

Tales of the Ridings eBook

Tales of the Ridings

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Tales of the Ridings eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Page 1.....	5
Page 2.....	6
Page 3.....	7
Page 4.....	8
Page 5.....	9
Page 6.....	10
Page 7.....	11
Page 8.....	12
Page 9.....	13
Page 10.....	14
Page 11.....	16
Page 12.....	17
Page 13.....	18
Page 14.....	19
Page 15.....	21
Page 16.....	22
Page 17.....	23
Page 18.....	24
Page 19.....	26
Page 20.....	28
Page 21.....	30
Page 22.....	32

Page 23.....	33
Page 24.....	35
Page 25.....	37
Page 26.....	38
Page 27.....	39
Page 28.....	40
Page 29.....	41
Page 30.....	43
Page 31.....	45
Page 32.....	47
Page 33.....	49
Page 34.....	50
Page 35.....	52
Page 36.....	54
Page 37.....	56
Page 38.....	58
Page 39.....	60
Page 40.....	62
Page 41.....	64

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
MEMOIR		1
A LAOCOON OF THE ROCKS		9
THROP'S WIFE		16
THE INNER VOICE		25
B.A.		37
CORN-FEVER		39

Page 1

MEMOIR

Frederic Moorman came of a stock which, on both sides, had struck deep roots in the soil of Devon. His father's family, which is believed to have sprung ultimately from "either Cornwall or Scotland"—a sufficiently wide choice, it may be thought—had for many generations been settled in the county.⁽¹⁾ His mother's—her maiden name was Mary Honywill—had for centuries held land at Widdicombe and the neighbourhood, in the heart of Dartmoor. He was born on 8th September 1872, at Ashburton, where his father, the Rev. A. C. Moorman, was Congregational minister; and for the first ten years of his life he was brought up on the skirts of the moor to which his mother's family belonged: drinking in from the very first that love of country sights and sounds which clove to him through life, and laying the foundation of that close knowledge of birds and flowers which was an endless source of delight to him in after years, and which made him so welcome a companion in a country walk with any friend who shared his love of such things but who, ten to one, could make no pretence whatever to his knowledge.

In 1882, his father was appointed to the ministry of the Congregational Church at Stonehouse, in Gloucestershire; and Frederic began his formal schooling at the Wyclif Preparatory School in that place. The country round Stonehouse—a country of barish slopes and richly wooded valleys—is perhaps hardly so beautiful as that which he had left and whose memory he never ceased to cherish. But it has a charm all its own, and the child of Dartmoor had no great reason to lament his removal to the grey uplands and "golden valleys" of the Cotswolds.

His next change must have seemed one greatly for the worse. In 1884 he was sent to the school for the sons of Congregational ministers at Caterham; and the Cotswolds, with their wide outlook over the Severn estuary to May Hill and the wooded heights beyond, were exchanged for the bald sweep and the white chalk-pits of the North Downs. These too have their unique beauty; but I never remember to have heard Moorman say anything which showed that he felt it as those who have known such scenery from boyhood might have expected him to do.

After some five years at Caterham, he began his academical studies at University College, London; but, on the strength of a scholarship, soon removed to University College, Aberystwyth (1890), where the scenery—sea, heron-haunted estuaries, wooded down to the very shore, and hills here and there rising almost into mountains—offered surroundings far more congenial to him than the streets and squares of Bloomsbury.

Page 2

In these new surroundings, he seems to have been exceptionally happy, throwing himself into all the interests of the place, athletic as well as intellectual, and endearing himself both to his teachers and his fellow-students. His friendship with Professor Herford, then Professor of English at Aberystwyth, was one of the chief pleasures of his student days as well as of his after life. Following his natural bent, he decided to study for Honours in English Language and Literature, and at the end of his course (1893) was placed in the Second Class by the examiners for the University of London, to which the Aberystwyth College was at that time affiliated. Those who believe in the virtue of infant prodigies—and, in the country which invented Triposes and Class Lists, it is hard to fix any limit to their number—will be distressed to learn that, in the opinion of those best qualified to judge of such matters, he was not at that time reckoned to be of “exceptionally scholarly calibre.” Perhaps this was an omen all the better for his future prospects as a scholar.

It is a wholesome practice that, when the cares of examinations are once safely behind him, a student should widen his experience by a taste of foreign travel. Accordingly, in September, 1893, Moorman betook himself to Strasbourg, primarily for the sake of continuing his studies under the skilful guidance of Ten Brinck. The latter, however, was almost at once called to Berlin and succeeded by Brandl, now himself of the University of Berlin, who actually presided over Moorman’s studies for the next two years, and who thought, and never ceased to think, very highly both of his abilities and his acquirements. It was only natural that Moorman should make a pretty complete surrender to German ideals and German methods of study. It was equally natural that, in the light of subsequent experience, his enthusiasms in that line should suffer a considerable diminution. He was not of the stuff to accept for ever the somewhat bloodless and barren spirit which has commonly dominated the pursuit of literature in German universities.

Into the social life of his new surroundings he threw himself with all the zest that might have been expected from his essentially sociable nature: making many friendships—that of Brandl was the one he most valued—and joining—in some respects, leading—his fellow-students in their sports and other amusements. His first published work, in fact, was a translation of the Rules of Association Football into German; and he may fairly be regarded as the godfather of that game on German soil. Nor was this the end of his activities. During the two years he spent at Strasbourg he acted as Lektor in English to the University, so gaining—and gaining, it is said, with much success—his first experience in what was to be his life’s work as a teacher.

Page 3

On the completion of his course at Strasbourg, where he obtained the degree of Ph.D. in June 1895,(2) he returned to Aberystwyth, now no longer as student but as Lecturer in the English Language and Literature under his friend and former teacher, Professor Herford. There he remained for a little over two years (September, 1895, to January, 1898), gradually increasing his stores of knowledge and strengthening the foundations of the skill which was afterwards to serve him in good stead as a teacher. During that time he also became engaged to the sister of one of his colleagues, Miss Frances Humpidge, whom he had known for some years and whose love was to be the chief joy and support of his after life.

As a matter of prudence, the marriage was postponed until his prospects should be better assured. The opportunity came sooner than could have been expected. In January, 1898, he was appointed to the lectureship in his subject—a subject, such is our respect for literature, then first handed over to an independent department—in the Yorkshire College at Leeds; and in August of the same year he was married. Four children, three of whom survived and the youngest of whom was twelve at the time of his death, were born during the earlier years of the marriage.

The life of a teacher offers little excitement to the onlooker; and all that can be done here is to give a slight sketch of the various directions in which Moorman's energies went out. The first task that lay before him was to organise the new department which had been put into his hands, to make English studies a reality in the college to which he had been called, to give them the place which they deserve to hold in the life of any institution devoted to higher education. Into this task he threw himself with a zeal which can seldom, if ever, have been surpassed. Within six years he had not only put the teaching of his subject to Pass Students upon a satisfactory basis; he had also laid the foundations of an Honours School able to compete on equal terms with those of the other colleges which were federated in the then Victoria University of the north. It was a really surprising feat for so young a man—he was little over twenty-five when appointed—to have accomplished in so short a time; the more so as he was working single-handed: in other words, was doing unaided the work, both literary and linguistic, which in other colleges was commonly distributed between two or three. And I speak with intimate knowledge when I say that the Leeds students who presented themselves for their Honours Degree at the end of that time bore every mark of having been most thoroughly and efficiently prepared.

Page 4

In 1904, six years after Moorman's appointment to the lectureship, the Yorkshire College was reconstituted as a separate and independent university, the University of Leeds; and in the rearrangement which followed, an older man was invited to come in as official chief of the department for which Moorman had hitherto been solely responsible. This invitation was not accepted until Moorman had generously made it clear that the proposed appointment would not be personally unwelcome to him. Nevertheless, it was clearly an invidious position for the new-comer: and a position which, but for the exceptional generosity and loyalty of the former chief of the department, would manifestly have been untenable. In fact, no proof of Moorman's unselfishness could be more conclusive than that, for the nine years during which the two men worked together, the harmony between them remained unbroken, untroubled by even the most passing cloud. Near the close of this time, in recognition of his distinction as a scholar and of his great services to the University, a separate post, as Professor of the English Language, was created for him.

During the whole of his time at Leeds, his knowledge of his subject, both on its literary and linguistic side, was constantly deepening and his efficiency, as teacher of it, constantly increasing. With so keen a mind as his, this was only to be expected. It was equally natural that, as his knowledge expanded and his advice came to be more and more sought by those engaged in the study of such matters, he should make the results of his researches known to a wider public. After several smaller enterprises of this kind, (3) he broke entirely fresh ground with two books, which at once established his right to be heard in both the fields for which he was professionally responsible: *Yorkshire Place Names*, published for and by the Thoresby Society in 1911; and a study of the life and poetry of Robert Herrick, two years later. The former, if here and there perhaps not quite rigorous enough in the tests applied to the slippery evidence available, is in all essentials a most solid piece of work: based on a wide and sound knowledge of the linguistic principles which, though often grossly neglected, form the corner-stone, and something more, of all such inquiries; and lit up with a keen eye for the historical issues—issues reaching far back into national origins which, often in the most unexpected places, they may be made to open out. The latter, to which he turned with the more zest because it led him back to the familiar setting of his native county—to its moors and rills and flowers, and the fairy figures that haunted them—is a delightful study of one of the most unique of English poets(4); a study, however, which could only have been written by one who, among many other things, was a thorough-paced scholar. Many qualities—knowledge, scholarship, love of nature, a discerning eye for poetic beauty—go to the making of such a book. Their union in this *Study* serves to show that, great as was Moorman's authority in the field of language, it was always to literature, above all to poetry, that his heart went naturally out. The closing years of his life were to set this beyond doubt.

Page 5

It would be absurd to close this sketch of Moorman's professional activities without a reference, however slight, to what was, after all, one of the most significant things about them. No man can, in the full sense, be a teacher unless, in some way or other, he throws himself into the life and interests of his students. And it was among the secrets—perhaps the chief secret—of Moorman's influence as a teacher that, so far from being mere names in a register, his students were to him always young people of flesh and blood, in whose interests he could share, whose companion he delighted to be, and who felt that they could turn to him for advice and sympathy as often as they were in need. No doubt his own youthfulness of temper, the almost boyish spirits which seldom or never flagged in him, helped greatly to this result; but the true fountain of it all lay in his ingrained unselfishness. The same power was to make itself felt among the classes for older students which he held in the last years of his life.

To fulfil all these academical duties in the liberal spirit, which was the only spirit possible to Moorman, might well have been expected to exhaust the energies of any man. Yet, amidst them all, he found time to take part, both as lecturer and as trusted adviser, in the activities of the Workers' Educational Association, attending summer meetings and, during the last five or six winters of his life, delivering weekly lectures and taking part in the ensuing discussions, at Crossgates, one of the outlying suburbs of Leeds. To the students who there, year by year, gathered round him he greatly endeared himself by his power of understanding their difficulties and of presenting great poetry in a way that came home to their experience and imagination. His growing sympathy with the life of homestead and cottage made this a work increasingly congenial to him; and, as a lecturer, he was perhaps never so happy, in all senses of the word, as when, released from the "idols of the lecture-room," he was seeking to awake, or keep alive, in others that love of imaginative beauty which counted for so much in his own life and in his discharge of the daily tasks that fell upon him: speaking freely and from his heart to men and women more or less of his own age and his own aspirations; "mingling leadership and *camaraderie* in the happy union so characteristic of him," and "drawing out the best endeavours of his pupils by his modest, quietly effective methods of teaching and, above all, by his great, quiet, human love for each and all."(5)

It is clear that such work, however delightful to him, meant a considerable call upon his time and strength: the more so as it went hand in hand with constant labours on behalf of the Yorkshire Dialect Society, for which he was the most indefatigable of travellers—cycling his way into dale after dale in search of "records"—and of which, on the death of his friend, Mr Philip Unwin, he eventually became president. Nor was this all. During the last seven years or so of his life the creative impulse, the need of embodying his own life and the lives of those around him in imaginative form was constantly growing upon him, and a wholly new horizon was opening before him.

Page 6

At first he may have thought of nothing more than to produce plays suitable for performance either by the students of the University or by young people in those Yorkshire dales with which his affections were becoming year by year increasingly bound up. But, whatever the occasion, it soon proved to be no more than an occasion. He swiftly found that imaginative expression not only came naturally to him, but was a deep necessity of his nature; that it gave a needed outlet to powers and promptings which had hitherto lain dormant and whose very existence was unsuspected by his friends, perhaps even by himself. *The May King*, *Potter Thompson*, the adaptation of the *Second Shepherds' Play* from the fifteenth-century *Towneley Mysteries* followed each other in swift succession; and the two first have, or will shortly have, been performed either by University students or by school children of "the Ridings."⁽⁶⁾ This is not the place to attempt any critical account of them. But there are few readers who will not have been struck by the simplicity with which the themes—now pathetic, now humorous, now romantic—are handled, and by the easy unconsciousness with which the Professor wears his "singing robes."

The same qualities, perhaps in a yet higher degree, appear in the dialect poems, written during the last three years of his life: *Songs of the Ridings*. The inspiration of these was less literary; they sprang straight from the soil and from his own heart. It was, no doubt, a scholarly instinct which first turned his mind in this direction: the desire of one who had studied the principles of the language and knew every winding of its historical origins to trace their working in the daily speech of the present. He has told us so himself, and we may readily believe it. But, if he first came to the dales as learner and scholar, he soon found his way back as welcome visitor and friend. The more he saw of the dalesmen, the more his heart went out to them: the more readily, as if by an inborn instinct, did he enter into their manner of life, their mood and temper, their way of meeting the joys and sorrows brought by each day as it passed. And so it was that the scholar's curiosity, which had first carried him thither, rapidly gave way to a feeling far deeper and more human. His interest in forms of speech and fine shades of vowelism fell into the background; a simple craving for friendly intercourse, inspired by a deep sense of human brotherhood, took its place. And *Songs of the Ridings*⁽⁷⁾ is the spontaneous outgrowth of the fresh experience and the ever-widening sympathies which had come to him as a man. The same is true of *Tales of the Ridings*, published for the first time in the following pages.

Page 7

The last five years of his life (1914-1919) had, to him as to others, been years of unusual stress. Disqualified for active service, he had readily undertaken the extra work entailed by the departure of his younger colleagues for the war. He had also discharged the semi-military duties, such as acting on guard against enemy aircraft, which fell within his powers; and, both on the outskirts of Leeds and round his Lytton Dale cottage, he had devoted all the time he could spare to allotment work, so as to take his share—it was, in truth, much more than his share—in increasing the yield of the soil. All this, with a host of miscellaneous duties which he voluntarily shouldered, had put an undue strain upon his strength. Yet, with his usual buoyancy, he had seemed to stand it all without flagging; and even when warned by the army medical authorities that his heart showed some weakness, he had paid little heed to the warning, had certainly in no way allowed it either to interfere with his various undertakings or to prey upon his spirits.

The Armistice naturally brought some relief. Among other things, it opened the prospect of the return of his colleagues and a considerable lightening both of his professional and of his manifold civic duties. He was, moreover, much encouraged—as a man of his modest, almost diffident, nature was bound to be—by the recognition which *Songs of the Ridings* had brought from every side: not least from the dalesmen, for whom and under whose inspiration they were written. And all his friends rejoiced to think that a new and brighter horizon seemed opening before him. Those who saw him during these last months thought that he had never been so buoyant. They felt that a new hope and a new confidence had entered into his life.

These hopes were suddenly cut off. He had passed most of August and the first week of September (1919) at his cottage in Lytton Dale, keeping the morning of his birthday (8th September), as he always delighted to do, with his wife and children. In the afternoon he went down to bathe in the river, being himself an excellent swimmer, and wishing to teach his two younger children an art in which he had always found health and keen enjoyment. He swam across the pool and called on his daughter to follow him. Noticing that she was in some difficulty, he jumped in again to help her, but suddenly sank to the bottom, and was never seen alive again. An angler ran up to help from a lower reach of the stream, and brought the girl safely to land. Then, for the first time learning that her father had sunk, he dived and dived again in the hope of finding him before it was too late. But the intense cold of the water baffled all his efforts, and the body was not recovered until some hours later. It is probable that the chill of the pool had caused a sudden failure of Moorman's heart—a heart already weakened by the excessive strain of the last few years—and it is little likely that, after he had once sunk, he could ever have been saved.

Page 8

The death of Moorman called forth expressions of grief and of grateful affection, so strong and so manifestly sincere as to bring something of surprise even to his closest friends. Much more surprising would they have been to himself. They came from every side, from lettered and unlettered, from loom and dale, from school and university. Nothing could prove more clearly how strong was the hold he had won upon all who knew him, how large the place he filled in the heart of his colleagues and the county of his adoption. It was a fitting tribute to a literary achievement of very distinctive originality. It was also, and above all, a tribute, heartfelt and irrepressible, to the charm of a singularly bright and winning spirit: to a life which had spent itself, without stint and without one thought of self, in the service of others.

Endnotes (were footnotes):

(1) To this family is believed to have belonged John Moreman, Canon and eventually Dean of Exeter (though he died, October, 1554, "before he was presented to the Deanery"), of whom an account will be found in Prince's *Worthies of Devon* (ed. 1701, pp. 452-453), as well as in Wood's *Athenoe* and *Fasti Oxonienses* and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. He was "the first in those days to teach his parishioners to say the Lord's Prayer, the Belief and the Commandments in the English tongue" (whether the contrast is with Latin or Cornish, for he was then Vicar of Menynhed, in East Cornwall, does not appear). He was imprisoned, as a determined Catholic, in Edward VI.'s reign, but "enlarged under Queen Mary, with whom he grew into very great favour," and was chosen to defend the doctrine of Transubstantiation before the Convocation of 1553.

(2) His thesis for this degree, on *The Interpretation of Nature in English Poetry from Beowulf to Shakespeare*, was published in 1905.

(3) He published editions of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* in 1897, and an elaborately critical edition of Herrick's *Poems*, in completion of his *Study*, in 1915. He also contributed the chapter on "Shakespeare's Apocrypha" to the *Cambridge History of English Literature*; and for many years acted as English editor of the *Shakespeare Jahrbuch*.

(4) Dean Bourne, the parish to which Herrick was not very willingly wedded, is within five miles of Ashburton, Moorman's birthplace.

(5) The words in inverted commas are quoted from the records of the Class, kindly communicated by the secretary, Mr Hind. It is difficult to imagine anything stronger than the expressions of affectionate respect which recur again and again in them. I add one more, from the pen which wrote the second quotation: "So quiet, yet so pervading, was his love that each felt the individual tie; and our class, so diverse in spirit, thought and training, has never heard or uttered an angry word. We felt it would be acting disloyally to hurt anyone whom he loved."

Page 9

(6) *The May King*, written in 1913, has been twice acted by school children, once in the open air, once in the large hall of the University. *Potter Thompson*, written in 1911-1912, was acted by students of the University in 1913 and is at present in rehearsal for acting by pupils of the Secondary School of Halifax. The Towneley *Shepherds' Play* was acted with slight modifications by University students, under Moorman's guidance, in 1907. His adaptation of it, written in 1919, has not yet been acted, but was written in the hope that some day it might be. It may be added that he was largely responsible for a very successful performance of Fletcher's *Elder Brother* by the University students in 1908.

(7) First published serially in *The Yorkshire Weekly Post* of 1917-1918.

A LAOCOON OF THE ROCKS

The enclosure of the common fields of England by hedge or wall, whereby the country has been changed from a land of open champaigns and large vistas to one of parterres and cattle-pens, constitutes a revolution in the social and economic life of the nation. Though extending over many years and even centuries, this process of change reached its height in the latter half of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, and thus comes into line with the industrial revolution which was taking place in urban England about the same time. To some, indeed, the enclosure of the open fields may appear as the outward symbol of that enwalling of the nation's economic freedom which transformed the artisan from an independent craftsman to a wage-earner, and made of him a link in the chain of our modern factory system. To those economists who estimate the wealth of nations solely by a ledger-standard, the enclosure of the common fields has seemed a wise procedure; but to those who look deeper, a realisation has come that it did much to destroy the communal life of the countryside. Be that as it may, it is beyond question that to the ancient and honoured order of shepherds, from whose ranks kings, seers and poets have sprung, it brought misfortune and even ruin.

Among the shepherds of the eastern slopes of the Pennine Hills few were better known in the early years of the nineteenth century than Peregrine Ibbotson. A shepherd all his life, as his father and grandfather had been before him, he nevertheless belonged to a family that had once owned wide tracts of land in Yorkshire. But the Ibbotsons had fought on the losing side in the Pilgrimage of Grace, and the forfeiture of their lands had reduced them to the rank of farmers or shepherds. But the tradition of former greatness was jealously preserved in the family; it lived on in the baptismal names which they gave to their children and fostered in them a love of independence together with a spirit of reserve which was not always appreciated by their neighbours. But the spirit of the age

Page 10

was at work in them as in so many other families in the dale villages. Peregrine's six sons had long since left him alone in his steading on the moors: some had gone down to the manufacturing towns of the West Riding and had prospered in trade; others had fought, and more than one had fallen, in the Napoleonic wars. Peregrine, therefore, although seventy-six years of age and a widower, had no one to share roof and board with him in his shepherd's cottage a thousand feet above the sea.

Below, in the dale, lay the villages with their clustered farmsteads and their square-towered churches of Norman foundation. Round about his steading, which was screened by sycamores from the westerly gales, lay the mountain pastures, broken by terraces of limestone rock. Above, where the limestone yields place to the millstone, were the high moors and fells, where grouse, curlews and merlins nested among the heather, and hardy, blue-faced sheep browsed on the mountain herbage.

It was Peregrine's duty to shepherd on these unenclosed moors the sheep and lambs which belonged to the farmers in the dale below. Each farmer was allowed by immemorial custom to pasture so many sheep on the moors the number being determined by the acreage of his farm. During the lambing season, in April and May, all the sheep were below in the crofts behind the farmsteads, where the herbage was rich and the weakly ewes could receive special attention; but by the twentieth of May the flocks were ready for the mountain grass, and then it was that Peregrine's year would properly begin. The farmers, with their dogs in attendance, would drive their sheep and lambs up the steep, zigzagging path that led to Peregrine's steading, and there the old shepherd would receive his charges. Dressed in his white linen smock, his crook in his hand, and his white beard lifted by the wind, he would take his place at the mouth of the rocky defile below his house. At a distance he might easily have been mistaken for a bishop standing at the altar of his cathedral church and giving his benediction to the kneeling multitudes. There was dignity in every movement and gesture, and the act of receiving the farmers' flocks was invested by him with ritual solemnity. He gave to each farmer in turn a formal greeting, and then proceeded to count the sheep and lambs that the dogs had been trained to drive slowly past him in single file. He knew every farmer's "stint" or allowance, and stern were his words to the man who tried to exceed his proper number.

"Thou's gotten ower mony yowes to thy stint, Thomas Moon," he would say to a farmer who was trying to get the better of his neighbours.

"Nay, Peregrine, I reckon I've nobbut eighty, and they're lile 'uns at that."

"Eighty's thy stint, but thou's gotten eighty-twee; thou can tak heam wi' thee twee o' yon three-yeer-owds, an' mind thou counts straight next year."

Further argument was useless; Peregrine had the reputation of never making a mistake in his reckoning, and, amid the jeers of his fellows, Thomas Moon would drive his two rejected ewes with their lambs back to his farm.

Page 11

When all the sheep had been counted and driven into the pens which they were to occupy for the night the shepherd would invite the farmers to his house and entertain them with oatcakes, Wensleydale cheese and home-brewed beer; meanwhile, the conversation turned upon the past lambing season and the prospects for the next hay harvest. When the farmers had taken their leave Peregrine would pay a visit to the pens to see that all the sheep were properly marked and in a fit condition for a moorland life. Next morning he opened the pens and took the ewes and lambs on to the moors.

For the next ten months they were under his sole charge, except during the short periods of time when they had to be brought down to the farms. The first occasion was "clipping-time," at the end of June, before the hay harvest began. Then, on the first of September, they returned to the dale in order that the ram lambs might be taken from the flocks and sold at the September fairs. Once again, before winter set in, the farmers demanded their sheep of Peregrine in order to anoint them with a salve of tar, butter and grease, which would keep out the wet. For the rest the flocks remained with Peregrine on the moors, and it was his duty to drive them from one part to another when change of herbage required it.

The moors seemed woven into the fabric of Peregrine's life, and he belonged to them as exclusively as the grouse or mountain linnet. He knew every rock upon their crests and every runnel of water that fretted its channel through the peat; he could mark down the merlin's nest among the heather and the falcon's eyrie in the cleft of the scar. If he started a brooding grouse and the young birds scattered themselves in all directions, he could gather them all around him by imitating the mother's call-note. The moor had for him few secrets and no terrors. He could find his way through driving mist or snowstorm, knowing exactly where the sheep would take shelter from the blast, and rescuing them from the danger of falling over rocks or becoming buried in snowdrifts. The sun by day and the stars by night were for him both clock and compass, and if these failed him he directed his homeward course by observing how the cotton-grass or withered sedge swayed in the wind.

Except when wrapped in snow, the high moors of the Pennine range present for eight months of the year a harmony of sober colours, in which the grey of the rocks, the bleached purple of the heather blossom and the faded yellows and browns of bent and bracken overpower the patches of green herbage. But twice in the course of the short summer the moors burst into flower and array themselves with a bravery with which no lowland meadow can compare. The first season of bloom is in early June, when the chalices or the cloud-berry and the nodding plumes of the cottongrass spring from an emerald carpet of bilberry and ling. These two flowers are pure white, and the raiment of the moors is that of a bride prepared to meet her bridegroom, the sun. By July the white has passed, and the moors have assumed once more a sombre hue. But August follows, and once again they burst into flower. No longer is their vesture white and virginal; now they bloom as a matron and a queen, gloriously arrayed in a seamless robe of purple heather.

Page 12

Such were the surroundings amid which Peregrine Ibbotson had spent three quarters of a century, and he asked for nothing better than that he should end his days as a Yorkshire shepherd. But now a rumour arose that there was a project on foot to enclose the moors. The meadows and pastures in the valley below had been enclosed for more than half-a-century, and this had been brought about without having recourse to Act of Parliament. The fields had been enclosed by private commission; the farmers had agreed to refer the matter to expert arbitrators and their decisions had been accepted without much grumbling. The dalesmen were proud of their freehold property and were now casting their eyes upon the moorland pastures above. They agreed that the sheep would crop the grass more closely if confined by walls within a certain space, and the fees paid to the shepherd for his labour would be saved; for each farmer would be able to look after his own sheep. But what weighed with them most was the pride of individual possession compared with which the privilege of sharing with their neighbours in communal rights over the whole moor seemed of small account. Moreover, stones for walling were plentiful, and the disbanding of the armies after the French wars had made labour cheap.

At first Peregrine refused to believe the rumour; the moors, he argued with himself, had always been commons and commons they must remain. Yet the rumour persisted and gradually began to work like poison in his mind. He was too proud to mention the matter to the farmers when they came up for the autumn salving of the sheep, but a constraint in their manner deepened his suspicions, and all through the winter a pall of gloom enshrouded his mind like the pall of gloom on the moors themselves. Spring brought dark foreboding to yet darker certainty. From his mountain eyrie Peregrine could now see bands of men assembling in the village below. They were wallers, attracted thither by the prospect of definite work during the summer months, and on Easter Monday a start was made. Peregrine watched them from the fells, and as he saw them carrying the blocks of limestone in their hands they seemed to him like an army of stinging ants which had been disturbed in their ant-hill and were carrying their eggs to another spot.

Slowly but surely the work advanced. At first the walls took a beeline track up the hillside, but when they reached the higher ground, where scars of rock and patches of reedy swamp lay in their path, their progress became serpentine. But whether straight or winding, the white walls mounted ever upwards, and Peregrine knew that his doom was sealed. The moors which Ibbotsons had shepherded for two hundred years would soon pass out of his charge; the most ancient of callings, which Peregrine loved as he loved life itself, would be his no more; his mountain home, which had stood the shock of an age-long battle with the storms, would pass into the hand of some dalesman's hind, and he would be forced to descend to the valley and end his days in one or other of the smoky towns where his remaining sons were living.

Page 13

There was no human being to whom he could communicate his thoughts, yet the pent-up anguish must find outlet somehow, lest the heart-strings should snap beneath the strain. It was therefore to his sheepdog, Rover, that he unburdened his mind, as the dog lay with its paws across his knees in the heather, looking up to its master's face. "Snakes, Rover, doesta see t' snakes," he would mutter, as his eye caught the serpent-like advance of the walls. The dog seemed to catch his meaning, and responded with a low growl of sympathy. "Aye, they're snakes," the old man went on, "crawlin's up t' fell-side on their bellies an' lickin' up t' dust. They've gotten their fangs into my heart, Rover, and seean they'll be coilin' thersels about my body. I niver thowt to see t' snakes clim' t' moors; they sud hae bided i' t' dale and left t' owd shipperd to dee in peace."

When clipping-time came the walls had almost reached the level of the shepherd's cottage. It was the farmers' custom to pay Peregrine a visit at this time and receive at his hands the sheep that were to be driven down to the valley to be clipped and earmarked. But this year not a single one appeared. Shame held them back, and they sent their hinds instead. These knew well what was passing in the shepherd's mind, but they stood in too much awe of him to broach the subject; and he, on his side, was too proud to confide his grievance to irresponsible farm servants. But if nothing was said the dark circles round Peregrine's eyes and the occasional trembling of his hand betrayed to the men his sleepless nights and the palsied fear that infected his heart.

At times, too, though he did his utmost to avoid them, the shepherd would come upon the bands of wallers engaged in their sinister task. These were strangers to the dale and less reticent than the men from the farms.

"Good-mornin', shipperd. Thou'll be noan sae pleased to set een on us wallers, I reckon," one of them would say.

"Good-mornin'," Peregrine would reply. "I weant say that I's fain to see you, but I've no call to threap wi' waller-lads. Ye can gan back to them that sent you and axe 'em why they've nivver set foot on t' moor this year."

"Mebbe they're thrang wi' their beasts and have no time to look after t' yowes."

"Thrang wi' beasts, is it? Nay, they're thrang wi' t' devil, and are flaid to look an honest man i' t' face."

The old man's words, and still more the lines of anguish that seamed his weather-beaten face, touched them to the quick. But what could they do? They were day-labourers, with wives and children dependent on the work of their hands. Walling meant tenpence a day and regular work for at least six months, and the choice lay between that and the dreaded "Bastile," as Yorkshiremen in the years that succeeded the French Revolution had learnt to call the workhouse.

Page 14

So the work went on, and each day saw “the snakes” approaching nearer to their goal on the crest of the fells. Peregrine still pursued his calling, for the farmers, partly to humour the old man, gave orders that a gap here and there should be left in the walls through which he could drive his flocks. The work slackened somewhat during the hay harvest, and the services of the wallers were enlisted in the meadows below. But when the hay was gathered into the barns—there are no haystacks in the Yorkshire dales—walling was resumed with greater vigour than before. The summer was advancing, and the plan was to finish the work before the winter storms called a halt. All hands were therefore summoned to the task, and the farmers themselves would often join the bands of wallers. Peregrine kept out of their way as far as possible, hating nothing so much as the sound of their hammers dressing the stone. But one day, as he rounded a rocky spur, he came upon the chief farmer of the district, as he was having dinner with his men under the lee of the wall he was building. Seeing that an encounter was unavoidable, the shepherd advanced boldly to meet his adversary.

“I’ve catched thee at thy wark at last have I, Timothy?” were his words of greeting, and Timothy Metcalfe cowered before a voice which seared like one of his own branding-irons. “Enclosin’ t’ freemen’s commons is nobbut devil’s wark, I’s thinkin’,” Peregrine went on relentlessly, “and I’ve marked thee out for devil’s wark sin first thou tried to bring more nor thy stint o’ Swawdill yowes on to t’ moor.”

The wallers received this home-thrust with a smile of approval, and Timothy, roused by this, sought to defend himself.

“It’s noan devil’s wark,” he retorted. “Enclosure was made by order o’ t’ commissioners.”

“Aye, I know all about t’ commissioners—farmers hand i’ glove wi’ t’ lawyers frae t’ towns, and, aboon all, a government that’s i’ t’ landlords’ pockets. What I say is that t’ common land belongs iverybody, an’ sike-like as thee have gotten no reight to fence it in.”

“Happen we’re doin’ it for t’ good o’ t’ country,” argued Timothy. “There’s bin a vast o’ good herbage wasted, wi’ sheep hallockin’ all ower t’ moors, croppin’ a bit here and a bit theer, and lettin’ t’ best part o’ t’ grass get spoilt.”

“Thou’s leein’, and thou knows it,” replied Peregrine, with the righteous indignation of one whose professional honour is impugned. “I’ve allus taen care that t’ moors hae bin cropped fair; thou reckons thou’ll feed mair yowes an’ lambs on t’ moors when thou’s bigged thy walls; but thou weant, thou’ll feed less. I know mair about sheep nor thou does, and I tell thee thou’ll not get thy twee hinds to tend ’em same as a shepherd that’s bred an’ born on t’ moors.”

“We sal see about that,” Metcalfe answered sullenly.

“An’ what wilita do when t’ winter storms coom?” Peregrine continued. “It’s not o’ thee an’ thine, but o’ t’ yowes I’s thinkin’; they’ll be liggin theer for mebbe three week buried under t’ snow. It’s then thou’ll be wantin’ t’ owd shipperd back, aye, an’ Rover too, that can set a sheep when shoo’s under six foot o’ snow.”

Page 15

“Thou’s despart proud of what thou knows about sheep an’ dogs, Peregrine, but there’s mony a lad down i’ t’ dale that’s thy marrow.”

“Aye, I’s proud o’ what I’ve larnt misel through tendin’ sheep on t’ Craven moors for mair nor sixty year; and thou’s proud o’ thy meadows and pasturs down i’ t’ dale, aye, and o’ thy beasts an’ yowes and all thy farm-gear; but it’s t’ pride that gans afore a fall. Think on my words, Timothy Metcalfe, when I’s liggin clay-cowd i’ my grave. Thou’s tramplin’ on t’ owd shipperd an’ robbin’ him o’ his callin’; and there’s fowks makkin’ brass i’ t’ towns that’ll seean be robbin’ thee o’ thy lands. Thou’s puttin’ up walls all ower t’ commons an’ lettin’ t’ snakes wind theirsels around my lile biggin; and there’s fowks’ll be puttin’ up bigger walls, that’ll be like a halter round thy neck.”

As he uttered these words, Peregrine drew himself up to his full height, and his flashing eyes and animated gestures gave to what he said something of the weight of a sibylline prophecy. Then, calling his dog to heel, he moved slowly away.

By the end of August the walls had reached the top of the fells and there had joined up with those which had mounted the other slope of the moors from the next valley. And now began the final stage in the process of enclosure—the building of the cross-walls and the division of the whole area into irregular fields. This work started simultaneously in the dale-bottoms and on the crests, so that Peregrine’s cottage, which was situated midway between the valley and the mountain-tops, would be enclosed last of all. The agony which the shepherd endured, therefore, during these weeks of early autumn was long-drawn-out. He still pursued his calling, leading the sheep, when the hot sun had burnt the short wiry grass of the hill-slopes, down to the boggy ground where runnels of water furrowed their courses through the peat and kept the herbage green. But go where he might, he could not escape from the sound of the wallers’ tools. It was a daily crucifixion of his proud spirit, and every blow of the hammer on the stones was like a piercing of his flesh by the crucifiers’ nails.

October brought frost, followed by heavy rains, and the moors were enshrouded in mist. But the farmers, eager that the enwalling should be finished before the first snows came, allowed their men no respite. With coarse sacking over their shoulders to ward off the worst of the rain, they laboriously plied their task, but the songs and jests and laughter which had accompanied their work in summer gave way to gloomy silence. They rarely met Peregrine now, though they often saw him tending his flocks in the distance, and noticed that his shoulders, which six months before had been erect, were now drooping heavily forward and that he walked with tottering steps. They reported this in the farm-houses where they were lodging, and two of the farmers wives, who in happier days had been on friendly terms with Peregrine, paid a visit to the old man’s cottage in order to try to induce him to come down to the dale for the winter or go and stay with one of his sons in the towns. The shepherd received them with formal courtesy, but would not listen to their proposal.

Page 16

"Nay," he said, "I'll bide on t' moors; t' moors are gooid enif to dee on."

Early in November a party of wallers were disturbed at their work by the persistent barking of a dog. Thinking that the animal was caught in a snare, they followed the sound, with the intention of setting it free. On reaching the spot they found it was Rover, standing over the prostrate figure of the shepherd. The old man had fainted and was lying in the heather. The wallers brought water in their hats and, dashing it in his face restored him to consciousness. He was, however, too weak to talk, so they carried him in their arms to his cottage and laid him on his bed while one of them raced down the hill to summon the nearest doctor.

A few hours later fever set in, and the patient became delirious. A tumult of ideas was surging through his brain, and found vent in broken speech, which struck awe to the wallers' hearts as they bent over his bed.

"Ein-tein-tethera-methera-pimp; awfus-dawfus-deefus-dumfus-dik." The old man was counting his sheep, using the ancient Gaelic numerals from one to ten, which had been handed down from one shepherd to another from time immemorial. And as he called out the numbers his hand fumbled among the bed-clothes as though he were searching for the notches on his shepherd's crook.

Then his mind wandered away to his three sons who had fallen in their country's wars. "Miles! Christopher! Tristram!" he cried, and his glazed eyes were fastened on the door as if he expected them to enter. Then, dimly remembering the fate that had befallen them, he sank slowly back on the pillow. "They're deead, all deead," he murmured; "an' their bones are bleached lang sin. Miles deed at Corunna, Christopher at Waterloo, and I—I deant know wheer Tristram deed. They sud hae lived—lived to help me feight t' snakes." As he uttered the dreaded word his fingers clutched his throat as though he felt the coils of the monsters round his neck, and a piercing shriek escaped his lips.

After a time he grew quieter and his voice sank almost to a whisper. "He makketh me to lie down i' green pasturs," he gently murmured, and, as he uttered the familiar words, a smile lit up his face. "There'll be nea snakes i' yon pasturs. I's thinkin'. ... He leadeth me beside t' still watters.... I know all about t' still watters; they flows through t' peat an' t' ling away on t' moor."

Later in the day the doctor came, but a glance showed him that recovery was out of the question; and next morning, as the sun broke over the eastern fells, Peregrine Ibbotson passed away. The snakes had done their work; their deadly fangs had found the shepherd's heart.

THROP'S WIFE

Page 17

In Yorkshire, when a man is very busy, we say he is “despert thrang”; but when he is so busy that “t’ sweat fair teems off him,” we say that he is as “thrang as Throp’s wife.” Now I had always been curious to know who Throp’s wife was, and wherein her “thrangness” consisted, and what might be Throp’s view of the matter; but all my inquiries threw no light upon the problem, and it seemed as though Throp’s wife were going to prove as intangible as Mrs Harris. But I am not the man to be put off by feminine elusiveness, so I made a vow that I would give up smoking until I had found Throp’s wife and made her mine. My summer holiday was coming on, and I decided that, instead of spending the week in Scarborough, I would make a tour through the towns and villages of the West Riding in search of Throp’s wife. I took the matter as much to heart as if I had been a mediaeval knight setting forth to rescue some distressed damsel from the clutches of a wicked magician or monstrous hippogriff, and I called my expedition “the quest of Throppes wife”; as my emblem I chose the words “*Cherchez la femme*.”

I first of all turned my steps in the direction of Pudsey, for I knew that it had the reputation of being the home of lost souls. To my delight I found that Pudsey professed first-hand acquaintance with the lady.

“Throp’s wife,” said Pudsey; “ay, iverybody has heerd tell abaat Throp’s wife. Thrang as Throp’s wife is what fowks allus say.”

“Yes, yes,” I replied; “but what I want to know is who Throp’s wife really was.”

“Why,” answered Pudsey, “shoo’ll happen hae bin t’ wife o’ a chap they called Throp.”

Now that was just the answer I might have expected from Pudsey, and I decided to waste no more time there. So I made for the Heavy Woollen District—capital letters, if you please, Mr Printer—and straightway put my question. But the Heavy Woollen District was far too thrang itself to take interest in anybody else’s thrangness; it knew nothing about quests or emblems, cared little about Throp’s wife, and less about me. So I commended the Heavy Woollens to the tender mercies of the excess profits taxers and sped on my way. I struck across country for the Calder Valley, but neither at Elland, which calls itself Yelland, nor at Halifax, which is said to be the pleasantest place in England to be hanged in, could I obtain any clue as to the lady’s identity. “Thrang as Throp’s wife” was everywhere a household phrase, but that was all. I was beginning to grow weary; besides, I wanted my pipe.

“What is the use,” I asked Halifax, “of your establishing Literary and Philosophical Societies, Antiquarian Societies, and a local branch of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, if you cannot get to the bottom of Throp’s wife?”

Halifax was somewhat taken aback at this, and its learned antiquaries, in self-defence, assured me that, if she had been a Roman remain they would have known all about her.

Page 18

“But how do you know that she is not a Roman remain?” I asked. “Nobody can tell a woman’s age. She may even be a solar myth.”

Say what I might, I could not induce Halifax to join in “the quest of Throppes wife”; it savoured too much of quixotry for sober-minded Halifax.

I now realised that the quest must be a solitary one, and I consoled myself with the thought that, if the ardours of the pilgrimage were unshared, so would be the glory of the prize. Fired with new enthusiasm, I shouted the name of Throp’s wife to the everlasting hills, and the everlasting hills gave back the slogan in reverberating echoes —“Throp’s wahfe.” By midday I had reached the summit of Stanbury Moor, and the question was whether I should descend the populous Worth Valley to Keighley or strike northwards across the hills. Instinct impelled me to the latter course, and instinct was right. Late in the afternoon, faint but pursuing, I reached a hill-top village which the map seemed to identify with a certain Cowling Hill, but which was always spoken of as Cohen-eead.

I made my way to “The Golden Fleece,” and there, in the bar parlour, I met an old man and a merry. His face was as round and almost as red as a Dutch cheese, and many a year had passed since he had last seen his feet. I felt drawn to this old man, whose baptismal name was Timothy Barraclough, but who always answered to the by-name of Tim o’ Frolics; and when we had politely assured one another that it was grand weather for the hay and that lambs would soon be making a tidy price at Colne market, I spoke to him of the quest.

At first he remained silent, but after a few moments his blue eyes began to twinkle like stars in the firmament, and then, slapping his knees with both hands, he broke into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

“Ay, ay,” he said, “I know all about Throp’s wife. Shoo lived at Cohen-eead, an’ my mother telled me t’ tale when I were nobbut a barn.”

As I heard these words, I almost leaped for joy, and could have thrown my arms about the old man’s neck, and embraced him. Remembering Pudsey, however, I refrained, but urged Tim o’ Frolics to tell me all he knew.

“Throp was a farmer,” he began, “and lived out Cornshaw way. He was a hard-workin’ man, was Throp, but I reckon all his wark were nobbut laikin’ anent what his wife could do. You see, her mother had gien her a spinnin’-wheel when shoo were wed, and eh! but shoo were a gooid ’un to spin. Shoo’d get t’ house sided up by ten o’clock, an’ then shoo’d set hersen down to t’ wheel. Throp would sam up all t’ bits o’ fallen wool that he could find, an’ Throp’s wife would wesh ’em an’ card ’em an’ spin ’em into yarn, an’ then shoo’d knit t’ yarn into stockin’s an’ sell ’em at Keighley an’ Colne. Shoo were that

thrang shee'd sooin gotten shut o' all t' wool that Throp could get howd on, an' then
shoo axed t' farmers to let t' barns out o' t' village go round t' moors

Page 19

an' bring her t' wool that had gotten scratted off t' yowes' backs for ten mile around. Shoo were a patteren wife, and sooin fowks began to say to one another: 'I've bin reight thrang to-day; I've bin well-nigh as thrang as Throp's wife.' So 'thrang as Throp's wife' gat to be a regular nominy, an' other fowks took to followin' her example; it were fair smittlin'! They bowt theirsens spinnin'-wheels, an' gat agate o' spinnin', while there were all nations o' stockins turned out i' Cohen-eead an' Cornshaw, enough for a whole army o' sodgers. Ay, an' t' women fowks gat their chaps to join i' t' wark; there were no settin' off for t' public of a neet, an' no threapin' or fratchin' at t' call-hoils. It was wark, wark, wark, through morn to neet, an' all on account o' Throp's wife an' her spinnin'-wheel.

"Well, after a time Cohen-eead had gotten that sober an' hard-workin', t'owd devil began to grow a bit unaisy. He'd a lot o' slates, had t' devil; there was one slate for iverybody i' Cohen-eead. He'd had t' slates made i' two sizes, one for t' men an' one for t' women."

"The big slates were for the men and the little slates for the women, I suppose."

"I'm noan so sure o' that," Timothy rejoined, and his eyes began to twinkle again.

"Well," he continued, "t' devil began to look at t' slates, an there was onmost nowt written on 'em; nobody had gotten druffen, or illified his neighbour; there was nobbut a two-three grocers that had bin convicted o' scale-sins. So t' devil sends for t' god o' flies, and when he were come, he says to him: 'Nah then, Beelzebub, what's wrang wi' Cohen-eead? There's no business doin' there'; and he shows him t' slates. So Beelzebub taks t' slates and looks at 'em, an' then he scrats his heead an' he says: 'I can't help it, your Majesty. It's Throp's wife; that's what's wrang wi' Cohen-eead.'

"Throp's wife! Throp's wife!" says Satan; 'an' who's Throp's wife to set hersen agean me?'

"Shoo's made fowks i' Cohen-eead that thrang wi' wark they've no time to think o' sins.'

"An' what have thy flies bin doin' all t' time?' asks Satan. 'They've bin laikin', that's what they've bin doin'. They ought to hae bin buzzin' round fowks' heeads an' whisperin' sinful thowts into their lug-hoils. How many flies does thou keep at Cohen-eead?'

"T' god o' flies taks out his book an' begins to read t' list: 'Five hunderd mawks, three hunderd atter-cops, two hunderd an' fifty bummle-bees.' 'Bummle-bees! Bummle-bees!' says Satan. 'What's t' gooid o' them, I'd like to know? How many house-flies, how many blue-bottles hasta sent?' and wi' that he rives t' book out o' Beelzebub's hands and turns ower t' pages hissen.

“At lang length he gies him back his book, and he says: ‘I sal hae to look into this misen. Throp’s wife! I’ll sooin saddle wi’ Throp’s wife. I’ll noan have her turnin’ Cohen-eed intul a Gardin o’ Eden. I reckon I’m fair stalled o’ that mak o’ place.’

Page 20

“So Satan gav out that he were baan for Cohen-eead an’ wouldn’t be back while to-morn. ‘Twere lat i’ t’ afternooin when he’d gotten theer, an’ t’ first thing he did were to creep behind a wall and change hissen intul a sarpint. An’ as he were set theer, waitin’ for it to get dark, he saw five blue-bottles that were laikin’ at tig i’ t’ sunshine anent t’ wall. Well, that made t’owd devil fair mad, for they ought to hae bin i’ t’ houses temptin’ fowks to sin; so he opened his cake-hoil, thrust out his forked tongue, an’ swallowed three on ‘em at one gulp. After that he felt a bit better. When it were turned ten o’clock, he crawled alang t’ loans an’ bridle-stiles, while he gat to Throp’s farm. He sidled under t’ door and into t’ kitchen. It were as dark as a booit i’ t’ kitchen, an’ he could hear Throp snorin’ i’ bed aboon t’ balks. So he crawled up t’ stairs, an’ under t’ chamer door, an’ up on to t’ bed. Eh! but Throp’s wife would hae bin flustered if shoo’d seen a sarpint liggin’ theer on t’ pillow close agean her lug-hoil. But shoo were fast asleep, wi’ Throp aside her snorin’ like an owd ullet i’ t’ ivy-tree. So t’ devil started temptin’ her, and what doesta think he said?”

“I suppose he told her not to work so hard,” I replied, “but take life more easily and quarrel a bit with her neighbours.”

Tim o’ Frolics paused for a moment to enjoy the luxury of seeing me fall into the pit that he had dug for me, and then went on:

“He said nowt o’ t’ sort. That’s what t’ blue-bottles had bin sayin’ to her all t’ time, an’ all for nowt. Nay, t’owd devil were a sly ‘un, an’ knew more about Throp’s wife nor all t’ blue-bottles i’ t’ world. So he says to her: ‘Keziah’—they called her Keziah after her grandmother—‘thou’s t’ idlest dawkin’ i’ Cohen-eead. When arta baan to get agate o’ workin’?’”

“But surely,” I interrupted, “there was no temptation in telling her to work harder.”

Timothy paused, and then, in a reproving voice, asked: “Who’s tellin’ t’ tale, I’d like to know? Thou or me?”

I stood rebuked, and urged him to go on with his story, promising that I would not break in on the narrative again.

“Well, as I were sayin’,” he continued, “t’ devil kept tellin’ her that shoo mun be reight thrang, an’ not waste time clashin’ with her neighbours; an’ when he thowt he’d said enough he crawled down off t’ bed an out o’ house and away back to wheer he com frae.

“Next mornin’ Throp’s wife wakkened up at t’ usual time an’ crept out o’ bed. There was nowt wrang wi’ her, and o’ course shoo knew nowt about t’ royal visit that shoo’d bin honoured wi’. Shoo gat all t’ housewark done, fed t’ hens and t’ cauves, an’ was set down to her wheel afore ten o’clock. There shoo sat an’ tewed harder nor iver. It were

Setterday, an' shoo looked at t' bag o' wool and said to hersen that shoo'd have it all
carded an' spun an' sided away afore shoo went to bed that

Page 21

neet. Shoo wouldn't give ower when t' time com for dinner or drinkins or supper, but shoo made Throp bring her a sup o' tea and summat to eat when he com in through his wark. An' all t' time shoo called hersen an idle dollops 'cause shoo weren't workin' hard enough. That were t' devil's game. But for all shoo tewed so hard, there was a gey bit o' wool left i' t' bag when ten o'clock com and 'twere time to get to bed. You see, 'twere bad wool; 'twere all feltered an' teed i' knots. But Throp's wife were noan baan to bed while shoo'd finished t' bag. So Throp said, if that were so, he mun set hissen down an' help wi' t' wark. So Throp carded an' Throp's wife spun, an' that set things forrad a bit. But t' hands o' t' clock went round as they'd niver done afore; eleven o'clock com and hauf-past eleven, and then a quairter to twelve. Throp's wife looked at t' clock, an' then at bag, an' then at Throp.

"Throp,' shoo said, 'we'll noan be through wi t' wark by midneet.'

"Then we sal hae to give ower,' said Throp. 'It'll be Sunday morn i' a quairter of an hour, an' I'm noan baan to work o' Sunday.'

"When Throp's wife heerd that shoo burst out a-roarin'. 'I'm an idle good-for-nowt,' shoo said. 'Eh! but I mun finish t' bag; I mun, I mun.'

"I'm noan baan to work when t' clock has struck twelve,' Throp said agean, 'nor let thee work, nowther. I'm a deacon at t' Independent Chapil, an' I'll noan let fowks say that they saw a leet i' wer kitchen, an' heerd thy wheel buzzin' of a Sunday morn.'

"When Throp's wife heerd that, shoo fell to roarin' agean, for shoo knew they'd noan be through wi' t' spinnin' while a quairter past twelve. But at lang length shoo turned to Throp an' shoo said: 'Let's put t' clock back, an' then, if onybody's passin' an' looks in on us, an' wants to know why we're workin' of a Sunday morn, we can show 'em t' clock.'

"Throp said nowt for a bit; he was a soft sort o' a chap, an' didn't want to start fratchin' wi' his wife. So just to please her, he gat up on to t' stooil an' put back t' hands o' t' clock twenty minutes. An' t' clock gave a desperet gert groan; 'twere summat atween a groan an' a sweer, an' it went straight to Throp's heart, an' he wished he'd niver melled wi' t' clock. Howiver, he com back to his cardin', an' when t' clock strack twelve, t' bag o' wool were empty, an' there were a gert hank o' spun yarn as big as a man's heead. Throp looked at his wife, an' there were a glint in her een that he'd niver seen theer afore; shoo were fair ditherin' wi' pride an' flustration. 'Fowks san't say "Thrang as Throp's wife" for nowt,' shoo said, and shoo gat up off t' stooil, sided away t' spinnin'-wheel, an' stalked off to bed wi' Throp at her heels. Eh! mon, but 'twere a false sort o' pride were yon."

“Did people find out about putting the clock back?” I asked.

Page 22

"Nay, 'twere worse nor that," Timothy replied. "That neet there was a storm at Cohen-eead the likes o' which had niver bin seen theer afore. There was thunner an' leetnin', and a gert sough o' wind that com yowlin' across t' moor an' frettened iverybody wellnigh out o' their five senses. Fowks wakkened up an' said 'twere Judgment Day, an' T' Man Aboon had coom to separate t' sheep frae t' goats. When t' cockleet com, t' storm had fallen a bit, an' fowks gat out o' bed to see if owt had happened 'em. Slates, and mebbe a chimley or two, had bin rived off t' roofs, but t' beasts were all reight i' t' mistals, an' then they went up on to t' moors to look for t' sheep. When they got nigh Throp's farm, they noticed there was a gert hoil in his riggin' big enough for a man to get through. So they shouted to Throp, but he niver answered. Then they oppened t' door an' looked in. There was nobody i' t' kitchen, but t' spinnin'-wheel were all meshed to bits and there were a smell o' burnin' wool. They went all ower t' house, but they could see nowt o' Throp nor o' Throp's wife, nor o' Throp's wife's chintz-cat that shoo called Nimrod, nor yet o' Throp's parrot that he'd taught to whistle *Pop goes t' Weazel*. They lated 'em ower t' moors an' along t' beck boddom, but 'twere all for nowt, an' nobody i' Cohen-eead iver set een on 'em again."

Such was Timothy Barraclough's story of Throp's wife and of the terrible fate which befell her and her husband. I spent the night at the inn, and next morning made further inquiries into the matter. There was little more to be learnt, but I was told that farmers crossing the moors on their way home from Colne market had sometimes heard, among the rocks on the crest of the hills, the sound of a spinning-wheel; but others had laughed at this, and had said that what they had heard was only the cry of the nightjar among the bracken. It was also rumoured that on one occasion some boys from the village had made their way into a natural cavern which ran beneath the rocks, and, after creeping some distance on hands and knees, had been startled by ghostly sounds. What they heard was the mournful whistling of a popular air, as it were by some caged bird, and then the strain was taken up by the voices of a man and woman singing in unison:

Up and down the city street
In and out the "Easel,"
That's the way the money goes,
Pop goes the weazel.

"IT MUN BE SO"

I met her on her way through the path-fields to the cowshed; she was gathering, in the fading light of an October evening, the belated stars of the grass of Parnassus, and strapped to her shoulders was the "budget," shaped to the contour of the back, and into which the milk was poured from the pails. It was a heavy load for a girl of twelve, but she was used to it, and did not grumble. Her father was dead, all the day-tale men had been called up, and her mother, she assured me, "was that thrang wi' t' hens an' t' cauves, shoo'd no time for milkin' cows."

Page 23

In the village she was subjected to a good deal of ridicule. The children made fun of her on her way home from school, and called her “daft Lizzie”; the old folks, when they heard her muttering to herself, would shrug their shoulders and pass the remark that she was “nobbut a hauf-rocked ‘un”—an insult peculiarly galling to her mother.

“A hauf-rocked ‘un!” she would exclaim. “Nay, I rocked her misel i’ t’ creddle while my shackles fair worked. Shoo taks after her dad, that’s what’s wrang wi’ Lizzie. A feckless gowk was Watmough; he couldn’t frame to do owt but play t’ fiddle i’ t’ sky-parlour, or sit ower t’ fire eatin’ fat-shives.”

Lizzie’s daftness was not a serious matter; it consisted partly in a certain dreaminess, which brought a yonderly look into her eyes, and made her inattentive to what was going on around her, and partly in that habit of talking to herself which has already been referred to. I had won her confidence and friendship from the time when I rescued her “pricky-back urchin” from being kicked to death by the farm boys, who declared that hedgehogs always made their way into the byres and milked the cows. Since then we had had many talks together, but this was the first time that I had accompanied her when she went to milk.

Milking in summer-time, when the cows are out at grass, is pleasant enough, but it is different of a winter evening. Then one gropes one’s way by the light of the stable lantern through the rain-sodden fields to the cowshed, the reeking atmosphere of which often makes one feel faint as one plunges into it from out of the frosty air. But Lizzie liked the work at all seasons, and was never so much at ease as when she was firmly planted on her stool, her curly head butting into a cow’s ribs, and the warm milk swishing rhythmically into her pail. There were three cows in the byre, and she had called them after her aunts. Eliza, like her namesake, was “contrairy,” and had to have her hind legs hobbled lest she should kick over the pail. Molly and Anne were docile beasts that chewed the cud with bovine complacency. It was Lizzie’s habit to tell the cows stories as she milked, making them up as she went along; but to-day she found a better listener in myself.

Our talk was at first of cows; thence it passed to village gossip, pigs, hedgehogs, and so back to cows once more. Knowing the imaginative bent of her mind, I put the question to her: “Wouldn’t you like to know just what becomes of the milk you send off to Leeds by train every day?”

“Aye, I like to know who sups t’ milk,” she answered, “an’ so does t’ cows.”

“But you can’t know that,” I said. “You don’t take it round to the houses.”

“Nay, I don’t tak it round to t’ houses, but I reckon out aforehand who’s to get it.”

It was evident that Lizzie had some private arrangement for the disposal of her milk, and I encouraged her to let me share her secret.

Page 24

"I've milked for all maks o' fowks sin' father deed," she went on, "better my fowks and poor widdies. Once I milked for t' King."

"Buckingham Palace or Windsor Castle?"

Lizzie knew nothing about pleasantries, and was not put out by my frivolous question.

"'Twern't nowther o' them places," she continued; "'twere Leeds Town Hall. Mother read it out o' t' paper that he was comin' to Leeds to go round t' munition works, and would have his dinner wi' t' Lord Mayor. So I said to misel: 'I'll milk for t' King.' He's turned teetotal, has t' King, sin' t' war started, and I telled t' cows all about it t' neet afore. 'Ye mun do your best, cushies, to-morn', I said. 'T' King'll be wantin' a sup o' milk to his ham and eggs, and I reckon 'twill do him more gooid nor his pint o' beer, choose how. An' just you think on that gentle-fowks has tickle bellies. Don't thou go hallockin' about i' t' tonnup-field, Eliza, and get t' taste o' t' tonnups into thy cud same as thou did last week.' Eh! they was set up about it, was t' cows; I'd niver seen 'em so chuffy. So next day, just to put 'em back i' their places, I made em gie their milk to t' owd fowks i' t' Union."

"Who else have you milked for?" I asked, after a pause, during which she had moved her stool from Eliza to roan Anne.

"Nay, I can't reckon 'em all up," she replied. "Soomtimes it's weddin's an' soomtimes it's buryin's; then there's lile barns that's just bin weaned, and badly fowks i' bed."

"And will you sometimes milk for a lady I know that lives in Leeds?"

Lizzie was silent for a moment, and then asked: "Is shoo a taicher, an' has shoo gotten fantickles and red hair?"

"No," I replied, and I thought with some amusement of the freckled face and aureoled head of the village schoolmistress, who had got across with Lizzie on account of her inability to do sums and speak "gradely English." "She's an old lady, with white hair; she's my mother."

"Aye, I'll milk for thy mother," Lizzie answered; "but I'm thrang wi' sodgers this week an' next."

"Soldiers in camp?" I asked.

"Nay, sodgers i' t' hospital. Poor lads, they're sadly begone for want o' a sup o' milk. I can see 'em i' their beds i' them gert wards, and there's country lads among 'em that knows all about cows an' plooin'. Their faces are as lang as a wet week when they think on that they've lossen an arm or a leg, an' will niver milk nor ploo no more. Eh! but I'm fain to milk for t' sodgers."

"But how can you be sure that the right people get your milk?" I asked at last.

She did not answer at once, and I knew that she was wondering at my stupidity, and considering how best she could make me understand. But she could find no words to bring home to my intelligence the confidence that was hers. All that she could say was: "It mun be so."

"It mun be so." At first I thought it was just the usual game of make-believe in which children love to indulge. But it was much more than this, and the simple words were an expression of her sure faith that what she willed must come to pass. "It mun be so." Why not? "If ye have faith, and shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done."

Page 25

THE INNER VOICE

Fear is a resourceful demon, with whom we are engaged in perpetual conflict from the cradle to the grave. Fear assumes many forms, and has always a shrewd eye for the joints in that armour of courage and confidence which we put on in self-defence. One man conquers fear of danger only to fall a prey to fear of public opinion; another succumbs to superstitious fear, while a third, steadfast against all these, comes under the thralldom of the most insidious and malign of all forms of fear—the fear of death.

The power of fear has of late been forcibly impressed on my mind by hearing from his own lips the story of my friend, Job Hesketh. Six months ago I should have said that Job was entirely unconscious of fear. I have never known a man so good-humouredly indifferent to public opinion. “Say what thou thinks and do what thou says” was the golden rule upon which he acted, and which he commended to others. Superstition, in its myriad forms, was for him a lifelong jest. Thirteen people at table had never been known to take the keen edge off his Yorkshire appetite, and he liked to make fun of his friends’ dread of ghosts, witches and “gabblerratchets.” Nothing pleased him better than to stroll of an evening round the nearest cemetery, and he had often been heard to declare: “I’d as sooin eat my supper off a tombstone as off wer kitchen table.”

He faced danger with reckless unconcern every day of his life. He was employed as a “vessel-man” at the Leeds Steel Works, working on a twelve-hours’ shift, and his duty was to attend to the huge “vessels” or crucibles in which the molten pig-iron is converted by the Bessemer process into steel. The operation is one of enthralling interest and beauty, and Job Hesketh’s soul was in his work. The molten iron from the blast furnaces flows along its channel into huge “ladles” or cauldrons, and from there it is conveyed into a still larger reservoir or “mixer,” where the greater part of the slag—which floats as a scum on the surface—is drawn off. Then the purified metal passes into other cauldrons, which are borne along by hydraulic machinery and their contents gently tipped into the crucibles, which lower their gaping mouths to receive the daffodil stream of molten iron. When their maws are full, the crucibles are once more brought into an erect position, and the process of converting iron into steel begins. A blast of air is driven through the liquid metal, and the “vessels” are at once changed into fountains of fire. A gigantic spray of flame and sparks rises from their gaping mouths and ascends to a height of twenty feet, changing its colour from green to gold and from gold to violet and blue as the impure gases of sulphur and phosphorus are purged by the blast. For twenty minutes this continues, and then the roar of the blast and the fiery spray die down. What entered the crucible as iron is now ready to be poured forth as

Page 26

steel. Once more the “vessels” are lowered and made to discharge their contents. First comes a molten cascade of basic slag which is borne away to cool, then to be ground to finest powder, before its quickening power is given to pasture and cornfield, imparting a deeper purple to the clover and a mellower gold to the rippling ears of wheat. When all the slag has been drawn off, there is a moment’s pause, and then a new cascade begins. The steel is beginning to flow, not in a daffodil stream like the slag, but in a cascade of exquisite turquoise blue, melting away at the sides into iridescent opal. Sometimes a great cloud of steam from the pit below passes across the mouth of the crucible, and then the torrent of molten steel takes on all the colours of the rainbow, and the great shed, with its alert, swiftly moving figures, is suffused with a radiance of unearthly beauty.

When the vessels have discharged all their precious liquid, the cauldron into which the metal has been poured is swung in mid-air by that unseen, effortless power which we know as hydraulic pressure, through the arc of a wide circle, until it reaches the point where the great ingot-moulds stand ready to receive the molten steel. Then the cauldron is tapped, and once more the stream of turquoise flows forth, until the ladle is empty and the moulds are filled to the brim with liquid fire. Such was the work in which Job Hesketh was engaged, and it absorbed him body and soul from year’s end to year’s end.

Job was a giant in stature and strength. Born on a farm in the very heart of the Yorkshire wolds, he had drifted, as a boy of sixteen, to Leeds, and had found the life and activities of the forge as congenial as those of the farmstead. He had reached the age of fifty without knowing a day’s illness, and he would have been the first to admit that fortune had smiled on him. His home life had been smooth, his wages had been sufficient for his simple needs, and the good health that he enjoyed was shared by his wife and five children. It is true that, in spite of his long years of service, he had never risen to be a foreman; but that, he knew quite well, was his own fault. During the summer months his conduct at the forge was exemplary, but as soon as November set in it was another matter. Fox-hunting was the passion of his life, and with the fall of the leaf in the last days of October, Job grew restless. He would eagerly scan the papers for news of the doings of the Bramham Moor Hunt, and from the opening of the season to its close he would play truant on at least one day a week. He knew every cover for leagues around, and thought nothing of tramping six or eight miles to be ready for the meet before following the hounds and huntsman all day on foot across the stubble fields. In vain did foremen and works-managers remonstrate with him; he promised to reform, but never kept his word. The blood of many generations of wold farmers ran in his veins, and everyone of

Page 27

them had been a keen sportsman. The cry of the hounds rang in his dreams of a night, and when Mary Hesketh, lying by her husband's side, heard him muttering in his sleep: "Tally-ho! Hark to Rover! Stown away!" she knew that, when the hooter sounded at half-past five, it would summon him, not to work, but to a day with the hounds. He would return home between four and five, mud-stained from head to foot, triumphant at heart, but with an amusingly cowed expression on his face, as of a dog that expects a whipping.

The only whipping that Mary Hesketh could administer to her repentant Job was that of the tongue. In her early matrimonial life she had wielded this like a flail, and Job had winced before the blows which she delivered. But in course of time she had come to realise that her husband's passion for the chase was incurable, and, like a wise woman, she accepted it as part of her destiny. "Thou's bin laikin' agean, thou gert good-for-nowt," was her usual greeting for Job on these occasions.

"Ay, ay, lass," he would reply; "I've addled nowt all t' day. But thou promised, when we wed, to tak me for better or worse; an' if t' worse wasn't t' hounds, it would happen be hosses or drink. Sithee, Mally, I've browt thee a two-three snowdrops; thou can wear 'em o' Sunday."

Such was the Job Hesketh that I had known and loved for many years, and I saw no reason why his genial temper and buoyant heart should not remain with him to the end of his life. Yet within six months the man changed completely. He grew suddenly old and shrunken; the great blithe laugh that pealed through the house was silenced, the look of suave contentment with himself and with the world about him vanished from his face, and in its place I saw a nervous, troubled glance as of one who suspects a lurking foe ready to spring at his throat. The change which came over Job was like that which sometimes comes over a city sky in autumn. The morning breaks fair, and the sun rises from out a cloudless, frosty sky, promising a day of sunshine. But then, with the lighting of a hundred thousand fires, a change takes place. The smoke cannot escape in the windless air, but hangs like a pall over the houses. The sun grows chill, coppery and rayless, and soon a fog, creeping along the river, silently encloses each particle of smoke within a watery shroud, and a mantle of murky gloom invests the city.

What was it that wrought this sudden change in the mind of Job Hesketh? The story is soon told. For a long time there had been no serious accident at the Leeds Steel Works, and the workmen, almost without being aware of it, had grown somewhat reckless of the dangers which they had to face. They knew quite well that in many of the operations which the metal undergoes in its passage from crude ore to ingots of steel, a false step meant instant death. But they had known this so long that the knowledge had lost its terrors.

Page 28

There are many moments of enforced idleness for the vesselmen as they stand on their raised platform in front of the crucibles; but, even during these moments of inactivity, alertness of mind is required. One morning their minds were not alert, and one of the workmen, Abe Verity by name, seated on the railing which separates the platform from the pit in which stand the ingot-moulds, had snatched the cap from the head of one of his fellows. The latter, in response to this, had raised his crowbar, as if he meant to strike Abe on the head, and Abe, lurching backward on the railing in order to avoid the blow, had lost his balance and fallen backwards. Under ordinary circumstances this would have meant nothing worse than a drop into the pit below, but, as ill-luck would have it, one of the cauldrons of molten steel was being swung along the arc of the pit by a hydraulic crane, and, at the very moment when Abe lost his balance, it had reached the point beneath which he was sitting. There was an agonised cry from the vesselmen on their platform, a hissing splash with great gouts of liquid fire flying in all directions, a sickening smell, and then, a few minutes later, a clergyman, hastily summoned from the adjoining church, was reciting the burial service over the calcined body of Abe Verity.

Blank terror gleamed in the eyes of the men who had been witnesses of this grim holocaust. All work was suspended for the day, and Job Hesketh was led home, dazed and trembling in every joint, by his two eldest sons, who worked in another part of the forge. Huddled together in his chair by the kitchen fire, perspiration streamed from his face. He was in a state bordering on delirium, and the answers which he gave to the questions put to him were wildly incoherent.

Abe Verity was his friend. They had been boys together in the little wold village where they had been born, and it was at Job's earnest entreaty that Abe had quitted farm work and joined his friend at the Leeds Steel Works. Their tastes had been similar, and the Veritys had often joined the Heskeths in their summer holiday at the seaside. And now, in one fell moment, the lifelong friendship had been severed, and Abe, the glad, strong, heart-warm man, had plunged from life to death.

Job refused to go to bed that night, but sat in his chair by the flickering embers of his kitchen fire. His wife, lying awake in the bedroom above, listened to his hard breathing and to the half-stifled words which now and again fell from his lips. He was brooding over the terrible scene he had witnessed. Every detail had bitten itself into his brain like acid into metal. He saw the waves of liquid steel closing over his friend, the greedy swirl of the molten metal, and then the little tongues of red fire playing upon the surface. They reminded him of the red tongues of wolves which he had once seen in a cage, as they licked their chops after their feed of horse-flesh. Then it was the clergyman reading from his Prayer

Page 29

Book in the garish light of the forge that fastened itself on his mind. The words seemed charged with bitter mockery: "We give Thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased Thee to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world." "Hearty thanks"! he muttered scornfully. "I'll gie God nowt o' t' sort. Life tasted gooid to Abe. He knew nowt about t' miseries o' t' sinful world. He led a clean life, did Abe; an' he were fain o' life, same as I am."

Time gradually assuaged the first horror of the tragedy which Job had witnessed, but it failed to bring him peace of mind. Fear of death, which up to the moment of the tragedy at the forge had never given him an uneasy moment, now entered into possession of his mind and haunted him awake or asleep. His work at the forge, once a joy to him, was now an unbroken agony. He saw death lying in wait for him every time he climbed a ladder or lifted a crowbar. Nor could he wholly escape from the terror in what had always seemed to him the security of his home. The howling of the wind in the chimney, the muttering of a distant thunderstorm, even the sight of his razor on the dressing-table, were enough to arouse the morbid fear and strike terror to his heart.

He said little of the agony that he suffered, but it was written plainly in his eyes, in his ashen face and in the trembling of his hand. I did my best to induce him to speak his mind to me, but with poor success. One Sunday evening, however, when I found him and his wife seated by themselves over the fire, I found him more communicative, and I realised that what he dreaded most of all in the thought of death was loss of personality. Of the unelect Calvinist's fear of hell he knew nothing. What troubled him was, rather, dissatisfaction with heaven. Job was not much of a theologian, though he attended chapel regularly of a Sunday evening. His ideas of heaven were drawn mainly from certain popular hymns, which depicted the life of the redeemed as a perpetual practice of psalmody.

"What sud I be doin' i' heaven," he asked, "wi' a crown o' gowd on my heead and nowt to do all day but twang a harp, just as if I were one o' them lads i' t' band? What mak o' life's yon for a chap like me, that's allus bin used to tug an' tew for his livin'!"

"Nay, Job," his wife replied, "but thou'll be fain o' a bit o' rest when thy turn cooms. It's a place o' rest, that's what heaven is; thou'll noan be wanted to play on t' harp without thou's a mind to."

"I can't sit idle like thee, Mary," Job answered. "I mun allus be doin' summat. If it isn't Steel Works, it's fox-huntin'; and if it isn't fox-huntin' it's fettlin' up t' henhouse, or doin' a bit o' wark wi' my shool i' t' tatie-patch."

"Thou'll happen change thy mind when thou's a bit owder," was Mary Hesketh's answer to this. "When I'm ower thrang wi' wark on a washin'-day, I just set misen down on t'

chair and think o' t' rest o' heaven, an' I say ower to misen yon lines that I larnt frae my muther:

Page 30

"I knew a poor lass that allus were tired,
Shoo lived in a house wheer help wasn't hired.
Her last words on earth were, 'Dear friends, I am goin'
Wheer weshin' ain't doon, nor sweepin', nor sewin',
Don't weep for me now, don't weep for me niver,
I'm boun' to do nowt for iver an' iver."

"Ay, lass," Job replied, "that's reight enif for thee. Breedin' barns taks it out o' a woman. But it'll noan suit me so weel."

I did my best to reason with Job and to enlarge his conception of the life to come and of the progress of the soul after death, but I made little impression on his mind. A heaven without forges, fox-hunting and hen-coops offered him no possible attraction.

"What thou says may be true," he would answer, "but it'll noan be Job Hesketh that's sittin' theer. It'll be somebody else o' t' same name."

Thus did he fall back upon his ever-besetting fear of loss of personality in the life hereafter, and, like his Biblical namesake, he refused to be comforted.

The agony which Job Hesketh was enduring did not make him listless. On the contrary, it seemed to give him new energy. It is true that the old pleasure had gone out of his work and play, but to him work and play meant life, and to life he clung with the energy of one who lived in constant fear lest it should be suddenly snatched from him. It was January when Abe Verity had met with his fatal accident, and all through the next six months Job toiled like a galley-slave.

It was the practice of the Heskeths to spend the first ten days of August at the seaside. It was their annual holiday, long talked of and long prepared, and it was invariably spent at Bridlington. There Job could indulge to the full in his favourite holiday pastime of swimming, and there he was in close touch with the undulating wold country where his boyhood had been spent. He could renew old acquaintances, lend a hand to the farmers, or wander at will along the chalk beds of the *gipsies* or dry water-courses which wind their way from the hills to the sea. Years ago he and his wife had given a trial to Scarborough, Blackpool and Morecambe as seaside resorts, but they felt like foreigners there and had come back to Bridlington as to an old home.

"There's nowt like Bridlington sands," he would say, in self-defence. "I'm noan sayin' but what there's a better colour i' t' watter at Blackpool, but there's ower mich wind on' t' sea. Sea-watter gits into your mouth when you're swimmin' and then you've to blow like a grampus. Scarborough's ower classy for t' likes o' Mary an' me; it's all reight for bettermy-bodies that likes to dizen theirselves out an' sook cigars on church parade. But me an' t' owd lass allus go to Bridlington. It's homely, is Bridlington, an' you're not

runnin' up ivery minute agean foreign counts an' countesses that ought to bide wheer they belong, an' keep theirsens to theirsens."

Page 31

There had been no improvement in Job's state of mind during the long summer days that preceded his holiday. In his most robust days inquiries as to his health always elicited the answer that he was "just middlin'," which is the invariable answer that the cautious Yorkshireman vouchsafes to give. Now, with a shrunken frame, and fever in his eye, he was still "just middlin'," and, only when hard pressed would he acknowledge the carking fear that was gnawing at his heart. I was, however, not without hope that change of air and sea-bathing, for which Job had a passion almost equal to that for fox-hunting, would restore him to health and tranquillity of mind.

The Heskeths started for Bridlington on a Friday, and on the following Sunday the news reached me that my old friend had been drowned while bathing. I was stunned by the blow, and a feeling of intense gloom pervaded my mind all day. But next morning the rumour was corrected. Job, it seems, had gone for a long swim on the Saturday morning, and, not realising that he had lost strength during the last six months, had swum too far out of his depth. His strength had given out on the return journey, and only the arrival of a boatman had saved him from death by drowning. Relieved as I was by this second account of what had happened, I was, nevertheless, a prey to the fear that this second encounter with death would have enhanced that agony of mind which he had endured ever since the moment when his friend, Abe Verity, had fallen into the cauldron of molten steel. I waited anxiously for Job's return home and determined to go and see him on the evening following his arrival.

I was in my bedroom, preparing to start off, when, to my surprise, I heard Job's voice at my front door. I ran downstairs and was face to face with a Job Hesketh that I had not known for six months. His head and shoulders were erect, he had put on flesh, and the cowed look had entirely vanished from his eyes. I at once congratulated him on his improved appearance.

"Aye, aye," he answered, "there's nowt mich wrang wi' me."

"Bridlington, I see, has done you a world of good."

"Nay, I've bin farther nor Bridlington," he replied, and the old merry twinkle, that I knew so well and had missed so long, came into his eyes.

"What do you mean?" I asked. "Have you been on board one of the Wilson liners in the Humber and crossed over to Holland?"

"Farther nor Holland," he replied, with a chuckle. "I've bin to heaven. I reckon I'm t' first Yorkshireman that's bin to heaven an' gotten a return ticket given him."

"Sit down, Job," I said, "and stop that nonsense. What do you mean?"



Job seated himself by my study fire, leisurely took from his pocket a dirty clay pipe and a roll of black twist, which he proceeded to cut and pound. As he was thus engaged he would look up from time to time into my face and enjoy to the full the look of impatience imprinted on it.

Page 32

"Aye, lad," he began at last, "I've bin to heaven sin I last saw thee, an' heaven's more like Leeds nor I thowt for."

"Like Leeds!" I exclaimed, and, as Job seemed in a jesting mood, I decided to humour him. "I fancy it must have been the other place you got to. To think of you not being able to tell heaven from hell."

"Nay, 'twere heaven, reight enif," he continued, undisturbed. "I could tell it by t' glint i' t' een o' t' lads an' lasses."

I could see that Job had a story to tell of more than ordinary interest. His changed appearance and buoyant manner showed clearly that something had happened to him which had dispelled the pall of gloom which had settled on him since Abe Verity's death. I was determined to hear the story in full.

"Now then, Job," I said, "let us get to business. Take that pipe out of your mouth and tell me what you have been doing at Bridlington."

Job laid down his clay pipe, cleared his throat, and polished his face till it shone, with a large red handkerchief, and began his story.

"Well, you see, t' missus an' me got to Bridlington Friday afore Bank Holiday, an' next mornin' I went down to t' shore for my swim same as I'd allus done afore. 'Twere a breet mornin', an' t' chalk cliffs o' Flamborough were glistenin' i' t' sun-leet. T' fishin' boats were out at sea, an' t' air were fair wick wi' kittiwakes an' herrin' gulls. So I just undressed misen, walked down to t' watter an' started swimmin'. Eh! but t' sea were bonny an' warm, an' for once I got all yon dowly thowts o' death clean out o' my head. So I just struck out for t' buoy that were anchored out at sea, happen hafe a mile frae t' shore. That had allus bin my swim sin first we took to comin' to Bridlington, and I'd niver had no trouble i' swimmin' theer an' back. I got to t' buoy all reight an' rested misen a bit an' looked round. Gow! but 'twere a grand seet. I could see t' leet-house at Spurn, and reight i' front o' me were Bridlington wi' t' Priory Church and up beyond were fields an' fields of corn wi' farm-houses set amang t' plane-trees an' t' sun-leet glistenin' on their riggins. Efter a while I started to swim back. But it were noan so easy. Tide were agean me an' there were a freshish breeze off t' land. Howiver, I'd no call to hurry misen, so when I got a bit tired I lay on my back, an' floated an' looked up at t' gulls aboon my head. But then I fan' out 'twere no use floatin'; t' tide were driftin' me out to sea. So I got agate o' swimmin' an' kept at it for wellnigh ten minutes. But t' shore were a lang way off, an' then, sudden-like, I began to think o' Abe Verity, an' t' fear o' death got howd on me an' clutched me same as if I'd bin taen wi' cramp. There were lads fishin' frae boats noan so far off, an' I hollaed to 'em; but they niver heerd. I tewed an' better tewed, but I got no forrarder; an' then I knew I were boun' to drown."

As Job got to this point in his story something of the old terror crept into his eyes, and I did my best to cheer him.

Page 33

"Well, Job," I said, "they tell me that drowning is the pleasantest kind of death that there is."

His face brightened up immediately, and he replied: "Thou's tellin' true, lad, an' what's more, I know all about it. If anybody wants to know what it's like to be drowned, send 'em to Job Hesketh. If I'd as mony lives as an owd tom-cat, I'd get shut on 'em all wi' drownin'."

Job's spirits were evidently restored, so I urged him to get on with his story.

"Well," he continued, "I tugged an' tewed as lang as I could, but my mouth began to get full o' watter, my legs an' airms were dead beat, an' I reckoned that 'twere all ower wi' me. An' then a fearful queer sort o' thing happened me. I were i' my father's farm on t' wold, laikin' wi' my brothers same as I used to do when I were a lile barn. An', what's more, I thowt it were my ninth birthday. You see, when I were nine yeer owd, my father gave me two gimmer lambs an' I were prouder yon day nor iver I'd bin i' my life afore. Weel, that were t' day that had coom back; I knew nowt about drownin', but theer was I teein' a bit o' ribbin' about t' lambs' necks an' givin' 'em a sup o' milk out o' a bottle. An' then I were drivin' wi' my father an' mother i' t' spring-cart to Driffield markit. I'd donned my best clothes and my nuncle had gien me a new sixpenny-bit for a fairin', an' I were to buy choose-what I liked. Well, I were aimin' to think how I sud spend t' brass when I got to Driffield, when suddenly I weren't a lile barn no more. I were Job Hesketh, vesselman at Leeds Steel Works, and I were drownin' i' t' sea. I saw a boat noan so far away and I tried to holla to t' boatman, but 'twere no use; all my strength had given out, an' my voice were nobbut a groan. An' then——"

Job paused, and I looked up into his face. A strange radiance had come over it, such as I had never seen there before. I had heard it said that all that was brightest in a man's past life rises like a vision before his eyes when, in the act of drowning, his body sinks once, and then again, beneath the water, but I had never before confronted a man who could relate in detail what had happened to him. Then there was Job's story about his return ticket to heaven, which puzzled me, and I urged him to continue his story.

"Thou'll reckon I'm talkin' blether," he went on, "but I tell thee it's true, ivery word on it. I'll tak my Bible oath on it. All on a sudden I were stannin' i' a gert park, and eh! but there were grand trees. They were birk-trees, an' their boles were that breet they fair glistened i' t' sunleet. An' underneath t' birks were bluebells, yakkers an' yakkers o' bluebells, an' I thowt they were bluer an' breeter nor ony I'd seen afore. There were all maks o' birds i' t' trees—spinks an' throstles an' blackbirds—an' t' air aboon my head were fair wick wi' larks an' pipits singin' as canty as could be. Weel, I followed along t' beck-side while I com to a gert lake, wi' lads an'

Page 34

lasses sailin' boats on it. So I said to misen: 'My word! but it's Roundhay Park an' all.' But it wern't nowt o' t' sort. For one thing there were no policemen about, same as you'd see at Roundhay on a Bank Holiday, an' at low side o' t' lake there was a town wi' all maks an' manders o' buildin's; an', what's more, a steel works wi' blast-furnaces. Weel, I were stood there, watchin' t' childer paddlin' about i' t' watter, when somebody clapped his hand on my showder an' sang out: 'Hullo! Job, how long hasta bin here?' I looked round an', by t' Mass! who sud I see but Abe Verity."

"Abe Verity!" I exclaimed.

"Ay, 'twere Abe hissen, plain as life.

"So I said: 'Hullo! Abe, how ista?'

"'Just middlin',' says Abe, 'an' how's thisen? How long hasta bin here?'

"Well, I didn't hardlins know what to say to him. You see I didn't fairly know where I was, so I couldn't tell him how lang I'd bin theer. So I says to him: 'Sithee, Abe, is this Roundhay Park?'

"'Raandhay Park,' says Abe. You see Abe allus talked a bit broad. He couldn't talk gradely English same as you an' me. 'Twere all along o' him livin' wi' them Leeds loiners up at Hunslet Carr. 'Raandhay Park!' he says. 'Nay, lad, you'll noan see birk-trees like yon i' Raandhay Park.' And he pointed to t' birk-trees by t' lake-side, wi' boles two foot through.

"'What is it then?' I asked. 'Have I coom to foreign parts? I'm a bad 'un to mell wi' foreigners.'

"'Nay,' said Abe, 'thou's i' heaven.'

"'Heaven!' I shouted out, an' I looked up at Abe to see if he were fleerin' at me. He looked as grave as a judge, did Abe, but then I noticed that he were donned i' his blue overalls, same as if he'd just coom frae his wark. So I said to him: 'Heaven, is it? I can't see mich o' heaven about thee, Abe. Wheer's thy harp an' crown o' gowd?'

"'Harp an' crown o' gowd,' said Abe, an' he started laughin'. 'Who is thou takkin' me for? I'm noan King David. I'm a vesselman at t' steel works,' an' he pointed wi' his hand across t' lake to wheer we could see t' forge.

"Gow! but I were fair flustrated. There was Abe Verity tellin' me one minute that I were in heaven, and next minute he were sayin' that he were workin' at t' steel works. You see I had allus thowt that i' heaven iverything would be different to what it is on earth.

So I said: 'Does thou mean to tell me, Abe, that lads i' heaven do t' same sort o' wark that they've bin doin' all their lives on earth?'

“‘Nay,’ says Abe, ‘I’ll noan go so far as to say just that. What I say is that they start i’ heaven wheer they’ve left off on earth; but t’ conditions is different.’

“‘How’s that?’ I axed.

“‘Well, for one thing, a lad taks more pride i’ his wark; an’, what’s more, he’s freer to do what he likes. When I were at Leeds Steel Works I had to do choose-what t’ boss telled me. Up here I’m my own boss.’

Page 35

"When I heerd that, I knew that Abe were weel suited. You see he were a bit o' a Socialist, were Abe; he used to wear a red tie an' talk Socialism of a Setterday neet on Hunslet Moor. So I said to him: 'Doesta mean that heaven stands for Socialism, Abe?'

"But Abe laughed an' shook his heead. 'Nay, lad,' he said, 'we haven't gotten no 'isms i' heaven. We've gotten shut o' all that sort o' thing. There's no argifying i' heaven. There's plenty o' discipline, but it's what we call self-discipline; an' I reckon that's t' only sort o' discipline that's worth owt.'

"That'll niver do for me, Abe,' I said. 'If it were a case o' self-discipline, I reckon I'd niver do a stroke o' wark.'

"Nay, lad,' he said; 'thou'll think different now thou's coom to heaven. Thou'll hark to t' inner voice an' do what it tells thee.'

"Inner voice,' I said; 'what's that?'

"It's a new sort o' boss,' says Abe; 'an' a gooid 'un an' all. When thou wants to know what to do or how to do it, thou just sets thisen down, an' t' inner voice starts talkin' to thee an' keeps on talkin', while thou gets agate o' doin' what it tells thee.'"

Job's story was gripping my imagination as nothing had done before. Heaven was a place of activity and not of rest; a place where the labours of earth were renewed at the point at which they had ceased on earth, but under ideal conditions; so that labour, under the guidance of self-discipline, became service. Job's account of his conversation with Abe made all this as clear as sunlight, but I was still somewhat puzzled by the story of the inner voice.

"What do you think Abe meant by the inner voice?" I asked.

"Nay," replied Job, "I can't tell. But what he said were true. I'm sure o' that. There were a look in his een that I'd niver seen theer afore; 'twere as if t' inner voice were speakin' through his een as well as through his mouth."

"It's something more than conscience," I went on, speaking as much to myself as to Job. "Conscience tells a man what it is his duty to do, but conscience does not teach him how to do things."

We were both silent for a few moments, pondering over the problem of the inner voice. Then a thought flashed through my mind and, rising from my seat, I went to my bookshelves and took down a volume of Browning's poems. I eagerly turned over the pages of *Paracelsus*, read a few verses to myself, and then exclaimed:

“I know what it is, Job. The inner voice is the voice of truth.” And I read aloud the verses in which Paracelsus, that eager quest after truth, speaks his mind to his friend Festus:

Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fullness; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception—which

Page 36

is truth.

A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Binds it and makes all error: and to KNOW
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
Than in effecting entry for a light,
Supposed to be without.

Browning was, perhaps, somewhat beyond the comprehension of Job Hesketh, but he liked to hear me reading poetry aloud.

“Whatever it is,” he said, “Abe Verity knows all about it. He were allus a better scholar nor me, were Abe, sin first we went to schooil together; but I reckon I’ll know all about it, too, when I’ve slipped t’ leash an’ started work at Heaven Steel Works.”

It was evident that a great change had come over Job’s mind, and that the wonderful vision of a future life that had been granted to him during that second immersion beneath the waves of the North Sea had wholly taken away from him his old fear of death. But I wanted to hear the conclusion of the story, and pressed him to continue.

“Nay,” he said, “there’s noan so mich more to tell. There was summat i’ Abe that made me a bit flaid o’ axin’ him ower mony questions. He were drissed like a plain vesselman, sure enif; but he talked as if he were a far-learnt man, an’ his own maister. I axed him how lang t’ shifts lasted i’ heaven, an’ he said: ‘We work as lang as t’ inner voice tells us to.’ You see ‘twere allus t’ inner voice, an’ I couldn’t hardlins mak out what he meant by that.

“Then a thowt com into my heead, but I didn’t fairly like to out wi’ it, for fear T’ Man Aboon were somewheer about an’ sud hear me. So I just leaned ower and whispered i’ Abe’s lug:

“‘Doesta tak a day off nows an’ thens an’ run wi’ t’ hounds or t’ harriers?’

“Abe laughed as if he were fit to Brust hissen, an’ then, afore he’d time to answer, iverything went as dark as a booit. I saw no more o’ Abe, nor o’ t’ lake, nor o’ t’ birk-trees; an’ t’ next time I oppened my een there were a doctor chap stannin’ ower me wi’ a belly-pump in his hand, an’ I were liggin’ on a bed as weak as a kitlin.”

Job was silent for a while, after finishing his story and relighting his pipe, and his silence gave me a chance of looking at him closely. Physically he was none the worse for his adventure; mentally, spiritually, he was a new man. The fear of death had gone from his eyes, and in its place was the joy of life, together with a sure faith in the triumph of



personality when, to use his own coursing phrase, he had slipped the leash. His vision of heaven was somewhat too material to satisfy me, but there could be no doubt that it had brought to his terror-swept soul the peace of mind which passeth all understanding.

After a while Job rose, knocked the ashes from his pipe, and took his leave. I accompanied him to the door and watched him as he walked down the street. There was something buoyant in his tread, and his gigantic shoulders rolled from side to side like a seaman's on the quarter-deck. Soon he started whistling, and I smiled as I caught the tune. It was one of his chapel hymns, and there was a note of exultation in the closing bars:

Page 37

“O grave! where is thy victory?
O death! where is thy sting?”

My mind was full of Job's story all that day. I somehow refused to believe that what he had related was mere imagination, and it was evident that he could not have invented the story of the inner voice, for this remained a mystery to him. The inner voice haunted me all the time, and, as I lay in bed that night, I asked myself again and again the question: Why must we wait for a future life to hear this inner voice?

B.A.

They met at the smithy, waiting for “The Crooked Billet” to open for the evening. There was Joe Stackhouse the besom-maker, familiarly known as Besom-Joe, William Throup the postman, Tommy Thwaite the “Colonel,” so called for his willingness to place his advice at the service of any of the Allied Commanders-in-Chief, and Owd Jerry the smith, who knew how to keep silent, but whose opinion, when given, fell with the weight of his hammer on the anvil. He refuted his opponents by asking them questions, after the manner of Socrates. The subject of conversation was the village school-mistress, who had recently been placed in charge of some thirty children, and was winning golden opinions on all sides.

“Shoo's a gooid 'un, is schooil-missus, for all shoo's nobbut fower foot eleven,” began Stackhouse; “knows how to keep t' barns i' their places wi'out gettin' crabby or usin' ower mich stick.”

“Aye, and shoo's gotten a vast o' book-larin' intul her heead,” said Throup. “I reckon shoo's a marrow for t' parson, ony day.”

“Nay, shoo'll noan best t' parson,” objected Stackhouse who, as “church-warner” for the year, looked upon himself as the defender of the faith, the clergy, and all their works.

“Parson's written books abaat t' owd churches i' t' district, who's bin wedded in 'em, and who's liggin' i' t' vaults.”

“Well,” rejoined the Colonel, “and didn't Mary Crabtree, wheer shoo lodges, insense us that t' schooil-missus had gotten well-nigh a dozen books in her kist, and read 'em ivery eemin?”

“Aye, but shoo's noan written 'em same as t' parson has,” retorted Stackhouse.

“I reckon it's just as hard to read a book thro' cover to cover as to write one,” retorted the Colonel.

“An’ shoo can write too,” the postman joined in, “better nor t’ parson. I’ve seen her letters, them shoo writes and them shoo gets sent her. An’ there’s a queer thing abaat some o’ t’ letters at fowks writes to her; they put B.A. at after her name.”

“Happen them’ll be her Christian names,” suggested Stackhouse. “There’s a mak o’ fowks nowadays that gets more nor one name when they’re kessened.”

“Nay,” replied Throup, “her name’s Mary, and what fowks puts on t’ envelope is Miss Mary Taylor, B.A.”

“Thou’s sure it’s ‘B.A.,’ and not ‘A.B.,’” said Stackhouse. “I’ve a nevy on one o’ them big ships, and they tell me he’s registered ‘A.B.,’ meaning able-bodied, so as t’ Admirals can tell he hasn’t lossen a limb.”

Page 38

"Nay, it's 'B.A.,' and fowks wodn't call a lass like Mary Taylor able-bodied; shoo's no more strength in her nor a kitlin."

"I reckon it's nowt to do wi' her body, isn't 'B.A.,'" interposed the Colonel. "Shoo'll be one o' yon college lasses, an' they tell me they're all foorced to put 'B.A.' at after their names."

"What for?" asked the smith, who was always suspicious of information coming from the Colonel.

"Happen it'll be so as you can tell 'em thro' other fowks. It'll be same as a farmer tar-marks his yowes wi' t' letters o' his name."

"Doesta mean that they tar-mark lasses like sheep?" asked William Throup, his mouth agape with wonder.

"Nay, blether-heead," replied Stackhouse, "they'll be like t' specials, and have t' letters on one o' them armlets. But doesta reckon, Colonel, that B.A. stands for t' name o' t' chap that owns t' college?"

"Nay, they tell me that it stands for Bachelor of Arts, choose-what that means."

The smith had listened to the Colonel's explanation of the mysterious letters with growing scepticism. He had scarcely spoken, but an attentive observer could have divined his state of mind by the short, petulant blows he gave to the glowing horseshoe on the anvil. Now he stopped in his work, rested his arms on his hammer-shaft, and proceeded, after his fashion, to test the Colonel by questions.

"Doesta reckon, Colonel," he began, "that t' schooil-missus is a he-male or a she-male?"

"Her's a she-male, o' course. What maks thee axe that?"

The smith brushed the query aside as though it had been a cinder, and proceeded with his own cross-examination.

"An' doesta think that far-learnt fowks i' colleges can't tell a he-male thro' a she-male as well as thee?"

"O' course they can. By t' mass, Jerry, what arta drivin' at?"

"An' hasta niver bin i' church, Colonel," the smith continued, unperturbed, "when t' parson has put spurrins up? Why, 'twere nobbut a week last Sunday sin he axed if onybody knew just cause or 'pediment why Tom Pounder sudn't wed Anne Coates."

"I mind it, sure enough," interjected Stackhouse, "and fowks began to girn, for they knew there was ivery cause an' 'pediment why he sud wed her."

"Hod thy din! Besom-Joe, while I ve sattled wi' t' Colonel" said the smith, and he turned once more on his man. "What I want to know is if parson didn't say: 'I publish t' banns o' marriage between Tom Pounder, bachelor, and Anne Coates, spinster, both o' this parish.'"

"Aye, that's reight," said the Colonel, "an' I see what thou's drivin' at. Thou means Mary Taylor ought to be called spinster. Well, for sure, I niver thowt o' that."

"It's not likely thou would; thou's noan what I sud call a thinkin' man. Thy tongue is ower fast for thy mind to keep up wi' it."

"Then what doesta reckon they letters stand for?" asked Besom-Joe.

Page 39

"There's nowt sae difficult wi' t' letters when you give your mind to 'em," the smith replied. "What I want to know is, if Mary Taylor came here of her own accord, or if her was putten into t' job by other fowks."

"I reckon shoo was appointed by t' Eddication Committee."

"Appointed, was shoo? I thowt as mich. Then mebbe 'B.A.' will stand for 'By appointment.'"

The smith's solution of the problem was received with silence, but the silence implied approval. The Colonel, it is true, smarting under a sense of defeat, would have liked to press the argument further; but just then the front door of "The Crooked Billet" was thrown open by the landlord, and the smithy was speedily emptied of its occupants.

CORN-FEVER

"Sithee, lass, oppen t' windey a minute, there's a love."

"What do you want t' windey openin' for, mother? You'll give me my death o' cowl."

"I thowt I heerd t' soond o' t' reaper."

"Sound o' t' reaper! Nay, 'twere nobbut t' tram coomin' down t' road. What makes you think o' reapers? You don't live i' t' country any longer."

"Happen I were wrang, but they'll be cuttin' corn noan sae far away, I reckon."

"What have you got to do wi' corn, I'd like to know? If you wanted to bide i' t' country when father deed, you sud hae said so. I gave you your choice, sure enough. 'Coom an' live wi' me i' Hustler's Court,' I said, 'an' help me wi' t' ready-made work, or else you can find a place for yourself 'i Thirsk Workhouse.'"

"Aye, I've had my choice, Mary, but it's gey hard tewin' all t' day at button-holes, when September's set in and I think on t' corn-harvist."

There was a pause in the conversation, and Mary, to humour her mother, threw up the window and let in the roar of the trams, the far-off clang of the steel hammers at the forge, and the rancid smell of the fried-fish shop preparing for the evening's trade. The old woman listened attentively to catch the sound which she longed for more than anything else in the world, but the street noises drowned everything. She sank back in her chair and took up the garment she was at work on. But her mind was busy, and after a few minutes she turned again to her daughter.

"Thoo'll not be thinkin' o' havin' a day i' t' coontry this month, Mary?"

“Nay, I’m noan sich a fool as to want to go trapsin’ about t’ lanes an’ t’ ditches. I’ve my work to attend to, or we’ll not get straight wi’ t’ rent.”

“Aye, we’re a bit behind wi’ t’ rent sin thoo com back frae thy week i’ Blackpool.”

“Now don’t you be allus talkin’ about my week i’ Blackpool; I reckon I’ve a right to go there, same as t’ other lasses that works at Cohen’s.”

“I wasn’t complainin’, Mary.”

“Eh! but I know you were; and that’s all t’ thanks I get for sendin’ you them picture postcards. You want me to bide a widdy all my life, and me nobbut thirty-five.”

Page 40

"Is there sae mony lads i' Blackpool, that's thinkin' o' gettin' wed?"

"By Gow! there is that. There's a tidy lot o' chaps i' them Blackpool boarding-houses, an' if a lass minds her business, she'll have hooked one afore Bank Holiday week's out."

Again there was silence in the workroom, and the needles worked busily. The daughter was moodily brooding over the matrimonial chances which she had missed, while the mother's thoughts were going back to her youth and married life, when she lived at the foot of the Hambledon Hills, in a cottage where corn-fields, scarlet with poppies in summer-time, reached to her garden gate. At last the old woman timidly re-opened the conversation.

"We couldn't tak a hafe-day off next week, I suppose, and gan wi' t' train soomwheer oot i' t' coontry, wheer I could see a two-three fields o' corn? Rheumatics is that bad I could hardlins walk far, but mebbe they'd let me sit on t' platform wheer I could watch t' lads huggin' t' sheaves or runnin' for t' mell."(1)

"Lor'! mother, fowks don't do daft things like that any longer; they've too mich sense nowadays."

"Aye, I know t' times has changed, but mebbe there'll be farms still wheer they keep to t' owd ways. Eh! it were grand to see t' farm-lads settin' off i' t' race for t' mell-sheaf. Thy gran'father has gotten t' mell mony a time. I've seen him, when I were a lile lass, bringin' it back in his airms, and all t' lads kept shoutin' oot:

"Sam Proud's gotten t' mell o' t' farmer's corn,
It's weel bun' an' better shorn;
—Shout 'Mell,' lads, 'Mell!'"

Mary had almost ceased to listen, but the mother went on with her story: "A canty mon were my father, and he hadn't his marra for thackin' 'twixt Thirsk an' Malton. An' then there was t' mell-supper i' t' gert lathe, wi' singin' an' coontry dances, an' guisers that had blacked their faces. And efter we'd had wer suppers, we got agate o' dancin' i' t' leet o' t' harvist-moon; and reet i' t' middle o' t' dancers was t' mell-doll."

"Mell-doll!" exclaimed Mary, roused to attention by the word. "Well, I'm fair capped! To think o' grown-up fowks laikin' wi' dolls. Eh! country lads an' lasses are downright gauvies, sure enough."

"Nay, 'twern't a proper doll, nowther. 'Twere t' mell-sheaf, t' last sheaf o' t' harvist, drissed up i' t' farmer's smock, wi' ribbins set all ower it. A bonnie seet was t' mell-doll, an' if I could nobbut set een on yan agean, I'd be happy for a twelmonth."

"You'll see no more mell-dolls, mother, so long as you bide wi' me. I'm not going to let t' lasses at Cohen's call me a country gauvie, same as they did when I first came to



Leeds. But I'll tell you what I'll do. Woodhouse Feast'll be coomin' on soon, and I'll take you there, sure as my name's Mary Briggs. There'll be summat more for your brass nor mell-suppers, an' guisers an' dolls. There'll be swings and steam roundabouts, aye, an' steam-organs playin' all t' latest tunes thro' t' music-halls—a lot finer than your daft country songs. An' we'll noan have to wait for t' harvest-moon; there'll be naphtha flares ivery night lightin' up all t' Feast."

Page 41

“Nay, lass, I reckon I’se too owd for Woodhouse Feast; I’ll bide at yam. I sal be better when September’s oot. It’s t’ corn-fever that’s wrang wi’ me.”

“Corn-fever! What next, I’d like to know! You catch a new ailment ivery day. One would think we kept a nurse i’ t’ house to do nowt but look after you.”

“A nuss would hardlins be able to cure my corn-fever, I’s thinkin’. I’ve heerd tell about t’ hay-fever that bettermy bodies gets when t’ hay-harvest’s on. It’s a kind o’ cowl that catches ’em i’ t’ throat. So I call my ailment corn-fever, for it cooms wi’ t’ corn-harvest, and eh, deary me! it catches me i’ t’ heart. But I’ll say nae mair aboot it. Reach me ower yon breeches; I mun get on wi’ my wark, and t’ button-holes is bad for thy een, lass. Thoo’ll be wantin’ a bit o’ brass for Woodhouse Feast, an’ there’s noan sae mich o’ my Lloyd George money left i’ t’ stockin’ sin thoo went to Blackpool. Nay, don’t start fratchin’, there’s a love. I’s not complainin’.”

(1) The mell, or mell-sheaf, is the last sheaf of corn left in the harvest field.