joe, and whenever I think about him there always comes into my mind the verse we put up over him, ‘Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me,’ for Joe hadn’t an easy lot. I’ll tell you what his trade was, though it may make you laugh to hear he was a sweep! Now, I don’t know what there is about a sweep that makes little rascals of boys throw stones at him, and call names after him, but that’s the curious fact. As soon as ever a sweep begins to call out in the street, there’s a crowd of little rascals round him at once. I’ve seen Joe sometimes, a little crooked man with a lame leg and a black face, and a tail of little ragamuffins shouting “Weep, ‘weep!’ behind him, going about his earthly business in the dirty streets round about where he lived. ‘Eh! never mind ’em,

Mr Charter,' he used to say. 'It pleases the children, and it doesn't hurt me.' That was the sort of man he was, you see, humble and content.



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“He was married, was Joe, to a good, hard-working little wife, and they’d had one daughter. She married a young plumber who got work at Peterhead, and she had three little boys that their grandfather had never seen. He had a photograph of them on the mantleshelf with their mother, that she’d sent him one Christmas. Now one day, an idea came into his head, that if he put by threepence a week, after a good long time, he and his wife could go by a cheap excursion to see those little grandchildren and their mother, just once before they died. He prayed about it, and then week by week, they began saving up, and the nearer they came to having L3, the more real those little grandchildren of theirs became. The daughter, you see, wasn’t to be told till all was ready, and then there was going to be a grand surprise. Well, you know, I got as interested in that saving-up as though it was me that was going the excursion!

“Now Joe, he had the young men’s class in the Sunday-school (all of ’em who weren’t too high up in world to be taught by the sweep), and one day I was looking in at a foundry as I passed, when a young man who was standing out at the door said to me, ‘Have you heard about Joe?’

“‘No!’ I said, rather startled, for he’s a frail old man at the best, ‘What about him?’

“‘Oh, it’s nothing wrong with himself,’ he said, ‘but a week ago when he was going out in the early morning—last Saturday was wet, wasn’t it?—he found one of them poor street girls fallen down in a faint a few yards away from his house. He called the missis, and they got her into the kitchen and gave her a cup of tea and put her to bed, and she’ll never get up again, it seems. She was in a consumption too bad for them to take her at the hospital, so Joe’s keeping her till she wants it no more.’

“I said good-bye to the young man and set off straight to see Joe. It was afternoon, so he was in when I got there. He didn’t say much, but we went in to see the girl (she’d got the bed, and the missis slept on the sofa and Joe in the armchair), a poor, breathless, young thing, very near to death. I began to talk to her of the love of our Saviour, but she stopped me. ‘Nobody’s ever loved *me!*’ she said, ‘nobody’ll care if I die or not. I never believed there was any kindness in the world till I met these two.’ We left her gasping there and went into the kitchen.

“‘Poor lost lamb,’ said Joe, ‘them’s sad words to hear.’

“‘Sadder to feel they’re true about so many others as well,’ I said. ‘But, Joe, be open with me,’ I said, ‘have you spent your savings on this poor soul?’

“‘Yes!’ he said, ‘all but a few shillings. She must have milk and nourishment, you know.’

“‘Yes, I know that,’ I said, ‘and for the present I can’t help you, but you mustn’t be allowed to spend all you’ve saved.’

“Nay,’ he said, ’it was a bitter cross the Lord of Glory carried for my sins. I can at least do this for one of His lost ones.’



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"I knew he'd say that, or something like it, but in my own mind I'd determined to get it back again from somewhere for him, but you'll hear how I was prevented. I noticed that he looked a bit tired and thin as I went out, and I said to him, 'You're not looking very grand! You must take care of yourself too.'"

"'No! I don't feel very well,' he said. 'I've been feeling my age a bit lately,' he said laughing.

"'I'll look in to-morrow again,' I said as I went away, and about the same time next day I went back to find him sitting still on one side of the fireplace and the wife on the other. The girl had died suddenly in the night. They'd got the photograph of the little grandchildren, and I could see the old woman had been crying.

"'We shan't see them in this world now,' said Joe.

"I thought he was considering the money and began to talk.

"'No!' he said, 'it isn't that. The money was a bit of a sacrifice at the time, but I can see now why He asked me for it, and how thankful I am, as things have turned out, that I didn't refuse to do that little thing for Him. After you'd gone yesterday,' he went on, 'I felt so poorly that when the doctor came to see that poor girl I told him what I felt like. He looked a bit queer at first, and then he said:

"'Well, Joe,' he said, 'I know very well that you're not afraid of death, so I won't beat about the bush,' he said.

"'Thank you, doctor,' I said.

"'Of course,' he said, 'I can't be certain, but I'm afraid it's cancer, and I can only say that I'll make it as easy for you as I can.' He's a kind man, Mr Charter, though he's reckoned rough. Well, you can imagine how my first feeling was of thankfulness that I'd been kept in the love of God, and not held back for my own pleasure the money he was needing. *He* knew, you see, that I shouldn't want it, and he sent that poor girl to be looked after by someone as had money to spare.

"'I'll bless the Hand that guided,
I'll bless the Heart that planned,
When throned where glory dwelleth,
In Immanuel's Land.'"

So my summons is come, Mr Charter, though I'd no idea it was so near.'

"There's not a great deal you can say at such times, and my heart was very full as I listened to him, though I knew that it was well with him. I'm not going to tell you about the way he went through the valley, beautiful though it was, but I'll tell you just this



before I sit down. Those young men of Joe's Sunday class got together and talked, and though they were young working-men with not much of a wage, they each gave sixpence a week and the old man had ten shillings a week as long as he lived, and every time he got the ten shillings he'd cry, and say, that he didn't know anybody in the world who'd had so much kindness shown to them all their life long as *he* had."



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The evangelist glanced round the chapel as the minister gave out the hymn. The heads of the boys were bent over their hymn-books, searching, with whispering, among the pages which they turned with wet thumbs. There was no apathy now. All the slow sun-burnt faces showed signs of having understood. One or two men sat with their eyes fixed on the evangelist as if waiting for more. A woman wiped her eyes and sighed. There was no restlessness. He had succeeded in making all these people, so different from the driven, excited, underfed congregation he constantly saw, think from beginning to end of his poor people, and had succeeded in making them sorry. He was content.

With that inarticulate desire to come into close contact with those who have moved them, which one knows among the poor, many of the congregation crowded round the pulpit to shake hands with the evangelist who leaned over the side, gripping hand after hand.

“A very good meeting,” said the steward, looking round with an air of satisfaction.

“You’ve made me feel very small, sir,” said a young man to the evangelist. “I’ve a good deal further to go yet.”

“It’s true of us all,” replied the evangelist, shaking his hand fervently.

Anne Hilton had returned from the farmer to whom she had sold one of her pigs, and fed the animals, but had not taken off the linen pocket which she tied round her waist under her petticoat, and which held her money. She was trying to get at it now in the narrow pew. She knocked down a hymn-book and several pennies rolled under the feet of the out-going congregation. A young woman, with roses in her best hat, nudged another and laughed. A big boy stooped to pick up two, and restored them with a purple face. Anne replaced them in the linen pocket, shook her skirt down again, wrapped something in a piece of an old envelope, and beckoning the steward gave it to him, then followed the others through the blue square of the doorway. The steward approached the evangelist with a rather embarrassed smile.

“Our good sister’s a bit queer,” he said. “I don’t know why she couldn’t put it in the collection box.”

The evangelist unwrapped the envelope and disclosed a sovereign. He paused.

“It’s a big gift for a poor woman,” he said in a moment. “She needed to make up her mind a bit first. The collection box came too soon.”

“I’ve no doubt you’re right,” said the minister. “She’s a good woman if a little erratic, and a sovereign means a large part of her week’s takings.”



“I don’t think she ought to have given it,” said the steward’s wife, who was waiting for her husband to drive her home. “She’ll need help herself if she gives away like that. She always *must* be different from other people.”



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Anne Hilton was walking home in the cool night air. The stars were so clear that they seemed to rest on the fields and tree-tops, and the rustle of the sleepless corn passed behind every hedge. She walked with a certain carefulness as of one who had unexpectedly escaped a physical danger; but the peril from which she was conscious of fleeing was spiritual. She had been threatened by avarice which had prompted her to give a small sum instead of the sovereign, and the evangelist had been right in his intuition. It had needed a good deal of "making up her mind" to give away the greater part of her earnings, even under the warmth of human appeal. She had conquered, but narrowly, and there was as much shame as satisfaction in her heart as she left the building, and more than all a great fear lest it should be talked about.

CHAPTER XVII

It was the first day of spring, the season of swift changes. For the first time the sky was lighter than the ground. Its brilliant clouds threw heavy shadows on the earth, fugitive shadows which ran with the warm wind, alert with colour. Nothing was quiet or hidden. There was not yet sufficient life to cover or screen. Everything that had budded had a world to itself and could be seen. Radiant, innocent, carolling, self-revealing, the movement and action of spring were in the earth. The running and glittering water, in winter so vivid a feature of the fields, had become insignificant in comparison with the splendid and vigorous sky. The noise of the wind, too, beat in one's ears louder than the water. One had no time for meditation. One was hurried as the wind, speeding as the sunshine. Yet the spring more than any other season is the time when one thinks of the generations that pass—perhaps from the very transitoriness of the visual images, their evanescence and momentary changes reminding one so of the dead. In autumn the passage is grave and decorous, like the advance of old age. In spring the image is lovely and momentary, like the bright passage of those dead young.

Anne Hilton looked out to see what kind of weather it was for the market, and with a sudden pang, she remembered her old father, and how, on such a day, he would totter to the open door, and there sit in the sunshine, grateful for the same warmth for which his old dog was grateful. When she came home from the market, she would make a wreath of white holly to put on the grave in which he rested. She thought of him vividly, of the pathos of his last illness from which she had vainly tried to drive the fear and soften the pain. She remembered his slow laugh, and the knocking of his stick on the floor. Memory is keener in bright sunshine than in the twilight, in vivid enjoyment more poignant than in melancholy. The churchyard, with its unvisited green mound and dwelling of the silent, became visible to Anne, and with it the dying out of joy which returns with that vision and memory. The house, too, was very quiet, as she drew in her head, with the stillness of a place once lived in and now empty. She had become accustomed to thinking of her father with tranquillity, satisfied to believe him at rest. Now the pain of loneliness returned with memory.



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She harnessed the pony to the cart, and stowed her baskets safely under the seat. She was dressed in a purple merino skirt, kilted thickly, a black mantle, with a bead fringe, and an antiquated straw bonnet. Round her neck she had folded a man's linen handkerchief, and she had elastic-sided boots on her feet. She locked the door, and put the keys in her linen pocket tied round her waist under her skirt, and climbing up by means of the wheel, seated herself on the board which did duty as a seat, and took the reins. "Go on, Polly!" she said, and the pony, with a good deal of tossing of head and tail, set off obediently towards the high road. The clacking of its feet as it trotted on the hard road overwhelmed all other sounds. At the corner of the roads an old woman tending a cow nodded to her, and one or two field labourers raised themselves to see who was going past, remaining upright and staring longer than was necessary to satisfy their curiosity. At an open field-gate she had to wait until two heavy wagons, their wheels a mass of red, soft earth, had emerged, and turned in the direction of the town. She passed them, and for some time met no one. An advancing cart soon came in sight, accompanied by a great jangling of cans—a milk-cart returning from the station, having sent off its supplies to the town, now bringing back its empty cans. It was driven by a man whom Anne knew, and, instead of drawing to one side to pass, he reined in his horse as if to speak. "Good morning, Miss Hilton," he said. Anne checked her horse which had gone a few paces past, and turning in her seat to look over her shoulder, answered his greeting. The farmer's horse, impatient of this check on the way home, made several attempts to start, and at last, being held in by his master and scolded loudly, fell to pawing the ground with one foot. Having quieted his horse, the farmer also turned in his seat, and looking back at Anne said:

"I've just been up to the Union with the milk, Miss Hilton. They've had a death this morning. I thought I'd tell you."

"Not Jane Evans?" said Anne, dropping the reins, but the next moment retaking them as the pony had started off.

"Yes, it's Jane," said the man. "The child's living. It's a boy. She's to be buried to-morrow seemingly. They soon put you where they want you when you go in there."

Anne, who had been living all morning with the dead whom she knew to be dead, stared helplessly as she heard that one whom she believed to be alive was dead also. She had meant to go to the Union to-morrow. She was speechless.

"She had a drouth on her it seems, and couldn't drag herself up again," said the farmer.

Anne remembered the room with its blue-covered beds, and the fire burning beneath the lithograph of Queen Victoria, and the girl sitting beside it whom she could not reach by speaking, and who was now indeed dead.

“You’ll perhaps be going up?” said the farmer, as if to lay on someone else the responsibility of knowing about it also.



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"I'll go up this afternoon," returned Anne, picking up the whip and flicking the pony. The farmer said "Good morning," and the rattle of milk cans once more filled the road as his horse set off at a gallop towards home.

CHAPTER XVIII

When the business of the market was done, and Anne reached the Union, it was late in the afternoon. The roads outside the town were full of farmers returning from the market, of women walking with empty baskets, and an occasional small herd of cattle, being driven away from the terrifying experience of the town, by a purchaser. It was visiting-day at the Union, and here and there from the out-going stream, a man or woman of middle-age turned aside to enter the gate of the big brick building, in whose side-garden men were working, dressed in the bottle-green corduroy of the institution.

The presence of spring seemed to surge about the bare building. The trees planted about it were old, and belonged to an older building which protruded from the back; the weather-stained wall was old also, and the sunlight, older than either, shone with an urgent warmth beneath the heavy green shade. Rows of green blades were appearing in the border, set aside for ornament. The air, the clouds, the light near the ground, all seemed alive with the peculiar revival only felt in the spring.

Anne was admitted with others to the corridor, and left while they turned to the places they sought.

"She might see the Matron," said the porter, going along with a clatter of his feet to the far end of the corridor and knocking at a door. The Matron almost immediately emerged carrying a large key.

"It was very sad, wasn't it?" she began at once. "It happened night before last. It's a fine boy, though it's a bit too soon. One of the young women's got him." She led the way to the wide front stairs and began to ascend. Stopping at a half-open door, she entered and Anne followed.

It was a smaller room than the big ward, and sunny. It had an air of privacy, of comfort given by the sunshine only, for it was uncarpeted, and bare like the others. Four young women were sewing the stiff linsey skirts worn in the Union.

"How's the baby?" said the Matron.

"Asleep," replied a good-looking, blond young woman, rising willingly from her work and going over to the window, beneath which was a wicker-cradle covered with a shawl. She drew back the shawl, and Anne saw lying on one cheek on the pillow, the tiny, fuzzy, misshapen head and creased purple fist of a new baby. The confidence of that tiny breathing creature lying asleep seemed strange to Anne, who knew how desolate it



was. It had already, as it were, taken possession of its place in the world, and had no intention of being dislodged.

“He’s a healthy little thing,” said the Matron.

“Greedy too,” said the blond young woman, with a laugh.



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“Could I look at Jane?” asked Anne.

“They fastened it up this afternoon,” replied the Matron. “There’ll be two funerals to-morrow. The other’s an old man. You can see all there is to see.”

She covered the baby and left the room, descending the same stairs, and going out of a side door. A strong smell of disinfectants came out into the warm garden as she opened the door of a glazed brick building. The blinds were down to keep out the sun. The building was lined with white glazed brick, and two straight burdens lay on a trestle-table.

“Eight o’clock to-morrow,” said the Matron, coming out again and locking the door.

Jane had gone. She was as confident as the baby in her absence. It was that which impressed Anne. Neither of the two so lately one flesh, needed or cared for the other. Jane seemed to have shut herself of her own accord in that wooden case, so that she would be no longer teased or tortured, and the baby was quite happy that it should be so. Their disregard one of the other was strange to Anne.

“Elizabeth Richardson was inquiring if you were coming,” said the Matron. “Will you go up and see her?”

Elizabeth Richardson was lying in the bed that had been Jane’s. She looked less peevish and more tended. Anne glanced at the fireplace as she entered. The armchair had been moved back, and no one sat at the fire. She sighed and turned to Elizabeth.

“Yes, it’s very comfortable,” said Elizabeth. “I’m glad I came. It’s nice to have the bed made every day. You’ll have heard that Jane Evans is out of her troubles?”

Anne nodded.

“It’s best, I think,” said Elizabeth. “The world’s none too kind, and she was a depending sort of girl. She got out of it easy enough. There’ll be some disappointed though,” she added with her old cynicism.

“Don’t let’s be hard in our judgments,” said Anne, sadly.

CHAPTER XIX

The habit of working for another is so fixed in the lives of poor women, that the interruption of it becomes a kind of second death, almost as difficult to bear as the death of the affection which is itself almost a kind of habit. When Anne returned from market, and sat down, her house seemed to have become a little emptier, because the girl whose welfare she had carried with her for so many months was beyond her reach.



She took down her Bible to read it, and find relief for her trouble. She was a woman who had had “experience”—that experience which comes to each as a kind of special revelation, a thing so surprising, that it appears impossible to think of its having happened before, or to withhold the telling; the cynicism, which declares this to be an overwhelming interest in one’s internal self, being only partially right, it being rather the excited and surprised mental condition which is the deep well from which all art, all expression, breaks forth. She read slowly, trying to find meaning in each phrase, when suddenly a verse struck her in its entirety before her lips had finished reading.



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“Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

She saw exactly what she would do. There was the child, motherless, and worse than fatherless. She would take him and bring him up unspotted from the world. It was clearly a leading for her. She had not been permitted to save the girl, but she might take and protect the boy. She remembered even the commonsense of Mrs Hankworth. “It’s soonest forgotten about if it’s a boy.” She was not so much an old maid as a woman shut up from issue, and she had no fear of a child. And in the midst of her bewilderment about the girl, about death and the hereafter, she could see an earthly duty clearly, and pure religion for herself. She began to sing:

“Who points the clouds their course,
Whom winds and storms obey,
He shall direct thy wandering feet,
He shall point out thy way.”

She opened a drawer which held what was left of her father’s clothes without any feeling of incongruity. There were four shirts of checked oxford shirting, two pairs of long stockings, a corduroy jacket, and his best suit of black serge bound with braid round the coat. There was a revolver, too, a clasp knife, a unused church-warden, an old wide-awake hat. To-morrow she would write to the Union, and offer to bring up the child when he was weaned.

CHAPTER XX

It was a cool evening in early summer, full of the leisurely peace of the country. The women were out of doors after much perspiring work within. It was too early for the shadows, yet a sensible relief to the day’s ardour, which one was disposed to linger and enjoy, was evident in the tranquil atmosphere, and on the relaxed faces of those who lingered about the doors of the cottages, or turned the bleaching clothes on the hedges. Mrs Hankworth, in a fashionable bonnet and dark green dress, which proclaimed a ceremonial visit, was driving beside her husband in a light yellow trap, in the unusual direction of Anne Hilton’s cottage. Her husband, with his eyes on the road, suddenly pulled up the horse.

“Now, where did you two come from?” he ejaculated, jumping from the trap and examining the backs of two enormous sows, who were munching and rooting in foreign ground with great satisfaction. At the sight of their enemy, a man, they began that lumbering but nimble trot, by which their tribe elude and disregard anything disagreeable.



“You better get up again,” said Mrs Hankworth. “We’ll keep up to them and perhaps turn ’em in somewhere. Miss Hilton’s the nearest.”

“I don’t recognise ’em,” said the farmer, springing up with agility and driving the horse carefully after the sows. “Some one must have bought them yesterday. We can call at one or two places on the way back and inquire. There’s William Crowther,” he added, standing up in the trap—“William!” he shouted, “do you see them sows? Stop ’em at Anne Hilton’s sty. I don’t know whose they are.”



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"I'll give them a little exercise!" shouted William, setting off in pursuit. Anne Hilton looked out from her door to see the farmer standing up to bar the road backwards, and shouting directions to William, while he at the other side dodged one sow after the other, and Mrs Hankworth sat back laughing with enjoyment.

Anne ran to open the yard-gate, and, with management, the sows saw no other opening and ran in at a trot, scattering the squealing hens as they did so.

"Of all the knowing things!" said Mrs Hankworth.

"Well, Miss Hilton, we're bringing you two sows and ourselves to visit you!" said the farmer. "First a baby and then two sows! You'll keep a foundling home very soon."

He jumped out, and his wife came slowly over the wheel.

"Somebody'll be sending out to inquire for them soon," said Anne. "I'm very pleased to see you, Mrs Hankworth."

"We came to say we'd send you milk for the baby every day," said Mrs Hankworth, entering the kitchen. "You'll want yours for the butter."

"It's very kind of you," said Anne. "But he'll want a good deal."

"We've got seventy-five cows, you know," said Mrs Hankworth, with a contented laugh. "He'll not make much difference among 'em. Where is he? Bless him," she said, as she saw the baby staring at her from the wide wooden chair, in which he was tied.

"A fine baby," said the farmer with an ultimate tone.

"He *is* a nice one!" said his wife. "I *must* take him," she said, picking up the baby and turning him face downwards over her arm while she seated herself. She spread open her knees and laid him, docile to her practised handling, across them. Anne watched her with the air of one taking a lesson.

"Did you have much trouble to get him?" asked Mrs Hankworth.

"No, very little," said Anne. "There were some papers to sign, and one or two other things, but I believe they're generally glad to board out children if they can."

"Well, he's a healthy child. Oh! I don't know anything that made me so full as to hear that poor girl had slipped away like that. I didn't get over it for some days. You remember the last time I saw you, I was intending to go and see her."

"Yes, we were all making plans," said Anne.



“Here’s Mrs Crowther,” said the farmer. “Come to see the baby, too, I expect. I’ll just go and see how the sows is doing,” he said, approaching the door.

“Well, Mr and Mrs Hankworth, I didn’t expect to see you here,” said Mrs Crowther, coming in. “I came to see how the baby was getting on. Eh, how they *do* get hold of you, don’t they, little things. I *must* have him a minute,” she said, taking him from Mrs Hankworth’s knee. “No, you’re not the first baby I’ve had hold of,” she added to the little creature, who twisted about with protesting noises. She smacked its soft thighs, and held its warm head against her cheek. “I’m right down silly over a baby!” she exclaimed, laying it back on Mrs Hankworth’s knee.



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"We can't have any more of our own," said the latter, "we have to make the best of other people's."

Anne took a tissue-paper parcel from the shelf, and opening it, showed a blue cashmere smock with a ribbon.

"I was so pleased," she said. "Mrs Phillipson's eldest girl that's to be married next month brought it in yesterday. It shows how you misjudge people. When I went to see them, they seemed so hard upon poor Jane. But she brought that pretty frock she'd made herself for the baby. She's a good-looking girl, and she'll make a good wife."

"You think on these things at such a time," said Mrs Hankworth. "All kinds o' little things you never thought of before come into your mind when you're going to be married. But it was nice of her. I shall think better of that girl after this."

"That sounds like Mary," said Anne, looking round the open door. "Yes it is. Come in, Mary. You'll find some friends here."

Mrs Hankworth laughed uproariously. "The baby's holding a reception," she said, her huge form shaking.

"It's Mrs Hankworth, I know," said Mary.

"And Mrs Crowther," interposed the latter herself; "we're making sillies of ourselves over the baby. Here, sit down and take him, Mary."

She set Mary in the chair which she had vacated, and laid the baby on her knees carefully placing the blind woman's hands over the little body.

"There's not much of him," said Mary. "What does he like? This?" And with her hands spread upon the child, she moved her knees backwards and forwards, clicking her heels on the floor.

"I could soon do it," she said, with a satisfied chuckle.

"I'm sure you could," said Anne.

"It was Peter Molesworth that told me you was here," said Mary, "so I thought I'd come too."

"Whatever *do* you think that Peter Molesworth came out with in the class the other day?" said Mrs Hankworth. "We was having as nice a meeting as you could wish, and then Peter gets up to give his experience. He says, 'I thank the Lord I've got peace in my home and a praying mother' (she's not much o' that, I thought to myself); and then he went on, 'You know, when I think of the troubles of others in serving Christ, I cannot



bear. There's a poor woman I know,' he says, 'that's trying to serve Christ, and whenever she kneels down to say her prayers, her husband begins to tickle her feet.' Did you ever hear of anybody coming out with such a thing before? 'I think this door wants oiling, Mrs Hankworth,' he says to me as we was going out. 'Nay, Peter,' I says, 'it's *thee* that wants oiling.' 'Why, Mrs Hankworth, what's the matter?' he says. 'Whatever made you come out with such a thing in the meeting,' I says. 'Why, what was wrong with it?' he says. 'Oh, well!' I says, 'if you don't know yourself, *I* can't tell you,' I says. He's a bright one is Peter Molesworth."

"Are you ready, Mother?" shouted Mr Hankworth, putting his head in the door. "John Unsworth thinks the sows belongs to Mr Phillipson. He saw him bringing some home last night. We can take him on the way home."



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"I'm coming," said Mrs Hankworth, rising slowly. "If there's anything you need, any advice or that, I'll be very pleased to give it you. Let me give him a kiss." "You're a beauty, that's what you are," she said, kissing the baby and giving it back to Mary.

"I must go too," said Mrs Crowther. "I'll send down some old flannel to-morrow, Anne. One of my girls'll come in and help you sometimes. It's well they should get used to a baby."

"She'll not be able to stop away herself," said Mrs Hankworth, shrewdly, and laughing together, both women went out, disputing amiably as to whether Mrs Crowther would take a seat in the trap and be driven as far as the cross roads.

The blind woman was feeling carefully the downy head of the baby.

"He's as soft as a kitten," she said. "I could spare several eggs a week out of the basket," she added, "if they'd be any use. I don't know much about babies. My brother was bigger than me when we was at home, and, of course, since then I've not had much to do with children."

Anne watched the two so helpless and confident. Mary rocked her knees steadily, and the child's head lay contentedly.

"I believe you've put him to sleep," said Anne. "Shall I put him in the cradle?"

"No, let me have him," said Mary, "I've never nursed a baby before."

CHAPTER XXI

Anne was left alone in the cottage with the baby, who slept in the clothes-basket she had turned into a cradle. The dog slept, too, having made friends with fortune. A late evening glow lit one side of the wall. When it faded, the dusk would absorb all the room and its inhabitants. Anne, sitting very still lest she should wake the baby, remembered one by one the agonies that had been lived through, whose sole result seemed to be this peaceful evening and the confidently breathing child. She remembered the shock of the disgrace to her, she, who had been a friend of the grandmother's, and how she had carried the burden about. She remembered the new house, and Jane, pretty, spoiled, and without misgiving, caring nothing for the hard judgments of which she herself imbibed the bitterness. Then Jane, with the child already striving to be free, leaving the new house at night, knowing without being told what door was open to her of all the doors in the country, and what place she would henceforth take. She saw the girl again, seated by the fire in the Infirmary ward, with that strange division between herself and all living, removed, as it were, to a distance which could not be bridged. Then Jane was no more to be found. There was the boy-child instead, who knew nothing except his desire to be kept alive; who met all reservations and pity by a determination to be



fed. Throughout the whole evening, Anne had been struck by the fact that the other women scarcely thought of Jane any more than the baby did. It remained to them a very simple

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matter. There was a baby to feed and bring up. Being a boy, other things would soon be forgotten. It was too late, she knew, to do anything for Jane. The only thing that seemed possible to her in her simple reasoning, was to prevent such catastrophes for the future. It was not that pity was misplaced when shipwreck came, nor that charity ever failed. She understood, without being conscious of it, the ironic severity of Jesus, who would have no sudden pity and heart-searching on account of His poor. He had come into the world for righteousness and for judgment, and the judgment and righteousness both declared, not at the time of disaster or human appeal, nor with sudden loud outcries, but, "The poor always ye have with you, and *whensoever ye will*, ye may do them good."

The baby stirred. Anne lit the candle, and set it on the stairs. She stepped over the dog, and took a warm flannel from the oven door. Tucking it in at the feet of the child, she lifted the clothes-basket and carried it upstairs. The dog raised his head and watched her. She returned, covered the fire, and set an earthenware pot of milk on the hob. The dog laid his nose between his paws again. Anne, taking the candle and leaving the room in darkness, closed the staircase door and went upstairs.