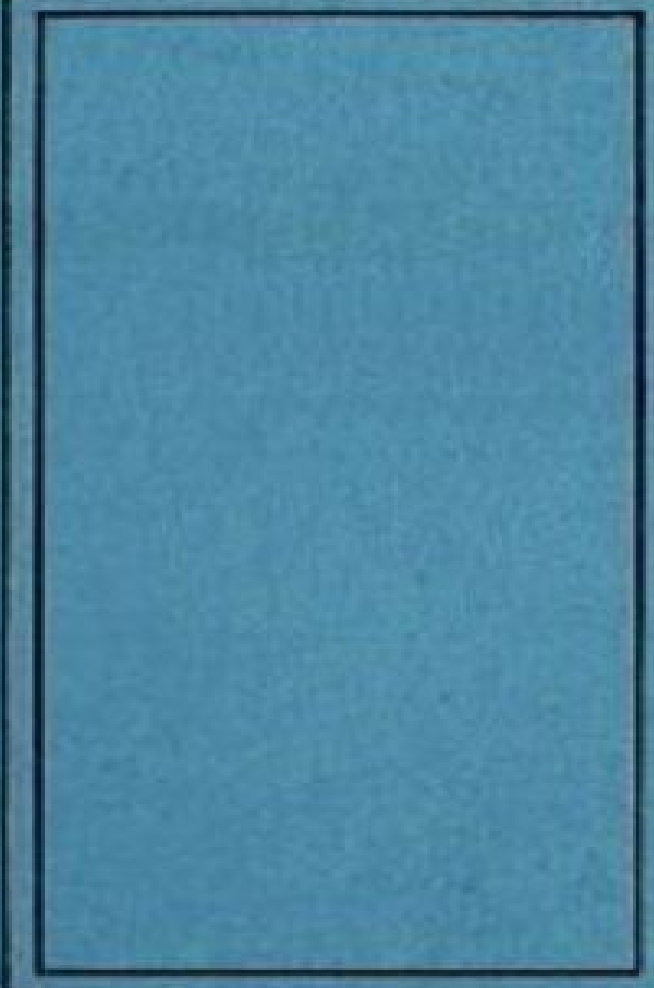
THE POCKET BOOKS

A BACHELOR'S COMEDY

By J. E. BUCKROSE

Author of
"Down Our Street," "Love In a Little Town," etc.



GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
NEW YORK

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BY J. E. BUCKROSE

BECAUSE OF JANE
A BACHELOR'S COMEDY
THE BROWNS
GAY MORNING

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY
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A BACHELOR'S COMEDY

A BACHELOR'S COMEDY

CHAPTER I

THIS was no comedy to those most concerned, of course, for comedy is like happiness—directly a person knows he is in it, he is out of it. Tragedy, on the other hand, can only touch those who do not take themselves seriously enough.

No man, however, could take himself more seriously than did the Reverend Andrew Deane as he travelled down alone in a third-class railway carriage to his new living of Gaythorpe-on-the-Marsh.

When the train neared Millsby, the station for Gaythorpe, he rose hastily and peered at the piece of looking-glass provided for self-conscious travellers. Yes, his worst fears were altogether justified. His hair curled in a stiff bush above his forehead, in spite of brilliantine applied at the very last moment before leaving his London lodgings. Why—he demanded desperately of himself—why had he not brought a bottle in his pocket?

For he considered curls not only undignified but unclerical. His sensitiveness on the subject had started at the age of six, when he still wore them rather long and other little boys called him “Annie”! He fought the other little boys and induced his mother to have his hair cut, but the wound remained and rankled.

“Pshaw! Most annoying!” he said, passing his hand over his offending head. Then he sat down and blew his nose nervously as the train glided into Millsby station.

“Morning, Mr. Deane. I suppose you are the Reverend Deane?” said a fat gentleman with black hair and a red face, approaching the carriage door.

“Yes. Thank you. How-do-you-do?” said Andy, rather jerkily.

“My name’s Thorpe,” said the fat man, with colossal repose. “I’m the churchwarden. Glad to welcome you to your new parish, though it’s only for a few hours.”

“You are very kind,” responded Andy, feeling sure that the porter, the stationmaster and three stragglers were listening, and anxious to be as like his late senior curate—who was tall, lean, and immensely impressive—as possible.

“I expect you’re going to see what you want in the way of furniture for the Vicarage?” said Mr. Thorpe, moving ponderously towards the gate.

“Yes,” said Andy breathlessly.

It is rather a breathless thing, of course, to stand finally on the summit of one’s desires.

“Cart’s waiting. No luggage this time, I s’pose?” said Mr. Thorpe, who economised words. “Come this way, then.” And to the stationmaster, who

stepped forward, thin and alert: “This is the Reverend Deane, our new Vicar.”

Again the parson shook hands, but that was nothing; because an eternal handshaking is as essential a part of a clergyman’s life as putting on his trousers: it was the absence of the Andrew that went home to him. All his life he had been dogged by an undignified “Andy,” which was even more unclerical than the curls. Now he meant to drop it for ever. No one here had known him before at school or college—no one here was acquainted with the aunt by marriage and the cousins who had been his family since the age of sixteen—he would drop the boyish “Andy” into the limbo of the past.

From all this it will be gathered, and rightly, that the Reverend Andrew Deane had obtained a living almost as soon as it was legally possible, and that he had a boyish air which made every one treat him like a boy.

“There’s a good strawberry bed in the Vicarage garden,” said Mr. Thorpe, as he settled himself in the cart. “Gee-up, mare!”

Then he seemed to think he had said all there was to say, and they jogged on silently through the quiet lanes.

After the hurry and bustle of the growing years, and the time at college, and the London curacy, Andy seemed, as he sat there, to have come out into some quiet place where he could look round and listen. He felt, unconsciously, as a man does who has stood on a country road to watch a noisy procession pass: the last straggler vanishes in the cloud of dust behind it—the clash of music and shouting dies away—and a lark that has sung unnoticed all the time, goes on singing.

This is the voice of peace grown audible at last, and those are very happy who hear it.

“H-hem,” said Mr. Thorpe, rousing himself at a sharp corner. “Funny you should be a bachelor. We seem in for unmarried parsons.”

“In the present day there are many——” began Andy. But when Mr. Thorpe started a speech he had a sort of steam-roller habit of finishing it.

“I was looking at the church-books the other day—they only go back to 1687—and the first vicar whose name stands there was a bachelor. He was there fifty years. He signed himself Will Ford, though he’s called Gulielmus now on his grave by the churchyard path. Gee-up, mare!”

But in that minute Andy saw it all, and across the centuries he greeted a brother.

“That’s the church,” said Mr. Thorpe, pulling up on the crest of a little hill and pointing with his whip towards a square tower with the roofs of a village clustering near; a flight of rooks trailed across blue sky and grey-white clouds.

Andy drew a long breath.

“It’s—it’s extraordinarily peaceful,” he said.

“Not so peaceful as you’d——However, best find out for yourself,” said Mr. Thorpe.

So they jogged on again, cop, cop, cop in a sunny silence, until they neared the Vicarage, when the churchwarden added—

“Mr. and Mrs. Stamford are away, else they’d have asked you to lunch, of course, as they gave you the living. I thought you’d maybe look round the Vicarage, and then come up to my house for a meal. Mrs. Thorpe has a cold fowl waiting for you when you’re ready for it.”

“Thank you. It’s awfully good——”

“And I’d have stopped to show you round myself,” said Mr. Thorpe, rolling on, as it were, over Andy’s acknowledgments, “but I have to see a man about some pigs. However, young Sam Petch’ll be there. He was odd man to the old Vicar.”

“Do you advise me to retain his services?” inquired Andy, with the responsible dignity of a vicar and a householder.

“Um,” said Mr. Thorpe. “I don’t know. The poor old Vicar grew very feeble towards the end, and let things go. And those Petches are none of ’em models. They don’t seem to know when they’re speaking the truth and when they aren’t. And young Sam drinks a bit too. No, I can’t really advise you to keep him on.”

“I shall certainly not do so after what you tell me,” said the new Vicar, sitting very erect. “I have the strongest feelings about the households of the clergy—they should be above reproach.”

“Y-yes,” said Mr. Thorpe. Then, relieved, “And, of course, the Petches have William to fall back on.”

“If there is any one responsible that settles——” began Andy, when the mare shied violently at a man on the road, and he had to devote his attention to his new hat.

“It’s the man who’s waiting to see me about the pigs,” said Mr. Thorpe calmly, indicating a red-faced, angry-looking person on the roadside. “He looks as if he was tired of waiting. Should you mind walking across the churchyard instead of driving round to the Vicarage gate?”

“Of course,” cried Andy, jumping down; and followed by Mr. Thorpe’s hearty “Mind you come up for a meal as soon as you’re ready,” he went through the churchyard gate.

It clicked loosely behind him, easy with the passing of the generations, and as he walked down the path a great many of these thoughts which are common to all generous youth passed through his mind; for there is, in every one of us, such a glorious wish to do something for the world when we are young, though

we can no more talk about it, then, than Andy could have done as he looked at the gravestone of that Gulielmus who in life had been plain Will Ford.

Even to his own soul, Andy did not say those things; he only remarked to himself that he would be always, as it were, Gulielmus. The abbreviation should not intrude. The Reverend Andrew Deane he was, and the Reverend Andrew Deane he would remain.

Thus reflecting he reached the little gate leading into the Vicarage garden, and a tall, middle-aged man stood there, cap in hand. Honesty was in his blue eyes—respectful candour in his pleasant voice.

"Mr. Thorpe wished me to show you round, sir," he said.

"Ah! Good-day. Where is the lad?"

"The lad?" said the man, a little surprised. "Oh, he's got a place at Millsby, sir."

"Good. That's excellent," said Andy, much relieved at not being obliged to start with a dismissal. "Now for the house."

"Peas here," said the man, passing a plot of ground, "and beans there. I bought the seed and sowed them on my own responsibility. 'Whoever's coming,' says I to myself, 'old or young, he'll want peas and beans.' "

The words flowed in that delightful easy way which is of all human sounds the most comfortable, running into the heart like a cordial.

"Most thoughtful of you," said Andy warmly.

And his fellow-curates in London had talked of the apathy of village people! He would tell them about this when he saw them. What working-man of their flock would buy peas and beans and sow them for love of the Church?

"I put a row of potatoes in too," continued the man. "Says I to my wife, 'Married *or* single, he'll want potatoes.' "

"You're married, then?" said Andy, as they reached the house door, wishful to show interest in the domestic concerns of this ardent churchman.

"Yes," replied the man. "My wife can't get about much, I'm sorry to say. Legs given way. But"—he gave a queer side look at Andy—"it isn't that she's lost power, so to speak: the power's only moved from her legs into her tongue."

Andy smiled back—and when two men enjoy together the immemorial joke about a woman's tongue it is as good as a sign of freemasonry—then he said solemnly, "Very sad for you both, I am sure."

"Yes," said the man, immediately solemn too. "I'm sure I don't know what we would do if it wasn't for William."

"William!" repeated Andy. "Why—what is your name?"

"Samuel Petch," said the man.

"Then it will be *young* Sam Petch who has taken a situation at Millsby?"

demanded Andy.

"*I'm* young Sam Petch. Father's old Sam Petch. He's eighty-one."

"Oh!" said Andy.

And almost in silence he went over the Vicarage escorted by his pleasant and obliging guide, who said at every turn, "We ought to trim honeysuckle; I only waited until you came," or "I put a few newspapers down here, because the sun seemed to be fading the paint."

Andy tramped up and down stairs, and peered into cellars, and found no words in which to inform young Sam Petch that his services were not required.

How was it possible in face of that trustful confidence to say abruptly, "You are mistaken. You may remove your peas, beans, and potatoes, or I will pay for them. Even your wife's legs are nothing to me, though I deplore them. You must depart"? Andy could not do it.

At last Sam Petch went back to lock up the opened rooms while the new Vicar stood alone at his own front door. It was rather a dignified door, with pillars where roses grew and five steps leading into the garden, and Andy's heart swelled with a proud sense of possession. Here he would stand welcoming in the senior curate who had treated him like a rather stupid schoolboy. Here the aunt and cousins who could not remember that he was a man and a clergyman would take on a proper attitude of respect. Here the lady lay-helper who had so condescended to him in the London parish would be received, kindly, but—He held out a hand and rehearsed the greeting. The bland and prosperous Vicar on his own threshold. Quite equal to dealing with anything.

"A-hem!" coughed Sam Petch behind him.

"Ah—that you, Sam?" said Andy, turning very red and drawing in his hand. "We—er—we had better be moving on. I was just—er—exercising my arm."

"Exercise splendid thing, sir," said Sam, tactfully looking away. And while they walked down the road Andy said to himself that a man accustomed for two years to dealing with sharp Cockneys would find the simple villager a very easy problem. All he had to do was to wait until they reached the cottage at the next turning and then say, firmly but kindly, that he did not need Mr. Petch's services.

The turning was two hundred yards away—one hundred and fifty——

"Here's my poor wife at the gate," said Sam. "Looked after the old Vicar like a mother, she did, until her legs went. It's one of her bad days, but she was bent on saying a word of welcome to you as you went past."

And of course Andy had to put it off a little longer while he took Mrs. Petch's hand and bade her "Good morning."

She placed her other hand on her heart, and began to speak quickly in a thin, high voice with a gasp in it.

“I’m done up, sir—waiting here so long for you—will you step in?”

So, of course, Andy went through the little garden in the wake of Mrs. Petch’s dragging footsteps.

“It’s such a comfort,” said Mrs. Petch, sitting limply, “to feel we’re settled again. Unsettledness is what tries the female nerves worse than anything, as you’ll no doubt find out some day, sir.”

Andy passed his hand across his brow. It was very difficult. But it was now or never. He rushed blindly at the fence with an incoherent—

“I’m sorry to disappoint you, Mrs. Petch, but I have—that is to say—your husband’s services will not be required.”

He mopped his brow, forgetful of all clerical dignity, while Mr. and Mrs. Petch looked at him and said nothing, and he felt as if red-hot worms were crawling about his unprotected person. Still they said nothing; and that was what made it so awful. At last a parrot screeched in the stillness.

“You—you have a relative to—er—fall back upon,” said poor Andy.

Mrs. Petch took a drink of water and passed a handkerchief across her eyes, then she asked faintly—

“What relative?”

“One named—er—William,” said Andy. “I understand——”

“T-that’s William!” interrupted Mrs. Petch, pointing to the parrot; then she laughed hysterically and burst into tears. “We get five shillings a week from an old mistress of mine as long as the parrot lives. And for that my poor husband is to lose his place. Oh, it’s hard—it’s cruel hard.”

Andy stood up, rather upset, but determined now to go through with it.

“Look here,” he said. “That’s not the only reason. I gather that your husband is addicted to drink.” Andy paused and elevated his chin. “A clergyman’s household must be above reproach.”

“It’s not true,” said Mrs. Petch eagerly. “He’s always so much livelier than the other men at Gaythorpe that when he gets a glass and is a bit livelier still, they think he’s drunk.”

“Give me a chance, sir,” said Sam Petch, in a low tone, speaking at last.

And of all the winged words in any language which he could have chosen to shoot straight at Andy’s heart, those were most sure to hit the core of it.

A chance!

Oh, Andy’s young soul had been wrung during those two years in London by the sight of thousands who had never had a chance, or who had missed it, or had wilfully wasted it. The ragged horde of them with haggard eyes and dirty soft hands seemed to press about him in the flowery silence of the cottage doorway.

“All right,” he said, drawing a long breath. “I’ll give you a chance.”

“You shan’t have cause to regret it, sir,” said Sam Petch quietly, with a simple manliness that pleased Andy.

All the same, on leaving the cottage, he felt bound to pause at the door in order to deliver a further warning.

“I must ask you to adhere to the strict truth in all our dealings together,” he remarked austerely.

“He always does,” said Mrs. Petch, before her husband could reply.

“I shall be glad to find it so,” said Andy.

“Only,” added Sam Petch, scratching his head, “it’s so hard to tell the difference. A lie—well, often it isn’t exactly a lie——”

“What else can it be?” demanded Andy.

“A lie——” repeated Sam. “Well, it’s often”—he searched the ceiling and derived inspiration from a string of onions—“it’s often the truth the other way out.”

“The difference between truth and falsehood is always perfectly clear and distinct,” said Andy, opening the door. And, really, he was still young enough to think so.

Sam Petch accompanied him with a sort of subdued dignity to the Thorpes’, and there said farewell.

“You may rely on me, sir,” he said.

Andy held out his hand impulsively.

“I think I may, Petch.”

Then the churchwarden’s wife came hospitably forward and shook hands with the new Vicar. She was as fat as Mr. Thorpe, but with a different sort of fatness; for while he seemed to be made of something very solid, like wood, she shook and wobbled to such an extent that Andy, following her down two steps into a cool room, held his breath involuntarily for fear she should crack.

“Mr. Thorpe’s out still,” she said, panting slightly. “But my nephew will take you to wash your hands. Wa-alter!”

A fat youth with round cheeks that swelled up under his eyes came reluctantly through the French window, followed by a friend.

“They’re holidaying,” said Mrs. Thorpe. “Now you go and have a wash, and then come down and help yourself. I shall be somewhere about when you’ve finished your meal.”

The fat boy escorted the guest upstairs, and left him in the spotless stuffiness of the spare-bedroom, where everything smelt of camphor and lavender. When Andy came down he was almost dismayed to see the banquet which had been prepared for him. Cold fowls. A whole ham. A huge trifle. A dish of tarts and cheesecakes. A cream cheese. It was stupendous. And Mrs. Thorpe’s fowls and

cheeses and hams were all bigger, tarts more full of jam, cheesecakes more overflowing with yellow richness, than any in the whole shire.

Mrs. Thorpe had never been an uncharitable woman, and in speaking of a mean relative the most scornful thing she could say was, “You could eat one of her cheesecakes in a mouthful. Now you know the sort of woman!”

Andy sat down, realising that he was very hungry, and he was rather consoled to find that some one had obviously been lunching before him. He would scarcely have dared to mar the exquisite proportions of the trifle or to disturb the elegant decoration of the fowls. The previous luncher had even spilt fragments on the shining tablecloth.

He glanced at his watch, and began to eat hastily, finding his time was growing short, and as he was finishing Mrs. Thorpe came in. She paused at the door, gave a little grunt of astonishment which she changed into a cough, and said heartily—

“Well, I am glad you’ve enjoyed your lunch. Mary”—she shouted down a long stone passage—“bring in the coffee.”

Mary—and this was a queer thing—Mary also paused in the doorway with a grunt of astonishment which she turned into a cough; but Andy did not notice this, and after drinking his coffee he climbed into Mr. Thorpe’s cart, and was driven to the station, feeling as only a man can feel who gets what he wants from life before he loses his illusions.

The groom eyed him curiously as he sat looking straight ahead with the light of youth and hopeful candour shining in his eyes—but the groom’s gaze was upon his slack waistcoat, not upon his face.

And in a corner of the Thorpes’ orchard fat Walter and his friend were still munching the last remnants of a stolen feast.

The cart arrived so early at the railway station that Andy had nearly half an hour to wait, and as one country person after another came upon the platform, and joined a group, an obvious whisper went round, followed by a furtive inspection of the black-coated stranger.

Andy straightened his shoulders, and unconsciously endeavoured to assume an expression of benevolent dignity. Naturally, they were interested in the new Vicar of Gaythorpe. It would have surprised Andy very much at the moment to have met any one who was not interested in that gentleman, and he felt a little glow, in passing one of the groups, to hear a woman say—

“He’s so slight and thin. You’d wonder where he *could* put it.”

“H-hush!” warned the rest.

Andy smiled inwardly and settled his collar. Of course they referred to his brain. Well, it was rather a wonderful thing to have a living presented to one at

twenty-five by a man who had only chanced to hear a single sermon. He thought it all over again. The old friend of his Vicar attending morning service—the interview three days later—the astonishing offer of a living that was a rich one, as livings go in these days.

"Of course," said Andy to himself, stepping into the railway carriage, "I *was* rather trenchant that morning."

He glanced out of the window as the train slipped away through the spring afternoon, and congratulated himself on the impression he seemed to have made on his new neighbours. They would be eager to see him again. Ridiculous for the London clergy to talk of apathy in the face of such interest as he had seen at Millsby station. The parishioners were already discussing the mental qualifications of the new Vicar with a keenness that was perfectly delightful.

And in the next compartment three women bent together, discussing a wonder.

"*Was it six cheesecakes that Thorpe's groom said?*"

"*And eight tarts! And you know Mrs. Thorpe's tarts.*"

"*Besides ham and fowl and half one of her great trifles.*"

"*He must have got some complaint.*"

"*Oh, I hear them London curates is half starved. P'raps he'd never seen a meal like that before, and he couldn't stop.*"

"*But you'd think he'd burst!*"

"*That's just it. That's just where the wonder comes in. Cool and thin as a lath after it all.*"

"*I shall go to hear him preach.*"

"*So shall I. Good as the Sword-Eating Man at Bardswell Fair. Ha-ha!*"

Poor Andy!

CHAPTER II

As Andy passed through his own hall between his own umbrella-stand and eight-day clock on his way to pay a parochial call, he stepped lightly, less like the proud incumbent of an excellent country living than a schoolboy who endeavours to escape a maiden aunt.

But it was no use. Before he reached the porch a door was opened, and Mrs. Jebb, the housekeeper, fluttered forth from the back regions. She had previously fluttered in and out of matrimony in rather the same way, and seemed to have brought nothing from it but a wedding ring and a black satin dress trimmed with beads.

She had, however, brought something hidden as well—a profound conviction that she was fascinating to the gentlemen. Her late husband had been wont to remark, during their brief married life, that there was a something in her way of looking out of her eye-corners that was enough to upset an aconite. He meant a rather different thing, but he was not as cultured as Mrs. Jebb would have liked him to be. Still the habit of—as she inwardly phrased it—"eye-cornering" clung to her still.

Andy's aunt chose her solely because she and sex seemed to have no connection—which is only another proof that nobody knows anything at all about anybody else—and she called herself a lady-cook-housekeeper.

She "eye-cornered" Andy now as she came flitting after him to the front door, but more for the sake of practice than from any ulterior motive.

"*Might* I ask you—you *do* pass the grocer's shop—and we are out of soft sugar?" She had a way of talking in gasps until she got fairly started, when nothing would stop her. "I am so sorry to make mistakes, but I must ask you to try and remember that I never expected to serve even in the—er—higher reaches of domestic—when Mr. Jebb——"

"Excuse me," said Andy, seizing his hat from the peg, "I am rather pressed for——"

"*And* a pound of rice, if you *would* be so very kind?"

"Delighted. Of course," said Andy incoherently, escaping down the steps.

He had already learned that the reminiscences of life with Mr. Jebb were so long and varied that it seemed strange a year could have held them all, and of so intimate and pathetic a nature that, once fairly started, it were sheer brutality to cut them short.

But half-way down the drive a thin voice floated out to him—

“Candles—a pound of candles—if you *could*?”

He looked back, and there she stood on the doorstep, eye-cornering Andy from afar, with strands of brownish hair and odd bits of cheap white lace fluttering about her.

“All right,” he shouted back; but to himself he grunted, “Silly old kitten. What on earth did Aunt Dixon get me an old fool like that for?”

Then a sudden waft of lilac scent warmed by sunshine, which is the essence of spring, swept across Andy’s freckled nose, and he felt kind to all the world.

“Oh, let her *be* a kitten! I don’t care. It’s hardish lines on an old woman like that having to go out into service——”

Old woman!

What a glorious thing it is that nobody can see into the mind of anybody else.

Andy turned into Parson’s Lane, where the birds sang, and wild flowers bloomed earlier than anywhere else, and lovers walked silent on summer evenings; and he began to whistle from pure happiness. Then he remembered his position and hummed the “March of the Men of Harlech” instead.

The widow’s house stood at the farther end of the village, and when Andy went in at the farm gate he saw preparations going forward for that little tragedy, a country sale. The room into which he was ushered stood carpetless, miraculously swept and garnished, its large table crowded with glass and china that had remained for years hidden in the great storeroom, excepting on rare festivals, when it was brought out with care and put away by the hands of the mistress. A big sideboard filled one wall.

“I’m afraid,” said Andy, “that I’ve come at the wrong time, Mrs. Simpson. I’ll call again.”

Mrs. Simpson, who was a fair woman with a meek brow and an obstinate mouth, motioned him to a seat.

“Everything’s ready,” she said. “We go into the little cottage near you to-night. My husband’s cousins, the Thorpes, wanted us to stop with them for a few days, but I felt I couldn’t.”

“I hope—I hope you’ll be comfortable in your new home,” said Andy, who was not glib at consolation.

Mrs. Simpson crossed her hands on her lap.

“Oh, I shall be comfortable enough. My husband’s family have behaved well. They have clubbed together to make me and the children a little allowance—and they’re buying in all the furniture we need.”

Andy rose. He could not find anything to say to a woman years older than himself, who had lost her husband and her home—so, of course, he was a poor sort of parson.

“Is there a garden in your new home? May I send you some flowers?” he asked, going towards the door.

“Thank you; but flowers make dirt in a little house.”

They were near the big sideboard now, and in his confusion Andy caught his elbow in the corner.

“That is going to be sold, too,” said Mrs. Simpson. “The Thorpes won’t buy that in.”

“Ah—yes,” said Andy.

Then, suddenly, Mrs. Simpson’s face began to work like a child’s before it cries aloud, and she passed her hand over the smooth surface of the top.

“Nobody’s ever polished it but myself. We bought it in London on our honeymoon. Now Mrs. Will Werrit’ll get it—and those girls of hers’ll put hot-water jugs on the polished top.”

Andy stood there, touched to the heart, struggling for something to say, and only able to stammer out ridiculously at last—

“Perhaps they’ll use mats.”

But as he went home he began to wonder if he could afford to buy the sideboard and present it to Mrs. Simpson. No; he had had so many expenses on entering the incumbency that there was practically nothing at the bank. The little fortune which had sufficed for his education and for furnishing the Vicarage was now at an end. He literally could not lay hands on a spare five-pound note. A certain sum he had set aside for the new bicycle which was a necessity in a country living, but that was all he had over and above the amount for current expenses——

His thoughts stopped in that unpleasant way everybody knows, when a conclusion is forced upon an unwilling mind. He turned into the yard and pulled out his old bicycle. It would do. It was not a dignified machine, but it would do.

He had to see that as he trundled it dismally back again and went into the house to search for a bill of Mrs. Simpson’s sale among his papers.

Oh, nonsense! He wouldn’t!

He sat down to tea and glanced at his dining-room furniture, almost ecclesiastical in its chaste simplicity, and heaved a sigh of annoyance. Then, taking a large piece of cake in one hand and a newspaper in the other, he endeavoured to immerse himself in the news of the day.

Did Mr. and Mrs. Simpson feel anything like as jolly as he did when he bought his new furniture? If so——

He turned to the foreign telegrams, and in the midst of China and Peru he saw Mrs. and an imaginary Mr. Simpson buying a sideboard for their new home.

Pshaw! He flung down his paper and rang for the little maid.

“Please tell Mrs. Jebb I shall want lunch at twelve to-morrow. I am going out.”

Then, feeling that it was a deed which accorded more with a freckled nose and an abbreviated Christian name than with the dignified attitude of a Vicar of position, he began to search the sale catalogue for a mahogany sideboard. He knew that the senior curate would never have done such a thing. He would have given the money to the deserving poor.

Andy felt profoundly thankful that the senior curate would never know as he wrote to countermand his order for a new bicycle.

After that he went across the field and looked over the hedge into the churchyard, where that Mrs. Werrit who was his rival for the sideboard chanced to be tending the graves of such Werrits as were already taking their rest. People in Gaythorpe said that it was the only time a true Werrit did rest; and Mrs. Will was one to the backbone though she had been born a Thorpe of Millsby.

It was strange to Andy, who had always lived in towns, to find that nearly all the people were more or less related to one another: the Thorpes and Werrits permeated the social relationships of the countryside in the very same way as one or two great families have done the aristocracy of England. It is a thing that is going, but it survives still in many country places, and it produces a social atmosphere which is rather different from any other.

“Good afternoon,” said Andy.

“Oh, good afternoon, Mr. Deane,” called Mrs. Will Werrit, shrill and piping.

Andy stood idly watching the low sun slant across the graves, and across the woman’s kneeling figure. A cuckoo cried up into the clear, keen air; a little way off a cock was crowing. Something that Andy felt, and tried to grasp, and couldn’t, was in that quiet afternoon.

He came back over the fields with his hands deep in his pockets, unconsciously trying to make out what it was, and he felt inclined to write a piece of poetry that afternoon because he was young and alone and in love with life. It is an instinct, under such circumstances, for people to try to catch hold of the glory by putting it into words, just as a child instinctively tries to get hold of the sunshine, and both occupations are equally silly and joyful and engrossing.

So Andy walked in through his study window and sat at his table, looking out over the green and golden day that shimmered up by most exquisite gradations to a sky just before sunset. Green of the close-cut lawn—green and gold of the holly hedge—gold and green of the trees full in the sun—gold of the lower sky—translucent green of the cloudless upper reaches. No wonder Andy’s growing soul groped and groped after some way of keeping this. No wonder he stretched out baby hands of the soul. And no wonder that he grasped nothing. Or

so near nothing that this is all he found to say about the Werrits near the church porch with Mrs. Will Werrit bending over them. He called it “The Others,” and was melancholy—as all happy poets are—

“When I can bear no more
  The sound of tears,
And all the muffled roar
  Of hopes and fears,
I let my tired mind a vigil keep,
  To watch in silence where the others sleep.

A moment—and I go
  Where green grass waves,
Where still-eyed daisies grow
  On quiet graves,
While every afternoon the setting sun
Falls on the names there, like a benison.”

Andy read it over. He thought it was very beautiful indeed, and began to compose an epitaph for himself when he should lie, like Gulielmus, beneath the shadow of the ancient church.

“A great poet and a great priest. Fifty years of untiring service——”

Oh, he was so young and so happy that he enjoyed it very much indeed. And he was so hungry afterwards that he was able to eat Mrs. Jebb’s pastry.

The next day about two o’clock he went across the lawn to speak to his gardener about the radishes when it suddenly occurred to him that he had seen nothing of that worthy since half-past ten, though he had been about the place all the morning. Evidently young Sam Petch was beginning his games. This should be put a stop to at once. Andy walked over the short grass with a determined step, and was about to start the inquisition when Sam, with a pleasant smile, remarked—

“Nice morning I had of it. Searching high and low, I was, for bits of cloth to nail up the creepers on the stable wall. And in the end my poor missus gave me the clippings she’d saved for pegging a hearthrug.”

Andy looked hard at his gardener, but it was his own eyes which fell before the radiant honesty shining in Sam Petch’s face.

“Very good of Mrs. Petch—I must see if I haven’t an old pair——”

He broke off, for he had come closer to Sam in speaking, and there was somewhere in the air an unmistakable odour of the public-house.

“Your oldest would be too good for that job,” said Sam hastily. “My wife would sponge ’em with beer with a drop o’ gin in it and they’d look like new.

She does that, time and again, to my old clothes. These I have on she did last night. On'y drawback is, you can't get the smell of the liquor out all at once. You'll maybe not have noticed, but I smell a smell of drink about this here jacket yet, though I've been out in it since morning."

Andy looked hard again. Again he was met by the clear, blue gaze of honesty and simple candour. He walked away, making no remark.

But half-way across the grass he paused, shook his head, and went back.

"I would have you know," he said, copying as closely as possible the air and manner of the senior curate, "that I am perfectly able to appreciate the difference between the odour of beer applied externally and internally. Pray remember that for the future."

Then, head in air, he marched towards the house, feeling greatly annoyed that a dandelion root should trip him up half-way and spoil the exit.

Sam watched him go into the house, and then bent over the mowing machine in a paroxysm of helpless laughter.

"Golly—he's a rum 'un—but not so soft as he looks."

For young Sam Petch had many failings, but also the great virtue of being able to enjoy a joke against himself.

Meanwhile, Andy made his way to Mrs. Simpson's sale, and as he entered the house the auctioneer's raucous voice could be heard selling the spare-bedroom furniture. Every one was upstairs save a few who waited in the dining-room so as to have a good place when the auctioneer came in there.

Mrs. Thorpe and Mrs. Will Werrit, for instance, had planted themselves firmly by the table on which Mrs. Simpson's cut glass and china were displayed. They were not surprised to see the new Vicar, as they supposed he would be wanting things for his house, and Mrs. Thorpe tore herself away from a fascinating and confidential conversation with her neighbour to say pleasantly glancing at him over her ample chest—

"I hope you're comfortable at Gaythorpe, Mr. Deane?"

That was what Mrs. Thorpe wanted every one to be in this world—comfortable—and it was certainly what she hoped for in the world to come.

"I'm more than comfortable," said Andy. "I love the place already. And after London it seems so peaceful—like one big family."

Mrs. Will Werrit's thin lips curled at the corners.

"Are big families peaceful in London?" she said.

"Well, well!" said Mrs. Thorpe, soothingly. "Human nature is human nature. And how does your housekeeper cook, Mr. Deane?"

"Oh, not very grandly," said Andy, with a laugh.

"Can she make decent pastry?" asked Mrs. Will Werrit.

“No. But I’m not much of a pastry lover—”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Thorpe and Mrs. Will Werrit. Then they coughed behind their gloves to tone down the ejaculation, and carefully avoided each other’s glance.

But Andy wondered what on earth there was to be so surprised at in the fact that he did not like pastry. He walked to the window and stood there with his hands in his pockets while the two women resumed their interrupted conversation.

“Did you hear?” said Mrs. Will Werrit. “He said he didn’t like pastry. After eating six tarts and eight cheesecakes at a sitting.”

“Well, well. I’m sure I don’t know how that got about. I never told a soul, that I can swear.”

“Nobody,” said Mrs. Will Werrit, snapping her lips together, “can blame a lad for liking tarts and cheesecakes. But what I hate is his lying about it.”

“Come, come! You can’t call it lying,” said Mrs. Thorpe. “Poor lad, he’s ashamed of his appetite, I expect.” She touched a set of glass dishes on the table before her. “I’m bidding for those.”

“Don’t touch ’em!” said Mrs. Will sharply. “There’s a woman looking at you. You don’t want anybody to notice them before they’re auctioned if you can help it. They’ll be running you up.”

“I shan’t go beyond two shillings apiece,” said Mrs. Thorpe.

“You don’t know. Sales are such queer things. You’d think”—Mrs. Will lowered her voice still further and glanced at Andy’s back—“you’d think sometimes when you get home with a lot of rubbish you’ve no use for, that you’d been *possessed*.” She paused. “I shall bid for the jelly glasses. I remember thinking I should like them the last time we had supper here before Mr. Simpson’s illness.”

“Did you, now?” said Mrs. Thorpe. “Well, I thought the same about the glass dishes on that very night. Last party they gave before he was taken ill.”

And yet they were good women, and would do the widow and her children a thousand kindnesses. It is such things that make the dullest-seeming person so tremendously interesting.

“Finger-bowls!” said Mrs. Will Werrit, touching one with a scornful finger. “No wonder he died in debt!”

“Maybe they were a wedding——” began Mrs. Thorpe, but a great trampling of feet announced that the auctioneer was coming downstairs, and with a hasty “Now, stick to your place; don’t let yourself be pushed into a corner,” the two ladies prepared gleefully for the conflict.

Andy grew very tired indeed of waiting, as one thing after another was

knocked down to flushed and excited buyers. The auctioneer was a kind-hearted man, and went out of his way to try and make the best price he could of the things, cracking jokes with a bad headache in a stentorian voice, which may not be a picturesque sacrifice upon the altar of charity, but is a very real one, all the same. And he understood his audience so well that he had them all in high good-humour, ready to bid for anything.

"And now," he remarked, "we come to the sideboard. You're not like the greedy boy who said, 'Best first for fear I can't hold it.' I kept the best until the last, sure that the spacious residences of those I see around me *could* hold it, and find it the greatest ornament of their homes." He put his hand to his head, feeling he was getting muddled. "Ladies—it's not drink—it's love! I meant to say this exquisite sideboard in solid mahogany, plate-glass back, will be the chief ornament of *some* home: for to my regret only one of you can possess it." He paused. How his head ached! "Now, what shall I say for this magnificent piece of furniture fit for a ducal palace?"

"Five pounds," said a red-faced man near the door.

"Five pounds! You offer the paltry sum of five pounds for this magnificent sideboard, which contains a cellaret for the wedding champagne and a cupboard for the christening cake! Ladies and gentlemen——"

He threw himself, as it were, upon their better feelings. And several people who did not want the sideboard began to bid for it as if their happiness in life depended upon their getting it.

"Five pounds ten! Six pounds! Seven pounds ten!"

"Eight!" said Andy, beginning to be awfully excited too.

"Eight ten!" said Mrs. Will Werrit.

"Nine!" said Andy.

"Nine ten!" said a new voice—clear, and yet breathless.

"Ten pounds!" said Andy, glaring in the direction of the voice.

"Ten ten!" and the crowd opened, leaving a little space around a girl who seemed to bloom suddenly upon the dull background of oldish faces like an evening primrose on the twilight. She was pale with the fear of being late and the excitement of arriving just in time, and she waited with parted lips for Andy's defiant "Eleven!"

The other buyers had all stopped bidding, and her quick "Eleven ten!" rang clear across a silence.

"Twelve!" said Andy, doggedly fixing his chin into his collar.

"Twelve ten!"

"Thirteen!" said Andy, looking at his opponent with extreme distaste.

"Thirteen ten!" responded she, catching her breath.

“Fourteen!” shouted Andy, who had actually forgotten both the sideboard and Mrs. Simpson, and only felt that he would sell his shirt rather than let this girl conquer him.

“Fourteen ten!”

“Fifteen!”

“Fifteen ten!”

“Sixteen!”

Back and forth rang the words like pistol shots.

“Nineteen ten!” They were both pale now, and trembling with excitement. An electric thrill ran through the room, a strange spirit hovered almost visibly about the commonplace group in the farmhouse parlour, and the auctioneer recognised it easily enough and without surprise, for he had grown used to knowing that men and women touch the borders of the Inexplicable at little country sales.

“Twenty!”

Andy had the ‘twenty-one’ ready on his lips, when, instead of the expected retort, there was a moment’s silence that could be felt.

“Going at twenty!”

“Now, won’t any one give another ten shillings for this exceptionally handsome sideboard?”

“Going—going—gone!”

The hammer fell, and with that sound the two young people stared at each other with a sort of odd surprise, as if they had just awakened from a queer dream.

“That’s Miss Elizabeth Atterton,” whispered Mrs. Thorpe to Andy as he began to push his way out, marvelling at his own folly.

Twenty pounds was a ridiculous sum for him to have paid for the thing in any case, and just now when he was so short of money it was sheer lunacy.

“Miss Elizabeth Atterton,” he said vaguely—“oh, the young lady who bid against me? I see.”

Then he made arrangements for the delivery of the sideboard, and went home to find a dapper, middle-aged gentleman walking down the drive.

“How-de-do. Just been to call on you. Sorry to find you out,” said the dapper gentleman.

“Do come in,” said Andy, “and have a cup of tea.”

“Sorry I can’t. But I’ll go back with you for a few minutes, if I may. Fact is, I told my daughter to bring the cart round here for me at four. She’s gone off to a sale or something. Queer taste. But it’s better than developing nerves. If a female of my household developed nerves I should—er—duck her.”

“Sensible plan,” said Andy, wisely shaking his head. “Most women are as full of fancies as an egg is full of meat.”

“Just so, just so,” said the dapper gentleman, sitting very straight. And thus they disposed of the mystery and tragedy of womanhood.

“Miss Elizabeth Atterton is here with the cart, sir,” said the little maid, putting her head in at the door.

“Ha, my daughter’s here early,” said Mr. Atterton, rising.

Andy accompanied him to the cart, where Miss Elizabeth Atterton stood holding the head of a rather restive pony. The light shone full on her face, showing most clearly the gold in her brown hair and in her eyes and in her exquisite skin, which was of a deep cream with a faint red in the cheeks-not at all like milk and roses, but like some perfect fruit grown in the youth of the world. Her features were irregular, the upper lip being rather too long and the nose broad and short, but her forehead and her eyes were very lovely.

“My daughter Elizabeth,” said Mr. Atterton, as Andy took the pony’s head. “Oh, by the way, my gloves,” and he bolted back to fetch them.

“I am afraid I ran the price of your sideboard up,” said Elizabeth stiffly.

“Not at all,” said Andy, with equal stiffness.

Then Mr. Atterton came out, and the little cart clattered away through the lilac-scented afternoon.

CHAPTER III

NOTHING could be less like a messenger of Fate than a mahogany sideboard with a plate-glass back.

And yet——

"Here's Mrs. Simpson's little girl for the third time since seven!" said Mrs. Jebb, coming hastily into the room, with ribbon-strings all aflutter about her, as usual.

"What does she want?" said Andy, buttering his toast.

"Something about a sideboard," said Mrs. Jebb, poised, as it were, upon one hand at the table corner. "Three times before breakfast about a sideboard! You really must make a stand, or you will never have a minute to call your own. You are too good-natured."

And she turned her head slightly, so as to give Andy the benefit of that glance which the late Mr. Jebb found irresistible.

"Nonsense," said Andy. "It's what I'm paid for;" and he rustled his letters together, carefully avoiding the amorous eye.

"As your aunt remarked, in engaging my services," said Mrs. Jebb, "it is a great thing for you to have a lady in the house. I hope you will let me help you in any way that I can."

"Thank you. I'll go round to Mrs. Simpson's at once," said Andy, leaving an excellent corner of the buttered toast. "By the way, I should like my potatoes soft in the middle if you don't mind."

"Of course. Anything you wish, please mention at once," said Mrs. Jebb. Nothing could subdue her gaiety upon this summer morning, when the birds were singing, and the sun was shining, and Hope threw wreaths upon the tombstone of Mr. Jebb.

Andy glared at her.

"There is nothing more at present, thank you," he said, going out; then Mrs. Jebb went to the window and looked after him with an easy tear in her eye.

"Impetuous," she murmured, "impetuous, but *sweet*."

Could Andy but have heard her!

However, by this time he was already entering the little garden before Mrs. Simpson's cottage at the lane end, and all his thoughts were engrossed by the unexpected sight of the famous sideboard standings in sections around the creeper-covered doorway. The widow sat weeping on an empty box near that part containing the cellaret, while a dark, anxious-looking little girl of about six

stood pulling her mother's sleeve, and a big boy of three hammered the little girl with broad, fat fists.

"Stop that," said Andy, seizing the boy from behind; but the culprit turned on him such a jolly, good-natured smile that he was disarmed, and only said lamely —

"You shouldn't hit your little sister."

"I haven't got nobody elth to hit," lisped the cherub, looking up at Andy with blue-eyed surprise.

"You mustn't mind what he says," interposed Sally anxiously. "Boys are born naughty. They can't help it."

Andy glanced at Mrs. Simpson, who still sat with her face hidden, evidently overcome by her feelings, and he braced himself for a scene of tearful gratitude. It was unpleasant, but no doubt inevitable, so the best thing to do was to get it over as soon as possible.

"H-hem! I see you got the sideboard all right, Mrs. Simpson. I am afraid it would be rather late last night before you received it, but the carrier——"

"I've been sitting on this box since six, waiting to see you," interposed Mrs. Simpson.

"Please don't! Don't say a word more. I'm only too delighted," began Andy.

"There's nothing," wept Mrs. Simpson, "to be delighted about. It won't go into the house. And you can't keep a sideboard in a garden. Oh, I know you meant well, but this makes me realise my comedown more than anything else that has happened. After thinking I'd got it, it still has to go all the same. I dreamt last night that rows of great girls came up one after the other and banged hot-water cans down on the polished top, and when I wasn't dreaming I was looking out of the window to see if it rained. And Mrs. Werrit will get my sideboard after all. And the Thorpe family will say they were in the right not to buy it in for me. And I shall look like a fool. I hate people that always turn out to be right in the end."

It was a very long speech for Mrs. Simpson, who was usually neither tearful nor garrulous, and Andy saw that the woman had been stirred to the foundations of her being.

"What can I do? If I could do anything?" he said helplessly.

Mrs. Simpson dabbed her eyes with a black-bordered handkerchief and tried to pull herself together.

"I never gave way like this before—not even when my husband died. And you mustn't think me ungrateful. It was very kind indeed of you to buy the sideboard for me. Only, you see how it all is."

"Well, suppose we get the thing moved away from here at once," said Andy,

ruefully surveying the scene.

Mrs. Simpson looked at him.

"There's one thing—but I don't suppose you would—one couldn't expect ——"

"What is it?" demanded Andy. "I'd do anything I could, but I don't see——"

"Well, I was wondering if you could possibly take care of it for me at the Vicarage until I did get a house where there was room for it."

"Why, splendid!" said Andy. "The very thing. Of course I will."

"Splendid!" said Jimmy, butting at Andy's legs like a young goat.

"And mother can go across and shine it, can't she?" said Sally gravely. "She doesn't never let anybody shine it but herself."

"Of course she can," said Andy, "and you too. I have heaps of empty rooms."

"But it must be in a room with a fire," said Mrs. Simpson, beginning to weep again. "It would soon look different if it was put away in an unoccupied room."

"It's not a piano," smiled Andy. "Oh, it'll be all right in the drawing-room. That isn't furnished yet you know."

"It ought to be in a room with a fire," persisted Mrs. Simpson, setting her lips.

"But my study is not large enough, and the dining-room is fully furnished. I really could not——"

"Of course. I said not from very first. I couldn't expect it," said Mrs. Simpson, rising with resigned sadness. "Shall I let Mrs. Will Werrit know, or will you?"

"But, Mrs. Simpson, I assure you it'll be *perfectly* all right," urged Andy.

"I'm sure you think so, Mr. Deane, and I'm most grateful to you for what you've done. I'll drop a line to Mrs. Will Werrit at once."

She turned to go into the cottage and Jimmy set up a piercing yell, the tired little girl whimpered; there were loose straw and paper blowing desolately about the garden. It seemed most melancholy to Andy, this everyday trouble of a broken-up home. The dreariness of it pierced through the young hope and glamour that surrounded him, and for one dull moment he heard the hopeless chant which underlies all life: "Is it worth while? Is it worth while?"

As Andy stood there, staring blankly at the dust and straw, the tasteful appearance of his dining-room seemed quite suddenly to be a very small thing—and he had thought it so tremendously important.

"We will put your sideboard into the dining-room, then, until we find a better place for it," he said.

"Well, that is good of you—though it's an ornament to any room," said Mrs. Simpson, brightening at once. "We must make some arrangement by which it

becomes your property altogether if I die first," she added, in a burst of real gratitude.

"No," said Andy, driven to asserting himself at last by the idea of being saddled with the sideboard for life. "No. To that I will never agree." He paused. "But there's no need to talk about dying at present."

Mrs. Simpson dried her eyes, folded her hands, and spoke with almost her wonted tranquillity.

"You never know. Anybody would have taken a lease of Mr. Simpson's life."

"I am sorry I never knew your husband," said Andy, resuming his professional manner.

"Well," said Mrs. Simpson, "I don't suppose you'd have seen much of him if he'd been here. He didn't like the clergy. Not that he had anything against them, but he didn't like them." She paused, then, wishful to avoid offence, she added: "It was just a matter of taste. He never could eat oysters either, and they're a delicacy, as everybody knows."

"Of course," said Andy solemnly, his face grave but his heart light with laughter, and the dolorous chanting of the underworld forgotten.

Life was a splendid thing—like the spring morning—and something glorious must be round the corner.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. STAMFORD, the wife of the Squire of the parish, stood before the mantelpiece awaiting the arrival of the new Vicar. She was a tall, spare woman, and her garments always seemed to cling to her, not because they couldn't come off, but because they dared not. Even in repose, Mrs. Stamford always looked as if she had that moment finished doing something energetic, or were just about to start again.

"Pleased to see you, Mr. Deane," she said, when Andy, very flat and shining about the head, was ushered in. "Only got back a day or two since, or we should have looked you up before. Have you got settled down? How d'you like Gaythorpe?"

She fired these remarks with such directness that Andy could not help feeling as if some one had thrown something at him.

"I like it immensely." Then, after a moment's pause, and with a good deal of effort, "I am more than grateful to you and Mr. Stamford——"

"Oh, that's all right; we'll take that as read," interrupted Mrs. Stamford with a short laugh so exactly like that of William the parrot that Andy could not help having a bewildered feeling that she would next begin to draw corks as well. However, she looked towards the door behind her guest instead, and remarked in a voice which she kept for that one topic—

"Here is my son, Dick."

A tall young fellow, very like his mother, but somehow indefinably weaker, came forward and shook hands without effusion.

"Got settled down yet?"

"Quite, thank you."

"You'll find it dullish, I expect."

"No—rather exciting, so far."

The young men took each other's measure, and then Dick Stamford said in a different tone—

"Well, come in and have a game of billiards with me when you've nothing better to do."

"Thanks, I shall be very pleased," said Andy.

It was queer how anxiously Mrs. Stamford had looked from one to the other during the little conversation, and more odd still that this tough, unemotional woman should be unable to keep back a long sigh of relief when it was over.

"Have a turn in the garden until the others turn up?" said Dick, after a pause.

So the two young men went out, and a moment later Mr. Stamford came into the room, limping slightly, and walking with a stick. As he closed the door he looked across anxiously at his wife.

"Well?"

"I think it will be a success. He has taken Mr. Deane round the garden."

"I wonder, Ellen, if we ought not to have let him remain in the Guards. He showed no tendency to drink when he was with his regiment, so far as I know."

Mrs. Stamford's mouth set into those firm lines her husband knew so well.

"It was his duty to come home and look after things when your accident made you unable to do so. He will be master here. He must learn how to manage the estate."

Mr. Stamford smiled at his wife, and it could be seen then whence Dick's weakness came.

"You wanted him home, Ellen, and so did I."

"I should never have suggested it if I had not thought it the right thing," said Mrs. Stamford, flushing a little.

"Of course not—of course not," agreed her husband. "Young companionship is all he needs, and I think Mr. Deane will supply that deficiency. It was his open look and pleasant, manly tone that struck me when I first heard him preach. 'Just the sort of young fellow to make a nice companion for Dick,' I said to myself." He rubbed his hands together as he repeated this little story for the hundredth time, after the manner of people who live deep in the country and have little to talk about. "I went straight to my cousin after the service and asked if the lad wouldn't do for us."

"Your cousin thought it an unsuitable appointment. He wanted you to take the senior curate," said Mrs. Stamford, "and in some ways he was quite right. Of course this boy can't preach."

"No." Mr. Stamford chuckled. "I believe, though, he thinks he got the living on account of that sermon about Saul."

"Oh, well, so long as he doesn't preach more than half an hour *I* don't care what he says."

They were both smiling as the two young men came in through the glass door, and then luncheon was announced.

"Mrs. Atterton and Elizabeth can't be coming," said Mrs. Stamford, glancing at the clock. "Anyhow, we won't wait any longer."

So they went across the spacious old hall into a dining-room where everything was so harmonious and so mellowed by long companionship, that you noticed the various objects in it at first no more than you do, at first sight, the details of any beautiful thing which has grown and not been made. Mr.

Stamford himself was no more conscious of his treasure-house than he was of the nose upon his face. He was, of course, in some hidden place, proud of both. The nose was the best kind of nose, and the house was the best kind of house, and it would have been incongruous if a Stamford of Gaythorpe Manor had been provided with a nose or a house that was less than the best; but he felt no more inclination to draw his visitor's attention to his surroundings than to his nose.

"Cold beef, please," said Andy, in answer to the butler's discreet inquiries; and when the man returned with quite a mountain of thins slices on the plate he felt too much of a stranger to offer any remonstrance.

Mrs. Stamford gave the man an imperceptible nod of approval, for it had already penetrated to her ears—as such things do penetrate in country places—that the new Vicar had an enormous appetite.

But Andy wrestled with the cold beef, all unheeding, for it takes a lifetime to learn—and some happy ones never learn—how different are people's thoughts of us from what we imagine they must be—not worse, necessarily, or better, but so extraordinarily different.

Then a cart went past the window to the front door and they all looked up.

"Elizabeth at last. Dick!" said his mother.

The young man left his luncheon and went, with more alertness than Andy had supposed him capable of, to welcome the belated guest. A minute later he returned with her, and Mr. and Mrs. Stamford both glanced with pleased eyes at the tall, gallant-looking couple who came down the long room together. Evidently, felt Andy, there was something in the air, though he saw, when Elizabeth sat down, that she had no engagement ring on her finger.

"I'm so sorry to be late," she said, "but at the last moment mamma's back gave way."

"Oh, how unfortunate; but I quite understand," responded Mrs. Stamford, more nearly gushing than Andy could have believed possible.

"I hoped Mrs. Atterton's back had been better of late," said Mr. Stamford.

Then Mrs. Stamford added, to draw the stranger into the conversation, "Poor Mrs. Atterton is troubled with a weak back, Mr. Deane."

Thus was Andy introduced to that feature of Gaythorpe society—Mrs. Atterton's back. He looked across at Elizabeth and remembered vividly his first sight of her, shining out, as it were, between the drab, middle-aged crowd, and his secret resentment against her was increased. She obviously had everything; it must have been simply a childish desire to 'best' him which had led her to bid against him until he was obliged to pay some pounds more than he need have done.

"And how," said Elizabeth, leaning towards him, "do you like Gaythorpe?"

The question did not surprise him, because it would have been much more unusual at this period if any one had failed to ask it; but what did astonish him was the change in Elizabeth's manner from the extreme stiffness of their last parting to an eager kindness that made Andy say to himself, with some pleasant feeling of man-of-the-worldness, that she was evidently the sort who would flirt with a broomstick if nothing else were available. *He* had known that kind in London town. And he winked to himself astutely over the fruit-tart as he responded to her overtures with some reserve.

After luncheon they all went into the garden, and just for a moment, while Dick fetched the key of one of the fruit-houses, and Mrs. Stamford was settling her husband in his long chair, Andy and the young lady were alone together on a broad grass walk beside a hedge of lilacs. There was a border of flowering plants on the other side just coming into bloom, and at the end you could see a little figure of Love without an arm under a copper beech. Somewhere in the distance a pigeon was cooing. The full sun lay very calm and bright and even over the old stable tower and the long house, and the grass path before them. The stable clock chimed a quarter to three. It all seemed the very embodiment of age-long prosperity and pleasant ease.

Andy felt at peace with all the world. She could flirt with him if she liked—he didn't care.

"So you're fond of walking?" he said indulgently, continuing a topic started at luncheon.

"Yes," she said, staring at the grass path. Then she put out a hand, not touching him, only nearly, and the colour in her cheeks deepened until they were like some exquisite fruit that a young sun had kissed in orchards that belonged to the youth of the world. But Elizabeth was always greatly annoyed at her trick of blushing, and compared herself bitterly to a beetroot.

"You were going to say!" remarked Andy.

"Oh, there's Mr. Stamford coming. I must tell you. I've been to see Mrs. Simpson," said Elizabeth.

"Well?" said Andy, taken aback.

"You wanted it for her. And I bid against you until you had to pay pounds more than you need have done. And you must have had so many expenses getting into your house. And it was all so idiotic of me. My sister always says I'm an idiot, and I am. I only stopped when I did because I hadn't another penny until next July."

"Why"—Andy stood still, facing her, and the most wonderful scent from all the sun-warmed lilacs blew across them—enveloped them—"why—you wanted it for Mrs. Simpson too?"

“You surely couldn’t think,” said Elizabeth, “that I wanted that beast for *myself*!”

“You thought I did,” muttered Andy.

“Oh—a man—that’s different,” said Miss Elizabeth.

“My furniture is all Sheraton—modern, of course, but good in style,” said Andy loftily. Then he saw Elizabeth’s hair against the lilacs, all brown and gold, and something made him forget he was the new Vicar—he was a boy and she a girl, with a joke between them. “I say,” he chuckled, “you know it wouldn’t go into her house. She’s made me put her sideboard into my dining-room.”

Ha-ha-ha! They laughed together for the first time, and the sound mingled with the rustling of young leaves and the love-song of a thrush, as much a part of the sweetness of nature in springtime as the rest.

Then Dick Stamford came towards them with his mother, and Elizabeth slipped her arm through that of the elder woman with her little air of reposeful tenderness which sat almost oddly on a young girl. She had that sort of kindness in her ways which most girls only learn from their first baby, and her voice held deep notes which caught the heart every now and then, breaking her light chatter like a stone in a narrow stream.

“You’ll stay tea, Elizabeth, and then Dick shall take you home,” said Mrs. Stamford.

“I’m awfully sorry, but I must have the cart round in half an hour. Mamma’s back——” apologised Elizabeth.

So mamma’s back was not only a convenience to herself, personally.

Then Andy said good-bye, and Mrs. Stamford, leaving Dick and Elizabeth alone, strolled down the drive with her other guest.

“You will find Gaythorpe very quiet,” said Mrs. Stamford at the gate, obviously thinking of something else, and yet lingering.

Andy glanced back at it all, and a sudden vivid picture of the tumult of things warring beyond this quiet place struck across his mind.

“This seems——” He sought a way to say it, but none came. “This does seem quiet.” He tried again. “Seems as if it had been lived in easily for ages.”

“Um. Well, people have no leisure to live now; they’ve only time to make a living,” said Mrs. Stamford absently. Then she said what she had been meaning to say all down the drive. “My son is a great deal alone here in the evenings. More alone than is good for him. I shall be grateful if you will come in when you can and have a game of billiards. You play, don’t you?”

“Oh yes—we had a couple of tables at the Men’s Institute in my last parish. I shall be very pleased to come,” said Andy.

So he went away down the road, feeling that pleasant as the world had been

that morning early, it was immensely more delightful now.

Two urchins watched him go up the road, then squashed disreputable hats down on their brows and began to imitate his professional stride which he had unconsciously copied on first arrival in London from the senior curate.

“Parson Andy walks like this! Parson Andy walks like this!” they chanted together under their breath, stepping down the road behind him.

For by this abbreviation was the Reverend Andrew Deane already known to his parishioners. It was inevitable, of course, but as yet he remained in blissful ignorance of the fact, and only the night before had secretly burned a satin tie-case on which a tactless cousin had embroidered ‘Andy.’

As he went across the churchyard, taking the short-cut home, he glanced once more at the gravestone of Gulielmus; and having glanced, he stood a moment, thinking.

It was most probable that this dead brother of his had been entertained by a Stamford of Gaythorpe Manor, just as he had been. Will Ford—who was now Gulielmus—had no doubt walked back by the very path beside which his body now lay sleeping.

What had he felt? Why had he never married? How had life gone with him?

Andy was standing very still in the warm quiet of the spring afternoon when suddenly a sense of jolly-good-fellowship and kindness seemed to fill his spirit—as if some comrade had passed that way and shouted a merry greeting. There was nothing strange or abnormal about it, either then or in the ineffaceable after-remembrance of it.

Only—Andy had felt on his first journey to Gaythorpe as if, across the centuries, he greeted a brother; now he felt as if, across the centuries, a brother greeted him.

CHAPTER V

ANDY sat in his study, endeavouring to prepare a Sunday-morning sermon that should justify the high opinion of his preaching which had led Mr. Stamford to present him to the living of Gaythorpe.

A light rain fell outside and a scent of the honeysuckle—it being now June—came through the open window; but Andy was not yet aware that every wayside flower preaches the finest sermon man can preach to man, and says, more convincingly than any parson ever could, 'God so loved the world.'

The new Vicar, therefore, had taken in turn such topics as the Origin of Evil and the Reason for Free Will, handling them with a courage perfectly remarkable when you consider how the saints of all ages have hesitated afraid before them. This morning, however, having settled these questions, he cast about him for something else which should be at once striking and profound, and it was some time before he noticed a gradually increasing noise in the other part of the house.

Even when he did become aware of it he brushed it aside from his mind and went peacefully on, reconciling the doctrine of evolution with the second chapter of Genesis. At last, however, the study door was burst open in a manner that even a poet could not ignore, and Mrs. Jebb paused, inarticulate with some unknown emotion, upon the threshold.

"*Not* the boiler burst again?" exclaimed Andy, who had already learned some of the trials of a housekeeper.

Mrs. Jebb swallowed, blinked, and demanded—

"Did you give that—female—permission to clean my furniture?"

It was a long way from the dawn of the world to Mrs. Simpson's sideboard, and for the moment Andy felt nonplussed; then he remembered.

"Oh, she's turned up to polish it, poor woman, has she?" he said, with an air of relief. "I told her she could. It's all right."

Mrs. Jebb fluttered forward, wavering a little like a butterfly that has imbibed too much nectar, and she alighted with one trembling hand upon the writing-table edge.

"It is not all right," she said. "It is all very, very wrong, Mr. Deane. Poor, I am, reduced to domestic service, I may be—but I will retire to the workhouse before I will allow a female from outside to polish furniture in this house while I remain your lady-cook-housekeeper."

"Really, Mrs. Jebb—I'm sure I never——" began Andy.

"What will the parish say?" went on Mrs. Jebb, growing still more agitated

as she saw Andy's concerned face. "What will the world say? Naturally that I'm not fit to be your housekeeper, if Mrs. Simpson has to come with dusters and furniture polish and an—an infant, to clean the Vicar's dining-room sideboard."

A dragging sound as of something being pulled reluctantly along, a bump, a yell, and Mrs. Simpson's voice in the rear, shrill with motherly indignation.

"How dare you call this dear child names?" she cried, replying to the limitless opprobrium which lay behind the word 'infant' rather than to the term itself.

"Come, come," said Andy, rising. "He is an infant all right, aren't you, Jimmy? Not twenty-one yet, ha-ha! There is nothing unpleasant in the word 'infant.' "

He smiled ingratiatingly from one angry face to the other, trying to carry it off easily, but in truth as frightened as a decent young man always is when he stands between two quarrelling women.

"There's a way," replied Mrs. Simpson slowly, glaring with her prominent light-blue eyes at Mrs. Jebb—"there's a way of saying 'woman' that implies things I wouldn't sully my lips by uttering. And yet 'woman' isn't a bad word."

"It all comes to this," panted Mrs. Jebb. "Is Mrs. Simpson to walk in without a with-your-leave or a by-your-leave and start polishing your sideboard, or is she not?"

"It's *her* sideboard," said Andy weakly. "But I'm sure you'll look after it all right, if Mrs. Simpson doesn't mind."

"Why should she mind? And if it's hers, why doesn't she take it away? Dozens of times I've said that the hideous thing completely ruins your dining-room, and I'm sure——"

"Now," interposed Mrs. Simpson, who grew, quiet as her opponent grew noisy, "*now* I shall say what I'd meant to keep to myself, because Mrs. Jebb has her living to earn, poor thing, and I wouldn't do her an injury. That sideboard in its present state, Mr. Deane, is a disgrace. So is your beautiful table. So is all the furniture."

"It only wants dusting. We've not had time this morning," quavered Mrs. Jebb, retreating before this onslaught.

"It wants what you'll never give it," said Mrs. Simpson, hauling Jimmy away, and looking back for a last shot. "It wants elbow-grease."

"Look here," said Andy, pulling himself together. "I—er—really—discord in a clergyman's house is what I greatly dislike. Mrs. Jebb, I told Mrs. Simpson she could come and clean her sideboard. Mrs. Simpson, you must put yourself in Mrs. Jebb's place and consider if your feelings might not have been hurt under similar circumstances. This really won't do."

He threw his head back, settled his chin in his collar, and looked as nearly like the senior curate before a refractory Bible Class as nature permitted.

Mrs. Simpson paused.

“I came peacefully enough,” she said, “and I was going to tell Mrs. Jebb, only she went off at such a tangent, that I did ring five times. But I couldn’t make any one hear, so I walked into the hall. Then I saw the dining-room door open, and nobody there, so I went in *there* and started polishing. I’ll own it may have looked funny, but she shouldn’t have spoken as she did.”

“There! That makes all the difference. Doesn’t it, Mrs. Jebb?” said Andy eagerly, forgetting to be dignified. “I say, shake hands and make it up. Jimmy, shake hands with Mrs. Jebb to start with.”

“Won’t. Hate her. She’s got yeller teef like old Towzer.”

“Hush, hush,” said Mrs. Simpson, changing all in a minute from the fighting woman to the careful mother. “Jimmy mustn’t talk like that. Jimmy must beg the lady’s pardon.”

“Won’t,” said that gentleman truculently.

“Jimmy must do as he’s told,” said Mrs. Simpson, then, grasping the pudgy little hand firmly, she held it out to the housekeeper.

“I’m sure I’ve no wish——” began Mrs. Jebb, with trembling stateliness, when Andy cast aside the mantle of the senior curate, grabbed Mrs. Jebb’s hand in his own, and pushed the bony fingers of his lady-cook-housekeeper towards Jimmy.

“I say,” he exclaimed boyishly, “you can’t refuse to shake hands with a little chap like that!”

Mrs. Jebb felt the touch of the firm, young fingers on her wrist, weakened, advanced a step, finally ‘eye-cornered’ Andy with a tremulous smile and waggled once the fat hand of Master Simpson.

“I’m sure,” she said, “I’ve no wish to be un-neighbourly, Mrs. Simpson. It was just seeing you there on your knees rubbing the sideboard front when I never expected to see anything but the cat or Mr. Deane. I ought to be able to enter into a widow’s feelings if anybody ever could. With Mr. Jebb I was not merely a wife, I was an obsession.”

“With all my wordly goods I thee endow, of course,” quoted Mrs. Simpson vaguely, in whose mind the words possession and obsession had somehow run together and produced a blurred impression of Mrs. Jebb’s meaning. But she saw Andy was anxious for peace, and gratitude for the sideboard gradually overcoming her anger, she wished to do her part.

“Two widows living near together should be on good terms,” said Mrs. Jebb, her annoyance also cooling, while prudence dictated a course obviously pleasing

to Andy. “Will you step into my room and have a cup of tea? I am no breakfast-eater, and generally take one at eleven. And”—she concluded the amend generously, “Jimmy shall have a biscuit with pink sugar on the top.”

That settled it; for Jimmy was so fond of eating that he would have accompanied the sweep—his idea of the embodiment of evil—to search for biscuits with pink sugar on them.

So the baize door of the study banged in the rear of an amicable trio while Andy sat down and mopped his brow. It was difficult to catch evolution by the tail after that—he seemed to have gone so far from it. But he knitted his brow, shook his fountain-pen, and started on the quest.

One thought, however, would creep in and out of the books of reference and between the written words—it was not so easy as it looked, to live in a place where everybody was so inextricably mixed up with everybody else. And later in the day he was to have another striking proof of this queer inter-independence of which a townsman knows so little. For when he walked past the Petches’ cottage he beheld the Attertons’ landau, drawn by a sleek and fat pair of horses and driven by a sleek and fat coachman, standing in front of the little gate. Elizabeth Atterton and an ample lady in grey occupied the carriage, and they were inspecting a parrot in a cage, which Mrs. Petch rested on the step.

“I trust,” said Mrs. Atterton, “that William is in good health. He looks”—she paused— “he looks far from well, Emma.”

“Moulting, ’m,” said Mrs. Petch. “That’s all.”

“But this is not the season for moulting,” objected Elizabeth.

“Ah,” said Mrs. Petch, with an easy smile, “but William always was different to other birds. Scores and hundreds of times I’ve heard my poor mistress say so.”

“Well, it was a remark my poor aunt often made,” said Mrs. Atterton, eyeing the dejected attitude and naked chest of the parrot doubtfully.

“I’m sure you give him every attention. You would, of course, when your annuity dies with him. My poor aunt no doubt felt that.” She paused again, and added in answer to Mrs. Petch’s look of wounded innocence, “Of course, you would in any case. I do not forget what a devoted maid you were to poor Aunt Arabella.”

“She trusted me with William,” said Mrs. Petch simply, applying the corner of her apron to her eye.

“I know. I was not reflecting on you in any way, of course, Emma,” said Mrs. Atterton kindly. “Only, I promised to see after William sometimes, and I like to do it. Poor William! Of course, one can’t expect him to live for ever.”

“Parrots sometimes live to be a hundred,” said Mrs. Petch quickly. “Sam read that in the paper only the other day, ’m.”

“Well, we’ll hope William may,” said Mrs. Atterton comfortably. “I never liked him, even in his best days, but I don’t want him to die.”

There was a reposeful kindness about Mrs. Atterton that seemed exactly like that of her daughter Elizabeth—and yet, in its essence it was altogether different.

“Good afternoon, sir,” said Mrs. Petch, long before Andy reached the group. She greeted him with such alacrity, indeed, that an enemy might have thought she welcomed the interruption to the interview with William.

“Oh, mamma, here is Mr. Deane. Mr. Deane, you haven’t met my mother?” said Elizabeth, who was, for some foolish and obscure reason, a little nervous.

“No—er—I am very glad—that is—I am sorry—at least, I mean to say I am delighted to meet you now,” said Andy, who, for some equally foolish and obscure reason, was nervous too.

Mrs. Atterton beamed placidly on him.

“Sorry I did not see you when you called, Mr. Deane, but it was one of my bad days. My back——” She paused, as if that explained all, and Andy filled in the blank with a sympathetic—

“Of course. I’m afraid you are a great sufferer.”

“Oh,” said Mrs. Atterton pleasantly, “it is not that I have any great pain, but I collapse. Don’t I, Elizabeth?”

“Mamma is so patient,” said Elizabeth, with loving sincerity. “She hates to make us feel——”

“Come, come, come! Bring that cup of tea! Bring that cup of tea!” interrupted William, croaking hideously.

“Poor Aunt Arabella! Couldn’t you fancy you heard her voice from the grave?” murmured Mrs. Atterton, shedding an easy tear.

“William belonged to my great-aunt, Mr. Deane,” explained Elizabeth.

Then it swept over Andy again with renewed force, how everybody here was connected in some way with everybody else. He had always known in a general way, of course, as we all do, that if you slip on a banana skin and use expressions better left unemployed you may influence some one for evil in central China—but he had never before come near enough to the principle to be able to see the working of it with the naked eye.

“I thought when I first came to Gaythorpe that William was a person,” said Andy, noticing the pink nails of Elizabeth’s ungloved hand upon the carriage door.

“Well, poor Aunt Arabella always did say he had an immortal soul—and you never know,” said Mrs. Atterton, willing to give everything created the benefit of the doubt.

Then the fat coachman, who was tired of waiting, made one of his fat

charges stamp idly on the ground in a perfunctory manner, and Mrs. Atterton said the horses were growing restive and it was time to go.

“So glad we are to see you on Thursday evening,” she said, over her shoulder. “Good-bye, Mr. Deane. Good afternoon, Emma. Let me know how William is, please.”

The farewells of Andy and Elizabeth were somehow merged in the salutations of Mrs. Atterton, and the responses of Mrs. Petch, but they looked at each other just as the carriage went off with a direct glance which held more than either of them could yet understand of young hope and joy and question.

“What was it?” that look said. They didn’t know—they didn’t know—only something glorious!

Andy stood staring after the carriage until at last Mrs. Petch’s voice from behind penetrated his understanding.

“Cars are all very well,” she said, “but there *is* a something about a carriage and pair—however, they *own* motor-cars—it isn’t that.”

Andy understood that the wealth and standing of the Atterton family were being defended, and replied at once—

“Of course. All the same, I can’t understand when you have a Limousine ____”

“Mrs. Atterton’s back won’t stand motor-cars,” said Mrs. Petch gravely, but if so perfectly behaved a gardener’s wife could have ever winked, Andy would have said she winked then. However, he felt the light must have dazzled his eyes.

“Quite so,” he said. “It is a great affliction.”

“Yes, sir. It is, indeed,” responded Mrs. Petch at once. “Everything in life, as you may say, and yet a back to spoil it all.”

“There’s always—er—something,” said Andy, feeling he ought to improve the occasion.

“There is, indeed,” sighed Mrs. Petch, with a sort of serious cheerfulness. “No rose without a thorn in this world, sir, and we can’t expect any different. We should never want to go to another if we’d everything we wanted here.”

“Nice, right-thinking woman!” reflected Andy, as he went up the road.

He was on his way to visit a woman called old Mrs. Werrit, an obscure connection of the Werrit family who had drifted near them again in her extreme old age, and Andy had been told that day that she was dying. But he was ready enough to help any old person to die, just as he was ready to help any young one to live, and he went up some crooked stairs to the bedroom, full of confidence in himself and his office.

For some time the old woman said nothing in response to his remarks, and

allowed a daughter of Mrs. Will Werrit's to answer for her. Maggie Werrit felt rather glad that her aged relative was not in a talkative mood because she lacked that polish which the best boarding-school in Bardwell had imparted to the latest generation of the family, and the new Vicar would look down on them all if he heard one of them talk about 'ankerchers.'

"I hope you don't suffer much?" said Andy, sitting down beside the bed.

Then Mrs. Werrit opened her eyes, and he was surprised to find how full of life they were in that sunken, dull old face.

"I did suffer," she said, "but that's over now," and she shut her eyes again.

Andy took out his little book and prepared to read, when Mrs. Werrit looked at him once more.

"The others are all gone first," she said. "Every one of us six but me."

"I'm sorry," said Andy, very gently.

"You needn't be," said old Mrs. Werrit. "It doesn't matter now." She paused, and added after a moment, "You'll find out—all that matters at the very end—is how near you've gotten to God in your life."

Then she closed her eyes again, and Andy shut his little book and put it in his pocket without a word, and crept reverently down the crooked stairs as if he were leaving the presence of some one very great.

When he was far down the village street, and too far from the little house to go back again, he realised that, for the first time in his professional career, he had failed in his ministration to the aged poor. He fingered his little book, feeling inclined to go back again, and all the way home something within him smarted and burned underneath his wandering thoughts.

Youth knows nothing more unpleasant than those secret growing pains of the soul of which it does not understand the meaning.

Perhaps it was these—or it might have been the dull evening after a day of clouds and storms—anyway, Andy felt driven forth after supper to tramp restlessly up and down the garden path by the churchyard hedge. Had he chosen the right life? Was he fitted for a country parson?

New and perplexing doubts of himself began to assail him for the first time as he tramped up and down, casting a glance at Brother Gulielmus every now and then over the churchyard hedge.

Had he tramped up and down here too? For the garden dated back to that time, though the house was modern. Had he wondered and felt restless too?

But gradually the regular motion quieted Andy's nerves, and he began to notice how the crimson rambler had grown, and to feel the freshness of the dew-laden air.

Then, quite suddenly, for no reason at all, he remembered with wonderful

vividness how Elizabeth's hand had looked upon the door of the carriage. His mental picture of her face was indistinct, but her hand seemed painted on the summer darkness, and he felt an intense longing to take it in his own.

That was all he wanted—so exquisite a thing is the first beginning of young love.

"Mr. Deane! Mr. Deane! Will you have eggs and bacon for breakfast, or the rest of the cold ham?" shrilled Mrs. Jebb from the doorstep.

"Oh, just as you like. I've told you so before," said Andy.

"But I *like* to consult your tastes," said Mrs. Jebb pathetically.

"Eggs and bacon, then," said Andy.

"It's damp under foot," said Mrs. Jebb. Then something in the woman's voice and look as she tried to keep him there for company struck home to Andy's perceptions, and he suddenly realised that she might be dull and lonely too.

"I say—it's awfully good of you to bother about my tastes like that. You mustn't think I don't appreciate it," he said eagerly. "Those gooseberry dumplings we've been having are fine."

"Now Mr. Jebb couldn't assimilate boiled paste at any price," began Mrs. Jebb, delighted.

So Andy listened to her for quarter of an hour and then went back to the path by the churchyard hedge and that dream which Mrs. Jebb had interrupted.

Or perhaps it was scarcely a dream as yet—only the indescribably delicate stuff of which dreams are made.

Gradually, however, the quietness of all about Andy seemed to fit in with his misty memories of Elizabeth. Tenderness. Sweetness. Repose. Why—those meant Elizabeth—they were but other names for her.

Words gathered in his mind, singing of themselves about her sweetness. The nightingale in a little wood half a mile away was no more singing to his mate than Andy there, beneath the churchyard hedge.

Only, the nightingale's song was lovely for every one, and Andy's could never be lovely for any one but Elizabeth.

He pictured them, hand in hand, there in the garden together, watching the village as it went to sleep.

"Let us watch the quiet village
Till each little casement glows
For there's something in the sight, Love,
That is like a heart's repose.

Let us watch the starlight glimmer
Through the windless evening air,
For there's something in your eyes, Love,
That is like a star at prayer.

Let us watch——"

"Beg pardon, sir. Didn't see you. Churchyard's chortesh way home for me," said Sam Petch, blundering through the gate in the hedge. "Beautiful night, sir."

Sam was not uproariously drunk, but he was affably so, and took no notice of Andy's frigid—

"I will speak with you in the morning, Petch. Go home at once."

"Sho I will, sir. Sho I will," said Sam heartily. "An'thing to oblige. Good-night, sir." He paused, then looked back and said pleasantly, "Had a bit o' bad luck on my way home, sir. Wife sent me for sixpennoth o' brandy for her spasms, and I've broke the bottle. I suppose you haven't a drop you could——"

"No," said Andy sternly. "Go home."

"Of course, sir. *Of* course. No offence taken and none meant," said Sam, moving off. He paused again and added solemnly, "It's a great relief to me, after the way our poor late Vicar went on, to find you don't keep no spirits in the house, sir. A great relief it is. Good-night."

CHAPTER VI

WHEN Andy went into the garden next morning he buckled on tight the mantle of the senior curate and advanced across the grass to where Sam Petch was bending over a flower-bed with an air of decent contrition. No skulking behind bushes for him—he prodded dismally for all the world to see.

Andy, in spite of himself, felt slightly mollified, but he had made up his mind to say a certain thing, and he said it.

"This state of things cannot continue. You bring discredit on my profession, my parish, and myself."

There—that was it—just as the senior curate would have put it; Andy took hold of his coat lapel, coughed, and waited—just as the senior curate would have done.

It is one of those facts about human nature which cannot be explained, that while Andy disliked the senior curate exceedingly, and had groaned under his oppressive rule, he strove to imitate that gentleman. Perhaps he unconsciously wanted people to be as much impressed by him as he had been by the senior curate.

Anyway, Sam Petch appeared to be greatly impressed by the dignified rebuke.

"I own I'd had a drop too much," he said repentantly. "But Bill Shaw drank five times what I did and never turned a hair. It shows how unfair things is, sir."

"If a little makes you drunk you must refrain from that little," said Andy, severely.

"I know," acknowledged Sam. "But it is hard when a man can't take his mug o' beer with the rest without getting what you might call jolly; isn't it, sir?"

"After all—what is a mug of beer?" argued Andy. "I'm not a total abstainer myself, but I will become one if you will."

Sam's potations of the previous night still hung about him sufficiently to make him very irritable, and he suddenly lost control of his temper.

"It's all very well talking like that," he said. "You, who don't care whether you ever have another drink or not—what do you know about it? Give up the thing you like best and then I'll do the same."

Andy looked at the man, and the mantle of the senior curate was blown away in the blast of truth that swept across him. He even forgot to notice the disrespectfulness of Sam's manner as that wind burst open a closed chamber in his mind and he saw farther than he had ever done before.

“All right,” he said simply. “I like”—he sought for his preference—“I like butter best of anything—always did, as a little kid—I’ll give up that.”

“I’ll give up beer, then,” agreed Sam Petch; but he made certain mental reservations of which Andy, naturally, could know nothing. Every man had a right to beer on a Saturday night, of course; that was the privilege of a British working-man which was above and beyond all other agreements.

Then Andy went back into the house with a complete sense of failure dogging his footsteps. It was a ridiculous and undignified thing to do, to make a compact of that nature with a drunken gardener. He ought to have insisted in a dignified manner upon instant reform or instant dismissal.

“Mrs. Jebb,” he said, looking in at the kitchen door, “please do not send butter into the room with my meals. I shall not be taking any for some time.”

“What? No butter?” said Mrs. Jebb. “Are you bilious? Well, I know towards the last Mr. Jebb never could——”

“And I am dining out to-night,” continued Andy, who was particularly disinclined, just then, for Mr. Jebb.

“How convenient! I mean, how strange!” said Mrs. Jebb. “I was just about to ask if you would have any objection to my going over to Millsby Hall this evening.”

“Why—are you invited too?” said Andy, very much astonished. “I mean, there’s no reason why you should not be dining with the Attertons, only I hadn’t heard——”

“Once a lady always a lady, of course,” replied Mrs. Jebb, smoothing her lace cravat. “But the conventions of life are such that, as lady-cook-housekeeper, I neither am, nor expect to be, bidden to Mrs. Atterton’s table. I was referring to the Long Night.”

She gave to the two last words such a melancholy emphasis that Andy had a vague idea, for the moment, that she was in some new way referring to the demise of Mr. Jebb.

“The long night?” he echoed stupidly.

“I mean the final evening of the Parish Dancing Class,” said Mrs. Jebb, “which Mr. and Miss Fanny Kirke have pressed me to attend.”

“Of course,” said Andy. “I’d forgotten. It is to be held at Millsby Hall, of course, so that Mrs. Atterton may see the final practice of the country dances for the Garden Fête next week.”

“Mr. and Miss Kirke told me in confidence,” added Mrs. Jebb, with an indescribable air of being ‘in the know,’ “that Mrs. Atterton’s back would not permit of her coming to the village schoolroom.”

“Ah,” said Andy, to whom even the back of the Beloved’s mamma was

sacred. “Well, go, by all means, Mrs. Jebb. I expect I shall see you dancing like a girl.”

“My girlhood’s days are over,” sighed Mrs. Jebb. “But”—she cheered up—“married ladies are very popular in ballrooms now, I understand. The gentlemen seem to like mature conversation combined with their dancing. And I do not intend to refuse. I think it neither Christian nor right, Mr. Deane, for a widow to make a suttee of herself.”

“Of course not,” agreed Andy absently. “Well—no butter—you quite understand?”

“Trust me,” said Mrs. Jebb effusively, “to understand a gentleman’s inside. For months before he died, Mr. Jebb——”

Andy departed, and the recording angel put it down to the right side of his everlasting account that he did *not* say, “Damn Mr. Jebb.”

The day seemed long, and the afternoon appeared to stretch out interminably until the hour when Andy could adorn himself in a new clerical dress-suit which he now thanked the aunt and cousins in Birmingham for insisting upon; thus arrayed, he surveyed his newly plastered curls in the looking-glass, and felt that, though severely freckled and rather short than otherwise, he was the right thing.

He stepped jauntily in the cool of the evening past Brother Gulielmus asleep, and never gave him a thought, only wondering if he had buckled his braces high enough, or if his trousers were, after all, a shade too long. He paused behind the yew at the corner to adjust matters, and gazed down at his legs with a keen preoccupation that left no room for anything else.

He felt it was such an immensely important thing that Elizabeth should see him with his trousers exactly the right length, and he was very much startled to hear a voice behind him saying tentatively—

“Excuse me—as a married lady—perhaps I *might* oblige with a safety-pin ——”

Mrs. Jebb again!—taking the air in the congenial neighbourhood of the tombstones.

Not daring to trust himself to speech, Andy shook his head and marched out of the churchyard. He began to hate Mrs. Jebb.

But when he came in sight of Millsby Hall he forgot all about her, and approached with beating pulses the extremely ugly, modern house which sheltered the lady of his dreams. It had been built by Mr. Atterton’s father after he developed from a small county landowner into the owner of a watering-place. Marshaven, previously to 1850, had been the resort of fishermen and waterfowl only; now it was crowded from June to September with train-loads of trippers from all over the country, and Mr. Atterton found the joy and interest of his

existence in supervising the erection of ever-new rows of red-brick villas, and in putting his finger into every pie which the town council of that prosperous resort made for the purpose of attracting visitors.

"I believe we've got that matter arranged with the Bandmaster," he said, rubbing his hands energetically as he entered his drawing-room that evening. "I did think for a time that the situation looked serious, but I approached him informally at first, and then officially, as the Chairman of the 'Amusements Committee,' and I think the crisis is over." He paused, and smiled with satisfaction at his assembled family. "I'm glad to have my mind free for the Promenade question—that will take some engineering—but of one thing I am absolutely determined,"—he hit one hand on the other—"I will *not* have blue seats picked out with gold. I admit they may look prosperous—that is the argument Smith uses—but I dislike the idea. I cannot say why, but I dislike it."

"Your artistic sense suggests to you unconsciously that they'll make the sea look dirty," said his daughter Norah, glancing across at him with the corners of her thin lips more mocking than usual—and she always seemed to be making game, a little contemptuously, of all that happened at Millsby Hall.

"Oh, I hadn't thought of that," said Mr. Atterton eagerly. "That will be an argument to use at our next meeting. It polishes your wits up, Norah, going about speaking in public as you do—though I can't say I always——"

"Mr. Deane," said the servant.

Then, immediately afterwards—

"Mrs. Stamford. Mr. Richard Stamford."

There were only eight people in all, in the room, but they seemed to Andy like a crowd each possessing more than the normal number of feet, and it was only after treading upon the toes of Bill Atterton and then stepping back heavily upon those of the divinity that he managed to pull himself together sufficiently to realise that there was ample space in the apartment for the feet of a small army.

"Very—er—hot for the time of year," he said to Dick Stamford, with whom he had become more or less intimate.

"Think so?" said Dick, as perfectly at his ease as if this were the ordinary drawing-room of commerce and not the shrine of a sacred lady. "Well, I thought myself it was chilly. Had to get a whisky before I came to warm me up a bit. Funny thing," he added, with unusual animation, "but when I am cold whisky warms me, and when I am warm it cools me. I think I must have a peculiar constitution."

"I don't know. I've met chaps like that before," said Andy, with a grin.

"Oh, so have I, of course. But it's a rum thing, all the same," said Dick, looking at Elizabeth.

“Now, Mr. Deane,” said Mrs. Atterton, “this is a family party, so we will just go in to dinner informally. But as you are the only one who does not know the way, you must come with me.” Then when they were all settled she added pleasantly, choosing a topic for Andy, “You’ll be sorry to hear that we are anxious about William. He is very ill. Elizabeth”—she spoke across the table—“do remember to go and see how he is to-morrow morning.”

“Yes, mamma,” said Elizabeth dutifully, from the midst of a laughing conversation with Dick Stamford.

“It will be a misfortune for the Petches if he does die,” said Andy.

“Elizabeth is the one who really ought to go to inquire,” said Mrs. Atterton vaguely; she was watching to see how the new footman handed the soup. “My poor Aunt Arabella was her godmother, and left her a small fortune.”

“I hear,” said Mr. Atterton from the other end of the table, “that the Gaythorpe Dancing Class is to be held in our ballroom to-night. What next, Norah?”

“I want to make quite sure that those girls know how to dance before I ask a lot of people down to the Garden Fête for the Children’s Hospital,” said Norah. “As I’m getting the thing up, I intend to see that it is properly done.”

“My daughter Norah,” said Mrs. Atterton, leaning confidentially towards Andy, “has a genius for organisation. Now, Elizabeth possesses no particular talent that way.”

Andy swallowed a piece of chicken hastily, choked, turned very red, and blurted forth—

“She always seems to be doing something.”

But that was, of course, not at all what he really meant to say. What he tried to bring out from the chaotic ideas which surrounded Elizabeth in his mind like the storm-clouds about a pictured saint, was the fact that she did a great deal more than exercise a talent—she created an atmosphere.

Mrs. Atterton glanced at his red face and said, in her comfortable way—

“That’s a tough chicken, I’m afraid, Mr. Deane. We always do have tough fowls, because my husband will grow our own poultry, and we put off killing them. You would be surprised how attached they become to us all.”

“I’m not surprised in the least,” said Andy, with a very pleasant look, half bold, half shy.

And Mrs. Atterton, who had her feelings, though she did measure thirty-four inches round the waist, smiled very kindly on her young guest.

“Well, I hope you’ll like us, too, when you get to know us,” she said. Then she turned to her eldest daughter. “What time are we to join the revels, Norah? I shall not be able to stay long as my back is troubling me a little.”

Andy felt very sorry to hear that, because Mrs. Atterton had so enjoyed everything but the chicken that he hoped her back was in abeyance; but Norah's reply showed rather a want of sympathy.

"Will your back last out for half an hour?" she said. "Because, if so, we will do the country dances from half-past nine to ten."

"That will do excellently. Then Martin can bring me my cocoa to my room at ten. By the way, Elizabeth, have you seen about the refreshments for the Dancing Class?"

For it was Mrs. Atterton's second daughter who attended to the domestic arrangements of the establishment.

"Yes, mamma. Mrs. Smith knows all about it," said Elizabeth.

"I hope you are giving them something decent, Elizabeth," said Norah. "I hold socialistic principles, Mr. Deane, and I hate the bun-and-mug system of entertaining so-called social inferiors."

"That's all right," said Elizabeth.

"But what are you giving them?" insisted Norah, thinking she perceived a reluctance in her sister's reply.

"Oh, the usual thing—sandwiches, creams, fruit, hock-cup, iced coffee, strawberry ices——"

"What?" said Norah. "Ices? Quite unnecessary!"

"I know all the girls," said Elizabeth, defending herself. "I've played with Rose Werrit at every school-treat since I could toddle. I wanted them to have things they would like."

"You're so sentimental, Elizabeth," said Norah lightly. "I can't stand sentiment. Can you, Mr. Deane?"

"There are as many kinds of sentiment as there are of"—Andy paused for a simile, and concluded somewhat lamely—"of sauce."

"Elizabeth's is the sweet kind, then, flavoured with vanilla," said Norah, with her little upward curve of the lips.

"I expect yours is that tart kind like they have with fried sole, Norah," laughed Dick Stamford, who had been on intimate terms with them all since he was in petticoats.

"Haven't got any," said Norah. "Nor you, either, Mrs. Stamford; have you?"

"Not a scrap," said Mrs. Stamford, thinking she was speaking the truth. "Still—it's nice in Elizabeth," and she patted the girl's round arm.

"I am not at all sentimental," said Elizabeth with indignation. "Sentiment is so squashy!"

"I don't know," said Mr. Atterton, quite unexpectedly. "I've a sort of idea that—well, that sentiment is the thing that makes it all seem worth while, you

know.”

“Oh, if father begins to get sentimental, I’ve done,” said Norah, laughing. “Come on, Elizabeth.”

So the two young ladies followed Mrs. Atterton and Mrs. Stamford through the open door, and after a very brief interval the whole party went into the ballroom.

The usual pianist provided for the class had been supplemented by a violin, and the Lancers were being danced in rather a frozen manner when Mrs. Atterton entered.

“Delighted to see you,” she said to the village schoolmaster, who also acted as dancing-master and choir-master, teacher of singing and mender of broken clocks—a person of such extraordinary energy that no wonder he seemed to be made of wire and India rubber, instead of the ordinary materials, and had never found time to get married.

“The pleasure is mutual,” said Mr. Willie Kirke, bowing; he always prided himself on having the right word ready. “I trust your—er—back is fairly well?”

“You’re very kind. It is troubling me a little this evening, owing to the sudden change of temperature,” said Mrs. Atterton, who was always gratified by any reference to the institution, and would have talked about it with pleasure to a crossing-sweeper.

Mrs. Jebb and Miss Fanny Kirke and Mrs. Will Werrit sat in a corner and looked at Andy as he came in with the Atterton girls.

“I believe he has his eye on Miss Elizabeth,” said Mrs. Jebb. “Of course this is in *strict* confidence.”

“No! What makes you think so?” said the other women eagerly.

“I don’t know. I’ve a sort of second sight in these matters,” replied Mrs. Jebb modestly, forbearing to mention that she had held his blotter to the looking-glass that morning. “Mr. Jebb always used to say, ‘Emma detects an incipient love-affair as a—as a——’ ”

“A weasel does a rat,” supplied Mrs. Will Werrit obligingly. “Well, he seems a nice young fellow enough, but the Attertons won’t want Miss Elizabeth to marry a country parson, with all their money.”

“I don’t know but what it isn’t nicer having the class in the schoolroom,” said Miss Fanny Kirke, who was thin, like her brother, and bright-eyed. “They’re going through the grand-chain now as if it were a funeral. And look at those young men from Millsby, hunched in a corner together like a lot of fowls with the pip.”

And Norah Atterton, at the other end of the room, whispered in substance the same thing to her sister.

“This is awful!” she said. “I feel I made a mistake in getting them to have the class here. We shall have to make Dick Stamford and Bill join in and start the country dances at once. Now for it!”

She flew about in her gold and black gown like some new sort of human wasp, and planted a little sting here and there until she had the whole company on the alert. Elizabeth talked first to one girl and then another, her slow drawl with the deep notes in it contrasting oddly with her sister’s quick, clear accents. But there still hung about the occasion that leaden dullness which can be felt, but never described, and it was Mr. Atterton, coming in breezily unconscious from an after-dinner stroll, who saved the situation.

“Now then, Mr. Kirke,” he said, “I hear you and my daughter are reviving the old country dances for the ball on the lawn next week after the bazaar. Excellent! Excellent! Rubbish trying to waltz on a lawn. And I shouldn’t wonder if your great-grandfather and mine stood up at a dance on the green together a hundred years ago. They were both neighbours here, anyway. Really an excellent idea!”

It truly did seem a grand idea to him now that he had adopted it, for that was his way. Everything was splendid when it all belonged to him—even an idea.

“Everybody must join in—everybody,” he said. “Now, Mrs. Werrit, now Miss Kirke—no skulking in corners. Mr. Thorpe, you stand up with my daughter Elizabeth. My dear,” to his wife, “you take Mr. Deane.”

“I never dance,” said Andy with dignified decision.

“Nonsense! Nonsense! My wife hasn’t danced for years—Mr. Thorpe hasn’t either—they both came as spectators.”

“And I shall not begin again now, my dear,” laughed Mrs. Atterton.

“Mamma’s back!” said Elizabeth. “How *can* you, father!”

Then the unexpected happened, as it always does—Mrs. Atterton glanced at Andy, and the spirit of mischief within her, which years and fat had sent to sleep, flickered up for a moment.

“Very well,” she chuckled; “if Mr. Deane will dance, I will!”

“Now!” said Mr. Atterton.

“Of course,” Andy was obliged to respond.

So the company were placed in two long lines by the omniscient Mr. Kirke, and the leaden dullness was lifting—lifting. With the first beginning of the tune an old spirit of merry-making that had been hiding in the bushes round Millsby Common for fifty years or more crept forth, heard the scraping of the fiddle, began to lose the stiffness in his joints before he reached the open windows, and was all a-caper, jocund, jovial, glorious, by the time Mrs. Atterton had tripped down the middle with the queer, surprising lightness of fat people, crossed hands

with Mr. Thorpe, and returned panting and laughing to her place.

Andy was the next to go—clerical coat-tails flying, curls rising in spite of half a bottle of brilliantine, the Spirit of Ancient Revelry skipping behind him, pricking his cheeks, whispering in his ear, making him forget everything but that life was most jolly, and he was off across a shining space to clasp hands with Elizabeth.

Mr. Atterton chuckled, stamped to keep time with the rest, perceived Mrs. Jebb drooping in a corner, and led her triumphantly forth. It was a sight that remained long in the memory of Millsby parish, to see Mr. Atterton's trim little figure bobbing up and down gaily in his place, while his grey hair hung in damp strands over his forehead, and he responded to the "eye-cornering" of Mrs. Jebb with reckless gallantry.

Dick Stamford had a tendency to put his arm round any pretty girl that came his way, pleading ignorance of the proper person and moment in a country dance, and Mrs. Stamford jogged enduringly forward to meet wiry little Mr. Will Werrit, making the best of it because she was above all things anxious to conciliate Mr. Atterton. She would have jogged toward a charge of light cavalry with the same stoic calmness if she could have saved her son from any danger by so doing. But the Spirit of Ancient Revelry never came near her. He knew quite well that she thought him an absolute and incomprehensible fool.

The schoolmaster hovered round, pulling, pushing, commanding, advising—miraculously at the bottom when he had been at the top a second before—and at last he flung up his arms distractedly—"Ladies! Ladies! You don't want to waddle, you want to willow!"

The musicians stopped; with the last wail of the fiddle the Spirit of Ancient Revelry fled through the window and, creeping ever more slowly, lay down to sleep again in the bushes at the edge of the green; people remembered that they were enlightened products of the twentieth century, with a superior education and a purpose in life, and a chance to be as good as anybody if they didn't give themselves away.

"To willow—that's a new verb! How clever of Mr. Kirke, and how appropriate to the present style of dress," said Mrs. Atterton artificially, putting up her eyeglass.

She had to do something to obliterate the fact that her toupee was over one eye, and that she had, for a quarter of an hour, totally forgotten that she possessed a back.

"This kind of thing suits neither you nor me, Mr. Deane," said the churchwarden to Andy behind his hand; "but, of course, we didn't like to disoblige Mr. Atterton."

Thus was the dignity of the Church restored.

“Silly sort of dance, I think,” remarked Rose Werrit to Dick Stamford; “but, of course, they had primitive ideas in those days.”

“Well, I liked it,” said Dick, who was more lined about the mouth and heavier about the eyes than a young man ought to be. “No stiffness about it.”

“We’re not dancing *now,* Mr. Stamford,” giggled Rose, moving her arm.

“Oh, I thought we were. I forget what I’m doing when I’m with such a pretty girl as you,” responded Dick, whose mode of compliment had been learned in circles where, in such matters, you dot your i’s and cross your t’s.

Rose frowned, but only as an offering to propriety, and accompanied Dick in high feather to a buffet where supper was already in progress.

Mrs. Will Werrit, Mrs. Thorpe, and Mrs. Jebb again foregathered round a little table and criticised the refreshments.

“Never was a cook yet who could make bread,” said Mrs. Thorpe. “The inside of these sandwiches is all right—but the bread——”

“There’s a tang about the butter too,” said Mrs. Will Werrit.

“Talking of butter,” said Mrs. Jebb, rather left out and anxious to make herself conversationally felt, “it’s a queer thing—I’m telling you in strictest confidence—that Mr. Deane never touches it now.”

“Doesn’t he?” said Mrs. Thorpe, astonished. She paused, then added tentatively, “I suppose he eats pretty well otherwise?”

“He’s not what I call a hearty eater,” said Mrs. Jebb. “Now my poor husband ____”

“Eats no butter?” interjected Mrs. Will Werrit with a side-glance at Andy as he stood by the buffet. “You may depend on it he’s ruined his digestion with eating too much.”

“Well,” agreed Mrs. Thorpe, “I should never have hinted at such a thing if it hadn’t leaked out somehow without my knowledge, but of course *no* stomach could stand the strain for any great length of time.”

Their combined gaze, fixed on Andy’s slack waistcoat, somehow drew his attention towards the group, and he came forward, saying in his most cheery, parochial manner—

“Well, Mrs. Thorpe, can I get you anything more?”

“Not for us, thank you,” said Mrs. Thorpe.

“Perhaps you are like me, not great supper-eaters,” said Andy, anxious to be agreeable.

Glances passed round. Of course he could not eat any supper. No doubt inordinate eating had made him into a confirmed dyspeptic. No young man in ordinary health would give up eating butter.

But at that moment a servant came quietly through the crowd and spoke first to Mrs. Werrit and then to Andy. Old Mrs. Werrit had been taken suddenly worse and wished to see him.

Mrs. Will Werrit rose at once.

“Can we give you a lift, Mr. Deane? We were going in a few minutes, so it makes no matter. Rose can come home with her cousins. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Tom, has gone to the old lady already. No one can say that it won’t be a happy release.”

It seemed so strange—after the noise and bustle and laughter—to sit in the back seat of the Werrits’ cart and see the house and garden gradually receding in the starlight. Every pulse was thrilling still to the remembered touch of his arm about Elizabeth—to the fragrance of her as she rested for a second so near him—to the sweetness of her eyes as she had glanced up at him.

For Andy was in love, after the fashion which is supposed to be dying out. However, so far, the young lover still sees his lady infinitely fair: and when that changes——

Well—it is a pleasant thought—we shall be somewhere else.

It was so late that the June dawn was breaking as Andy stood by the side of the old woman’s bed in his dress clothes, his round face kind and grave beneath his ruffled hair, his young voice most clear and solemn in the still morning.

“Unto God’s gracious mercy and protection we commit thee. The Lord bless thee and keep thee.”

The familiar word seemed to spread round the old dying woman a precious atmosphere of love and peace—to speed her forth on the long journey with a certainty of joy and welcome at the journey’s end.

“Margaret,” cried the old woman suddenly, in quite a loud voice, “get up. It’s wash morning!”

Then she died.

“Great-aunt Margaret’s been dead fifty years,” wept Mrs. Will Werrit.

So death led Mrs. Werrit most tenderly—as he does the very old—through the land of youth to the land of Unknown Peace.

“I wish,” said Mrs. Tom Werrit, bidding Andy good-bye, “that I’d made her a plum-cake yesterday. I knew she couldn’t eat it if I did, but she seemed to want one such as they used to have at Gaythorpe Feast when she was young. I wish I’d made it!”

“You were very good to her,” was all Andy found to say.

For he had often heard already, and had felt once in his own heart, that terrible, hopeless cry of the bereaved—“Come back and let us be kind.”

He walked home very gravely through the early freshness of the morning,

and the great things of life—love, birth, death, and faith in God—began to take their right places in his soul.

He had been going to preach on the next Sunday morning upon the Evidences of Immortality, but he changed his mind upon that homeward walk. He actually felt the subject was too big for him.

CHAPTER VII

ANDY did not feel inclined to go to bed when he got home, and so had a bath and went to work in the garden. He was not what you would call a sentimental gardener, and only weeded the herbaceous border because it was full of weeds, and he had invited the Attertons and the Stamfords to luncheon on the following day—so, of course, he wished everything to be perfect before it greeted the eyes of the Perfect Lady.

But after a while the windless freshness of the early morning began to have its effect on his preoccupied thoughts, and he felt a sort of cool spaciousness in the little hot chambers of his mind, as if all the doors had been thrown open.

Every one knows how. The hot throbbing of a thousand anxious thoughts, the gradual subsidence, the sense of freshness and peace—but only one person has been able to put it into words, and that one is Thomas à Kempis: he no doubt felt it one early morning, after having striven all night long for cool light amid a hot darkness full of fears.

"Quietness of heart and pleasant joy."

That's it.

But Andy's only *conscious* thought was that he felt fresher now, and that he would take a few vegetables up the lane to Mrs. Simpson. She had nothing more than a little flower-garden before her cottage, and would no doubt be glad of them.

So he ate his breakfast with an appetite which almost justified his early reputation in Gaythorpe, and went off with a basket of green things, all wet with dew, to his neighbour's door.

"You're very kind," said Mrs. Simpson. "I never touch greens myself, but the children will like them. It takes a green stomach to tackle greens, I always think."

She glanced placidly from Andy to the two children by the door, so evidently including him among the green things of the earth that he felt bound to assert himself.

"It is extremely bad for the health to take no vegetables," he remarked, with a flavour in his voice compounded of the senior curate and the lady lay helper.

"Oh," said Mrs. Simpson, moving her calm gaze from the distant fields, where it had strayed, "well, my great-grandmother lived to be ninety-six, and *she* never touched greens."

Andy frowned. That was the way things happened in real life—so different from a well-ordered parish—no method anywhere.

"I'm glad you've made friends with Mrs. Jebb," he said, begging the question until he thought of a good reply. "It's rather lonely for her, and I shall be grateful if you would look her up sometimes—without your furniture polish," he added, with a laugh.

"You know Miss Elizabeth bid for the sideboard to give me as well?" said Mrs. Simpson.

"Yes," said Andy eagerly, so delighted to speak of Elizabeth that he quite forgot to address any further admonition on the subject of 'greens.' "Yes, it was a queer thing we should both think of the same thing, wasn't it?"

How lovely the 'we' sounded! Andy thrilled to the exquisite, fresh music of it.

But Mrs. Simpson stroked Sally's hair and said calmly—

"I don't know that there was anything so strange about it. All my life I've had things happen like that. When I was a little girl like Sally here I lost my best gloves—new ones they were—and I went up into the china-cupboard by myself and prayed hard to find them, and I did find them under my bed—a place nobody would think of finding new gloves in, would they?"

"N-no," said Andy.

"And it was the same thing," continued Mrs. Simpson, "with the cupboard. I prayed hard about that sideboard, and I said if anything could cheer me up a bit, it would, and I got it. I expect Them that overlooks all thought I had had as much as I could stand." She paused, then added, just in the same tone, "Sally, if that boy swallows that carrot he'll choke himself."

Sally's responsible little face sharpened, and she ran out to rescue her charge from an untimely end.

"Naughty boy," she said, taking the carrot from his fat hand to substitute her own ripe gooseberry, and she did it without any ill-feeling; he was behaving, of course, as well as you could expect boys to behave.

But as Andy tramped off with his empty basket, an almost incredible idea crossed his mind. Could Mrs. Simpson have reached a place beyond him?

Ridiculous! Her idea of the Deity as a sort of Lost Property Office was an altogether wrong and hideously material one.

And yet——

A thought forced itself from somewhere outside upon Andy's mental vision. Had she not perhaps grasped with the fingers of superstition a corner of that gigantic truth which is above all creeds—all theories—the truth that there is no limit whatever to the power of faith?

Andy sat down to his study-table and wrote his article for a paper to which he contributed at those times—very rare times—when the editor would accept his contributions. And after he had been writing five minutes he felt perfectly certain, of course, that he knew more about everything in the world than Mrs. Simpson could ever possibly do.

Still—there had been a moment——

About eleven o'clock he began to get restless and to wonder at what hour a young lady would be likely to visit the invalid parrot of a deceased great-aunt.

Not so very early, because, after all, William was not a lovable person in himself.

And not so very late, because of the great-aunt deceased.

Andy washed his hands, put on a clean collar, which is all a young person can do, be he never so much in love, and strolled carelessly through the garden to the back lane which led past the Petches' cottage.

He pretended not to see Sam Petch as he went by the asparagus bed, and hummed abstractedly when he went out of the little corner gate. It was as if he said to himself, "Ah, here is a gate—I may as well go through it."

And he walked a step or two up the lane, then viewed the garden hedge with an intent air, as if he were laying deep plans about it. He even pulled a leaf or two, critically, and so managed to reach the holly bush at the end where there was a stile deep in shadow.

Again he paused, appearing to say to the blank universe, "This is actually a stile. Stiles are made to sit upon. I will sit."

Thus he waited for his girl to pass, by a sort of logical sequence, which impressed the sparrows very much, and quite allayed any undue curiosity on the part of the fieldmice.

But Sam Petch, being neither a sparrow nor a fieldmouse, peeped through the holly bush and wondered.

Then he saw Elizabeth coming along, and he did not wonder any longer, but he did wish Andy good luck, for he had a sort of generosity, had young Sam Petch, and a sort that is rarer than it seems—he could be glad that somebody else was enjoying a treat while he had to work.

But all the same he chuckled to himself at the thought that Andy was going without butter, and he had no scruples whatever about drinking all he could afford to pay for, as usual; for he considered that his master had interfered with the most sacred right of a Briton—the right to get drunk on beer—and that the punishment exquisitely fitted the crime.

Still, he was growing fond of Andy, and he gazed after him through the hole in the holly bush with a benevolent eye.

“Gosh, I could put him up to a thing or two! He doesn’t know how to begin. Squeeze ’er ’and, squeeze ’er ’and, you young ijiot!”

And he quite danced with impatience behind the holly bush at the respectful brevity of his master’s salute.

Then the young couple went sedately down the lane, and Sam Petch strolled back to his work, remarking scornfully, “I could do better than that when I was fifteen.”

He would have been more scornful still if he could have walked behind them, for Andy knew, and Elizabeth knew, and both knew the other knew, that this was not a chance meeting. It was, for both of them, the first definite step upon that journey which leads to the mysterious City of Wedded Love.

It lay before them, as it does before every young lover—strange, wonderful, and yet with familiar streets that we all know by name—an enchanted muddle of realism and romance.

“I think it’s going to rain,” remarked Andy, but, of course, his heart said, “How sweet you are—sweeter even than I thought!”

And Elizabeth replied—

“Yes, the glass has gone down,” but, of course, she really said, and Andy understood, “I’m glad to be here with you.”

Then for a little while they walked along saying nothing at all, because that had been so tremendous. Only Andy’s young body worshipped the exquisite harmony of his lady—cream gown, skin of that peach-like shade that has no name, golden eyes, and pure, burning sunlight in the brown of her hair.

And his soul worshipped the kindness of her voice and the clear candour of the girl’s eyes.

Oh, he was in love, body and soul, was Parson Andy.

He would never have believed that Norah was really far the better looking of the two sisters, with lovely features, graceful figure, and perfect colouring, which left nothing for the imagination of a lover to idealise, while Elizabeth’s charm must always be, to a certain extent, in the eye of the beholder.

However, old Sam Petch, in his little shanty at the fag-end of the village, gave a description of his friend Elizabeth, which was perhaps correct, though not refined. “She’s just a niceish-looking lass,” he said; “no beauty, though.” Then he paused, pulled at his pipe, and winked at Andy, who was his visitor. “Bud, howivver,” he added, “she’s a cuddlesome one, she is.”

Andy had replied with cold dignity at the time, but he thought of it now, as he walked near Elizabeth—he thought of it to the exclusion of all the brilliant things he meant to have said to Her.

“Here we are,” said he, opening the gate of young Sam Petch’s garden.

“Oh yes, here we are,” echoed Elizabeth, who really was rather an intelligent talker as a rule.

But the ‘we’ she echoed was the second step—the enchanted muddle was that glorious much nearer—and they could find no words in face of such a view.

“How-do-you-do, Mrs. Petch?” said Elizabeth at last; then she glanced round for the next remark, quite forgetting what she had come for.

“And how are your legs to-day, Mrs. Petch?” said Andy, hiding his emotions under an expression of overdone sympathy. Then he felt a lady’s legs were perhaps not subjects to mention before Elizabeth, and added with incoherent haste, “But, of course, it’s heads the heat affects. Sunstroke. Most dangerous thing!”

Mrs. Petch glanced at the poor ostrich trying to stick *his* head in the sand.

“My uncle had sunstroke,” she said, helping to bury his wriggling extremities with a sort of tolerant contempt.

“Mr. Deane and I have been talking about the change in the weather ever since we met by accident in the lane,” remarked Elizabeth, with a little laugh. “It really is quite remarkable.”

“Indeed it is, miss. Fine to-day and dull to-morrow, as you may say,” assented Mrs. Petch cordially, casting a little sand over the other ostrich, but asking herself scornfully what they took her for.

Finally, Elizabeth remembered the purpose of her visit, and looking round the room for an absent bird-cage, she said hastily—

“William’s not dead, is he?”

“Why, no, miss; William’s a lot better, only he has to be kept quiet. Sam saw the bird-fancier when he went into Bardswell on Saturday, and he said perfect quiet was the thing. It just fell out lucky, Mr. Deane giving Sam the afternoon off to go and sell an old clock that the second-hand dealer’s been wanting so long. Just right it did, for it gave us a chance to get the best of advice for William. It isn’t,” said Mrs. Petch, applying the corner of her apron to her left eye, “it isn’t only what we get with him that makes us so anxious, but me and Sam has no bairns, and we’re fair soft about him. We love him like a child, that we do.”

It might have been thought that Mrs. Petch was talking on to ward off the question she saw trembling on Elizabeth’s lips, but if so, she was disappointed, for Elizabeth asked at once—

“Where is William? I should like to look at him. Mamma will not be satisfied if I go away without seeing him.”

“He stands on the dressing-table upstairs in our bedroom window,” said Mrs. Petch. “That looks out into the garden, and it’s just the place for him, and he’s scattering seed all over everything; but what do I care, poor lamb, so long as he

gets better? Let him only get himself again, say I, and no matter——”

“I should like to see him,” said Elizabeth, with a look which her family would have recognised. Indeed, she possessed rather more than her share of a quality which her friends called firmness, and her family something else.

“I really couldn’t take it upon myself with Sam away——” began Mrs. Petch; then she glanced at Elizabeth’s face, and added reluctantly, “Of course, miss, if you accept the responsibility——”

“I do,” said Elizabeth. “Shall I go up and see the bird?”

“I haven’t done the room yet,” said Mrs. Petch.

“Then I’m afraid I shall have to ask you to fetch him down,” said Elizabeth.

Mrs. Petch went slowly upstairs, creaking remonstrance at every step, and Elizabeth whispered to Andy—

“I’m convinced that William is either dead or dying, and Mrs. Petch is trying to hide it from us. Don’t you think so?”

Lovely to have her appeal to him, even about a bird with an unpleasant character. Andy thrilled as he responded baldly, “Seems so.”

But, contrary to all expectations, William appeared to be in excellent health and feather; he looked better, in fact, than he had done for a long time. Elizabeth felt ashamed of having suspected the poor woman.

“William,” she murmured. “Poor old William!” and held out a finger. “Is that tea ready? Is that tea ready?”

But William, for the first time since Elizabeth had known him, failed to echo that familiar remark. He refused to whistle, to draw corks, to cry “Cat”—to do anything at all that he had been in the habit of doing for the past twenty years.

“That’s it!” said Mrs. Petch desperately. “I daren’t tell you. I knew Mrs. Atterton would think we’d been neglecting him, and we never have. He’s lost his vocaberlery. He can only make a hoarse shriek.”

She threw her apron over her head in a dramatic attitude of despair, and in that moment the parrot turned so that the light caught three yellow feathers in his tail.

“Why, William never had a yellow feather before!” exclaimed Elizabeth.

“No,” muttered Mrs. Petch, still hidden in her apron; “it’s the strong medicine the bird-fancier sent as has done it.”

Elizabeth’s glance met Andy’s rightfully indignant, then both pairs of eyes began to twinkle, and finally a tide of ridiculous, uncontrollable laughter rose up within them. They felt it coming, tried to keep it down, and were overcome by it.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!” laughed Elizabeth, clear as a bell.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!” laughed Andy in deeper tones, but just as fresh and jolly.

She put up her hand to wipe her eyes, when, somehow, she caught her elbow

on Andy's stick and hurt it. Andy instinctively touched her arm, drew it tighter as they laughed together. Then Mrs. Petch looked out from under her apron.

"Er—Miss Atterton has hurt her arm," stammered Andy.

Mrs. Petch's shrewd little eyes were lowered discreetly as she replied in a dejected manner—

"You seem to think it *funny*, miss, poor William losing his voice."

"Well, it isn't exactly—funny," said Elizabeth, very red and more breathless than a fit of laughter should have left a gay young woman. "It's more—what you would call peculiar, isn't it, Mr. Deane?"

She paused, recovered her self-control with a rapidity that astonished Andy, and added briskly, "I must tell mamma about it; but no doubt his vocabulary will come back."

"I doubt it," said Mrs. Petch. "I doubt it very much."

Elizabeth walked to the door and said good-bye, but at the last minute she turned back.

"Mrs. Petch, I think William had better give up taking the medicine that turns his tail yellow before mamma sees him, don't you?"

Outside, Norah and the pony-cart were already in sight, so Andy only had time to murmur hastily—

"I say, you really ought to tell Mrs. Atterton; it's a shame to let yourself be done like——"

"Hush!" interrupted Elizabeth. "I am the only person it really matters to, because the money comes out of my pocket eventually. I inherit my aunt's fortune when I am twenty-five, you know."

"It isn't a question of money only," began Andy instructively.

"Then what is it?" laughed Elizabeth. But a glance at his face showed her that something else must be done, and she put her hand lightly on his arm.

"Let's keep it a secret," she said—"*do*."—Oh, Elizabeth!

"Well, if you really think——" said Andy.

Then Norah clattered up with the little cart, and Elizabeth got in.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was the day of the luncheon-party at the Vicarage, and the Vicar sat in solemn conclave with his lady-cook-housekeeper.

"Then you really think boilers?" he said anxiously.

"I ordered boilers, so they'll have to be," said Mrs. Jebb, with the air of a person rather at the end of her tether. "We agreed that with white sauce and grated egg and lemon slices you could make boiled fowls look more dressy than plain roast."

"Of course, of course," said Andy hastily, wishing to keep her in a good temper until the great day was over. "Stupid of me to have forgotten that. And the asparagus"—he hardly dared it, but he did—"I suppose you're quite accustomed to cooking asparagus?"

"Any one can cook asparagus," said Mrs. Jebb coldly. "I haven't cooked it, because we never had it when I was a girl at home, and Mr. Jebb didn't like it. But it's boiled with plain water."

"*And* melted butter served with it," suggested Andy.

"Of course," said Mrs. Jebb.

"I think we'd better not have any waiting," continued Andy. "Sophy" (Sophy was the small maid) "will hardly be up to it, eh? And is there anything else that you can think of, Mrs. Jebb? Being a lady yourself, you will understand——"

Mrs. Jebb thawed a little and considered dramatically, with her finger to her brow.

"Let's see. What did we do when we entertained at 'The Laurels' in Mr. Jebb's lifetime? Scented soap. Clean towels. Black and white pins. Ah, there's one thing I have forgotten—if you really wish to provide all—but in a bachelor's household they would never——" She paused tantalisingly.

"What is it?" demanded Andy. "Anything I can——"

"Well, perhaps it's hardly a subject to mention to an unmarried gentleman," hesitated Mrs. Jebb; "but if you want everything to be complete you ought to provide face powder. It's always done. Ladies come in warm, or flustered, or shiny about the nose, and a dash of powder means everything to them."

"But there's none to be bought in Gaythorpe," said Andy, cast down at the omission.

"Yes, there is. Go to the grocer's and ask for a box of violet powder the same as he keeps for babies. That'll do quite well," said Mrs. Jebb.

"Oh, I can't," said Andy.

“Well, neither Sophy nor I have time to go,” said Mrs. Jebb, “and it doesn’t really matter at——”

“If it’s the right thing to have I’ll go and fetch it,” interposed Andy desperately, which shows once more what any man—even a new vicar, who thinks he knows nearly everything—will do for the Beloved before he gets her.

It was disappointing that the Atterton girls did not enter the guest-chamber prepared for them with such care, after all, but laid their sunshades and dust-coats down in the hall.

“You’re sure you wouldn’t like to wash your hands?” urged Andy, thinking of the black and white pins, scented soap, and violet powder.

“Mine are quite clean. I don’t know about Elizabeth’s,” said Norah, with her little smile, marching into the dining-room, followed by her brother Bill.

“Mamma was so sorry not to be able to come at the last minute,” apologised Elizabeth. “But she is not very well to-day.”

“She took the schoolmaster’s words to heart the night of the dancing class and ‘wanted to willow,’ ” said Norah. “At least she wanted to willow more than she did. So she started some sort of treatment—hot water—strict diet—and it has upset her.”

“It wasn’t the treatment that upset the mater,” said Bill, with a grin; “it was the way she broke loose last night to make up for a week of fasting. I watched her.”

That was how they talked about their mother, and yet it was strikingly evident in every word they spoke how they loved her and one another. An atmosphere of invincible family affection surrounded the Attertons like a glow of firelight—as if they were always gathered in spirit round a cheerful hearth.

“Father’s in Marshaven, gloating over a new row of red-brick houses,” said Norah. “But you knew he couldn’t come? He has a magistrates’ meeting at Bardswell to-day as well.”

“Oh, here are Mrs. Stamford and Dick,” said Bill.

Voices were heard from the hall.

“No, thank you,” in Mrs. Stamford’s croaky, distinct voice.

Mrs. Jebb in a vague, persuasive undertone.

“No, my dear woman, I can’t and won’t wash my hands again. Do you think they’re as dirty as my gloves?”

Indeed, as the Squire’s wife came forward to greet her host, it could be plainly seen that her wash-leather gloves had known long and faithful service.

“Your housekeeper nearly pushed me up the stairs,” she said indignantly to Andy. “What’s she mean by it?”

“Well, Mr. Deane seemed rather anxious *we* should wash our hands,”

laughed Norah, coming carelessly to Andy's assistance. "I know what it is. The Vicarage is sacred, and you wash your hands when you enter in the same way as you take off your shoes at the door of a mosque."

"The—the fact is," said Andy, "Mrs. Jebb has made everything as smart as she could upstairs, and I expect she wanted you to see."

"Oh, poor thing! I say, Mrs. Stamford, let us go after all. She'll be so disappointed," said Elizabeth.

"I'll come too, if you like," suggested Dick, whose conception of wit was rather elemental.

"Don't be foolish, Dick," said his mother, who actually enjoyed his jokes because they showed his frequent moods of sullen discontent had lifted for the time being.

Then they all went out and returned in five minutes, Norah's nose being conspicuously white.

"You see we've used *all* the luxuries you provided," she said.

Andy gave an involuntary chuckle, for the coating of coarse, white violet powder had such an odd effect on her little nose, contrasted with her delicate face. Then all the others began to laugh too—Mrs. Stamford because the rest did, and she wished to be a sort of jolly-good-fellow with her son's friends. It was really almost grotesque to see this woman run counter to every instinct but that of mother-love in order to please her boy—at least it would have been grotesque if it had not been almost tragic.

But a violent irritation was produced in her by the effort, all the same, and she turned sharply to Bill Atterton.

"When do you start work?"

"In October. At least I'm supposed to be reading with old Banks and Bardswell now, but I go up to Cambridge in October."

"Hum," said Mrs. Stamford. "Well, it's time you did. You are getting too stout. Face of fourteen and figure of forty."

The Atterton girls laughed and took it all in good part—they were so used to shafts of that kind flying about the family—but it hit Bill on his most tender spot.

"I can return the compliment," he said, with a pleasant smile. "Now, you have the figure of sixteen and the face of sixty."

They all involuntarily glanced at Mrs. Stamford's spare, angular form and weather-beaten face, and found it too true to trifle with.

"What nonsense," said Norah, with a lightning glance at Bill.

"Ha-ha! I call it rather good," laughed Dick Stamford.

Mrs. Stamford laughed too, with him; but something pulled tight inside of

her. So that was how she looked to her son!

Then they all began to cast surreptitious glances at the clock, and Andy saw that it was already ten minutes past two, though the guests had been invited for one-thirty. The anxious host began to fidget about the room and give distracted replies, and the conversation grew more desultory than ever.

“So this is Mrs. Simpson’s sideboard,” said Norah. “How dreadful in this room! And how weak of you! Don’t you hate it?”

Andy caught sight of Elizabeth’s averted face and for a moment forgot all about the lateness of the luncheon. She was thinking the same thing as he was thinking. Glorious moment!

“*Don’t* you hate it?” repeated Norah.

“No, I—er—sort of like it now,” said Andy.

Then a faint colour crept up the bloomy cream of Elizabeth’s cheek to her ear, and Andy could not help trying to make her turn towards him with a futile, “What do you think of it, Miss Elizabeth?”

“Oh, it’s hideous! But there’s something I rather like about it too,” said Miss Elizabeth demurely.

Then the little maid appeared in the doorway with an expression which would have made the most obtuse hostess on earth remember that she had forgotten her handkerchief and go hastily in search of it. But Andy, being a man, only glared vacantly at her and wondered what she wanted.

She whispered a ‘Sir’ so hoarse with nervousness that no one could hear it, and then in despair she beckoned with her forefinger.

“I think,” suggested Elizabeth apologetically, “that your maid——”

“What is it? Luncheon ready? Then bring it in,” commanded Andy.

But the child shook her head hopelessly and tears appeared in her goggling blue eyes. A sound as of wood crackling and a range roaring, with all dampers out, came through the open door behind her.

“What is it?” asked Andy again, with some impatience.

“She said I was to tell in private, but you won’t *be* private,” burst forth the maid, half crying and finding her voice at last “The asparagus won’t cook. We’ve been feeding the fire since twelve with all the firewood there is, and the soft end is boiled to a mush, but the hard end’s as hard as ever it was. You’ll have to do without it.”

Then she flung up her apron and clattered back to the kitchen.

“It’s really most——” began Andy, pale with annoyance, striding towards the door.

But Bill caught hold of a flying coat-tail.

“Easy on,” he said. “She couldn’t help it. She’s done”—he paused, then burst

out into an irresistible guffaw—“she’s done her best!”

“It’s very kind of you to make a joke——” began Andy again, when Norah remarked—

“*Make* a joke! You couldn’t *make* a joke like that!”

And the whole party, excepting Mrs. Stamford, laughed with such infectious gaiety that the agitated host at last joined in.

However, the little maid now reappeared bearing the chickens, which were so elegant in their white sauce and golden egg and green parsley that Andy felt comforted.

“Nothing I like so much as a boiled chicken,” said Elizabeth, assuming an air of greedy expectation.

“I always maintain,” said Bill, “that if you ask the King to lunch and give him a fowl, he’s all right.”

“I expect that’s what you gave him, last time he lunched with you, eh?” chaffed Dick Stamford.

Andy took no part in the conversation. He was too much engaged in carving, and being at no time an expert, he failed to find the joints of the fowls and cut slices from various parts. It required a silent concentration of mind and muscle to sever the legs, of which in cooler moments he would have been incapable.

At last, however, everybody was served, and he sat down, bathed in perspiration, to talk about the weather. He had already done so twice over, but he could think of nothing else. He forgot to give himself any chicken, and ate potatoes agitatedly with a knife and fork.

“One wonders if this weather can possibly last,” he said, unconsciously grasping at the manner of the senior curate in his emergency. “It will be a providence for the farmers if it continues to——”

His voice slackened—stopped. He glanced from one guest to the other. No one had even touched their chicken.

“I hope——” he began.

Then Mrs. Stamford, as it were, stepped forward.

“We’re so very sorry. No doubt your cook, being from the town, is accustomed to have the fowls ready prepared.” She paused.

“I got these from Mrs. Werrit. Usually we have them from Mrs. Thorpe,” said Andy hopelessly.

“In summer,” continued Mrs. Stamford, “it is usual about here to send the poultry home not drawn—it keeps better so.”

“Not drawn,” echoed Andy vaguely, all at sea.

Then Bill took hold of the situation.

“The old girl’s boiled ’em with their insides in,” he explained.

“I thought,” said Andy, staring wide-eyed from one to the other, “that there was *something* funny. But I never dreamed of anything as bad as this.”

“Mrs. Jebb’ll die. She’s so refined,” said Dick Stamford, trying to turn the thoughts of his host from his own despair.

“She deserves to die,” said Andy with extreme bitterness.

The Beloved for the first time under his roof—and he had offered her this! If he had been a woman he would have wept.

“Poor Mrs. Jebb! She decorated them so beautifully. She tried so hard,” murmured Elizabeth.

“I must say I’m sorry for the woman. It will never be forgotten in Gaythorpe so long as Gaythorpe exists,” said Norah.

“Look here,” said Bill. “It is rough on the poor old thing. She’s tried her best. Let’s bury the bits in the garden, and she’ll think we’ve eaten them, and we’ll say nothing about it.”

“Ridiculous!” said Mrs. Stamford. “Personally I like bread and cheese for lunch better than anything, so I am going to help myself from that Gorgonzola on the sideboard.”

But the idea of burying the lunch in the garden struck the Atterton family as novel and delightful. And when they were in certain moods there was no withstanding them; so a procession headed by Mrs. Stamford and closed by Andy, each person bearing a plate, actually did creep with caution through the French window of the dining-room.

“A spade,” whispered Bill, to whom the whole thing had already become a thrilling adventure.

“Here’s one,” replied Andy in the same tone; he was gradually warming to the spirit of it all and forgetting his despair. “That’s a good place under the gooseberry bushes.”

“You’ll have some juicy ones next year,” suggested Dick Stamford.

“Now,” said Norah. “We must do the thing in proper style. Mrs. Stamford—you first. Mr. Deane—you didn’t take any.”

“Wise chap. Knew better,” said Dick.

Andy lifted an anxious face from the hole under the gooseberry bushes.

“You surely don’t think——” he began, aghast.

“Rubbish. Of course not. Here, Elizabeth, pop in your lot,” said Norah briskly, but in a guarded tone, and with an eye on the windows of the house. “Give me the spade. I’ll pat him down. Now, let’s creep back to the house. Oh, isn’t it lovely? Don’t you feel as if you had murdered somebody and just been burying the body?”

They sat down again before empty plates, and Andy, half amused and half

rueful, paused with a hand on the bell.

"Shall I ring now?"

"Yes, yes. We're all ready," said the young people excitedly.

So the little maid came in and began to remove the plates in her usual clattering style. But when she had gathered four in a heap on her tray, her blue eyes began to goggle again, and by the time she had amassed the lot they seemed ready to fall out of her head with some incomprehensible emotion; or a mixture of emotions. For horror, surprise, and admiration were all mingled in the final goggle which she cast upon the party as she retired from the room.

In an incredibly brief space of time, considering she had to put on a clean apron, Mrs. Jebb appeared bearing a dish of stewed raspberries and cream. The little maid followed close behind her, as if for protection, and they both now wore the queer mingled expression, complicated, in Mrs. Jebb's case, by the most acute and lively curiosity.

She had sworn never to wait, and held any form of "waiting" to be beneath the dignity of a lady-cook-housekeeper, but curiosity is a passion stronger than pride, and she glanced hastily round the room, searching the sideboard, the side-table, the window-seat, even the floor.

Then an imperceptible nod passed between her and the little maid—but it expressed columns of close newspaper print—and they retired backwards together, both now goggling alike upon the company and closing the door with an odd reluctance, as if they shut in some fascinating horror.

The guests feigned to be unconscious of this singular behaviour, though Mrs. Stamford really began to feel as if she were having lunch in a nightmare, and it was Andy himself who spluttered out, purple with suppressed laughter—

"They think we've eaten the b-bones!"

"The *what*?" cried Bill.

Then a light kindled from one face to the other until they all sat in a blaze of hilarious comprehension.

Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

The young laughter pealed out through the open windows, and across the garden as far as the quiet place where old Gulielmus lay asleep—but it made no discordance there, because it only sang in the long grass above his head, the jolly creed of his lifetime: "Laugh when you can, and cry when you can't, and trust God to make all right at the finish."

"Don't know why I'm going on like this," said Norah, wiping her eyes.

"It's never the funny things that do split your sides," said Bill. "It's always something just idiotic."

"That little maid of yours thought we were going to crunch *her* bones next,"

gasped Elizabeth.

Then they all started again. Again the young laughter pealed out over the quiet graves, saying “Life’s a jolly thing!” and there was, in that moment, an atmosphere in the room which seemed made up of beauty and hope and simple merriment.

Oddly enough, Andy himself suddenly thought of the grave beyond the yew hedge. It was almost as if Gulielmus had answered back that message of laughter with a splendid, “And death’s also jolly.”

But, of course, all this passed sub-consciously through Andy’s mind, and the only definite thought that reached him was embodied in his casual—

“There was another bachelor vicar here in 1687. A man called Will Ford.”

“I wonder if he gave luncheon parties,” laughed Elizabeth.

“Oh, he’d give anything that was going, would Will Ford,” said Andy, smiling back at her.

But, oddly enough, he felt as if he were talking of his friend to the woman he loved.

“I’ve had a splendid lunch,” said Mrs. Stamford, rising. “Haven’t eaten so much for years.”

“I’d no idea bread and butter and cheese were so delicious,” said Elizabeth. “It shows we always eat them at the wrong end of a meal.”

“Never enjoyed a luncheon-party so much in my life,” said Bill. “Hate ’em as a rule,” he added, rather dimming the compliment.

“Great sport,” condescended Dick Stamford, helping Elizabeth on with her coat. He did not talk much to her, but he was usually somewhere near her.

Andy stood, looking from one to the other, half proud and half dubious.

“I’m glad—if you really did—awfully good of you to be so kind about it.”

“And now,” said Norah, “we shall have a most delightfully ghoulish reputation in Gaythorpe village. The bone-eaters—to be seen almost any day free of charge—ladies and gentlemen—please walk up!”

“I shall inform Mrs. Jebb,” began Andy anxiously.

“If you do, I’ll never speak to you again—nor Elizabeth either,” she added, with something far too delicate to be called a wink—and yet—

Andy blushed.

“Of course—if you’d rather not——”

Then he remembered he had said that to Elizabeth about the parrot secret, and blushed still more deeply, and could have kicked himself for blushing at all.

Norah’s lips curled in that odd little smile of hers that did not show her teeth, and her eyes twinkled maliciously.

“I should be greatly annoyed, and I’m sure you wouldn’t annoy me for the

world, would you, Mr. Deane?”

“N-no,” said Andy, puzzled what on earth she was driving at.

But if he had been behind the two sisters as they walked up the drive to their own house that evening he might have felt enlightened—or he might not.

“It was fun at Gaythorpe Vicarage, wasn’t it?” said Norah blandly.

“Yes,” said Elizabeth. “Are you going to Bardswell to-morrow or——”

“Elizabeth!” interrupted Norah. “Surely you’re not going to be so silly?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” said Elizabeth.

“I mean,” responded Norah, “that you’d better remember life at a country vicarage isn’t all laughing at nothing and burying boiled fowl under a gooseberry bush.”

“I never thought it was,” said Elizabeth somewhat shortly. “Oh, here’s father!”

And she greeted her parent with quite unusual effusion.

CHAPTER IX

ANDY paid one or two calls in the parish that afternoon and then went into the church to ring the bell for evensong. Clang, clang, cling! Come to church! So it had rung for generations of Sundays across the quiet fields, but only for Andy had it worked upon a week-day. He had a great argument on the subject with Mr. Thorpe, who thought that week-day services in Gaythorpe, where every one was busy from morning to night, would be merely an accentuation of the fact that the parson had nothing to do. For Gaythorpe never could and never would believe that a parson's occupations could be truthfully called work.

It was only when Andy did finally so envelop himself in the mantle of the senior curate as to leave not a trace of the original Andy to be seen, that Mr. Thorpe said, "Have two a day, then, if you like. But to my mind it's ridiculous! And nobody'll come unless they want to get something out of you."

Nobody, evidently, thought what could be got out of Andy worth leaving work and attending daily service for, so he read the service grimly alone each morning and late afternoon. Labourers, looking up from their work, used to say in a morning with a chuckle, "Parson's at it again. Pity he hasn't nowt better to do." And later in the day, women, straining the milk, would remark to one another, "Does he think we're going to leave all this and go up to church just at tea-time? Here—are them eggs for Mr. Deane? Oh, he only gets twelve to the shilling. It's grocer gets thirteen."

So Andy rang a quiet one—two—three, one—two—three, through the golden light of a late June afternoon, and afterwards stood alone as usual to read the lovely words of prayer and praise which seem to have been written in an age when men could be poets and yet sincere. An atmosphere of simple goodness and humanity clings like incense about the evening service, and the close of it is —in the dullest, dreariest place—like evening light through a stained window. It leaves such an impression of solemn peace and beauty.

Andy forgot to be annoyed at the absence of a congregation before he reached the exquisite prayer about the perils and dangers of this night, and he walked home quite content. He was not, of course, a model clergyman, or perhaps he would have gone on worrying about the absent flock. And when he got in he found Mr. Thorpe waiting for him.

"Waste of time," said Mr. Thorpe. "Waste of time! What good does it do?"

Here was a poser! What good *did* it do?

"Stops me from getting slack," said Andy, at last.

“Oh, you!” Mr. Thorpe implied that Andy ought to be able to look after his own eternal welfare without any outside help—it was his business.

“And perhaps when people hear the bell going it reminds them of good thoughts,” suggested Andy.

“What if they’re chapel?” said Mr. Thorpe. “There’s more chapel than church in Gaythorpe.”

Andy ceased arguing and called up the senior curate.

“I do what I think right.”

“Well, well! Nobody can do more than that,” admitted Mr. Thorpe, and he glanced slowly round the room for a change of subject. “I see you have the sideboard still. Looks well there. Handsome bit o’ furniture.”

“Very,” said Andy.

“But you made a mistake, buying it in. You oughtn’t to have bought it in. If us Thorpes had thought Mrs. Simpson required that sideboard, us Thorpes would have bought it in for her. You meant well. But you made a mistake. Us Thorpes would have bought it in ourselves if it had been required.”

He straightened his chest as one who has delivered himself of a burden, and added—

“I’m not one to bear grudges and tattle from one to another. If I have anything to say to a man I say it to *him*. Us Thorpes are like that.”

“Thank you, Mr. Thorpe. I’m afraid I did seem officious. I didn’t mean to be,” said Andy, with a manly simplicity and an understanding of the point of view of “us Thorpes” which was very pleasant and was all Andy—not a vestige of the senior curate in it.

“Naturally,” continued Mr. Thorpe in a tone that somehow responded to Andy’s, but in words which he had previously rehearsed to Mrs. Thorpe and did not intend to depart from—“Naturally it was narking to a well-known family like us Thorpes, with big farms all around Bardswell, to have the tale going about. If we’d thought she required the sideboard bought in, we should have bought it in. We knew she didn’t require it, so we didn’t buy it. But,” he added, unrehearsed, “all’s well that ends well, and so it is.”

“Anyway I promise not to buy any more sideboards,” said Andy with a rueful smile.

Mr. Thorpe relaxed altogether, and his black eyes began to twinkle in his fat red face.

“She run you up, I hear. You had to pay a matter of eight pounds odd more than you would have done if Miss Elizabeth hadn’t been there. Appears Mrs. Simpson had been complaining to both of you, and you neither of you knew the other was going to give it to her. Would have been a rare good joke under some

circumstances."

What Mr. Thorpe really meant was that it would have been a rare good joke if it had happened in the Werrit family—but he did not say so, even to himself. He added, instead—

"Handsome young lady, Miss Elizabeth. Though most people admire Miss Norah most. But she's one of your clever ones—you don't want a wife too clever."

"Some people don't want a wife at all," said Andy, with self-conscious jocularity.

"But that's neither you nor me, Mr. Deane," said Mr. Thorpe with a fat wink.

Andy drew himself up and toyed with the paperknife.

"And the school-treat?" he remarked.

"Yes—that's what I came about," said Mr. Thorpe, responding to the check. "It appears that you've consulted Miss Fanny Kirke about the date."

"Yes," said Andy. "I expected she would know all the details."

"Everybody knows them," said Mr. Thorpe. "They're always the same. But you ought to have gone to some responsible lady like Mrs. Thorpe or Mrs. Will Werrit. I, myself, make nothing of being churchwarden. But Mrs. Thorpe seems to think that, in the position of churchwarden's wife, she ought to have been asked to fix the date. Or Mrs. Tom Werrit. Or Mrs. Will." He rose. "I was to tell you they can't take trays this year."

"Not take trays!" said Andy, who had already learned what that involved. "Why, they used to make themselves responsible for nearly all the provisions required. What shall we do?"

"I don't know. They said I was to let you know, and I've *let* you know."

But it was evident he had acted under compulsion, and he added, as one man to another—

"You go and have it out with 'em. Butter 'em up a bit and they'll come round."

And Andy replied—as one man to another—

"I'm hanged if I will! I'll manage somehow if I have to make the cakes myself!"

Mr. Thorpe nodded.

"Just as you like, of course."

But, oddly enough, his respect for Andy was increased by this unreasonable behaviour, and he stood by the door, scratching his head, and slowly evolving a means of compromise. Then he closed the door again, advanced a few steps, and remarked with the air of a conspirator, "I've got it!"

His manner was so queerly at variance with his appearance, that any one not

concerned in the serious question must have been tickled by the incongruity; but Andy peered at him anxiously—

"Well?"

"*I'll* fix the date. Can't let you have my waggons to take the children until the 12th. You'd said the 5th. And if the date's altered to suit me, Mrs. Thorpe must oblige you. And Mrs. Will and Mrs. Tom Werrit'll follow her."

It was Mr. Thorpe's first effort at diplomacy, and he was fifty-one. No wonder he glowed with the late joy of the creator and forgot everything but the splendour of his own idea.

"My word. That's a splendid plan. Awfully good of you," said Andy with eager sincerity.

"But not a word to Mrs. Thorpe. Not a word," chuckled Mr. Thorpe, going towards the door.

"You may rely on me," said Andy warmly.

Mr. Thorpe paused with his hand on the door before opening it again.

"Look here," he said. "You can't know as much about women as I do. You come to *me* if you get stuck."

He really felt, now he had started on a diplomatist's career, that he should like to go on. He felt all the stirring pleasure of using talents hitherto unsuspected.

"I will," said Andy gratefully, though he did think it rather ridiculous that fat Mr. Thorpe should consider he knew more about women than a young man who had been a curate in London.

"There's a pack of women in Gaythorpe," said Mr. Thorpe, opening the door. "Good-bye."

But that was not what he meant to say, nor what Andy understood. He intended to convey to his Vicar the strange comradeship which binds all men together against all women. And the hand-shake they exchanged was a final expression of this bond.

For it is ridiculous to pretend that spoken words are so tremendously important, and that they alone bridge the blank space between one soul and another; they cast a line, as it were, but souls cross always in silence. The intrinsic part of every conversation is without words, which, if you think of it, becomes very comforting. It shows that our souls are not so lonely as we feared, and that they have a language which even death need not cause us to forget.

So Andy went back to his study full of the things that Mr. Thorpe had never said, and the churchwarden plodded sedately down the road mentally patting his Vicar on the back for remarks he had never made; and they both felt pleased with themselves, and each other—which is not a bad result for any conversation

to have.

Andy pulled out a few sheets of foolscap, and began to write one of those articles which were sometimes accepted, when Mrs. Jebb came in to apologise about the asparagus.

"I'm sorry," she said with mournful dignity, "but it is my misfortune and not my fault that my youth was not passed in circles where asparagus can be afforded."

"Never mind," said Andy. "I'm sure they enjoyed the party."

Mrs. Jebb pursed her lips together and approached mysteriously.

"One thing," she said in a low voice, "strikes me as very strange. The bones!"

"What bones?" said Andy, bending over the foolscap. "I'm rather busy just now, Mrs. Jebb, so if——"

"I and Sophy have searched the dining-room. Then a cat occurred to our minds."

"The poor old cat looked hungry," said the Vicar after a pause.

"Ah, I *thought* you must have given them to the cat," said Mrs. Jebb. "But at a luncheon party—however, in a bachelor's establishment——"

She evidently felt that Andy had not known how to behave, and that made the next step easier.

"I fear," she continued, "that Mrs. Thorpe is to blame for what might have been a catastrophe if the fowls had been—er—entirely dismembered. I forget if it is larks, or a woodcock, or what, that you do cook in that way, though I never thought it really *nice*. However, as everything went off all right——" She paused for Andy's reply, having put the matter, it must be confessed, with some delicacy.

"Oh, excellently," said Andy. "You must have heard us laughing."

"Yes. If there had been champagne—but there wasn't——"

Again the point of a conversation passed unspoken, and then Andy pulled his paper towards him with such determination that Mrs. Jebb fluttered from the room.

Ten minutes later she tripped back, bearing a vase of roses.

"I always think a man's room looks so desolate without flowers. As if he had no woman to care for him," and she placed the vase close to Andy's elbow.

He thanked her briefly without looking up. But when she had gone out again he stared blankly at the print on the opposite wall.

"Blest if the old girl isn't gone on me! How unpleasant!"

The attentions of certain elderly-young church workers in his late parish had paved the way for comprehension, and he comprehended. But though it was

intensely annoying he did not feel it to be unnatural.

He was, of course, an attractive fellow.

That he had learned, too, in his late curacy, for before that he had been exceedingly doubtful of his own charms.

He went in to supper feeling annoyed with Mrs. Jebb, but rather sorry for her all the same. And after supper he strolled out into the garden, where twilight was falling and the young moon was rising above a bank of cloud. A feeling of loneliness drove him to the front gate, where he could watch the distant houses being lighted up, one after the other.

Homes—thought Andy. Places where people were trying—trying——

He could not get hold of the tail of the flying thought.

Then an oldish man passed, worn with long labour, most patient in the twilight.

The thought came near again, but not near enough, and Andy called out a friendly ‘Good-night.’ Then he added impulsively, because he somehow wanted to do something—he somehow felt ashamed before that plodding figure—“I say, will you have a cigar?”

The man stopped, stared, and replied bluntly—

“I never smoked a cigar.”

“Then take these,” said Andy, emptying his case of that portion of his aunt’s last Christmas present with which he had stocked it in anticipation of the luncheon-party.

“Thank you, sir,” said the man, stuffing them into his bag with a bit of bread and half an onion.

Then he plodded on again, thinking the Vicar was a rum ’un, and no mistake, and agreeing with the newspaper he took that parsons ought to be done away with if they could afford to go about with their pockets crammed with cigars.

Andy stood there, looking after the man as he went up the lane to the little house where he slept at night, and where he had kept his wife, and maintained his children ever since early youth. He smelt of earth and sweat and was rough in his manner, and yet he enabled the Vicar of Gaythorpe to get hold of that thought which had previously eluded him.

Andy saw.

It is pleasant to see the glory in things that are glorious, but there is a still more intimate and exquisite pleasure about seeing glory in things which seem sordid. It is a sort of treasure-hunting of the soul—as fresh and full of life as a boy’s treasure-hunt in a water-logged hulk—as full of the thrillingly unexpected.

Andy went back into the study and took down some accounts which he had shelved. They dated from the late Vicar’s time, and were complicated, and he

stuck to them until they were done.

But he had no idea why he did it.

At last he put down his pen and stretched himself, and something he had vaguely been keeping at bay ever since the early afternoon swept over him like a tide. He lit a candle and went out into the silent hall where the light was already extinguished, and unlocked the dining-room door. It had the odd look common to all unused rooms at night—they seem to be waiting in some uncanny and yet quite conscious way for somebody long gone.

Andy came there to search for nearer dreams of Elizabeth. Elizabeth as she had been in her youth and gracious kindness only a few hours before. Elizabeth as she might be when they were married. And he found instead the most clear and vivid memory of a man he had never seen. He never thought much of the old Vicar, for what he had heard of him in no way appealed to the imagination. And yet now he suddenly remembered the years his predecessor had spent between these walls, and that he must, too, have been young when he came—young and full of life and hope.

It was, truly, as if the old Vicar held out a hand in that still, dimly-lighted room, claiming recognition, and the new Vicar gave it in a half-spoken—

"Poor old chap! I'd forgotten he planted the rose trees and the holly hedge. He must have liked the garden."

Then Andy went to bed, but he was restless and could not sleep, for now the dreams of Elizabeth that he went to look for in the dining-room pressed so close around him that he remained vividly awake.

He could not have told next morning what those confused dreams were—no one, not even a young man can describe the dreams of a young man about the girl he hopes to marry. They are like the City of Married Love itself, that has spires soaring into a clear heaven and little dim places where a man may hide. And one tells of the spires and another of the dark, but no one of the whole; for the poet and realist and true lover all combined who can write about those dreams as they are, has yet to be born.

And married love—that Enchanted Muddle—is different from any other love.

For love without marriage has also the dark places and the spires pointing upwards, but it has no battlements—and battlements keep in and keep out many things.

Andy got up in the morning, hoping to see Elizabeth, and yet almost afraid to see her, lest she should guess that he had dared to come so near to her in his dreams.

A letter lay on the breakfast-table that seemed, even when opened and read, to be of minor importance. But that is the extraordinarily interesting thing about life—you never can tell what is important and what is not.

Still, of course, "DEAR ANDY.—We are coming to Marshaven for a few days on the 15th. Promenade Hotel. Do come over and see us.—Your affectionate Aunt," could hardly—any more than the sideboard—be regarded as a likely messenger of Fate.

Andy beamed as he helped himself to fried bacon. Fortunate—most fortunate. Just when he needed some one to back him up in demanding the hand of a girl who might marry a duke if she wanted, here was the fashionable Aunt Dixon with her two stylish daughters by a husband previous to Uncle Dixon.

The gratitude which Andy had always felt to his aunt by marriage for her kindness to him, and the admiration he had always entertained for the Webster girls, grew stronger than ever as he sat eating his breakfast; then his reflections were interrupted by the incursion of Mrs. Jebb.

"Excuse me interrupting," she said, "but an extraordinary thing's happened. The cat buried the bones under a gooseberry bush, and Sam Petch found them. I've never heard of a cat doing that before. You ought to write to some paper about it."

"Most odd," said Andy, rising—Andy, who had always seen so clearly that straight line between truth and fiction. "By the way, I want to speak to Sam about something." And he hastily escaped across the lawn to the rose-garden, where he found Sam engaged in doing something mysterious with two old umbrellas.

"What on earth——"

"I'm sheltering some fine blooms that's coming out, sir," replied Sam. "I thought you'd maybe like 'em sheltered. They'll be ready to cut by to-morrow. Fit for a queen they'll be."

"Beautiful," said Andy.

"I raythe fancied you might want 'em, sir," said Sam.

"The grass in front of the study window requires cutting," said Andy. "I should like it to be done at once."

"Yes, sir—certainly, sir," said Sam, with deep respect.

But there passed between the two men an unspoken conversation, thrilling and full of point, which left Andy greatly annoyed. How had a fellow like that learned a secret that he had told to no one in the world?

It enraged him to think that Sam Petch should know he loved Elizabeth before he had told even her. Mrs. Petch's apron could not have been so opaque as it appeared during that exquisite moment when he held Elizabeth's arm in the

cottage kitchen and they laughed together.

However, the memory of that moment thrilled him to a bravery that made him care naught for fifty Sam Petches. He returned to the rose-garden.

“You can keep those roses sheltered. I may want them, after all.”

“Yes, sir,” said Sam solemnly, without looking up. “I’ll see to it, sir.”

But when his Vicar had passed out of sight he straightened his long figure and looked towards the house with a queer mixture of scorn and affection on his handsome face.

“Why doesn’t he ask me how to go on? I could let him have a tip or two. There isn’t enough of the ‘Give us a kiss, me lass, first, and talk after,’ about him.”

Young Sam Petch smiled pleasantly as he moved to another rose bush—a vista of happy occasions not neglected rose before his mind; anyway, he had had nothing of the sort to reproach himself with at twenty-five.

But it was not worthy of Andy—either as a beneficed clergyman or a lover—that he should sneak into the rose-garden next day during Sam’s dinner-hour and cut the blooms surreptitiously, afterwards secreting them in his bedroom washbasin. Nor did it do any good. For when Mrs. Jebb went there with a fresh pat of soap she put the roses and a young lady together and made matrimonial intentions out of the combination. On the day of the luncheon-party she had suspected, and her suspicions had fallen on Elizabeth for the reason—unflattering both to Andy and the Beloved—that Norah was certain to look higher.

So there was another person in it; and one quite wanting in the sympathy felt by Sam Petch.

There is a saying that everybody loves a lover, but, though it sounds nice, it is not true; anyway, it does not go far enough. Everybody loves a lover in some one else’s household.

And, of course, Mrs. Jebb did not want Andy to marry, because she would then certainly lose one of her titles and be only lady-cook, and possibly she might lose her place altogether. Therefore she was anxious, and, being a nervous person, she was also irritable, and being human, like all the rest of us, she felt inclined to pass on some of the discomfort to the cause of it.

So she waited about the hall after luncheon, dusting and rearranging, until Andy’s bedroom door opened and she heard him coming downstairs. She knew he would have the flowers in his hand and that he would prefer to escape unobserved. If not, why had he put them in his washbasin instead of asking for a proper receptacle?

She kept very quiet, holding her breath and looking up. Andy, also very

quiet, craned his head far over the banisters and looked down.

Now there is no reason in the world why a gentleman should not lean over his own banisters if he so desire, and there is equally no reason why his lady-cook-housekeeper should not look up towards the first landing; but the fact remains that when the two pairs of eyes met they both blinked with conscious guilt.

“Oh—er—I was just wondering if you were there,” said Andy. “Could you give me a bit of string?”

Andy—who was still boy enough always to have string in his pockets!

And Mrs. Jebb said, almost at the same moment—

“I was just looking at that crack in the ceiling. I often wonder if it really is safe.”

But she remained in the hall, having procured string from the hall-table drawer, and she busied herself in polishing doors and skirting-boards with such an air of having eternity at her disposal, that Andy, after two or three noiseless sorties upon the landing, was reduced to the necessity of facing her with the roses in his hand or going down the back stairs.

He gave his hair a final dose of brilliantine to subdue an objectionable curl on his forehead, and came down the front stairs, armed with a bunch of roses and an air of unapproachable dignity.

After all—so far as she knew—he might be going to take them to some invalid.

“How beautiful!” murmured Mrs. Jebb as he passed. “How it brings things back. I well remember Mr. Jebb presenting me with just such a bunch when he proposed; but his was surrounded with maiden-hair fern. It seems a pity, Mr. Deane, that you haven’t a little maiden-hair to put with them.”

Andy made no reply, and marched out of the front door.

But as he walked along the pleasant field-paths that lead to the Attertons’ house he began to lose his sense of irritation, and to wonder vaguely if Mr. Jebb could by any human possibility have felt for Mrs. Jebb anything at all like he was feeling then.

It seemed incredible.

And yet, Andy reflected, the longer you lived the more you found out that people did think and feel the most unsuspected things. For love and nature together were opening Andy’s eyes, and he began vaguely to see how very different people are from what you think. Perhaps Mr. Jebb had felt something the same, after all.

However, when he neared the small park which surrounded the Attertons’ house, he dismissed the idea as ridiculous.

He was quite sure no one at all had ever loved any girl in just the wonderful and particular way that he loved Elizabeth. He had invented it, and it would die with him.

And, of course, if he had not felt like that, he would not have been a real lover.

During the last quarter of an hour before he rang the bell he was preparing phrases to use in presenting the flowers.

“I just saw some fine blooms as I came away, and I thought you might like them, Miss Elizabeth. I remember your saying you were fond of roses.”

No. That was too casual.

“I saw these roses in the garden and they reminded me of you. So I brought them to you.”

No. That was too pointed.

But he *wanted* to be pointed.

Then he saw a motor before the door and a cart going round to the stables and was thus made aware of a possibility that he had quite left out of his calculations. There were other visitors in the house.

His throat grew quite dry with nervousness and annoyance and disappointment, and he thought he would hide the roses in a bush; but a certain doggedness made him cling to them, and as he stood undecided the Stamfords passed him in their motor and he had to go on or look like a fool.

So he went on, and was ushered into a room half full of people, where Elizabeth sat laughing in a distant window-seat with Dick Stamford and her brother Bill, and he had to account for the roses in his hand.

“How-do-you-do, Mrs. Atterton?” he heard himself saying in a voice that sounded queerly unfamiliar.

“And you’ve brought me those roses? How sweet of you,” said Mrs. Atterton in her good-natured way, thinking he was shy and wanted helping out. “I love roses!” She glanced round with the eye of the born hostess. “Will you take Miss Banks in to tea? Mr. Deane of Gaythorpe—Miss Banks, the daughter of Mr. Banks, the Rector of Millsby.”

“Oh, Mr. Deane and I are *quite* old friends,” said Miss Banks with animation.

“Delighted,” said Andy.

And half an hour later he came back to the room to find his roses wilting on a side-table and Elizabeth absent.

“I hope your daughters are quite well?” he remarked wistfully to Mr. Atterton, whom he encountered on the lawn.

“Oh yes. Norah’s away and Elizabeth is playing tennis in the lower court, I expect,” said Mr. Atterton carelessly, as if he were speaking of any ordinary girl.

“Miss Elizabeth plays very well, doesn’t she?” said Andy.

“No ... rotten service,” said Mr. Atterton, and Andy felt he did not deserve to have such a daughter.

“I suppose the lower court is over there?” suggested Andy.

“Yes. I say, would you like to come and see my pigs?”

Now pigs were, next to red villas, the main interest of Mr. Atterton’s existence, and an invitation to visit them in his company was a great honour. What was a possible prospective son-in-law to do?

“Thank you very much,” said Andy, following his host, and endeavouring to take an intelligent interest in queer-looking and precious animals that rather resembled a wild boar than the domestic porker. He must have succeeded, for on leaving to be in time for evensong, he received an immense compliment.

“You’re like me,” said Mr. Atterton. “Pigs more in your line than girls and tea-drinking, hey?”

CHAPTER X

THE year was just at that most pleasant pause between hay-time and harvest, and the Vicarage brooded in the sun amongst the full-leaved trees like an architectural embodiment of repose. Quiet joys seemed to cluster round its broad windows like the roses, and a very faint ‘Coo-coo!’ from the pigeons in Mr. Thorpe’s yard sounded like a lullaby heard only by the soul—something too deeply peaceful to be real.

And in spite of all that, there were three broken hearts, or cracked hearts—anyway, hearts not in a comfortable condition—under that very roof.

For Elizabeth had receded, mentally and physically, to a remote distance. She first departed to some inaccessible region in a sort of glory of white draperies and careless smiles when Andy caught sight of her in the window-seat across the blank distance of her mother’s drawing-room. It seemed then incredibly audacious that he could ever have dreamed what he had dreamed.

In addition to which she had actually gone to stay with an aunt for a week, a fact of which Andy was unaware; and he haunted the lanes where he had sometimes met her in the past with so sad a countenance, that such of his parishioners as met him reported it was true—he *had* ruined his stomach with over-eating—no young feller with a good house and a decent income would go about like that if he could digest his food. There was no doubt a very good reason for his abstaining from butter, as Mrs. Jebb told Miss Kirke he continued to do.

Then Mrs. Jebb herself. She also suffered—not from blighted affection exactly, but from a blight upon certain vague hopes which were ready to ripen into affection. It was, she had felt on coming to the Vicarage, notorious that young men *did*, in the present age, often marry women old enough to be their maiden aunts; and though Mr. Jebb still loomed monumental in her heart, she had a large heart, and there was plenty of room for another occupant. So she went about her work with a certain romantic melancholy that was not unpleasant, and her sighs were like the wind rushing sadly through those empty spaces which Andy declined to fill. She was short with the little maid, however, during those days, to a degree that would have caused Sophy to rebel if she had not been so full of her own concerns, and inclined to disregard a universe on account of a blue silk tie presented to another young lady.

So, by the day previous to the school-treat, there was a charged atmosphere at Gaythorpe Vicarage, which only required a match to make it explode; and the

match was provided by Mrs. Jebb in the shape of a gingerbread pudding, which she had absently sweetened with carbonate of soda, instead of sugar.

Andy rang the bell.

“Take this stuff away,” he said. “It is not fit for human food. Tell Mrs. Jebb I wish to speak to her.”

But in the five minutes which elapsed before she appeared, Andy’s wrath began to cool, and, unfortunately, his courage cooled with it, so that the dignified and stern rebuke which had been waiting for her at the moment of tasting the pudding petered out on her arrival into a rather feeble—

“I say, Mrs. Jebb, this won’t do, you know. You really must cook better than this.”

“When I entered your service,” said Mrs. Jebb, whom Sophy had not spared in her recital of the message, “I expected to be treated very differently from what I have been in many ways. I never expected to be sent for by cheeky maid-servants, in a manner”—she paused, gulped, and concluded—“that no gentleman should send for a lady in.”

“It’s not only the pudding,” said Andy, nettled afresh by this want of a proper attitude, “it’s your cooking altogether. You must see that.”

But Mrs. Jebb’s interview with the triumphant Sophy had left her in a state of mind that allowed her to see nothing but a mist, through which Andy’s boyish, reproving face loomed as a last irritation. She wanted to box his ears, but replied instead—

“If you are not satisfied, I will go. Pray accept my notice from this day forth.”

Feeling vaguely that she had given notice in a dignified, Biblical manner suited to her position as housekeeper at a vicarage, she walked from the room.

But when she reached the door the air blew in from the garden, and a little shower of rose-leaves fluttered down through the sunshine. She stopped short with a sudden stunned contraction of the heart.

What was she doing? What on earth was she doing? Had she been mad?

She passed a handkerchief over her forehead and came back slowly into the room.

“I apologise,” she said breathlessly. “My temper got the better of me. Pray think no more about it.”

Andy turned round from the window.

“I think we will not discuss the matter further,” he said. “Please consider your resignation accepted.”

He was pleased now at the thought of getting rid of her—though if she had not given notice, he would have kept her for an indefinite period, with a man’s

usual dislike for any change in his domestic arrangements.

"Very well," replied Mrs. Jebb, gathering some remnants of dignity round her, "it must, of course, be as you wish."

She attempted to flutter with her usual light air towards the door, but just before she reached it she stopped short and began to cry.

"Come, Mrs. Jebb," said Andy, unable to leave well alone, "you gave me notice, you know. And you'll find heaps of other places."

"Where?" said Mrs. Jebb, turning on him with a sort of desperate sincerity that made all her foolish little affectations fall from her like a mantle, leaving the real woman—old, defenceless, incapable—so nakedly plain for Andy to see that he felt almost ashamed.

"Lady-cooks," he murmured—"there's a constant demand for lady-cooks."

"I'm not very strong," sobbed Mrs. Jebb. "I couldn't take an ordinary place. No—I shall have to go back to my brother—and his wife——"

"Well, that will be pleasanter for you—with relations," suggested Andy cheerfully.

Then the bitterness of the unwanted—which is no less terrible because they do not deserve to be wanted—gripped Mrs. Jebb's soul and made her jerk out in breathless sentences—

"Pleasant! To sit down to meals all the rest of your life where you have to say you don't like anything tasty because there's never enough for three!"

Well, it was no reason for retaining an incompetent housekeeper, but there is something so helplessly touching about every real self, when the outside self which hides it fades away, that no wonder Andy said, after a pause—

"All right, Mrs. Jebb. Have another go and see how you manage."

For a moment longer Mrs. Jebb's real self remained visible while she leaned her head on the door-post and mopped her eyes in speechless relief and thankfulness; then it disappeared, and she patted her fringe with a fluttered—

"How foolish of me! But I have become so attached to Gaythorpe. I am so delighted that our little misunderstanding has been cleared up. I am so glad you spoke candidly, Mr. Deane. I hope you always will in future if there is any little matter you don't like."

And she tripped into the hall with something of her old airiness.

An hour later Andy was bending over the plantains on the lawn in the front part of the garden, facing the road, and two women passed by on the other side of the hedge without seeing him.

"Nice house, I allus think."

"Yes. Rare thing being Parson Andy." Then they passed on, and their Vicar saw through a hole in the hedge that it was the meek and respectful Mrs. Burt

who had spoken.

He ground his teeth. Parson Andy, indeed! Then the undignified abbreviation was going to dog him to his dying day.

It was the last straw—he flung down his spud and stalked into the house.

Nothing in life is more interesting and queer than the way in which every trifling event fits into and influences the rest.

For instance—Andy fell in love.

That made him feel a new chivalry and kindness towards all girls, particularly towards those who lived in his own parish. It may have been ridiculous, or it may not, but he became secretly proud of their fresh looks and jealous of their honour, like an elder brother. Several of them sang in the choir-gallery whose families attended chapel, and, one way or another, he knew nearly every one in the parish by now, as a country parson will in old-fashioned places. So when one of those regrettable incidents occurred which happen in all country parishes, he was inclined to forget his casual knowledge of such affairs in London, and to look on the thing as a personal outrage.

It was no longer a vague girl who had taken a wrong turning, but a definite Gladys Wilton, whose life was spoilt, and a John Wilton, shepherd, who went sorrowful and shamed.

Falling in love with Elizabeth, therefore, had made girls sacred to her lover, and that is rather a fine thing to say of Elizabeth.

The other events at work in Andy when he encountered the author of the misfortune in a lonely lane were, the difference with Mrs. Jebb, the "Parson Andy" of the two women passing the hedge, and, in the immediate present, a meeting with a big young man instead of the eagerly expected Elizabeth, who was still away from home, though Andy did not know it.

He had walked miles, scanning the fields and lanes round her house in vain, but not venturing to call. So he was feeling tired, and irritable, and more in love than ever. And the events mentioned pushed him on into a course of action which he would otherwise not have taken.

The young man, too, was looking very jolly, with a pipe in his mouth and a good bicycle and every evidence of self-satisfied prosperity.

"Afternoon!" he said rather insolently, with a smirk that irritated Andy still further. He had been asked by old Wilton to speak to the young man, and he suddenly made up his mind that he would speak now.

"Stop!" he cried. "May I have a word with you?"

So they entered into a conversation which began all right, but ended, as it was bound to do under the circumstances, by Andy calling the young man a

coward, and the young man calling Andy a blanked, interfering parson, who only dared to say things like that because he knew he wouldn't have to fight.

"I don't mind a fight," said Andy, beginning to go white about the nose and to breathe heavily.

No one, of course, could maintain for one moment that Andy was the right sort of parson.

"All very well to talk," sneered the young man, sticking a crimson face close to Andy's. "Do, then I'll believe you! Parsons"—(he used adjectives)—"we'll soon have done with parsons in this country" (and he used adjectives again).

"I'll fight you," said Andy slowly, "if you'll promise to marry her if I win."

"If you win, I will," panted the young man. "I can safely promise that. But you daren't. You'll get me to start and have me up for assault. I know you."

He thrust his face so near that his rough moustache tickled Andy's nose and that was enough.

Andy began to take off his coat.

Then, for a few moments, ensued an unseemly and unchristian scene which no friend of the Vicar of Gaythorpe would wish to dwell on.

According to all the laws of fiction Andy ought to have come off victorious, but, as a matter of fact, he was badly beaten, and it was only by a fluke that he managed to give his opponent a black eye in return for his own damaged wrist.

The big young man silently watched him struggling to put on his coat, then, with a hand over the injured eye, assisted him into it.

"Do you know I'm the best boxer for ten miles round?" he asked grimly.

"I—I believe I'd heard so," replied Andy, still very confused and hardly knowing what he said.

"And you made no more of going for me than as if I'd been a counter-jumper?" continued the young man.

"I forgot," said Andy. "However——" and he began to trudge on, very much ashamed of himself.

"Look here," said the young man. "I'll tell you a thing I didn't mean to. There wasn't no need for you to fight me about Gladys. I promised the old man last night I would marry her. But I wasn't going to tell you that when you started jawing me."

"I see," said Andy. "Well, I'm glad," and he started to plod on again, very shaky about the knees.

"Look here," said the young man, following him, "you're not fit to walk home. I gave you a doing, I did. Here's my bike."

Andy looked at him and he looked at Andy, and the virile souls of both met in that look and, in a sense, shook hands.

“Thanks,” said Andy, mounting the bicycle.

“I say,” the young man shouted after him, “we were going to be married at the registry in Bardswell, but you can marry us if you like.”

“All right,” Andy called back over his shoulder.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN you live in a large community you feel it possible to give an enemy a private black eye and that there the matter ends—nobody's business but yours and his—and it is only when you live in a little place that you realise the extraordinary fact that there *are* no private black eyes—every black eye affects the universe.

Of course every one knows this, but only through the microscope of narrow lives do you see the principle at work.

Which all means that Andy would not have met Elizabeth at Marshaven if the young man who was her aunt's carpenter had not been obliged to abstain from attending upon particular widows; for Elizabeth would have been unable to find any excuse which would possibly hold water for coming into the little town on the day of the school-treat. And her own self-respect—the self-respect of a girl in such matters is a queer and chancy thing—would not permit her to come in without a decent excuse.

However, a carpenter happened to be rather urgently needed, and, as the young man's father was laid up with bronchitis, and the young man himself had a black eye, Elizabeth volunteered to walk over to Marshaven, a distance of about two miles from her aunt's house, which lay between Millsby and the sea.

"Take the pony-cart," entreated the aunt.

But Elizabeth's face assumed the expression which her family knew well, and she walked.

Meantime, Gaythorpe had awakened early to the sense of an outing, which is a vastly different thing from just going out—as different as moonshine from electric light.

For an outing has glamour and wonder in it, and that precious atmosphere does still hang about certain feasts and seasons in lonely places, not because bicycles have not penetrated everywhere, but because the Spirits of Ancient Revelry come out from their hiding-places in barns and on deserted greens, and whisper jolly tales of days when men still had an appetite for fun—silly, childish, inferior fun that meant nothing and led nowhere.

And the very same spirit that had fled with a shriek of the violin from the Attertons' window, properly banished after making a whole roomful of people forget that they were earnest citizens with only one purpose in life—to do well for themselves and have a good time that should cost money and look it—that

very same spirit had the cheek to venture forth again and tap at all the windows in Gaythorpe village in the freshness of the early morning.

Most of the young people were used to bicycling over to Marshaven on a Sunday afternoon, and thought nothing at all of the few hours at the sea which had been regarded as such a treat when the School-Feast was first started, but even they scanned the dewy, blue distance of the pasture-lands with a feeling of joyous anticipation. And in most of the farmhouses there was a pleasant bustle of cutting ham-sandwiches, and packing them in cabbage leaves to keep moist and cool for the midday meal on the sands, and packing cheesecakes in cardboard boxes for fear the light pastry should break, and scalding cream, and corking it down in bottles, because the milk provided at the Marshaven refreshment-rooms was no sort of use to a woman who was dog-tired with walking about all day, and wanted a good cup of tea to hearten her against the return journey.

For a real outing is no brief run down to eat and back again—it is a day stretching out full of long, sunny hours, with sandwiches on the shore at half-past twelve, and tea, provided by the ladies of the parish, in a bare, high room at five.

So by nine o'clock the three waggon-loads were already rumbling down the village street. High above the horses' heads tossed the little arches of paper roses and trembling grass, and the tiny round bells jangled with every step, to make a tune that the Spirit of Ancient Revelry knew well, but which is as strange to us as a forgotten harvest-song.

The men and girls of the choir were there with the school-children and school-teachers, but such ladies as married Thorpes and Werrits would follow later, aristocratic in gigs and dog-carts.

Andy was in the last waggon, which had a wreath of pink paper roses and green laurel all round the body, with a bunch in the centre of each wheel, and pink arches above the horses' heads. It was a common enough sight about Marshaven between hay-time and harvest, but not to Andy; and the sight of the fine horses and the waggons in front, one trimmed with white, one with yellow, and the sunlight shining so fresh and gay upon the dewy hedgerows on either side, made him feel as if he wanted to throw up his hat and sing, in spite of his injured wrist and his other afflictions.

"It always is fine for the School-Feast," said Rose Werrit, who was a Sunday-school teacher, and who sat on a bench in a glow of youth and importance, with an arm round a fat boy of five.

Andy—it is a disgraceful thing to have to acknowledge—but Andy felt inclined to bend over and kiss Rose's pretty flushed cheek, and yet he was tremendously in love with Elizabeth—perhaps *because* he was so tremendously

in love with Elizabeth; but he caught back the wandering impulse and felt ashamed of his own wickedness. How could he——

But from that instant he began to feel less harshly toward certain sinners whom he had before condemned without a hearing. A little of the tolerant humanity of Brother Gulielmus, who had loved his flock so well, because he understood them, began to mellow Andy's crude judgment.

However, he turned his present attention to Miss Fanny Kirke, who was forty-nine; and they discoursed pleasantly of the weather and the approaching holidays, and finally of Mr. Willie Kirke, who was playing popular airs on a concertina in the first waggon to lighten the way.

"He really seems able to do anything," said Andy, with sincere admiration.

"Always could," said Miss Kirke. "Tiresome about his meals, even as a child, wouldn't touch suet pudding or animal's frys of any kind; but made a windmill out of a card, a pin, and a stick of firewood when he was five. I heard Mrs. Stamford once call him quite the Admirable Bright'un, and indeed he is."

Andy began to chuckle, then he turned it into a cough. Miss Kirke had not intended a pun at all, and she added in a very low tone, glancing at Mrs. Jebb's gauze veil that floated like a banner from the next waggon—

"He is just the sort of man to be taken in by a designing woman."

"Oh, I'm sure——" remonstrated Andy.

"Don't tell me!" interrupted Miss Kirke, her refinement for once upset by what was the obsessing fear of her existence.

"I can't think it possible," said Andy, unable to pretend, in face of that eye fixed on the floating veil, that he did not understand the drift of her remarks.

"Anything's possible," said Miss Fanny Kirke with some bitterness, "when you get a widow and a man together."

Then the waggons rumbled round that turning where there first begins to be a cool saltiness in the air, and little Jimmy Simpson called out, jumping up on a seat—

"I smell the sea! I smell the sea!"

"Sit down, you naughty boy. You'll tummel into the road," said Sally, anxiously pulling at a sturdy leg.

He gave a kick and roared out—

"Want to tummel into the road!"

"Now, now," said Mrs. Simpson. "Jimmy must be good, or else mother'll take him home again."

Jimmy eyed the long distance behind him for a moment, then he replied—

"You touldn't!"

But a lurch of the waggon pitched him into the midst of a little nest of

crowded baby figures, and he condescended to sit down again.

Sally looked across at Andy, because she and her Vicar had become friends, and she said with resignation—

"He'll get drownded in the sea if I don't have him tied to me. Can you lend me a bit of string?"

"He'll drown you too," remonstrated Andy, but he handed out the required string. It was impossible to treat Sally as though she were a very little girl.

"Oh, no," she replied. "I should call out. And I've a very loud skreek, haven't I, mother?"

"You make out Jimmy's such a bad boy. I'm sure he isn't, the lamb," said his mother, burying her cheek in his curls.

But the lamb was disinclined for demonstrative affection at that moment, and he fought her off.

"You don't want boys to sit still," said Mrs. Simpson, glancing round proudly.

"N-no," said Andy, as no one else replied. "He's a splendid little chap!"

And indeed, as he struggled up again to stand unsteadily in the sunshine above the other children, with the full light on his bright hair and merry face, he did seem the very embodiment of joy and hope and roguish bravery—the things that belong to the clean dawn of life.

"I hope he'll do well. I hope he'll grow into a splendid man," said Andy suddenly.

Or rather the words said themselves as he watched the little laughing lad with his curls all gold against the summer sky. Thus was the father born in Andy.

"It'll be getting on or the gallows with him, bless him," said Mrs. Simpson placidly.

Then the sea came in sight between a dip of the sand-hills, and after a little more creaking and jolting the waggons stopped outside the long refreshment-rooms known all over the countryside as 'Walkers',' and every one went down to the sands.

Andy walked in the midst of a group of choirmen and lads to the coco-nut shy, where it was agreeable to the feelings of the Gaythorpe youth that their Vicar knocked off no less than five coconuts; they would have been ashamed of him if he had missed. But after a while they dispersed in different directions, and Andy walked sedately along the shore with Mr. Kirke, discussing the news of the day.

Little groups encountered and chatted with them, and considered them important, and they considered themselves more important still, and everything was as it should be.

But it is just in those placid moments that you want to look out—for something nearly always lurks round the next corner. In this case it was Elizabeth. Not that she was lurking in any actual sense, that being a thing she would disdain to do, but she came along round a bend in the sand-hills with the free wind blowing her blue gown about her and the sunshine on her face.

"Bless me—Miss Elizabeth Atterton!" said Mr. Kirke.

"Is it?" said the Vicar. "Dear me, yes, I see it is."

Oh, Andy—when the world went golden like the sands beneath her feet at the very sight of her!

"Mr. Deane! How very strange," said Miss Atterton with great aplomb, but with a colour in her cheeks that had not been there when she walked the shore alone.

"Ha-ha! Yes. Just happened to be down with the School-Feast," said Andy, laughing at nothing at all.

"Oh—the School-Feast—of course," said Elizabeth, as if it had that moment entered her head. "And how are you getting on, Mr. Kirke? Is Miss Kirke here?"

"Yes, Miss Elizabeth. I—er—promised to join her. I must hasten back now, I am sorry to say."

So did Mr. Willie Kirke prove himself to be a man and a brother as he skimmed back with a light step by the damp edge of the waves, and Andy remarked with heartfelt sincerity—

"Awfully good chap—the heart of a true gentleman."

"And so marvellously versatile," added Elizabeth.

Then they strolled slowly along until they encountered Sally, who had strayed from a group of children round a shallow pool and was searching the shore with her usual earnestness of purpose.

"I'm not looking for shells—I'm looking for money," said Sally in a serious voice; and she disengaged herself from Elizabeth's detaining hand to plod on again in a business-like manner.

"There's no money on the sands, goosey," said Elizabeth, kneeling down to bring her own bright head in a line with the little anxious face.

Sally looked at Elizabeth with that questioning gaze by which children try to separate truth from what are called jokes in a puzzling, grown-up world.

"I heard Miss Kirke telling mother there was heaps of pennies lost on the sands," she said; "and mother doesn't know how she's ever going to keep me and Jimmy in boots—we kick them out so. She says we shall have to wear wooden ones like little foreign boys and girls, and I don't w-want to. The others would s-shout us so!"

Poor little Sally's voice broke at the prospect of such unpleasant notoriety,

and Elizabeth put her arms round that dear, pitiful thing—a baby who has learned to think too soon.

"Mother was only joking about the wooden shoes, ducky," she comforted. "But I *have* heard of people finding money on the sands; and I'm rather a good looker. I nearly always find things. Shall I help?"

"Y-yes, please," said Sally, smiling through the end of a sob.

And as Andy looked at them, all the dreams came back that he had known before—only glorified because she was there; and the protecting tenderness that marked her out always from other girls seemed to him now so beautiful that he adored it in her, as men for ages past have adored it in the symbol of all loving womanhood.

"I'll search too," was all he said, however.

"Come," said Elizabeth, drying Sally's eyes with a little handkerchief that smelt of violets, "here's Mr. Deane going to help as well. We're certain to find some pennies now."

It was an entrancing game, after that, to hide pennies and then sixpences under little brown heaps of seaweed behind Sally's back while one or other of them engaged her attention, and then to hear her shrieks of joy as she pounced upon them. It might almost be said that she became young again as she flung herself down on the sand and grubbed excitedly under a partly decayed starfish.

"Ugh! Don't touch that!" said Elizabeth. "Look here. Here's another penny."

And that proved to be the last, for the other children were shouting that it was time for dinner, and Mrs. Simpson was beckoning with a peremptory umbrella from her seat on the sand-hills.

"Anyway," said Sally, tying up the booty in her microscopic handkerchief —"Anyway, there'll be enough to buy real boots for Jimmy. I don't know *what* we should do with him if he had to wear anything that people shouted—he'd never stop fighting. And the policeman might get him after all."

There gleamed out the preoccupation of Sally's existence—the endeavour to prevent Jimmy's behaviour reaching a pass where the often-threatened policeman really would do his duty.

"Policeman *never* take baby boys like Jimmy. Never!" said Elizabeth quickly.

Sally said nothing—that policeman was a secret part of her life—and she felt vaguely that Elizabeth knew nothing of the realities of existence.

But, queerly enough, she was happier than most children can be, as she plodded up the sand-hills to her mother with no less a sum than three and ninepence halfpenny in her handkerchief.

Andy and Elizabeth watched her for a moment, and then turned towards a

gap in the sand-hills whence a road ran into the open country.

"This way seems pleasanter," said Andy.

"The sands *are* rather heavy," agreed Elizabeth.

And thus fortified they walked rather quickly until they reached a turning where a great sheet of mustard-seed in flower stretched, pure blazing yellow, beneath a cloudless blue.

It was like an unexecuted flare of silver trumpets on a still and joyous day, and Andy felt the sudden, triumphant exhilaration of it.

"Elizabeth——" he began—face shining—eyes alight.

Then the aunt and cousins who were not expected in Marshaven until the following week came round the corner, and the Vicar of Gaythorpe used an expression in the presence of the lady he adored which, one second earlier, he would have deemed himself absolutely incapable of using in the presence of any lady at all. "I beg your pardon," he added hastily.

But Elizabeth may have felt obliged to him.

"These," said Andy, muddling the introduction in the agitation of his feelings —"these are my cousins and aunt—at least my aunt, Mrs. Dixon and the Webster girls—Miss Elizabeth Atterton."

Then he openly mopped his brow—anybody would—even the most refined.

"How do you do? I have heard Mr. Deane speak of you very often," said Elizabeth, with a heightened colour but surprising composure.

Andy stared at her in astonishment, unable to understand how she did it, for that is a thing no man can understand until he has been married for at least a year.

"Delighted to meet any of Andy's friends," said Mrs. Dixon.

Andy scowled. So here was the adored learning the undignified name when he wished her always to think of him as Andrew. That was the worst of relatives.

"Yes, we quite look on Andy as a brother, though he is no real relation," added Irene Webster, swinging her sunshade with an air of great fashion.

"Quite a nice little place—Marshaven—if you want to get away from the rush," said Phyllis. "You can fancy yourself a tripper, and lead the simple life."

She laughed, high up in the top of her head, and Andy and her family followed suit, though there was nothing to laugh at, because she considered herself smart, and they had formed a habit of applause.

Then Elizabeth thought she must be going, as she had to make a call in Marshaven—she did not say that the call was upon the carpenter—and Andy said he would walk part of the way with her, because he was due to lunch on the sands with Mrs. Thorpe, who had arrived with an overflowing dog-cart at 12.30.

But Elizabeth said that the call was exactly in the opposite direction to the

sands, and that she could not, and would not, separate Andy from his new-found relatives, so they all walked together to the dip in the sand-hills whence Mrs. Thorpe was plainly visible, large and black like a derelict buoy that had been thrown upon the shore, with other members of the congregation scattered near.

So the ladies stood in a group to say farewell—Mrs. Dixon, tight about the figure and curly about the head, as she had been from Andy's very earliest recollections of her, with a perennial purple dusting of powder on her face—, Irene, very like her mother, only willowy instead of tight—and Phyllis more willowy still. Both girls had an indescribable air of possessing more neck and more eyes and more hair than other people, though of course this could not have been the case, and it was only an optical delusion.

Andy really felt very proud of them now the first awkwardness of meeting was over, and he thought Elizabeth and the girls would get on splendidly together.

"You're sure to meet again," he said encouragingly. "I hope my aunt and cousins will come to stay with me."

"Oh—a bachelor's household—and three women——" smiled Mrs. Dixon, shaking her head. "But we shall often go over. You will get quite tired of us in the neighbourhood, Miss Atterton."

Then the Webster girls went off in one direction, while Elizabeth took another, thinking how pleased Mr. Kirke would be if he could only get his dancing class to willow like that; and Andy plodded down the soft sand in the full sun to Mrs. Thorpe, realising, as he had not done before, that he had injured his damaged arm further by the coco-nut shying, and that it was beginning to be exceedingly uncomfortable.

After lunch there were games to be started for the children and races to be run for prizes, and no time at all could be had for dwelling on a certain high moment that shone in a blending glory of blue and yellow at the back of Andy's mind. At five o'clock followed a meat tea in the bare, high room, where some of the young men were late owing to a travelling circus which had put up its tent for a couple of performances. And as everybody filed out into the open air afterwards, very hot, and exuding ham fat quite visibly, young Sam Petch came up to Andy with an air of mysterious importance.

"Could I have a word, sir, in private?" he said, shading his mouth with his hand.

"What? Anything wrong?" said Andy, sharply alert—no longer a jolly boy but a leader with precious human lives under his care—something of what he might become shining clear and hard through the mists of youth.

"No, no, sir," said Sam Petch soothingly. "Only you asked me to be on the

look-out for a cheap little pony and cart, and I believe I've got an offer such as you'll never see the like of again."

"Well—I can't now——" began Andy.

"Sir," entreated Sam, "it's only the matter of a minute. The circus is doing badly this summer. Weather too fine. And the owner's up a gum-tree for a ten-pound note."

"How did you hear of it?" said Andy, almost unconsciously following his handy man round a corner.

"Oh, I always pick up news—overheard him telling somebody," said Sam, forbearing to mention that the information was acquired in the bar of the Blue Tiger.

Andy glanced at him once or twice—but said no more. After all, nobody could swear he had been drinking beer—they could only be quite certain that he had eaten peppermints.

"Always have to eat one after a full meal," said Sam. "Had a delicate stomach ever since I ate some tinned lobster that had been away from the sea a bit too long. Oh, here's the little turnout, all ready and waiting."

His air of ingenuous surprise showed what he might have done had his lines been cast in dramatic circles, and so did the honest way in which he said to a seedy, flashy man—

"Now, mind, I'm not going to advise this gentleman to buy. He must see for himself, and judge for himself."

"It's worth fifty. I'll take twenty for it," said the owner, rather thickly.

Andy looked at the little brown pony and the green cart picked out with red—it certainly was marvellous at the price.

"Look here. I'll just ask Mr. Thorpe or Mr. Werrit——" he said, turning to go back.

Sam put a hand on his arm.

"Excuse me, sir, but this is a private job—very private. This gentleman doesn't want any one to know he has to sell the cart. Says it would ruin his circus right off. I only heard by accident, and he's bound me over to keep quiet. Any honourable man would keep quiet under them circumstances."

"Of course," said Andy uneasily.

"Fact is," said the man, "it's twenty pound down now or nothing. Theatrical business is like that—all of it. One day a thousand means nothing to you and the next day you'll sell your soul for a five-pound note."

"But I do not wish to take advantage——" began Andy with the air Sam knew and dreaded, for it upset his calculations because it was an unknown quantity.

“You aren’t taking advantage,” he interposed, with bluff honesty, as man to man. “It doesn’t matter to me—only I’ve been in a bit of an ’ole myself at times, and I thought I’d do this chap a good turn and you too, if I could. Don’t often get such a chance. But *I* don’t care, not for myself, I don’t.”

He put his hands into his pockets, whistled mildly a favourite air, and, as it were withdrew.

“I’ll own,” said the circus-owner reluctantly, “that you’ll be doing me a good turn if you take it. So you needn’t keep back on that account.”

“But I haven’t twenty pounds with me,” objected Andy.

“If you send a cheque to-night that I can get by first post in the morning, it’ll do,” said the owner. “Then your man can drive it back with him to-night. But I must have the money first thing in the morning.”

“Very well,” said Andy. “So long as you can assure me that the transaction is perfectly honest and legal. I must have some proof that you really are the owner of the circus.”

“Come in here,” said the man sullenly, marching into the Blue Tiger and addressing the highly respectable landlord of that inn. “Look here. Am I the owner of Kennington’s Royal Circus, or am I not?”

“You are,” said the landlord, whom nothing astonished any more.

“You’ll swear it?” said the man.

The landlord cocked a placid and incurious eye at Andy.

“If necessary I’ll swear it,” he said weightily. “Mr. Deane of Gaythorpe, I believe?”

“Er—yes,” said Andy. “A little matter of business——”

“Quite so,” said the landlord. “Quite so.”

Then he went to draw three-pennyworth of whisky for a customer, and Andy, Sam, and the circus-owner filed out again in the by-lane.

“I’ll have it,” said Andy.

“Done with you,” said the man, leading the pony and cart back into the yard.

“My eye, you’ve got a bargain,” said Sam. “Cheapest pony and cart I ever see.”

And indeed it was a wonderful bargain, only to be accounted for by the fact that the circus-owner decamped next day, leaving behind a wife, a tent, a few assorted animals, and the responsibilities of existence in the Eastern Hemisphere.

Fortunately for himself, Andy never knew that he had provided the means of flight, but as the wife prospered much better alone it may be assumed that the circus-owner was no irretrievable loss to the circus or the country.

By the time the bargain was concluded, the waggons were already rumbling up to the door of the refreshment-rooms, and tired and happy babies cuddled

down against their mothers' knees to sleep all the way home, while the bigger ones sang hymns that sounded very sweet and touching, in spite of the rough, untrained voices, as they floated back in the still, evening air.

They were all very tired—young and old—but you want to be tired after a real outing, for that is a part of it—and as Mr. and Mrs. Thorpe, the solid and unemotional, followed in their dog-cart behind, they could hear all three waggon-loads singing "Abide with me."

"Another School-Feast over," said Mr. Thorpe.

"Yes," said Mrs. Thorpe.

That was all they said aloud, but one of those wonderful unspoken conversations went on between them.

"How many more School-Feasts shall we see?" was what Mr. Thorpe's heart said to Mrs. Thorpe's.

And hers said to him—

"There are more behind us, dear, than before."

Then, clear and faint, came the end of the hymn across the quiet fields—

> "Abide with me, fast falls the eventide,
> The darkness deepens, Lord, with me abide."

CHAPTER XII

ANY gentleman who begins a sentence by saying “Elizabeth”—in the tone which Andy used near the mustard-field at Marshaven, is bound, if he be a man of honour, to complete that sentence at the earliest possible opportunity.

Should he be suffering from a very painful arm—as Andy was—and should the skies look like a storm—as they did above Gaythorpe the next morning—so much the worse for the gentleman; but the thing has to be done at once.

So Andy put on his best coat with a good deal of difficulty, and cut himself in shaving, and ate a poor breakfast, and finally set forth in the new pony-cart to call upon Elizabeth at the house of her aunt, with a bleak and desolate feeling, as if he were going off in a tumbril to his own execution.

It does not sound romantic, but it is true, and it is none the less true that Andy was as much in love with the girl as any young and ardent man who has not frittered his emotions away can be.

However, the cool sweet air blew on his forehead as he drove along the lanes, and calmed his nerves, which were fretted by pain and suspense and a sleepless night. Andy began to feel better, and to forget everything but the fact that he loved her and would soon see her. He could not help thinking there was hope for him, because of a look that had come across her face when he said the fateful “Elizabeth.”

Andy’s reflections broke short at that point, and the grey summer world under a low sky seemed suddenly strange and unreal—nothing was vividly real to him in that moment but a blaze of blue and yellow and a girl’s face—all life since he was born seemed only to have been the dim antechamber to that moment.

He whipped up the pony, who really might have known that he was a substitute for the wings of love so sportingly did he respond, and as his little hoofs clicked on the hard road they made a merry sound that was pleasant to hear.

“Love’s all—folly. But it’s—jolly.”

So the gay little hoofs kept beating out all the way to the house of Elizabeth’s aunt; but Andy would have felt annoyed at such a sentiment if he had not been too engrossed to hear it.

The house was square, and extremely substantial, and rather ugly—just the house, somehow, where one would expect a widowed aunt to dwell—and the very superior parlour-maid who came to the door was just the sort of servant one

would have expected a widowed aunt to engage; for this aunt really was, in many useful and profitable ways, particularly to herself, an epitome of the expected.

The only unexpected thing she ever did was to omit having a family, and that was why the Atterton girls were obliged to stay with her rather more than they felt inclined to do; for an epitome of the expected is honoured by all and gets everything, but is not usually a great favourite with nice young people who have no wish to be remembered in her will.

But the kindness that underlay everything in the daily life of the Attertons, without ever being seen or spoken of, made it a matter of course that the girls should go over for a week when they were wanted. Norah went less often that Elizabeth, because of her public engagements and her Club in London; still, she took her turn all the same.

"Is Miss Elizabeth Atterton at home?" said Andy, his heart hammering so loudly against his ribs that he thought the superior maid must hear it and wonder. But she replied with a calm which was equal to that of any powdered footman—

"Not at home, sir."

It may sound foolish, or as if Andy were the neurotic young man he certainly was not, but the bare fact remains that Andy felt physically sick and the garden rocked about him. The reaction was so great, and the feverish night had unnerved him.

"When will she be back?" he managed to ask at last.

Then the superior housemaid proved that soft hearts do beat even under starched garments, and a demeanour so stiff that any softness at all might, at first sight, seem incredible.

"The ladies have gone out for the day, sir," she replied. "I'm sorry to say they won't be back until evening." She paused, then added, in almost a confidential tone, "Can I give any message?"

"Please tell Miss Atterton I called, and was sorry to find her out," he said dejectedly.

"Yes, sir." The parlour-maid had once had a young man in the weak and low-waged past, and she knew how it felt. "May I offer you any refreshment, sir? I am sure my mistress would wish——"

"No, thank you," said Andy, climbing back into his cart. "Good morning."

"*Good* morning, sir," said the parlour-maid feelingly. "I hope you'll get home before the storm starts."

But Andy did not care, as he jogged along home again, whether the rain fell or not. He had come in the cart so as to present an immaculate appearance to the Beloved and the Beloved's aunt, and he had used nearly quarter of a bottle of

brilliantine to ensure his curls remaining flat under any stress of circumstance, and now she was out. He didn't care what happened after that. Somehow he had never expected her to be out when he wanted to ask her to marry him. He felt vaguely that fate ought to have waited on so important an event.

The pony took his own time, clicking doggedly on the long way back, "Come on—Come on—Come *on*," and about half-way home a heavy thunderstorm broke over the country, lightning zigzagged in streaks across the horizon, and at length followed a deluge of rain. Andy had brought no mackintosh or overcoat, and the big drops whistled down in sheets from a still, low sky upon his shoulders and the pony's back.

It was such a storm as sometimes comes in an English summer after a long spell of dryish weather, and it seemed capable of going on for ever.

Andy eyed the landscape with a dreary gaze, and felt a savage pleasure in being as uncomfortable as possible until he remembered that his best suit was being ruined, and that the pony and cart had absorbed all his available spare cash. If the time ever came when the Beloved *were* at home—but that now seemed vague and improbable—he would have to court her in his second-best suit.

Another grievance against fate.

He was surveying the trotting pony with an uninterested gaze, including even that new and cherished possession amongst the things that did not matter, when his glance suddenly sharpened. What on earth——? He jumped out of the cart and ran round to the pony's left side. Yes, his sight had not deceived him. A faint patch of yellowish drab *was* appearing where before had been only a rather different shade of brown. And there was another similar patch on the animal's hindquarters.

He looked at the pony, and the pony flicked his tail as much as to say, "This is really no affair of mine—I must leave it for you humans to settle among yourselves."

Andy climbed back into the trap again, and drove for another hour through the deluge with an eye upon the increasing paleness of the drab patches. By the time he reached Gaythorpe he was driving an openly and flagrantly piebald pony in a green cart picked out with bright red, and it really did look a little gay for a country vicar.

"Sam!" shouted Andy at the top of his voice, as he drove into the great stable-yard where the little pony was to reign alone.

"Yes, sir!" called Sam, running.

"Look here," said Andy, pointing to the patches that were now cream-colour. "What's that?"

“Struck with lightning!” cried Sam dramatically. “Well! it’s a mercy it wasn’t you, sir. That’s all I can say. But shock will turn hair white in animals as well as people. I remember my poor old aunt had a white patch over her left ear ever after the roof fell in one stormy night.”

Andy looked at his henchman. “Come to me in the house in half an hour,” was all he said.

But Sam knew that this was one of his rare failures.

About half an hour later the Vicar sat in dry clothes, drinking hot tea, and awaiting the culprit. He was irritated, chilled through, and as like the senior curate as he had ever been in his life.

“I gather,” he remarked when Sam appeared, “that you were aware of the—er—tinting of the animal?”

Sam faced him as one honest man another.

“I won’t deny I were aware,” he said. “I won’t deny it. I’d seen the pony *before* the owner knowed the likely customer was a clergyman, and *after*. But he told me on his sacred oath that the stuff he’d put on was permanent. ‘Stand the little beggar under a tap for a year, and it won’t wash off,’ was his very words. And I thought what a man doesn’t know he can’t grieve about, so I kept it to myself. I was sure, being a clergyman with a quiet taste, that you’d rather *not* know he was so circussy underneath. And he was dirt cheap. Piebald *or* plain, he was dirt cheap.”

“I know that,” said Andy, “but what I object to is the dishonest dissimulation—yes, I can call it nothing else, dishonest dissimulation on your part.”

“I did it for the best,” said Sam with humble simplicity. “I wanted you to have a good pony and a cheap pony, and not to be bothered thinking if it was fit for a clergyman’s household or not, and I did it all for the best. But I made a mistake. I ought to have been more straighterer.”

“Is there anything else”—Andy paused for a word—“unusual about the animal?”

Sam scratched his chin and replied with reluctance—

“Well—there’s just one thing—he waltzes when he hears a band. Only there never *is* a band.”

“I should like to know,” said Andy, rising and standing in a dignified attitude with a hand on a book, “what *you* got out of this transaction?”

Then Sam threw himself, as it were, upon Andy’s mercy, and looked his master straight in the eye, with an honesty indescribable.

“I’ll be straight with you,” he said. “The man offered me half a crown, and I took it.”

He omitted to mention the other seventeen and six, because he felt that was

between himself and the landlord of the Blue Tiger, where much of it had been expended, but he did, after a great deal of fumbling in a dingy pocket, produce a half-crown.

"Here it is," he said in a voice charged with manly feeling. "You take it, sir. It justly belongs to you."

"I don't want your half-crown," said Andy hastily.

"And I can easily sell the pony and trap for what you gave," pursued Sam. "Hall, the butcher at Millsby, wants one for his wife. He'd jump at it."

"Well, I'll think the matter over," said Andy. "You can go."

But when he was alone the hot tea began to stimulate him, and he had a very pleasant sensation of repose after all the fresh air, following his sleepless night, and his depression suddenly lifted in that odd way which every one recognises who suffers from it at all. It is as if a cloud passed away from the spirit.

So Andy began to see that the end of everything was not come because he could not see Elizabeth for twenty-four hours. Then he remembered how the little pony had trotted on through the sunshine and through the rain like the game little creature it was, and he began to feel the first stirring of that affection which a decent man has for the horse or the dog that serves him faithfully. No, he would keep the pony, though it was such a secular-looking little animal, and he would go out now to see if the hot mash had been administered.

He stuffed a few lumps of sugar from the basin into his pocket, and went out into the stables, where he found Sam. He was afraid Sam would have to go after all.

"Enjoying his feed, sir. Not a penny the worse," said the culprit with a sort of chastened pleasantness.

Then he glanced at the cream-coloured spots and his mouth began to twitch, and he caught Andy's eye, and Andy's mouth was twitching too, and before they knew where they were, the big echoing stable was ringing with uproarious laughter.

"Beg pardon, sir, but it sort o' came over me how funny it was," gasped Sam, wiping his eyes. "When I see you drive in—all piebald—when you'd gone out plain brown—you might have knocked me down with a feather."

Andy wiped his eyes, too, and pulled himself together.

"You ought not to have lied about it, Sam. Why did you say the pony was struck by lightning?"

Sam rubbed the back of his head and eyed Andy apologetically.

"It was a silly thing to say. But I had to say something. And it jumped out of itself."

"It is a sad pity that lies should jump out so easily," said Andy, trying to

erase the memory of that unclerical laughter.

"It is, sir," agreed Sam. "I've often thought so myself."

After that Andy returned to the house and slept, and woke up stiff for evensong, and came back from the church to dress for dinner at the Stamfords', where he had promised to go that evening.

It already seemed so long a time since he had talked to Elizabeth in the sunshine that he could scarcely believe it was only yesterday.

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER the dull day and the storm a bright sun broke through the clouds and slanted in long mellow rays across the wet country. Every flower and herb gave out scent, and there was a sense of indescribable sweet freshness in the air as Andy stood at the gate leading into the Stamfords' garden, and looked at the village through a gap in the trees.

The little whitewashed houses and red-brick ones, grown lovely with time, clustered together round the grey church among the trees, in a bower of small flowery gardens and climbing roses and honeysuckle. Andy saw then, why some poet once upon a time had looked at it so, and called it Gaythorpe: though the present generation jeered at the name being given to a place that was over three miles from a station and had no modern improvements.

"Gay!" they would say. "Call *this* gay? Now, Blackpool's gay, if you like."

But Andy walked up to the Stamfords' door with a very tender feeling in his heart for the little place that smiled in the sunshine after rain, with something of the exquisite pathetic radiance of a child laughing through tears.

From that moment he loved Gaythorpe—the place itself—apart from the people, or his work amongst them.

When he entered the drawing-room Mrs. Stamford was there alone, as she had been on the first occasion that he took a meal in the house, and her appearance in evening dress was just of the same startlingly unfinished kind as her day attire. By some accident somebody seemed to have thrown a necklace round her neck and it had remained—but it was quite impossible to feel that Mrs. Stamford had had anything to do with its getting there. And her hair was somehow a distinct protest against the low neck, though it would have been impossible to picture her at that hour of the day in anything but a low neck.

She glanced out of the window after greeting Andy, and remarked—

"This rain will do old Sam Petch's garden good. He cried yesterday when my husband went to see him because his marigolds were dried up. I fear he is failing at last."

Andy looked at her, and suddenly he saw too, how the Stamfords and Gaythorpe were one—welded together by generations of common interests. It was as natural for Mr. Stamford to drive down to see old Sam Petch as it was for him to sit in his own garden.

Andy recalled the "visiting of the poor," which he had heard and seen, and knew that he was witnessing the last of a vanishing system which may or may

not have been good but was quite certainly beautiful.

"Mr. Stamford takes a great interest in old Sam Petch," was all Andy found to say out of these many thoughts.

"Interest!" said Mrs. Stamford. "Why, old Sam worked for my husband's grandfather, and he used to make whistles out of cabbage-stalks for Dick when he was a boy." She paused. "By the way, I'm so glad you and Dick are friends." She paused again. "If there is anything at all you are wanting for the church or village——"

Andy smiled at her in a way most women would have found pleasant.

"There's nothing I want. And I'm only too delighted to come up for a game of billiards whenever your son asks me."

Another of those unspoken conversations—full of difficult pride and mother-love on the one side, and touched recognition of it on the other—but perfectly clear to both.

A very rare colour crept up into Mrs. Stamford's weather-beaten cheeks.

"He's all we have," she said.

"I know," Andy answered.

Then the other two came in, and they all went through the atmosphere of reposeful centuries to dinner, when the conversation dragged sufficiently for Andy to search his mind for a fresh topic, and he introduced his aunt and cousins with a feeling that this was just what they would like. And he was quite sure Mrs. Stamford would like them, for they were social lights fitted to adorn any circle, and such very stylish dressers.

He did not say this in so many words, but his boyish gratitude to his aunt and admiration for the Webster girls shone sufficiently clearly through the remarks he did make to cause Mrs. Stamford's cordial—

"I shall be delighted if you will bring your aunt and cousins to lunch with us."

Andy little knew how seldom such an invitation was issued by his exclusive hostess, and he was conscious of promising equal enjoyment to both entertainer and entertained when he replied gratefully—

"Thank you very much. I am sure they would like to come."

Soon afterwards the two young men adjourned to the billiard-room, while Mr. Stamford went to his sofa, exhausted by one of his painful and tedious days which became more frequent as time went on, and Mrs. Stamford played with determination certain hard pieces on the piano to distract the invalid, not because they gave her the slightest pleasure, but because it was the duty of a wife to play music to her sick husband if she knew how.

Through a series of open doors the sound of correct and metallic "runs"

penetrated even to the billiard-room, and caused Dick Stamford to remark irreverently—

"There's the mater giving the poor old dad piano exercise again. She does believe in keeping things going."

He was walking to a little table containing whisky and soda and cigars as he said this, and he raised the whisky decanter, tilted it over the glass, then paused an irresolute second and put it down with the remark—

"She's a good sort, is the mater, all the same."

Andy turned away his head and answered casually—

"Anybody can tell that."

But his whole being was filled with a sudden rush of pity and comprehension and an intense desire to help. He felt he could go on for ever walking interminable miles round that billiard-table if it could do any good. He wanted, almost more than he had ever wanted anything in his life, to do something which should strengthen this weak man for the fight against such a tremendous enemy. Every instinct of backing the weak against the strong which had grown with him from boyhood, became focused and alert. But he could only say, after all—

"I'm sorry I can't play billiards to-night. I've hurt my arm."

"What a bore! How?" said Dick Stamford.

"Oh, got it strained a bit," said Andy. "Soon be all right."

"Well, we'll have a smoke instead," said Stamford, drawing a chair to the empty fireplace and putting his feet on the fender-stool. He was not in the least drunk, but he had taken enough whisky during the day to make him confidential and talkative, and he gave Andy to understand that when he was with the regiment he had enjoyed a gay and lurid past.

"You're not like some parsons," he said. "A chap can make a friend of you. You know there *are* such things as chorus girls—eh? What?"

"The only ones I ever met were dull," said Andy.

"Dull!" The bare originality of the suggestion struck Stamford dumb. How *could* a chorus girl be dull?

"Too jolly pleased with themselves to have any sort of humour," maintained Andy.

"What's a woman want with a sense of humour?" said Dick Stamford—and it must be owned that there he spoke for his sex.

"Well—the Atterton girls—they've got any amount," suggested Andy.

Stamford leaned forward in his chair.

"Yes, and between you and me that's the one thing I don't like about 'em. Norah, now; you never quite know if she isn't getting at you."

"But you can't say that of Miss Elizabeth," said Andy.

“No. No, you can’t say that of Elizabeth.” He paused, and added very confidentially, “I shouldn’t be doing the good little boy as I have been doing the last eight months if you could say that of her.”

Andy stared at him but said nothing, because he could not—all sorts of unheeded incidents were crowding into his mind so quickly that he felt as if it would burst.

“Fact is—I’m on probation. If I behave, I may pay my addresses to Miss Elizabeth Atterton next October. Old Atterton doesn’t want it, but Mrs. does, because Elizabeth would live next door, so to speak, instead of perhaps going off to India or goodness knows where. And I believe the mater would go straight up to heaven in a sort of bust of thankfulness if it ever came off. But I’ve promised on my honour to say nothing to her until next October, so of course I can’t. Rum situation, isn’t it?” And he drew a long whiff of his cigar and leaned back with the consciousness of being interesting.

Andy stared at the stove and still said nothing.

“Queer, ain’t it?” said Stamford, a little surprised at this lack of sympathy.

Then Andy got up.

“Look here,” he said. “I’m in love with Miss Elizabeth Atterton. I want to marry her.”

Stamford gazed at him with unflattering astonishment.

“You!” he said. “My dear chap—they’d never look at you. Don’t you know they’re rolling in money and consider those girls Venuses? Why, they wouldn’t think *me* good enough, even if I were as steady as you are, if I didn’t own a place next door.”

“I know I’m a bad match. I know I’m not to ask her,” said Andy.

“Well,” said Stamford with slight alcoholic emotion, “we’ve been pals, you and I. I never thought you’d go and steal a march on me when my hands were tied and I couldn’t do anything.”

“I’ve—I’ve sort of half proposed,” said Andy, turning very red. “I must go on. She’ll think it so dishonourable if I don’t, whether she likes me or not.”

“Oh, very well,” said Stamford, rising and walking across the room to the whisky and soda. “You are perfectly within your right, of course.”

He jolted out a stiff glass and drank it off.

Andy’s thoughts ran round and round like a rat in a trap as he sat watching. Then something in the lad which underlay all his clerical affectations and easy immaturity rose up and made itself felt. It was that germ—that something—which has informed the saints of all creeds and all ages, and with which a very human, faulty man may be a saint, and without which no man can be.

“If you’ll—if you’ll keep clear of that—I’ll wait,” he said. “We’ll take an

equal chance."

"What business is it of yours whether I drink or not?" demanded Stamford violently—only he used other terms which it is unnecessary to repeat. "And you'd have no earthly chance with her, anyway."

But certain unnoticed incidents were also crowding into his mind now, and he was sufficiently in love with Elizabeth to feel outraged at the thought of any other man proposing to her. He was more in love with her at that moment, as a matter of fact, than he ever had been before.

"Whether I have any chance or not, I mean to ask her," said Andy steadily. "But I'll play fair. I'll wait until you are free!"

"I suppose you think you are mighty magnanimous," replied Stamford unpleasantly. "Do you propose that we should walk up to the lady arm-in-arm, and say, 'Which of us will you have?' "

That was a difficulty which certainly had not presented itself to Andy, but he grappled with it in a desperate—

"Let's write then! So that she gets both letters by the same post."

Stamford kicked the fender-stool in silence for a moment or two, then he said suddenly—

"You're a good chap, Deane. My father knew what he was doing when he liked the look of you, and asked you to accept Gaythorpe."

"It was odd I should happen to be preaching that morning," said Andy dully.

"Preaching! Why, you don't suppose your *sermon* had anything to do with it, do you? If it had, you and I would never have hit it off as we have done."

"Why did he offer me the living, then?" said Andy.

"Oh, he saw you were a decent chap, and young and all that, of course."

"So that was it, was it?" said Andy. "Well, I think I'll be going. My arm bothers me a bit."

"Queer thing. If it hadn't been for your bad arm we should never have had this talk. We should have been playing billiards."

Queer thing! It was indeed, thought poor Andy as he went home. First he owed his meeting with Elizabeth at Marshaven to his fight with the carpenter, and now this conversation. He realised more acutely than ever that there are in the world no private black eyes or damaged arms. They all concern the Universe.

CHAPTER XIV

ANY one who has ever gone home after a great shock, hurrying along, and keeping the tearing thoughts of it at bay until a place is reached where they can be fought alone, will know how Andy felt as he went back to the Vicarage that evening. And those who have not felt it themselves could never understand how he struck the match left for him by Mrs. Jebb in the dark hall, and lighted the candle and stumbled up to bed, still fighting off the realisation of what had happened.

But when he was in his own bedroom, and had locked the door, he sat down on his bed and let it come. It had to come.

So all this time there had been some sort of understanding between Elizabeth and Dick Stamford—or, if not exactly that, some arrangement of which she must have been aware. Mrs. Atterton was not the woman to keep such a thing to herself, even if her husband thought it politic to do so.

He—Andy—was only another of the suitors, who doubtless crowded round that pleasant, affluent household with the two charming daughters. It was his own idiotic conceit which had made him hope.

Then he remembered the look he had seen on Elizabeth's face by the flaring blue and yellow at Marshaven, and he wondered if she did care, after all.

But he recalled that visit when she had chatted in a distant window-seat with Stamford, not noticing him, while he took in to tea a garrulous Miss Banks, and the despair which is always waiting for the true lover because he thinks himself unworthy, gripped poor Andy's vitals.

Of course she would never look at him.

Still—she had looked: she had done more, she had let him touch her arm as they stood close together, laughing, in Mrs. Petch's kitchen.

He groaned—the contrast between that exquisite moment and this was too great to bear.

All the pleasant certainty which had undoubtedly lurked at the bottom of Andy's mind, fostered by the opinion he had unconsciously gained during his London curacy that men *were* rather rare birds, and all women pleased to catch them, was swept away from him.

She wouldn't have him. She would never have him. Elizabeth!

If he could only go and ask her, and so make sure——

But he couldn't.

The gates of Andy's soul clashed to on such a temptation with a vibration

that roused him from his despair: but the sight of the spacious wall on which his shadow flickered brought back the memory of that other blow, which in the first agony of love's suspense he had forgotten.

He owed all this, then, to the fact that Mr. Stamford needed a companion for his son—a young fellow who should not be too old or too clever to disdain such companionship.

Oh, Andy was no fool, once his eyes were opened, and he saw that plainly enough now. But it is a painful thing to be wounded in one's vanity—more keenly smarting than to be wounded in one's love, though without the dull ache that love's hurts leave behind.

He went to the window and pulled up the blind. There was no moon, but it was a light night with stars, and he could see clearly the gravestones in the churchyard, and the dim whiteness of the lilies in the garden. He felt he could not stay within those four walls any longer.

The house was intensely quiet in the midst of the starlit silence, and he dreaded above all things to have Mrs. Jebb peering at him over the banisters in curling pins and dressing-gown as he went out of the door.

He looked down at the ivy beneath the window—the growth of fifty years—and crept down upon that green ladder provided by his predecessor into the free coolness of the summer night.

The wet grass soaked his thin boots as he crept cautiously across the lawn, and out by the churchyard path. Once out of sight of the house, he paused, and stood leaning against the gate with his hands in his pockets. The fact of doing something had diverted his thoughts for a while, and now a sort of dull depression settled down upon him—that horrible dull time after a storm of emotion, when nothing seems worth while.

But in that storm the mantle of the senior curate—good man that he was, with a real desire to serve his Master his own way—had been blown away from Andy's shoulders for ever. It never fitted, or perhaps it would have clung more closely.

And it was just a lad doubtful of himself, and of everything else, who stumbled miserably down the churchyard path in the uncertain light. He had forgotten all about Brother Gulielmus, and only because he caught his foot on the edge of the path that curved outwards by the tombstone did he pause there for a moment.

But once stayed, he glanced from habit at the familiar resting-place of that Gulielmus who had once been plain Will Ford.

Over fifty years. And the Vicar before Andy had been fifty years as well.

That half-century stretched out, interminable, before the young man's vision.

What was the good of a life like that? Why had he ever become a parson? It was no career for an active man in the flush of youth and energy.

But it was too late now to change.

He suddenly realised that his arm hurt intensely after his climb on the ivy, and that he was very tired, and he sat down on the edge of the tombstone.

It was the dark hour before dawn now, and the stars were setting. Andy and plain Will Ford—not Gulielmus—seemed to be very alone and very near together in the darkness.

It was as if the young had crept to the old, crying—

"Did you ever feel like this? How did *you* fight through it?"

Then the first cock crowed to herald in the morning, and it seemed almost like an echo of the sane and jolly laughter of Will Ford, now asleep. A dog barked somewhere—birds began to chirp—and—it is a strange thing, but true—Andy heard a voice say to him, so distinctly that it might have been Will Ford speaking: "Help the living—comfort the dying."

Andy started—the words did so seem to come from nowhere—then he remembered that they came from somewhere very near indeed.

"His work was to help the living, to comfort the dying"—so ran, in Latin, the inscription on the tombstone, where Andy sat. And then he realised, of course, what most of us have done at one time or another, that an inward voice says things to us which seem to come from nowhere, and are arrestingly true, though they are but the echo of something we have heard before.

And by the way in which life turns sometimes on one of those echoes we get a glimpse—a vague glimpse, all shadowy—of how echoes from this existence may influence our souls in the next: we hold our breath in the face of what seems, then, to open out before us.

Andy did, anyway.

He looked down at the tomb of a man forgotten, whom nobody had thought about for a couple of hundred years, and he knew that not only are there no private black eyes in the immediate present, but that they influence eternity.

He felt very small, did Andy, as he trudged back to the house in the growing morning; but when the immense truths come quite near to us we all feel little.

Before he reached the door, an odour of burning reached him, floating at first almost impalpable in the sweet air, though definite enough when it had once been perceived.

He stood quite still for a second, then he began to run quickly towards the lane, and in the direction of Mrs. Simpson's cottage.

He tore along, forgetful of his aching arm, and with a horrible picture of Sally and Jimmy being burned to death before his mind's eye. As he ran, he

planned rapidly what he should do in case the front door were locked and the sleeping Mrs. Simpson still unconscious of danger, and with his heart thumping against his side, he raced round the corner to see Mrs. Simpson seated calmly on a garden seat in a print dress and silk mantle, with the two children in woollen rugs and antimacassars beside her.

Andy was ill, so the run and the odd revulsion of feeling left him rather faint and breathless. He sat down on the end of the garden seat with the rest, unable to speak.

And, really, it was an odd sight if any one had been there to see. Andy in crushed and crumpled evening dress, with his hair in a curly bush on his forehead, staring wildly at Mrs. Simpson, while Sally's anxious little face between them was turned first to one and then the other; while the boy tried to kick the leg of the seat with his bare feet and shouted—

"Give me my boots! I want my boots!"

"It's out," said Mrs. Simpson placidly, in response to Andy's appearance, which seemed to demand something. "The partition between the two rooms caught fire from the back of the stove. They never ought to have put one in there. We might all have been burnt to death in our beds."

Andy wiped his damp forehead.

"You are sure it is quite extinguished?"

"Oh yes. The clothes were in soak, so I had water all handy. It seems as if it was meant. They'll have to either take the partition away or build it up, new. So I shall get it taken away. Then I can have my sideboard back."

Andy stared in a muddled sort of way, first at Mrs. Simpson and then at the house.

"Yes," he said. "Oh yes."

Mrs. Simpson's face quickened to anxiety at last.

"Of course—if you don't feel you can part with it——" she began.

"But of course I can. It's yours," said Andy eagerly. "I want you to have it."

Mrs. Simpson heaved a sigh of relief.

"That's all right," she said. "Well, I think we may be going in now." She glanced down at her toilet. "I just snatched up my widow's mantle—I knew I should never get another." Then something, strange in Andy's attire did seem to strike her. "I expect you were on your way home from a party," she said. She paused, considered the hour, and added: "A ball, I s'pose?"

"N—no," said Andy. "Only a dinner party. But I took a walk in the churchyard afterwards."

It sounded lame, and Andy was conscious, as the words died on his lips, that it had so sounded. "I'm a tremendous person for fresh air," he added.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Simpson.

And that was all she did say—then.

“Well, I must be going,” said Andy, using the formula which no parson ever escapes.

Mrs. Simpson held out her hand, and glanced at her apparel.

“You’ll excuse me rising,” she said, “but I—er—can’t.”

“Of course,” said Andy hastily, seeking refuge behind a clerical distance of manner. “Good-day.”

But the dawn was rising so glorious over the odd little group that he was moved to add impulsively—

“I am thankful you’re all right, Mrs. Simpson.”

And something in the kind, boyish face under the upstanding mop of hair may have stirred Mrs. Simpson, for she said, in the queer tone she always used coming down the aisle in church—

“I prayed that some way might be found for me to have the sideboard. And now one’s been found. You never know how Providence is going to help you.”

Andy opened his mouth to explain that Providence does not set fire to some one else’s property to provide a tenant with space for a sideboard, when he saw Sally’s eager face looking up at him.

The senior curate would have been able to explain without hurting anything, no doubt, but Andy was afraid to try.

“You never do know,” was all he said.

Then he went home through the freshness of the early morning, and managed to open the door with his latch-key, unheard by Mrs. Jebb. It was a fortunate thing that he had forgotten to bolt it after him the night before, because his arm was now so painful that he would have found it impossible to climb up the ivy to his window.

He slept late, in spite of the pain, for he was worn out, and after a poor attempt at a midday meal he was sitting at tea in the dining-room when Sam Petch chanced to go past the window.

The no-butter rule still held good, but Andy was no anchorite, and generally mitigated the dryness of his bread with jam or marmalade. This evening, however, his stomach turned against plum jam, and he sat listlessly gnawing a piece of dry bread when Sam Petch glanced in at the window.

Sam stood quite still for a moment, then put down his spade and rake, and crept on the short grass to the side of the window, where, by craning his neck, he could see without being seen.

He stood there watching for a few minutes, then suddenly turned away, and began to run fast across the grass in the direction of his cottage.

Five minutes later, Andy was rising from the tea-table, when Sam Petch burst panting into the room with a plate of butter in his hand.

“Here,” he said; “take it. Butter your bread on both sides with it. And I’m durned if I touch another drop o’ beer until further notice.”

Andy looked at Sam, and he understood.

“Thank you, Sam,” he said. But a great deal more than that passed unspoken between them.

“Have a bit now,” said Sam, nervously anxious to avoid comment, though he usually welcomed it. “Here! Butter a bit and try!”

So Andy buttered and ate a piece of bread, while Sam stood over him, watching every mouthful.

“Delicious butter. Where do you get it?” said Andy.

“Mrs. Will Werrit’s. She’s a rare hand for butter-making,” answered Sam. “Well, I’ll get home to my tea. Good afternoon, sir.”

“Good afternoon, Sam,” said Andy.

But as the two men parted on those words their souls drew quite near and said: “We are brothers.”

Of course men’s lips are always saying that—but when two souls say it there is joy in heaven, because the day for which all creation strives is just so much the nearer.

CHAPTER XV

ANDY was young and strong, so a good night's rest and a little attention from the Millsby doctor soon put his arm sufficiently right to permit of his going about as usual. A few days later, therefore, he was quite able to escort his aunt and cousins to luncheon at the Stamfords', whence they were to motor over to a garden-party at the Attertons' in the afternoon.

But no one can be hurt in their vanity by a wound from which it will never recover sufficiently to grow strong again, without showing some signs of stress. And when to this is added a never-ceasing ache of suspense about the attitude of the Beloved, there is no doubt that the first chubby, careless look of youth is bound to vanish. The aunt and cousins found to their surprise that Andy was, after all, really grown up.

But enough boyishness remained to make him feel highly delighted, in spite of everything, at the prospect of showing the girls to his new friends, and his new friends to them. He was unfeignedly proud, too, of Mrs. Dixon and her smart appearance; even, vaguely, of the blue powder, which had seemed to him from earliest youth a sort of symbol of discreet dashingness.

"My aunt and cousins—Mrs. Stamford," he said, with such a pleasant triumph in presenting people sure to accord to each other, that only a heart of stone could have failed to respond.

Mrs. Stamford, however, possessed that heart, socially; but she was so anxious to be agreeable to Andy's relatives that she said with cordiality—

"I am so glad you were able to come."

All the same, the stockings of the young ladies had a horrible fascination for her: she had never before realised that stockings could, as it were, so fill the horizon.

But to Dick Stamford, who entered as luncheon was announced, they were a delightful and yet familiar surprise. He had known stockings to fill the horizon before, and the general impression which the Webster girls gave, and Phyllis in particular, of having more eyes and hair and neck than other people, created an atmosphere in which he was absolutely at home.

And Mrs. Stamford was so pleased to see Dick roused from the rather sullen lethargy which was becoming habitual with him, that she began to see the Webster girls in a pleasant light too, in spite of the fact that they outraged all her inherent prejudices every minute. And yet she was a woman of strong character. But it is upon the strongest that mother-love works such ironic miracles.

“Really,” said Mrs. Dixon, seating herself at table in the beautiful old dining-room, with a feeling that here—in places like this—was where she and the girls belonged, “really, I must describe the tapestry in your hall to Lady Jones. Lady Jones is a friend of mine whose husband has just bought an estate—almost *fabulously* wealthy, or seems so to a poor woman who can only just afford to live.” And she gave her bangles and her expensive gown a sort of quivering movement to indicate, with subtlety, that the circles were indeed wealthy where she could be considered poor.

“The tapestry? Oh, my husband could tell you all about that, but, unfortunately, he is not well to-day, and obliged to remain in his room.”

“I said to Lady Jones when she consulted me about her house, ‘Old masters in the hall, of course. But I see now I made a mistake. I shall now advise tapestry *exactly* like yours.’ ”

“I’m afraid,” said Mrs. Stamford with a suspicion of dryness, “that Lady Jones will have rather a job to find it.”

Mrs. Dixon glanced at Mrs. Stamford’s coat and skirt, which bore obvious signs of wear, and at the exquisitely fine linen tablecloth, which was darned in three places.

“Look here,” she said. “You don’t seem to care very much for the tapestry, and I know if I just advise Lady Jones, she will be ready to give anything —*anything*. Now—can I? I should be *so* pleased. I know what agricultural depression is.”

She leaned back, feeling nothing could ever be more delicately done, but Mrs. Stamford paused, fork in mid-air, and stared at her guest with an expression that roused her son’s sense of the ridiculous.

“Ha-ha!” he laughed. “That’s good! Ask the mater to sell her nose while you are doing, Mrs. Dixon.”

“Oh, it was only a suggestion,” said Mrs. Dixon, sailing over the difficulty, and thinking it highly probable that Mrs. Stamford would come to her afterwards about the offer, in order to ask her to use her influence with Lady Jones. The power of the local millionaire does naturally appear illimitable in these days of the higher thought, when everybody is growing able to understand it. It seems odd to think that only a hundred years or so ago people believed there were things more valuable than money.

Andy was engrossed in youthful reminiscences with Irene, so he did not hear the whole conversation between his aunt and his hostess, and now broke in with a genial—

“Very jolly part where my aunt lives. Always something going on!”

“Some people say we give ourselves airs at Barkham—but we don’t, really.

Only it’s impossible to know everybody who wants to know you, isn’t it?” said Irene.

“Yes,” continued Phyllis, who was rather excited at the way in which she was getting on with a smart man about town such as Dick appeared to be. “I’ve heard it said *I* was ‘sidey.’ Now you could hardly believe that, could you, Mr. Stamford?”

Mr. Stamford bent towards her, and, under cover of some general conversation about the garden-party to which they were all going, he murmured in her ear—

“Couldn’t believe anything about you that wasn’t most awfully nice, you know.”

The last young lady to whom Dick said that, had replied loudly with a push, “Get along with you!” Phyllis translated this into a whispered “Oh! I’ve heard that old tale before!” which did just as well, and held that same pleasant, beckoning intention which Dick called vaguely, in his own mind, “Having no nonsense about her.”

Then the fruit furnished a topic to Mrs. Dixon, who described the strawberries she had eaten in February at the table of Sir Henry and Lady Jones, and Andy said he hated fruit out of season, which his aunt thought stupid when it was so fashionable—she resolved to speak to him about it afterwards; and finally the whole party went out into the gardens to await the arrival of the motor which was to take them to the Attertons’ garden-party.

Speculation was rife in Mrs. Dixon’s mind during that interval. She began to feel, somehow, that Mrs. Stamford could have a silk-lined dress trimmed with lace, too, if she wanted it—and yet she wore that blouse! Could it be considered more aristocratic in county society to go to a party in loose rags than in a tight and expensive toilet? If so, she and the girls would *get* rags. They had climbed into the Jones’ set from an obscure company of poorish merchants and professional people by showing themselves equal to any society, and they would continue to follow out the same successful principles without regard to personal feeling.

But as Mrs. Dixon glanced at her hostess, and pictured her own carefully repressed figure in that coat and skirt, she did feel that what you have to throw away in climbing is almost as painful as what you have to take on.

The relief therefore was rather great when Mrs. Stamford remarked casually—

“I am not going to the Attertons’ this afternoon; my husband is so seedy I do not care to leave him.”

As the big motor ran silently up the drive of Millsby Hall the four young

people inside caught sight of light dresses and gay flowery hats against the green lawns and the clear blue of the summer sky. Life seemed to them all—even to Dick, fighting the hidden enemy—even to Andy, hasting to a Tantalus feast—to be a sunny, flowery time of youth and pleasure. Then a gust of wind brought the sound of a band in the distance playing an inspiriting march.

"Go on—you're sure to win—Life was made for such as you!"

That was what the sunshine and the music and the swift, exhilarating movement of the car cried out to Andy, almost in words. And he looked so noticeably young and full of eager hope in spite of, or perhaps because of, the signs of strain round his mouth and eyes, that Mrs. Atterton was moved to remark—

"It *is* a glorious day, isn't it?"

She did not mean only that, of course; what her mind said to Andy's was, "I see you are finding life glorious. How very nice!" But no pleasant, normal person spoils such things by putting them into words. And Andy understood, though he did not know he did, any more than she knew that her mind had spoken to his mind through the gay bustle and the sunshine of that greeting. He would learn to see later, would Andy, the fun and beauty to be found in unspoken conversations—so far he only felt it.

"I am obliged to receive my guests seated," apologised Mrs. Atterton, shaking hands with Mrs. Dixon and the girls. "My back—" she smiled the smile she always wore when referring to that part of her person, cheerful and yet obviously brave.

"How sad! I know a lady who never put her foot to the ground for three years from the same cause," said Mrs. Dixon.

"Ah, I have my family to think of," sighed Mrs. Atterton, whose back was not to be outdone by any stranger's. "No one knows the effort——"

"How splendid of you," said Phyllis. "I do admire pluck."

"To give a large party in your state of health—awfully unselfish," murmured Irene.

Then they all passed on, and Mrs. Atterton remarked to her daughter Norah that Mr. Deane's relations seemed very good-hearted, kind people. She was glad, because she liked Mr. Deane.

"You wouldn't like those eyes and those stockings in the family though, would you?" said Norah, looking after the young ladies.

"In our family?" said Mrs. Atterton. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I suppose if Elizabeth were to marry Mr. Deane they would be in our family, in a way, wouldn't they?"

"Elizabeth—Mr. Deane—how ridic——" began Mrs. Atterton, when a new

batch of visitors came up. But when they also had gone on into the gardens she said uneasily—

"Norah, where is Elizabeth?"

Norah laughed.

"Oh, she's all right just now—she is over there shepherding the two old Miss Birketts—and they are such clingers that she won't get away from them for some time. You can always tell a clinger at a party—they're so afraid of losing you for fear they don't get any one else."

Mrs. Atterton's jolly face grew even pleasanter than usual, and she looked extraordinarily like her daughter Elizabeth, in spite of her huge bulk, as she replied—

"How *awful* not to be sure you are wanted!"

Norah glanced in the direction of her sister, who sat between two elderly ladies on a long seat.

"It's awful to care about being wanted as much as Elizabeth does." She paused, her keen, lovely little face and slim, erect figure outlined clearly against the green lawn. "It's dangerous," she added. "She'd far rather be with a dull person who wanted her badly than the most brilliant one who was indifferent. It's a fault in her character. I've always felt it, even when we were at school."

She stood frowning, speaking more to herself than to her mother; her strong affection for her sister, of which neither ever spoke, making her uneasy and alert.

"Elizabeth has not a weak character," said Mrs. Atterton.

"No—she's strong—with a weak spot—that's worse," answered Norah, still more to herself than to her mother.

"You can't move her when she has once made up her mind," pursued Mrs. Atterton vaguely.

"That's the worst of all," said Norah. "However"—she shrugged her shoulders—"life is apt to get muddled whether you're clever or not. Oh, here's father with the Mayor and Mayoress of Marshaven and party. He's happy, anyway. The Marshaven Corporation is his toy. *How* is it all men have to have a toy? Women don't."

"That's why so many of them can't get there," said Mrs. Atterton, who knew perfectly well what she meant. But Norah, not unnaturally, thought her mother was talking nonsense again, sweet old dear, and asked if she should fetch her a cup of tea.

Andy meantime had deposited his aunt with Miss Banks, daughter of the Vicar of Millsby, while Dick Stamford after seeing that Elizabeth was not available had taken the Dixon girls to see the greenhouses.

"Dear boy—like a son to me—and my girls are devoted to him, though he is

no blood relations," purred Mrs. Dixon to Miss Banks as they watched the young Vicar of Gaythorpe stroll across the grass towards the tennis courts. "So delighted to find him in such a pleasant neighbourhood. We have just been lunching with the Stamfords. I was glad to have the opportunity of getting a few hints for the furnishing of a place that a friend of mine, Lady Jones, has taken. I made," she creaked towards Miss Banks with confidential importance, "I don't mind telling you that I made a tentative offer for the tapestries. Nothing settled, of course. But I know how most of these old county families are situated nowadays."

"The tapestries at Gaythorpe?" gasped Miss Banks, in much the same tone as if Mrs. Dixon had proposed purchasing Westminster Abbey. "You made an offer for the Gaythorpe tapestries?"

"Not for myself," said Mrs. Dixon, with proud humility, waving a tight white glove. "We are *quite* poor people. But to Lady Jones money is no object. And we are like sisters."

"How nice!" murmured Miss Banks vaguely, quite out of her bearings. "Oh, here are the Miss Birketts coming across to speak to me."

"And my nephew is joining Miss Elizabeth," said Mrs. Dixon, putting up her eyeglasses. "Sweet girl! We met her at Marshaven. She was staying somewhere with an aunt."

"Oh yes," said Miss Banks, glancing at Mrs. Dixon's tight fringe, and reflecting on the passing vision of Phyllis and Irene. They were all new to the county, and they wore and did the very things which had been repressed in her from the moment she left school lest she should be cast out from the charmed circle, and yet they were intimately in it.

Miss Banks accepted an ice and gave the puzzle up, just at the moment when Andy was shaking hands with Elizabeth in the green distance beneath the mulberry trees.

"I was sorry to miss you that day you called upon my aunt," she said.

Andy's heart began to thump. What had he not meant to say that morning? And yet here he stood—a stranger.

"It turned out very wet," he answered, glancing at his boots.

"But you were driving—that was better than being on a bicycle."

Then Andy knew she had taken the trouble to inquire how he came, and the blood rushed up into his forehead. It was awfully hard, but he had said he would play fair, and he would keep his promise.

"Were you out in the storm?" he said.

"No, we came back after it was over," responded Elizabeth, whose manner began to change almost imperceptibly. "Well, I must go and help Norah with the

other guests, I think," she added in her soft, slow voice, and she began to move away.

But she had not been able quite to control that voice, which would catch on a deep note sometimes, just when she most wished to keep it even; and at the sound for which Andy's heart unconsciously waited something rose up in him which belonged to the great powers of existence—strong to sweep a man off his feet, and down a current against which he strives with all his might. He had meant to keep his promise—he had done his best—but this was stronger than his will.

"Elizabeth——"

But when we have wanted to do our best, it is a fact that something outside of us often does intervene to help us when we fail—though nobody could possibly recognise anything supernatural in the intervention. Anyway, nothing could be less like a divine messenger than Lady Jones in blue and gold, who came round the end of the mulberry avenue with Mr. Atterton and the Mayor and Mayoress of Marshaven.

"My daughter Elizabeth—Lady Jones," said Mr. Atterton, who was in high feather.

"Lady Jones came to open a bazaar for a former curate of the church she attends at home," explained the Mayoress. "We took the liberty of asking for an invitation."

"Very 'appy to be of any service to the town," said Lady Jones with ineffable aplomb and condescension.

"Lady Jones bought most of the big things, including the screen your aunt sent, Miss Elizabeth," said the Mayor effusively. He was a decent man, but you have to be effusive to millions.

"I hope you like the embroidery—my aunt spent months over it," said Elizabeth.

"Which was it? Oh, the cockatoos? Very nice, I'm sure. But I just pass the things on, on mass, to another bazaar. I don't buy what I want for the Towers at bazaars."

"Of course not," murmured the Mayoress. "Maple's, more likely, or Christy's ——"

"Lovely things at Christy's," agreed Mr. Atterton, who also saw, not a fat, rather vulgar woman, but a heap of money which had shed some of its particles to forward an object which he had at heart, and could shed more at will.

Then Andy came forward—it had taken him the few moments to recover his self-control—and the great lady shook hands with him.

"Glad to hear you've got a living," she said. "But I always told your aunt it

was a pity you would be a parson. Never a penny to bless themselves with—and begging all round."

"I'm satisfied," said Andy, with a grin.

Lady Jones smiled affably back.

"How can you be satisfied if you are poor?" she said. "Nobody could."

"Poverty isn't always a question of money," said Elizabeth.

"Ha-ha!" laughed Lady Jones. "I see your daughter's young yet, Mr. Atterton. She hasn't learned that everything's a question of money. You and me knows that."

"We does," agreed Mr. Atterton, involuntarily following the lady's lead; then he recollected himself, gave a quick glance round, and added, in some haste, "Of course, money is a power."

"My aunt is there, under those trees," said Andy, covering the retreat.

"Mrs. Dixon!" exclaimed Lady Jones, for some vague reason rather annoyed to find that lady even with her here too. "How did *she* get invited? Oh, came with you, Mr. Deane, of course." And suddenly the county society round Gaythorpe seemed less select in her eyes, as she walked up to the bench in the shade where her friend and Miss Banks were sitting.

"Well—'ow are *you*, my dear?" she called across a space.

Mrs. Dixon jumped up, creaking in every whalebone, and, after a moment's breathless pause, rustled forward with her most fashionable air of greeting—

"Charmed to meet you here, Lady Jones. How very fortunate—but how unforeseen!"

"Lady Jones has been kind enough to help us most generously with the bazaar for the new chancel," explained Mr. Atterton.

"Came to us for the opening ceremony, and remained the night," added the Mayor.

Mrs. Dixon's prominent grey eyes glanced swiftly round the group, and returned to the face of her friend. It was all right then. But she might have known. You had only got to be rich enough. She went nearer, and slipped her hand through the blue and gold arm.

"How lovely to see you again. I was talking of you at luncheon."

"Shall we go and have tea?" said Mr. Atterton.

So the whole group went into the house, Elizabeth and Andy being the last to cross the wide terrace before the open French windows; but just as they were about to enter, Elizabeth paused, and said to her companion in a careless voice—

"How hot and crowded it looks in there!"

Her face was turned towards the house, and rather away from Andy, so that he could not see the colour deepening in the creamy bloom of her cheeks, or how

her golden eyes shone with changing lights, or how the tendrils of hair which the sun caught became pure gold to crown this golden girl; but his heart knew that she was giving the woman's eternal invitation, and it was very hard—so hard, that his own face became aged and sharpened—to answer as he did—

"Oh, it's a big room. I don't suppose we shall feel the heat much."

For a moment Elizabeth felt as if some one had struck her a sudden blow, because what lay under those words was the unspoken "No," which is the most bitter thing the heart of a woman can ever hear. The spoken "No" can never bring quite such bitterness, because the woman who could force that would not feel so shamed by the refusal.

Then she brought all her girl's pride to her aid, and looked him, laughing, in the face.

"You did not suppose I wanted to stay outside, and go without my tea, did you?"

"N-no," said Andy. The ages have not taught men to hide as they have taught women.

"I'm ravenous," said Elizabeth, speaking more quickly than usual; then, with a bright colour in her cheeks and a fire in her eyes, she ran into the room where Dick Stamford was administering tea to the Misses Webster. He glanced at her, casually at first, and afterwards with roused attention.

"I say, Elizabeth," he took occasion to whisper, "you do look stunning in that lilac gown. You make all the other women look—look tough."

"Oh, well, I'm tough enough," said poor Elizabeth ruefully. "Girls have got to be." But the remark acted as a sort of safety-valve to her seething anger and shamed resentment, so that she was able to keep back her tears, and laugh and joke, with eyes only the more brilliant for them, amongst the group of young people who gathered round her.

The Webster girls being thus left without a cavalier, Andy sat down beside them, and tried to respond to a stream of conversation while he watched Elizabeth and wondered miserably if he had been a conceited ass to think she meant anything. He came to the conclusion that he must have made a mistake as he saw her take a large cake with cream inside and chocolate out, for his own soul loathed even bread and butter at this moment, though he had felt hungry half an hour earlier, and he was very fond of cakes with cream in them.

"Lovely day," he said, trying to rouse himself with an effort that would have been obvious to the Webster girls if their minds had been sufficiently composed to notice his manner. But they were so engaged in glancing self-consciously about them, and wondering what people thought of them, that they also made perfunctory remarks with no particular connection between one and the other.

At last Mrs. Dixon rustled up, looking to Andy's loyal eyes extremely smart still, in spite of the fact that her nose was no longer so calmly, palely blue as when she arrived. And when she parted from her nephew over the side of the hired motor vehicle which was to take her and her daughters back to Marshaven, he felt no less than she did that her final remark, "We're so glad, Andy, to be able to come among your friends and give you a little help socially," was as just as it was generous.

"It's awfully good of you. I knew you and the girls were certain to get on with the people about here," he said gratefully.

A moisture almost appeared in Mrs. Dixon's prominent eyes, and her nose-end flushed unmistakably; she had taken a liqueur before leaving, and was more emotional than usual.

"Brilliantine your hair and always wear a good hat," she said earnestly, "and you may end by being a bishop."

Then the car went off, and the embryo bishop trudged home through the afternoon sun, trying to piece his thoughts together, and conscious of a burning, stinging spot in the back of his mind that he was afraid to touch.

But it drew—as the aching spot always does—and he got to it at last.

If Lady Jones had not appeared when she did he would have broken his promise to Dick Stamford. Instead of helping a weak man, he would have proved himself to be a weaker.

With bent head and dragging feet he trudged up the churchyard path. Here—he felt it in the bottom of his soul—here, but for the grace of God, went a breaker of promises—a sneak—a man who couldn't play fair.

He would have to keep away from Elizabeth, because he could no longer trust himself.

He mechanically glanced at the church clock, and saw there was still a quarter of an hour before the time for evensong, and he suddenly realised that he was dog-tired. So he sat down, more from force of habit than anything else, upon the convenient edge of the tombstone beneath which Brother Gulielmus' body lay resting.

And after a while a little comfort crept into poor Andy's soul from somewhere, and he began to lose that impression of loneliness which to some natures is so intensely real and desolate. He began to have a sense of brotherhood with all those who have tried and nearly failed and not quite failed through no goodness of their own.

And so he felt a brother to all men—for every one of us must pass that way.

Finally, he got up from the tombstone and walked towards the church, and round the corner of the porch he heard the voices of two women near a grave.

“Churchyard grass wants cutting,” said one.

“Oh, the parson’ll see to it,” said the other. “He does look after the bit there is to do, does Parson Andy.”

And the poor lad went in, comforted still further by the warm, motherly note in the woman’s voice as she said ‘Parson Andy.’ He had come down low enough—or gone up high enough—to be grateful that the people of Gaythorpe called him ‘Parson Andy.’

About the same time Elizabeth and Norah Atterton went across the lawn towards the house in order to dress for dinner. Some of the guests had stayed, so there was not much time, but Norah had something to say, and when she had something to say she said it.

“The Deane females were quaint,” she remarked.

“They are called Dixon and Webster,” replied Elizabeth—but it must be owned that a great deal more was said than the words indicated.

“Has Lady Jones a daughter? If so, Mr. Deane really ought——”

“How vulgar you can be,” said Elizabeth. “You talk as if Mr. Deane were a mere fortune-hunter——”

“Of course he is,” said Norah calmly. “All clergymen are. They have to be.”

Elizabeth said nothing for a few steps, then she remarked rather abruptly—

“Well, he is not what you’d call an eager hunter, exactly.”

Norah stopped dead.

“You don’t mean to tell me he hasn’t proposed to you? We were all sure he had done, and that you were now behaving to him like a sister.” She broke off, and looked at her sister with her odd, mocking little smile. “That would be so exactly like you, Elizabeth.”

“He has not proposed to me—if that is what you want to know.”

“How odd!” said Norah.

“Why odd?” said Elizabeth, with some pardonable asperity. “I don’t expect every young man I meet to propose to me.”

“Of course not,” said Norah. “And now he has these girls within reach, I expect he will not be always making excuses to come over here. I dare say he was dull, and no wonder. And after all, you are not so unused to admiration that you would feel the loss of one young man, would you? Even if he did prove faithless?”

“I think I can exist without Mr. Deane, if that is what you mean,” said Elizabeth, marching on with her head in the air.

CHAPTER XVI

ANDY still went up to Gaythorpe Manor fairly often to play billiards with Dick Stamford; but the two young men no longer sat chatting after their game, and their talk became rather strained, as it always must be between two people who are constantly reminded by each other's presence of a subject about which they cannot speak.

The fact is that the air becomes, under those circumstances, so full of interesting and unspoken conversations that you cannot hear the dull words which do pass, and when Andy said, "Rotten weather for the time of year," he really was indicating the unpleasantness of life in the present trying conditions.

So when Dick Stamford replied, "Yes, beastly," he meant that Andy was not the only one who suffered.

But a young clergyman who dashes about the country in a shining green cart picked out with red drawn by a very active piebald pony does not excite pity in the casual observer, and people round Gaythorpe, and in all the villages between there and Marshaven, where Mrs. Dixon and the Webster girls still lingered, said to each other that Parson Andy had the times of it.

In this way Elizabeth was able to see very plainly that he did not wear the willow; and Norah, who was greatly relieved to find that her sister would not be thrown away on an impecunious country clergyman, lost no opportunity of accentuating this obvious fact.

And as the summer days passed on into autumn, Elizabeth was obliged to own to herself that she had given the most exquisite thing a girl has to give—first love, with all the bloom and glory on it—to a man who had looked at it quite near and not found it worth taking.

She did not mope or grow thin, but she looked sometimes as if she had not slept, and her mother made her take some kind of beef juice. Beef juice invariably is administered by those in authority for disappointed love, though they may know nothing about the love, and Elizabeth took it because she did not want to talk about her symptoms.

But she had some silent hours which left a mark on her life before she finally made up her mind that Andy did not want her; and she quite haunted the doorstep of the Miss Birketts, who were very dull, and lived in a little house in Millsby, and always had dry cakes, and wanted her very much indeed. She clung at this time with a sort of still passion to those who wanted her enough. Outwardly, however, she was just the same. Her slow voice, and her manner,

which was like that of a young mother and yet all girlish, did not change at all. The peculiar, elusive tenderness of it only deepened; there was a sort of strength in sweetness about Elizabeth now which you may often notice in those who love so much that they will be bound to sacrifice—the sort of thing which lies at the bottom of all the folly and all the glory of life.

One morning she came down to breakfast when a rather celebrated amateur ornithologist was staying with her parents, and, Mrs. Atterton for once being present at that meal, the conversation fell on parrots.

And that's the worst of love—there are such ordinary topics which it endows with the power to sting—even poll-parrots, for instance. Elizabeth thought of that moment in Sam Petch's kitchen when the gates of the Enchanted Muddle shone near and splendid before her happy eyes, and felt she could not bear it. Yet she also felt that she loved the deceiving bird about whose obstinately silent head shone the glory of that time when she and Andy had laughed together. She could not have it branded as an impostor and turned out into the cold world of cheap bird-fanciers' windows. And that was what seemed about to happen.

"I shall be so grateful if you will drive over with me and look at a valued parrot which belonged to my poor aunt," said Mrs. Atterton. "I feel I have neglected my duty—but my back——"

"Of course," bowed the celebrated ornithologist, paying the deference due. "No one could expect——"

"Especially," said Mrs. Atterton, "one who now understands everything. There were times on earth when she did not quite appreciate, poor dear, how I suffered. But," she added, "that makes me all the more anxious to look after the parrot, if you understand? And the poor bird has changed so. Lost its voice and its—its wonderful assertiveness."

"Ha-ha! that's what you call it, do you?" laughed Mr. Atterton. "Most ill-tempered, ugly old bird! Those poor Petches must have been more than thankful when it lost its voice. Enough to drive you into a lunatic asylum."

Elizabeth felt profoundly thankful that Norah was away and had never been moved to investigate the parrot problem, for she recognised that danger was in the air.

"I am sure Mr. Parrish gets enough birds at home. Besides, he only goes in for stuffed ones," she interposed hastily.

"They were all alive once, my dear young lady," said Mr. Parrish, smiling on Elizabeth, whom he liked because she did not seem very clever. He was of those who prefer to hold all the cards in their own hand.

"Oh, of course; how silly of me," said Elizabeth, with a meek little laugh. The best of women will understand how, though they may not own it. "I had

been thinking of asking you to walk through the woods with me—I know hardly anything about birds, and there are so many in Millsby woods—but, of course, you would prefer to drive with mamma."

The eminent ornithologist was also a man, and he was torn between an intense desire to walk through the woods instructing this sweet and teachable young lady, and politeness to his hostess. Happily Mrs. Atterton herself solved the difficulty by saying, with a sigh of relief—

"Now that's delightful! I really did not feel quite equal to the drive, but I was anxious for you to see poor William."

It was owing to this conversation that, two hours later, Andy encountered the couple in the wood, or rather followed them for a brief distance down one of the cross-roads; and he could not help being struck—no one could—by the efforts Elizabeth was making to please her companion. He had still hoped in the very depths of his mind that she might be pining for him, as he was for her; but now he saw that she could be engrossed in another fellow without even feeling that he was only fifty yards away from her. He decided that if she had ever loved him she must have felt that he was near.

So he turned dejectedly down the next opening without making his presence known, and could not know that Elizabeth was fascinating against time, which is, really, no such pleasing occupation, though an engrossing one.

At last, however, the habits of a lifetime asserted themselves and the ornithologist looked at his watch.

"My dear Miss Elizabeth"—that shows how far he had got—"*do* you know it is nearly one?"

"Never!" said the deceitful Elizabeth.

"I fear," said the gentleman, very much worried, "that I shall now not have time to see the parrot. My train leaves at two-fifteen."

"Does it really?" said Elizabeth.

"I would have stayed on, but I have an important meeting to-night," he continued, pushing his hat up from his forehead. "But"—he relaxed into an affectionate smile—"I shall hope to come again soon—very soon. I shall explain that to Mrs. Atterton."

"We shall have to hurry frightfully if we are to be back in time," said Elizabeth, suiting the action to the word.

"I trust—I may hope—for a welcome—from you," panted Mr. Parrish, who was not in such good walking form as Elizabeth.

But she pretended not to hear, and finally landed a very tired and perspiring ornithologist at the family luncheon table only three minutes late.

"And what did you think of William?" asked Mrs. Atterton earnestly.

“We never saw him. We lost our way in the wood,” said Elizabeth.

“Lost your way in Millsby wood!” began Bill, when a beseeching glance from his sister checked him, and he added good-naturedly: “Well, there are a lot of—er—rum turnings.”

Only about five minutes afterwards the bottled-in chuckle suddenly exploded.

“Bill,” said his mother—his father was away—“Bill, what are you laughing at?”

“Elizabeth’s bump of locality,” responded that youth.

“There is nothing amusing in that,” said Mrs. Atterton coldly.

“No, mother,” said Bill, with unusual meekness, and Mrs. Atterton could not think why her daughter turned so red. She hoped there was nothing going on between Elizabeth and the ornithologist, because he lived nearly all the year abroad, and she did want this home-girl of hers to remain near home.

But after lunch Bill did remark to his sister—

“I say—I don’t want a stuffed owl for a brother-in-law.”

“That’s no worse,” retorted the goaded Elizabeth, “than having a live donkey for a brother.”

Then she retired to her room, and Bill went out with a grin to exercise the dogs.

There is a theory held by many wise people that if we were all happy we should all be good and clever; but facts at present do seem rather to dispute it. For instance, Andy was undoubtedly less happy than he had ever been in his life, though he was beginning to get hold of the meaning of life, and yet he was both better and cleverer than when he was happy.

His soul was learning, awkwardly and timidly, with many mishaps, to drive his body—and that is, of course, after all, the reason of human life; when we have learned that we are ready for the next thing.

His air of sane and jolly boyishness was just the same, but strength showed through it; you saw that he might grow into one of those sane and jolly men who keep the world from going mad, but you also saw that if anything went wrong with the driving-gear he would have a bad fall.

As he sat in his study window the sunlight filled the garden with that deep radiance peculiar to an English September afternoon, and he looked out with a glance more focused, and features sharper, than on that spring day when he saw it all in a glory of gold and green. After a while he straightened his shoulders, as if banishing some insistent thought, and drew the paper towards him.

His little articles were accepted more often now, and he wrote slowly, so that

a good deal of his spare time was occupied in this way. But he was learning to follow the Holy Grail of all writers, which is to find the arresting and beautiful which hides in the obvious, and those who do that seek long and never come quite close; but there is a wonder in the far glimpse they catch sometimes which makes up for years of pilgrimage.

However, those only start on the quest to whom sorrow has wept and reality spoken, though a secret joy goes with them all the way which makes the dullest path a highway of adventure.

So Andy gave up trying to write of the infinities, and yet they began to shine, somehow, through the simple things he wrote about common life.

He worked on until Sam Petch came back from his tea and desired an audience, then he put down his pen and turned to the open door with some impatience.

"Well, what is it?"

"The Primitives has got our apples," burst forth Sam, before he was well inside the room. "For six years we've had the pulpit done with 'em, and the Primitives has been and got the promise of them."

"Well, let them," said Andy. "I don't mind. We can use something else."

Sam struggled to be polite, because he was a polite man, but he could not keep it out of his voice that he thought Andy a fool.

"Use something else?" he repeated. "Can't you see, sir, what a smack in the face it is for you and the Church? Strangers come from far and near to the harvest festival. Everybody in the parish has somebody to tea for it. As far as Millsby they come from, and last year I counted no less than four Bardswell people. And they'll all say, 'Where's the apples?' For nobody ever saw such red little apples anywhere. And folks'll have to answer back, 'Primitives has got 'em.' It's a slight on you, sir, that's what it is."

But Andy had not yet learned that this affair, in Gaythorpe, assumed the same proportions as the seizing of a burdensome protectorate by a rival nation, and was as hurtful to the pride of the vanquished.

"It's very good of you to bother about it," said Andy, "but I really don't care a bit. What does it matter whether we have red flowers with the corn or red apples?"

"And after you giving that old f——"—Sam checked himself—"body a whole ounce of your own tobacco only last week—it's outrageous! But he has a niece stopping with him from Bardswell that's a hot Primitive, and there you are!"

"Poor old chap, surely he has a right to do what he likes with his own apples—he can't eat 'em, more's the pity," said Andy.

“He can!” retorted Sam. “Anybody can with a scoop made out of a mutton bone. But it’s the principle of the thing I hate.” He paused. “Then you won’t go to see him about it, sir?”

“Certainly not,” said Andy, returning to his work.

Sam closed the door and retreated thoughtfully down the passage.

The next morning—the day before the harvest festival—was one of those autumn mornings when the world seems full of a cool sparkle, and the sunshine is to summer sunshine as champagne a little iced is to some still, golden wine which you drink under heavy-leaved trees at a Spanish inn. There’s a quality in it that makes the dullest want to be a little jolly—and those who are jolly already, like young Sam Petch, feel a little drunk with the clear exhilaration of it. They are buoyantly ready for anything, and not to be beaten even by Fate or nieces who are hot Primitives safely in possession of a desired object.

Anyway this was how Sam felt as he picked up Andy’s fallen apples which were only tame green and yellow, and he meditated, whistling, on the lovely red clusters which hung in a little garden at the other end of the village.

By and by out came Mrs. Jebb, ostensibly to fetch apples for a pudding, but really for conversation and fresh air, for she too felt the prickling stir of this lovely autumn morning.

Sam’s eyes lightened and grew younger than ever under his grizzled mop as he caught sight of her, and after a moment of that tense quietude in which men await a growing, fine idea, he slapped his thigh and muttered—

“I’ve got it!”

“Good morning, Sam,” said Mrs. Jebb, immensely condescending.

“Good morning, ’m,” said Sam, humbly respectful, with an ingenuous air of being grateful for such a lady’s notice; but his brain was working like a steam engine. How was he to begin?

Then Fate helped him, as she does, perversely, such people, while she leaves deserving objects like you and me severely alone.

“Mr. Deane says you may drive me into Bardswell this morning, if you will. Mrs. Dixon and the young ladies are coming to supper after the harvest festival to-morrow night, and there is no whisky in the house—Mrs. Dixon takes whisky for her gout—and we want various other little things.”

“How many bottles are you to get?”

“Er—two,” said Mrs. Jebb, whose dignified coldness intimated that it was no business of his.

Then Sam came a little nearer and spoke earnestly to Mrs. Jebb under the apple tree, and Mrs. Jebb appeared at first annoyed, then interested, then righteously indignant, finally in a state of fluttered adventurousness, for through

this stirring, sparkling day she too was going forth to do something desperate for the sake of Romance, and it made her feel agitatedly splendid.

Really she was going to give Sam the second bottle of Andy's whisky, presuming on the safe assumption that only one would be required and that he would forget all about the other. But it was a reckless and daring deed for one who had taken through life the motto of her pinafore days: "It is a sin to steal a pin, and much more so a greater thing."

Her mother had worked that on a sampler and, incidentally, on Mrs. Jebb's soul—as mothers did in the dark days before we all grew too clever to work samplers.

So no wonder that, having so given herself away to Sam, she should try to take a little back with a final—

"Then, Petch, you will be round punctually at half-past two."

Or, that, when she did climb into the cart behind the frisky piebald, she should remark to her coachman—

"Mr. Jebb always maintained that the sign of success was the ability to take a cab without consideration, and for weeks together I never so much as crossed the street on foot. Now I consider *this* luxury. Other times, other manners."

"It is so, Mrs. Jebb," agreed Sam, with respectful heartiness, though he had no idea what she was driving at. "Gee-up, Tommy."

The cart gave a slight lurch, and for a moment Mrs. Jebb clung to her hat, which was of the airy, summery kind which some women always wear forlornly on into autumn, just as they cling to felt in a burning June. It is not a question of money but of temperament. Then they passed a little garden where an apple tree with the reddest apples ever seen, deep crimson with ruby streaks on them, glowed like jewels in the sunshine.

"That's them," whispered Sam behind his hand, though there was not a soul in sight.

Mrs. Jebb averted her eyes and shivered slightly.

"Do you think it really would be taken as an indication by all the villages round that Mr. Deane was not getting on well with his parishioners?"

"I'm certain sure it would," breathed Sam earnestly.

"Very well," said Mrs. Jebb, drawing a long breath.

Sam glanced at her and hastened to change the subject from apples to women, with some instinctive sense of the connection.

"He doesn't get a wife—Mr. Deane doesn't. They say Miss Elizabeth Atterton give him the mitten. I don't credit it. She seemed keen enough on him so long as he kept going to see her."

"I don't know anything about it," said Mrs. Jebb coldly; then she closed her

eyes as if the light affected them and conversed no more.

But under her calm exterior a great storm was going on, and above that storm echoed some words that her father had read aloud from *David Copperfield*, while they all sewed in the old, old days in a narrow street of the place where she was born. “The first fancy of an undisciplined heart”—that was how the quotation came back, not quite correctly, of course, to a brain like Mrs. Jebb’s, but near enough to make her feel another Agnes, and to dismiss Elizabeth to that sentimental paradise where foolish girls with light hair and creamy complexions belong.

She pictured Andy turning for consolation to a more mature affection such as an experienced woman could give, and she was walking down the church aisle in pale-grey on his arm when Sam drew up with a jerk at the grocer’s shop, and she was obliged to come back from all that and order food. No wonder she forgot the sardines and the gelatine! Ordinary groceries, of course, were purchased in Gaythorpe, but these were to have been part of the supper next night. However, even when Mrs. Jebb remembered them on the way home, she still was in an exalted state of mind which made her feel vaguely that where love was, all was, and that a sardine more or less mattered nothing.

She was rather rudely shaken out of this blissful state by Andy’s reception of the news.

“But sardines on toast were to have been the only hot dish,” he said, “and you can’t get decent ones in Gaythorpe. Why didn’t you make a proper list, Mrs. Jebb? You know you have no memory.”

“Is it likely I should have a good memory after all I’ve gone through?” she asked.

So Andy felt rather ashamed of himself, while knowing he had no reason to be, and that a man who orders sardines ought to get them.

After tea young Sam Petch watched the little cottage with its one apple tree now black against the end of the sunset until the niece, who was a hot Primitive, had departed to an evening class at the chapel. He held a bottle concealed beneath his coat, and every now and then he laid its cool side affectionately against his face, while he sniffed at the leaden cap which jealously retained the fragrance locked within. Once he muttered something to himself and began to ease the cap, but with a terrific effort he desisted and put the bottle resolutely farther away from his thirsty mouth.

At last the hot Primitive went out, looking very cool and self-reliant in neat blue serge, and Sam knocked at the cottage door just as dusk was hiding the quiet fields beyond the village.

He remained within for half an hour, while voices rose and fell, and there

were emotional silences of indecision; then he opened the door and stood cautiously within, holding a basket in one hand and a small ladder in the other, while he looked back for a last word—

"She'll be that mad," urged an old man's voice from the dark interior.

"But you know what to say," responded Sam, curbing his impatience. "Say you've always given the apples to the Church, and when I came for 'em you couldn't refuse me. That's true enough."

A match was struck, a faint and pleasant clinking which made Sam's mouth water came through the quiet air, but he walked away into the dewy garden with his ladder and basket. And as he stood between the cool green world and the reposeful sky, where faint stars began to glimmer through the dusk, the poet that hides in almost every man was stirred a little. He laid the apples in the basket with the same charmed sense of adventure that children know when they hear of the cave of Aladdin and that spirit first awakes which drives them forth later into the far places of the earth, whence they bring nothing back but a secret memory. Young Sam Petch, with his breeches tied with string, and his grizzled hair, was gathering, in that moment, the enchanted, forbidden fruit of every fable since the world began. The greatest can do no more—a schoolboy in a wood can do no less—real adventure is so splendidly democratic.

At last the apples were all gathered, and the misty twilight had cleared into the soft radiance of a starlit night.

"Here's your ladder," said Sam, tapping very cautiously at the cottage door—not that there was any one to hear save a belated crow, but the spirit of adventure is always unconsciously dramatic.

The old man popped out his head into the starlight—he, too, felt somehow stirred and jolly.

"Got 'em?" he whispered.

"Yes, every one," whispered Sam back.

For men can always go on being boys playing at robbers—that's why they never grow so old as women.

"Put the ladder back in just the same place," chuckled the old man under his breath. "I don't want *her* to find out till to-morrow morning."

"Why, you're not frightened?" said Sam. "Frightened of a niece?"

"No, no—course not." Pause. "You're not frightened of anything with a drop of something warm inside you." Pause again and a conclusion of intense bitterness. "Barley water! She keeps me on barley water!"

"Well, I know if I'd let myself be frightened by any w——"

Faint footsteps in the lane—rapid dispersal—and when the hot Primitive reached the cottage all was in darkness and nothing seemed alive but a smell of

whisky.

"Uncle!" called the hot Primitive. "Come down!"

But he had armed himself.

"Can't, my dear. Got my trousers off." And he repeated the formula about the apples.

"It's Sam Petch, then. I might have known," cried the indignant niece. "He's an evil liver and wants to drag you down to his level."

"*His* liver's all right—it's mine that won't work nowadays," answered the old man at random, for he was trying his door to see if the lock really held; then when he found it did, he called more valiantly, "Good-night. Sleep well, my dear."

"Good-night, uncle," said the niece, but it did not seem to mean that; then she flung open the cottage door and the window where the geraniums flowered, and thought with pious resignation of the time when the apples would be inevitably hers.

Meanwhile, Sam tramped between wet, scented hedges underneath the stars with the big basket of apples on his arm, but he stopped still every now and then and muttered something that was obviously not in tune with the soft quiet of the September night. He put the apples in a safe place in the hayloft, and then went straight to Andy's study door without the usual preliminaries.

"Come in," said Andy.

He looked white and fagged as he sat over his papers, as if he were keeping some wearing thought at bay, which yet made the writing a great mental strain. It is not easy for a man to be in love, body and soul, at twenty-six, and yet to remain away and wait. And Andy had more to bear than mere waiting, for he began to be torn by those fears and agonies which seem trivial to other people but are more real and poignant to those most concerned than any of the tremendous things of life which can come afterwards.

"Well, Sam?" he said, seeing the man through a haze of ideas that he was forging amid the fire of his emotions, and only half aware of him. "What is it now?"

"I've got the apples. Old Bateson's given me them."

"Oh, all right," said Andy, turning back to his work.

"There's something else," said Sam. "I told you I wouldn't touch drink again without giving you notice. Well—this is notice. I'd have a glass of beer this night if I knew the devil was waiting to get me when I'd drunk the last drop."

The mist of thought cleared out of Andy's eyes and they became very kind and bright. He rang the bell without speaking, while Sam watched him uneasily. And when the little maid appeared he ordered her to bring in tea in ten minutes.

“I don’t want no——” began Sam roughly, driven beside himself by the old enemy.

“Will you wait ten minutes for me?” asked Andy. “I won’t ask you to do more than that. I am going out.”

“I don’t——” began Sam again.

“It’s all right, Sam,” said Andy.

There was a moment’s silence while the two men looked at each other, then Sam drew a long breath and said—

“Very well, I’ll wait.”

A moment after the time stated Andy rushed in breathless with two bottles under his arm, and almost upset the little maid, who was carrying the tea-tray.

“A tumbler, please,” he said, sitting down to the table. “Here, Sam, you have that chair.”

Sam sat gingerly on the edge of it, feeling suspicious that he was being ‘had,’ and yet scarcely thinking it of Parson Andy—but parsons were all alike, evidently, when you got deep enough down.

The door closed on the little maid again, the tumbler stood clean and shining on the table. Sam’s throat became dry as he stared morosely at it. Then there was a click, as of a beer-bottle being opened, the golden fluid ran ‘clop-clop-clop’ into the glass.

“Here, Sam,” said Andy, holding it out; and turning to the teapot, he poured himself out a cup of tea without looking at his visitor.

“Bit of cake?” he said, holding the plate. Then he glanced at Sam. “Why, you’re not drinking the beer?”

“Do you mean it, sir?” asked Sam.

“Of course I do. Here’s another bottle when you’ve finished that. I was glad of somebody to talk to.”

“My respects,” Sam said, gulping down the ale.

Then Andy poured out another bottle and brought forth tobacco, and as they smoked they talked together about everything on earth. Certain it is, that Andy had never been so amusing or so brilliant in his life, and sounds of laughter could be heard long after eleven in the apartment where Mrs. Jebb enjoyed her chaste repose, while the study was misty with tobacco-smoke.

Next morning, however, the little maid came out of the room aghast, with the two empty beer-bottles on her tray.

“Smoking and drinking till nearly twelve o’clock with Sam Petch! Why, even the public-house closes at eleven!” she exclaimed.

“Mr. Deane has a perfect right to do as he likes in his own house without giving rise to foolish remarks,” said Mrs. Jebb with her lips—but her heart was

so little in it that Sophy felt emboldened to reply—

"It does seem queer, 'm."

"When you get to my age, you will find that things are not always what they seem," said Mrs. Jebb vaguely.

But she shook her head as she took up the bottles, and again as she secreted them with her own fair fingers in the dust-bin.

CHAPTER XVII

FROST came in the night and the next morning was fine and glorious; the aromatic scent of autumn mingled with that of a brushwood fire in Mrs. Simpson's garden, and the smoke of it rose like incense to the god of harvest, straight up into a blue sky flecked with white clouds which were great brooding angels with their faces towards heaven.

When one man, meeting, said to another, 'Fine morning!' it was a Laus Dei that he meant, and the crimson beeches glowing upon the green country were lamps of festival.

And something of that splendour which has fired the souls of men like love and battle caught hold of Andy as he walked down the lane in the sunshine. "Oh, all ye works of the Lord—praise ye the Lord—bless Him and magnify Him for ever!" He knew how the man felt who wrote that, and was thrilled with that strange sense of nearness which men have when they sing a song together, the words swelling up; but it is not the words that move them so—it is the sense of having got a little nearer together in the immense loneliness of the Universe.

And some of this brief ecstasy was Andy's as he walked towards Mrs. Simpson's cottage in the sunshine.

At the turn he met Jimmy Simpson dragging a new-painted horse and cart but otherwise unattended, even by the faithful Sally. His golden curls shone in the morning sun, and he, too, seemed to come along in a sort of glory. When he reached Andy he said nothing, but looked from the piebald creature to the face high above him in breathless expectation.

"What a beauty! I never saw such a horse and cart in my life," said Andy, who loved children enough to know what was expected of him.

The round face relaxed into smiles.

"It's my birfday, Mith Elithabeth broughted it."

"When?" demanded Andy, glancing eagerly up the lane. "Has she gone home?"

"Yeth," said Jimmy. Then he corrected himself, for he only lisped now in moments of great excitement. "Yes. She went home d'reckly. She said her mummy wanted her."

Andy bent down and touched the piebald back of the animal.

"He's like Tommy, isn't he?"

"Better'n Tommy," said his owner sturdily. Then his eyes rounded more widely than ever, and he remarked—

“What a funny thing to kith a cart!”

The two young gentlemen eyed each other in the sunny lane, the one curious, the other shamefaced.

It was Andy who turned away.

“I say—let’s fill the cart with hay.” And he began to cut grass for the purpose with his penknife.

But the keen, fine morning took on its last glory because she had passed that way, while he, like a clod, had been eating bacon, and he kissed the unpleasant red paint of the cart-wheel because her fingers must have touched it. For the springtime of life breeds such follies—or what men call follies afterwards for fear of regretting them too much.

At last the game of hay-cutting came to an end, and Jimmy tramped back on his sturdy little legs, dragging his cart behind him, and as Andy watched him go safely round the turn, he looked back and shouted—

“Better’n Tommy.”

For Jimmy was a Briton of the old type.

But Andy went in with his thoughts full of Elizabeth, and he felt as we all do when we are young on a prickly sunny morning, that he must get what he wanted because he wanted it so much.

All day long while he helped to decorate the little bare church and was gay with the young ladies who assisted, and attentive to Mrs. Thorpe who brought sheaves of corn and piles of flowers and fruit over which she presided like a jolly goddess of plenty in the porch, he was thinking about Elizabeth. When Mrs. Thorpe said, “Do try one of these pears, they are so sweet,” he replied with decorum, but his heart throbbed ridiculously, “Sweet—sweet—how sweet my lady is!”

And when Rose Werrit asked if she should decorate the pulpit, and was so pleased that old Bateson had given them the red apples after all, because they were so bright and pretty—he said, “Yes, indeed—how good of you,” but even made a sort of song in his head about that—though, really, Elizabeth’s worst enemy could never have called her ‘bright.’

Then Mrs. Dixon and the Webster girls arrived about six o’clock, and the whole household went in to service excepting Phyllis, who felt at the last moment that she could not stand the heated church and preferred a quiet walk instead.

The last of the sunset was dying behind the unstained windows as the rough, country voices sang the harvest hymn, but the lamplight fell pleasantly enough upon grain and fruit and flowers, and as Andy stood there, though he did not know it, he was leading his people back to the mystic beginning of all worship.

He joined hands with Brother Gulielmus, who as plain Will Ford had sung a song at many a harvest home—and farther back still, with all those who had ever felt the joy of harvest. Rooted in immemorial needs—crowned with a hope that cannot die—belonging to all men and to all creeds—no wonder the hymn of that festival floated out across the sleeping fields with a poignant joy, a desperate hopefulness, that made old Bateson at his cottage door remark—

"I'm glad I let 'em have them apples!"

And which, all unconsciously, caused the hot Primitive to reply—

"I'm glad you did!" It was only afterwards that she added: "The schoolmaster has arranged with Mr. Deane that we are to have them for our pulpit next week. So all's well that ends well."

Old Bateson glanced at his niece and felt a little annoyed—like all those who conquer seldom he objected to having a victory tarnished by compromise—but faintly across the fields, through the open church door, the last verse of the hymn came to them.

"I remember when they used to have a harvest supper in Thorpe's big barn," he said, turning into the house. "Oh, well—in another twenty years——"

"They used to drink too much at those harvest suppers," said the niece. "And you needn't talk—you're a young man for your age, you know."

Thus did old Bateson sum up all the regret and mystery of life, and thus did youth try to console him for it—but those remarks pass in a constant throb beneath our daily round; every minute some one speaks so, and some one answers.

Then silence fell over the dim countryside, and within the lighted church was a quiet murmur of prayer and praise until the congregation rustled up in their seats to bellow with a will, "Now thank we all our God," in the hymn before the sermon. And the singing of that flooded the fields with sound again until the last echo reached the distant place where the Spirit of Ancient Revelry slept the long years through behind some bushes on a village green with scarcely ever a waking hour.

But this hymn awoke him, though it was badly sung, and so very far away. For there lingered in it something familiar that acted like a bugle-call—the dear sound of people bellowing through the night because the world was such a jolly place.

He was running in and out of the full pews, and laughing over Mr. Thorpe's shoulder, before the first verse was finished—and both he and Mr. Thorpe had a full-throated, jovial sense of finding what they wanted in familiar company, which is not surprising when you remember how often the Spirit of Ancient Revelry had met Mr. Thorpe's ancestors in the big barn and other places. He

even stirred in the Werrits, who were so anxious and progressive and modern, a sense of something lost and found again, so that Mr. Will Werrit's nose and ears went crimson with his exertions, and Mr. Tom Werrit felt a faint desire to wave something during the last line.

Then Mr. Banks of Millsby went up into the pulpit and began to preach about another harvest in that desolate and heart-breaking manner common to harvest festival sermons, with reference to those sheaves gathered in during the past year, which caused the ladies of the congregation, already a little emotional, to apply their handkerchiefs and think what a beautiful preacher Mr. Banks was, to be sure.

But there was a little windy sound through the church as if an autumn storm were already brewing, and every one thought "The summer's over." But it was not the wind; it was the sigh with which the Spirit of Ancient Revelry fled through the open door.

After the service, Mr. and Miss Banks and Mrs. Stamford and Mrs. Dixon with her daughter Irene spoke together in the porch, and gave to the occasion that air of Church and State greeting each other which the elder people of Gaythorpe still found fitting and pleasant, but the younger ones went out wondering impatiently why others should have motor-cars while they had not.

"Well, good-bye; sorry you won't stay supper," said Andy's cheerful voice, and the Bankses departed in their waiting cart.

"No moon to-night—hope to see you on Wednesday next!" shouted Mr. Banks back, already on the road.

"Good-night! Good-night!"

The lanes were full of that, and of cheerful voices, for a little while, and then the stars looked down on quiet hedgerows where the dew fell silently.

Mrs. Dixon and the girls had supper with Andy, and when that lady said to Mrs. Jebb, "This is a delightful spot, isn't it, Mrs. Jebb?" she really meant, "See what I have done for you." And when Mrs. Jebb answered, "Delightful, but dull, of course," she really meant. "I could get plenty of other situations, but I am glad to oblige you."

Then Phyllis, who looked flushed and excited after the walk she had taken while they were all at church, said it was time to go. And as her suggestions were usually acted upon, they went; but while Mrs. Dixon was speaking with Andy, the two sisters had a few words together beneath the snorting of the hired motor.

"Were you out walking all the time?" said Irene.

"Yes—why not?" said Phyllis shortly. "There's no harm in walking, is there?"

“That depends,” answered Irene.

Neither put what they said into words, and yet it *got* said—most clearly and definitely.

And that is where all books fail—they can only convey the unimportant word and are obliged to almost entirely leave out unspoken conversations—but it is always the unspoken conversation that matters.

CHAPTER XVIII

ANDY leaned over the gate while the throb of the motor grew fainter—ceased—and the dew fell quietly upon the grassy edge of the lane. Already lights shone from the upper windows of the village, little stars of home twinkling out in brief, pathetic bravery an answer to the eternal repose of Charles' Wain above the chimney stacks.

A sense of home wrapped Andy close as he stood there watching. During the last months he had gained a new capacity for love—that exquisite, human love of places which can never be explained to those who do not know it.

"Crunch! crunch!" sounded a faint footstep on the distant gravel of the churchyard path—then silence as the schoolmaster crossed the field—and a smell of tobacco in the night air close at hand.

"Good evening. Very pleasant out," said Andy.

Mr. Kirke stopped.

"Something to have a harvest festival *about* this year," he said. "When you see the crops all black in the fields——" he paused. "Fine congregation to-night. And the way the hymns went——" He paused and puffed again at his pipe. "Mr. Thorpe tells me there was no less than nineteen and tenpence in the collection bags. Last year it was only eleven shillings odd."

The two men's voices were softened and mellowed by the night air—they felt friendly towards one another. The schoolmaster refilled his pipe as he too leaned against the gate, but in a decorous attitude which expressed his sense of being rather honoured.

"My aunt thinks I must be frightfully lonely here," said Andy, unconsciously trying to bring the talk round to the subject of which his mind was full. "She thinks"—he laughed a little—"that I ought to get a wife."

Mr. Willie Kirke settled his shoulders more intimately against the gate—for that is a subject in which bachelors of all ages feel an interest at times—it is somehow pleasantly tickling to think what the poor women have missed through their abstinence.

"Well," said Mr. Kirke, striking a match that flamed on his narrow face and bottle shoulders as he lighted his pipe, "I don't know if you lose more'n you gain or gain more'n you lose by remaining unmarried. There was only one girl I ever ——" Puff. Puff.

"What did she——?" said Andy, through a sympathetic pause.

"Oh, married a butcher! But I never asked her."

“Should you——” Now was Andy’s chance.

“Should you think if a man were silly enough to propose that he’d better do it by letter or in person?”

He laughed a little scornfully, and put it in a detached manner—so.

Mr. Kirke kicked the gate thoughtfully with the air of a man who meditates on a series of gallantries so long that it takes some time to sort them out.

“Far as my experience goes—mind you, I don’t pose as one of your ladies’ men—but so far as my experience goes, I should say, ‘Kiss first and talk afterwards.’ ”

Andy moved a shade farther back into the shadow.

“But supposing you *had* to write?”

Mr. Kirke took his pipe from his mouth and gazed before him into the soft dark. This was what he liked. He had always been so clever and ingenious that since that hour in his boyhood when he had found he could mend the family clock he had continued to feel himself in a position to give a valuable opinion about everything.

“If I had to write, I should make it short and sweet. Very short and very sweet.”

“But supposing a man had an awful lot to say?” pursued Andy, trying still to sound detached and careless, and throwing a horse chestnut at a shrub to give the impression verisimilitude.

“He could say it after they were married,” replied Mr. Kirke with a chuckle. “Plenty of time then, and to spare.”

“She—she might not have him,” said poor Andy, the inmost fear of his heart forcing its way to his lips.

“Trust her!” chuckled Mr. Kirke again. For he held the profound conviction of most bachelors over forty that no woman can resist a man if he really does his best. “Well—good-night. I must be getting home.”

But Andy asked him to come in for a few minutes, and they went together into the brightly-lighted dining-room, where it did really seem incredible that any one should have asked advice on affairs of the heart from Mr. Kirke.

Andy assumed a demeanour more nearly resembling that of the senior curate than he had shown for weeks, and he was very much the Vicar of Gaythorpe as he rang the bell and ordered light refreshments. But Mr. Kirke was impervious to the change of atmosphere, and remarked when Mrs. Jebb closed the door behind her—the little maid was already in bed—“Been rather a fascinating woman in her day, I shouldn’t wonder.”

Andy started and his eyes began to twinkle, he forgot to be imposing as he caught hold of an idea.

“A very nice woman,” he said warmly. Then he remembered that Mr. Kirke was his friend, and felt bound to add, “She can’t cook—but that’s——” He waved it off with the matchbox.

“Doesn’t look a cook,” said Mr. Kirke, still in his character of the appraising dog. “But fine eyes. Fine eyes.”

Then Mrs. Jebb returned in the toilet which she had worn at the harvest festival service, with more odd bits of white lace and black ribbon floating than seemed possible for one mortal costume to contain, and she glanced at the schoolmaster as she put down the tray.

“Splendid congregation, Mrs. Jebb,” said Mr. Kirke, gallantly assisting with a corner of the cloth.

“Thank you. Oh, excellent. And the decorations so lovely,” said Mrs. Jebb, all aflutter.

Then she retired, and Mr. Kirke remarked—

“Quite a lady. You can see *she* hasn’t been bringing in trays all her life.”

Andy beamed at his guest, for he was at that stage of sentiment when an ordinary man or woman can no more help match-making than they can help breathing—though men carefully hide the craving. And after all, it is the most generous part of love—that desire to pass on happiness.

“Mrs. Jebb is so—so”—he sought for an adjective which should truthfully recommend the lady—“so chatty.”

“Now,” said Mr. Kirke, with the air of a connoiseur, “I can understand that woman fascinating a man who liked the airy-fairy type. It’s a matter of taste. For my part I like an armful. Always have. Always shall.”

So Andy saw that his first attempt at match-making had failed, and a few minutes later he allowed his guest to depart without protest. Then Mrs. Jebb went up to bed, after extinguishing the lamps in the hall and dining-room according to custom, and Andy sat down in his familiar seat by the study table.

He removed the sheet of blotting-paper which covered his little heap of manuscript and shook down the ink in his pen—after that he looked across the garden, though all was black darkness there and clouds had covered the stars; for it had already become a habit for him to sit at that table and look forth so. And Andy’s mother would have yearned and wondered if he had had one—to see the change in her boy. Boy still, beneath it all, as the best men are until their dying day—but putting on the mask of manhood. For loneliness and responsibility form such a forcing-house for qualities hitherto dormant that developments take place which seem almost incredible in the time.

The lamplight caught Andy’s face, which no stress could ever make anything but round and jolly-looking. He would always have, even in the deepest

adversity, the appearance of a happy person who has been wounded by some incomprehensible mistake; but he looked now strong enough to suffer without bitterness—and that is, after all, the final test of strength.

As he glanced out into the soft dark of the garden with no one watching him to put his face on guard, his eyes gradually grew luminous. It was clear enough that he watched a dream. All the hot vigour of a young man's love flowed in a molten tide into his imagination, where it blazed up and made a crimson, leaping glorious flame that enabled Andy to see quite clearly the City of Married Love as it looks to the eyes of a pilgrim. The high towers—the secret streets—the tender mist that glorifies the Enchanted Muddle—he seemed close to the gate as he sat there staring at the dim form of the trees against a starless sky.

Then the reading-lamp began to smell because Mrs. Jebb had forgotten the oil that morning, and of course Andy lost sight of his dream when it became necessary to extinguish the lamp and light a couple of candles.

But even that interruption did not cool the fire within him; it only blew across the leaping flames and caused the embers underneath to burn more fierce and even—a still, red heart of fire.

Andy shook out his pen again, and wrote on a blank sheet—

"Elizabeth——"

As he wrote it, he seemed to reach out towards her with his very soul. He felt that she must know, though she lay asleep with her cheek upon the white pillow and her hair spread round her.

A deep tenderness came over Andy as he pictured her so—it seemed to flow through all his being—how could he write a letter asking her to marry him? A man must be a poet without self-consciousness, a lover without fear, and a potential husband without priggishness to do that properly—and where do you find that man?

Anyway, not in poor Andy, who sat clutching the mop of curls above his brow that had been brilliantined so nice and flat for the harvest festival, and who could get no further than—

"I do not know if you will be surprised to hear that I love you."

He read it over. It sounded lame—awful! He must think of something more suitable.

But in about a week's time the letter would have to be sent. He had not liked to mention it to Dick Stamford—a sort of fierce delicacy restrained him—but of course Dick would be obliged to say something when the end of his period of probation arrived.

It was now the end of the third week in September, and October had been the time named; but what part of October, Andy did not know. In any case, it must

be soon.

He tore up the paper and started afresh—

> "My dear Miss Elizabeth,
> "It has long been my desire to tell you how deeply——"

No! He tore up that too, and flung it into the waste-paper basket. Then he began to wonder with a sort of smarting uneasiness what Dick Stamford would put in his letter.

It was all very foolish, of course—the whole plan from that beginning of it in the Stamfords' billiard-room was ridiculous to the last degree—but so, looked at in one way, are the chasings of the first white butterflies above a violet bank, and they are no less a part of springtime.

Andy got up and walked about the room; then he sat down again and began afresh, desperately—

> "My dear Girl,
> "I don't know what to call you in a letter, because you are everything to me, and I can't tell whether I am anything to you. But—"

he paused, pen uplifted—that was surely a ring at the doorbell. As he waited, for he had been too much engrossed fully to take it in, another peal echoed through the sleeping house and made the matter certain.

Hastily flinging his papers into a drawer, he went to the door, wondering, with a sudden anxious tug at the heart as he ran along, who was ill among the Gaythorpe folk, or what baby might suddenly need christening? Brother Gulielmus felt like that when men came with horn lanterns to wake him at dead of night and pilot him to some deathbed where the Devil wanted a lot of fighting if the soul were to soar away from his clutches. The little old house was gone, but it stood on the same spot, and everything was shaping Andy into the same sort of man.

He clattered the chain down and flung open the door. A dim figure stood in the shadow of the porch without speaking. Andy peered forth, concerned for one of his flock.

"What is it?"

No reply.

"Is there some one ill in the village?"

Still no reply.

Andy pushed back the door and came near to the man.

"You—Stamford!"

“Yes. I was—er—passing. I thought I’d drop in,” said Dick.

“Come in,” said Andy briefly, leading the way with a lighted candle in his hand. He expected to hear his guest stumble, for it seemed improbable that any one would call on a friend in the country at one o’clock in the morning if he were quite sober. But there was no sign of drink about Dick as he stood near the mantelpiece, fidgeting with the ornaments. He only looked very uncomfortable.

“Sit down,” said Andy, trying to treat it as an ordinary call. “Been a lovely day, hasn’t it?”

But Stamford did not sit down, and his rather heavy, florid face was deep crimson in the candlelight.

“I had to come,” he blurted out.

“I know. Used to late hours ever since you left school. Sometimes feel you can’t go quietly to bed. Here *I* am,” said Andy, carelessly indicating the two candles and the writing-table.

Stamford let a small china dog fall with a crash, picked up the bits, apologised, and walked to the bookshelf and back again.

“Look here. I don’t know how to begin.”

“Well, sit down to it, man,” said Andy, dragging the big arm-chair forward. “Have a pipe? Can’t offer you a cigar.”

Stamford disregarded the invitation, and backed up against the fireplace.

“I’m engaged to Elizabeth Atterton.”

Andy’s glance flashed out, keen as a rapier.

“Is that a joke?”

“No.”

Andy tried to speak, but no words would come from his dry throat. The room became misty for a second, then it cleared, and Stamford was saying, with no air of the triumphant lover—

“I dined with the Attertons, and after dinner old Atterton told me I’d been a good boy, and I might try my luck. And the old girl sent for me to her room, where she was nursing that blessed back of hers, and she cried, and said she hoped Elizabeth would have me. So when they told me to go down into the morning-room where Elizabeth was—what could I do? After that—what could I do? I couldn’t say I must wait until I’d thought it over, when they’d been thinking it over for a year. And I couldn’t say anything about you—now, could I?”

Andy shook his head.

“I suppose not,” he said with some difficulty.

“I’m beastly sorry. I never felt in such a hole in my life. I’d have given anything—*anything*, to be out of it and safe at home. I never meant to steal a

march on you, Deane."

"I know that," said Andy heavily.

Then Stamford sat down.

"I was in a d——d hole," he repeated. "I never meant to behave like a skunk. I was going to suggest that we should both write to her on the first of October, and let the devil take the hindmost. You believe that, Deane?"

"Yes," said Andy.

Then they both stared at the empty grate, and at last Stamford got up.

"After all," he said, "if she'd wanted you she wouldn't have taken me, would she?" He paused, and continued, arguing with himself as well as Andy: "Those Atterton girls have had heaps of chances. Neither of them would marry just for the sake of getting married. If Elizabeth hadn't been willing, she would have said so."

"Yes," said Andy again. Then he pricked his numbed senses into a little semblance of life. "Oh yes, of course."

"Don't think I'm not appreciating the way in which you stuck to your part of the bargain," continued Stamford, going uneasily towards the door. "You behaved awfully well."

Then through the mist caused by pain in Andy's mind loomed the image of Lady Jones. What had Lady Jones to do with it? Oh, he knew.

"It was only by an—an accident, that I did not break my promise and propose to her," he said at last.

But when the words were out, he wondered why he had said them.

For a moment the two young men stood silent, while a great thought, unspoken, almost uncomprehended, vibrated between them.

"You never know——" was all Stamford could find to say. Then he struggled and brought forth a final word. "We all seem in the same box, somehow, if you only knew. Well, good-night."

But they shook hands in the dark porch with an extraordinary vista opening out before both of them, blinding them for a moment to their own misery and triumph. They saw—those two ordinary young men on a doorstep—the road on which all creation moves towards the light. They knew that they were brothers.

Stamford kicked the mat. He wanted to go, and yet he could not get away.

"Then I may take it there's no ill-feeling?" he said mechanically.

"No," said Andy, and after a pause he held out his hand. "Good-night."

He had had enough.

"Oh, good-night."

Stamford escaped down the drive with a sense of immense relief. It had been horribly unpleasant, but it was over. Now for the next best thing.

Andy, meantime, stood in the shadow of the porch; he felt a queer reluctance to go back into the study—the same meaningless dislike that a child has for a place where it has been badly hurt, instinctive, based on the shadowy, primitive beginnings.

He closed the front door softly behind him, and followed the path round the house towards the church by force of habit. The night air blew cool upon his hot forehead, and the queer thud of his heart calmed down to its normal beat. But as his physical sensations ceased to trouble him, his realisation of what had happened grew clearer.

He fought off the moment when he must not only know, but realise, that Elizabeth could never be his wife, but it came nearer, with the slow, inevitable tread of such moments. He tried to pretend that he was listening to the wind, then to the clock striking two, then to a startled bird among the bushes—the inevitable moment marched on.

At last it was upon him.

But only the darkness, and the tomb of Brother Gulielmus where he sat, knew how he got through it.

About half-past three he went into the house, and found all dark and silent, the candles guttered out in their sockets. So he felt his way upstairs and closed his door.

But he could not sleep, because he saw Stamford every time he closed his eyes, and then Elizabeth as she looked the first time he met her at Mrs. Simpson's sale; and all the time one sentence of Stamford's rang in his ears with hideous reiteration: "After all—if she'd wanted you she wouldn't have taken me. After all...." And so on, over and over again.

The birds awoke to the tune of it—the little maid creaked downstairs—Mrs. Jebb came more lightly after—Sam tramped across the gravel beneath the window—all to the same dull, aching tune.

At last Andy got up, bathed, shaved, and came down to face a life without Elizabeth.

Mrs. Jebb, herself, brought in the bacon and placed it on the table like a funeral meat.

"Won't you have a boiled egg as well?" she asked in a low tone, such as is used in suggesting black gloves.

"No, thank you," said Andy, opening the paper.

"Or a poached one on toast?" she urged.

Andy glanced at her.

"I want nothing more, thank you," he said, curbing his impatience.

"Mr. Deane," said Mrs. Jebb, "there's news in the village. I thought I would

tell you myself. Miss Elizabeth Atterton is engaged to Mr. Richard Stamford."

"Oh, how did you hear that?" said Andy, turning his paper.

"Mr. Stamford's groom told Sam Petch, and he chanced to mention it at the back door," said Mrs. Jebb.

"News soon flies round Gaythorpe," said Andy. "Will you tell Sam I shall want the pony-cart at half-past nine."

So Mrs. Jebb had to go, but she ordered a chicken for dinner, and apple-pudding, because those were Andy's favourite dishes, and she knew that many a heart had been caught on the rebound. Of what use were the novels she interminably read, if not to teach her such things as that?

She watched the little maid peeling the apples with a pensive eye, putting to herself the following conundrum:

"Did he send that letter I saw a copy of in the waste-paper basket—or did he only *mean* to propose?"

And her invariable comment on giving it up, was: "Anyway, it's all right now." But even to her own mind she did not use those words, because those strange unspoken conversations can also take place between a woman and herself.

All the same she dined on a drumstick of chicken and forced the little maid to do the same, so that there would be more left for Andy, though she knew he would never notice it if they finished the fowl altogether.

The maid cocked her eye disdainfully at Mrs. Jebb as they sat at meat, and said to herself: "She needn't bother to eat drumsticks—*she'll* never get him!"

Which shows once more how unexpectedly much, and how wonderfully little, everybody knows about everybody else.

CHAPTER XIX

If Andy had been a woman, gall would have been added to his sorrow by the sympathetic package of sandwiches which Mrs. Jebb put into the pony-cart, and by the carelessly careful remark which Sam Petch made, glancing after the departing flutter of her skirts, that women seemed to have no sense, even the best of them, but that there was one comfort, nobody need grieve over any of them, because there were always as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.

However, being a man, Andy did not notice these indications of a knowledge that he had gone fishing on the matrimonial shore to come back with an empty basket. And he watched some apples being placed in the cart for his friend the Millsby joiner, whom he had once fought, without any of the intense, nervous irritation which must have followed a woman's intuitive discovery that she was being pitied and watched by those about her.

The piebald pony went off, as gay as a little pony can be who has a comfortable stable and plenty to eat and very little to do; but deep within his heart lurked the memory of past excitements, and he was trotting decorously through Millsby, every inch the parson's pony, when he heard a brass band playing the Ancient Order of Buffaloes into their annual festivities, and he forgot everything but that he was an artiste with a suppressed talent for dancing on his hind legs.

And as the artistic temperament—even in ponies—always brings inconveniences upon those nearest the gifted one, it is not surprising that Andy found himself in the road among a heap of apples with a few ham-sandwiches across his face.

Neither was it surprising that Elizabeth should be passing down the village street on her way from a visit to Miss Banks, because she constantly went there; but Andy, removing a ham-sandwich from his eyes, and jumping up unhurt, did feel it to be a particular irony of fate that she should be passing at that moment.

It really seemed as if fate, not content with depriving him of her, was making faces at him afterwards. But as the pony continued to execute a *pas seul* to the wonder of all beholders and the imminent detriment of the shafts, he was obliged to run to the little animal's head, and to hold it until the band was safely housed in the Public Hall opposite. By that time Elizabeth had entered the grocer's shop, where she remained until the apples were restored to the cart, and Andy departed, leaving only Mrs. Jebb's sandwiches on the road to show what had taken place.

He went on his way, feeling peculiarly miserable. Though he had dreaded the next meeting with Elizabeth, he had vaguely pictured it as something heroic—on his side, at any rate. Now nothing was left but the intense and bitter realisation that he was no more to her than any other man who passed her on the road.

He had wished, instinctively, to appear like those renouncing heroes on the stage who always wring the heart of the audience to soft music when they are having the first interview with the Beloved after she is Lost for Ever. And he had appeared among a heap of apples with a disordered ham-sandwich over his eyes.

But one advantage of it all was, nothing now seemed to matter. When he came downstairs that morning, he had dreaded keeping his appointment with Mrs. Atterton about a church window as a hurt man dreads the touch of a sore finger on an open wound; now, he jogged up the long drive feeling sure that nothing could happen at Millsby Hall which would make the slightest difference to him.

“Mrs. Atterton?” he said at the door, with as little anxiety as if he were asking for Mrs. Thorpe. And he followed a servant into the big morning-room all full of light and people and flowers and sunshine—a sort of temple to the jolly spirit of the Atterton family—with no more sense that he was standing on holy ground than as if he had found Mr. Thorpe smoking a pipe in his leather-covered arm-chair.

“No, please don’t send my pony round to the stables—I must only stay a few minutes—I am on my way to Marshaven.”

“Often on your way to Marshaven,” chuckled the irrepressible Bill. “But your cousins aren’t the ordinary sort, more kin than kind. These are more kind than kin, aren’t they?”

“They are the daughters of the first husband of my aunt by marriage,” said the Vicar of Gaythorpe, who was in no mood for jesting.

But he and Bill had been such good friends that the young gentleman failed to realise this; and, taking Andy’s dignified reply for a joke, he laughed uproariously.

“Ha-ha! ‘If Peter’s mother married’——”

“Hush,” interrupted Mrs. Atterton, but smiling too, “it’s a lucky thing you go back to Cambridge to-morrow. You need toning down a little. Now, Mr. Deane, as we have not much time, perhaps we ought to begin about the window at once.”

Andy rose, supposing she would lead him to a more retired room, but that was not the Attertons’ way; so she only beckoned him into a corner, while Bill continued to laugh and talk with Norah by the window.

Then Mr. Atterton looked in to say he was just off to a meeting of county

justices, and when Mrs. Atterton indicated the subject of her discussion with Andy, he said in a rather less breezy tone, “Ah yes. The window, of course. It must be attended to at once. My poor aunt wanted one with birds in, if possible, Mr. Deane. She owned William, you know. Left instructions in her will about the window. I suppose——” he paused, eyed Andy dubiously—“I can’t recall to mind any Biblical parrot—but if there were——”

Now Andy was as miserable as a man well could be, but he was also one of those whom the deepest sorrow cannot blind to the blessed funniness that is always shining out, like stars in a dark sky, to help travellers for whom life’s road would otherwise become impassable; and when he saw Mr. Atterton’s face—reverent yet annoyed—while that gentleman searched mentally the pages of Holy Writ with an inward, “Deuce take it! why *isn’t* there a parrot?” he could no more help smiling inwardly than he could help breathing. However, he replied, with a gravity befitting the subject—

“There are other birds—something can easily be arranged.”

“That’s all right. That’s all right,” said Mr. Atterton. “Of course, it’s of no real importance, but when you know what people would have liked and they’re not there to speak for themselves, you know——”

He left it at that and went off with a brisk farewell, to encounter Elizabeth in the doorway, who half turned to go when she saw Andy, but came on after all and shook hands.

“May I offer you my heartiest congratulations—Mrs. Atterton has been telling me——”

“Thank you, very much.”

There, the impossible had happened, and the world went on just the same; so one sort of youth was past for Andy, by the time Mrs. Atterton added—

“We *are* so delighted, Mr. Deane.”

But she did not look at him as she said it, because of what Norah had once told her, and because the poor boy might have had a passing fancy for Elizabeth. So many young men had suffered in that way.

“You will be glad to have your daughter near,” replied Andy, with so much calmness that Mrs. Atterton felt greatly relieved. It would be highly unpleasant if there *were* anything—with Elizabeth at the Manor and Mr. Deane at the Vicarage—so inconvenient at Mothers’ Meetings and Christmases.

She looked up at her girl with tears of joy in her eyes because they were not to be parted farther than the next parish.

As Elizabeth looked back at her mother, the colour started under her eyes and slowly crept under her whole face. It was like watching a rose open softly; and her tremulous mouth that she pursed up to keep firm, was like the heart of a rose.

Andy put out his hand hastily.

“Then I’ll be off now, Mrs. Atterton. You shall have the sketches and estimates as soon—”

“Please, wait a moment,” interrupted Mrs. Atterton. “Oh, here *is* Edwards with the tray. You must have a sandwich before you start on your drive.”

Andy did not want a sandwich, of course, but it was impossible to refuse being fed by Mrs. Atterton without being boorish, because she made it so the outward and visible sign of that atmosphere which pervaded the Atterton household. So he ate a combination of bread and meat which ought to have been very good, but which tasted like chaff to him at that moment.

The others came round and took a cup of tea or a glass of milk and sweet cakes or sandwiches, with no appearance of wanting them particularly, but rather as a further expression of the family sentiment: “If there *is* anything pleasant going let’s be in it!”

Elizabeth’s cake, in fact, crumbled in her saucer, while she drank the tea thirstily enough; and Bill remarked with a chuckle—

“I say—no breakfast—and now leaving her cake! Our Elizabeth ‘wants to willow,’ now she’s an engaged young woman, but banting won’t do it.” He clapped his sister on the back: “You’re not made that way, my girl.”

The Attertons all laughed—not because there was anything to laugh at—but because the schoolmaster’s saying had passed into one of those family jokes which are so dear and silly. For this is age—when there is no one left who knows the family jokes—when there is nobody in all the world to whom an idiotic remark means youth and hope and the golden days gone by.

“Oh, well,” said Norah, coming to the rescue with the freemasonry that exists between sisters, “one lamp-post is enough in any family, isn’t it?”

She stood near the window, erect, smiling, alert, so exceedingly able to take care of herself and other people too, if necessary. And she continued, after looking out at some one passing, “I forgot—we’re going to have another in the family soon—here she is!”

A moment later Mrs. Stamford was ushered in, or rather she did not wait for that, but hurried on ahead of the panting Edwards and across the expanse of carpet that separated her from Mrs. Atterton.

“My dear—I’m so glad—I’m so glad——”

It was significant that her unusual outburst of emotion did not culminate, as would have been natural, upon Elizabeth’s shoulder, but upon that of the girl’s mother. For once the ideas and traditions of a lifetime were in abeyance, and she came straight, swept along by an overwhelming tide of relief and thankfulness, to the one person in the world who would understand.

“You’ve walked all the way?” said Mrs. Atterton, patting the hard, slim hand of her visitor. “How sweet of you to come like this.”

Mrs. Stamford half turned to Elizabeth.

“I’m so delighted, Elizabeth, my dear, I can never say how delighted——”

Then she somehow became aware of the other people in the room, and sat up straight, remarking hastily, “Cold coming on. Been taking quinine. Always makes me so excitable. Only thing that does. I could drink a hogshead of port—but quinine!”

“I expect the capacity for unlimited port is hereditary. Weren’t *all* our ancestors, three-bottle men?” said Norah, composedly, tiding over the situation.

“The doctors all say my back is owing to that—gouty tendencies, you know,” assisted Mrs. Atterton.

And everybody felt immensely relieved to get down to Mrs. Atterton’s back from the emotional heights where they had stood during the past three minutes.

For it had been evident, even to young Bill, that Mrs. Stamford was saying a Magnificat as plainly as ever a Hebrew woman did in the days of old. And no mother ever rejoiced in the birth of a new life with a greater ecstasy of joy and thankfulness, than did Mrs. Stamford, in this beginning of a new life for her son. It seemed, after all the hidden suspense and agony of mind, as if he had been born again to her. She was so certain he would settle down to be all she had hoped and dreamed, when he was once married to Elizabeth.

And Mrs. Atterton had never known any harm of Dick save that he was, at one time, like other young fellows, a little wild. So his exemplary behaviour of late had quite disarmed both her and Mr. Atterton, and they were inclined to admire the honourable way in which he had kept the spirit as well as the letter of the arrangement come to a year ago.

And Norah was glad for her sister to be mistress of such a fine historical place as Gaythorpe Manor, and greatly relieved that there was now no danger of her becoming the wife of a country parson; while Bill was pleased to think ‘good old Elizabeth’ would remain, as it were, a part of home, with excellent shooting to offer in addition to her present virtues, and a five-pound note ever at the service of a brother who always seemed to run short of money at critical moments.

So everybody was pleased, and there was so much unspoken congratulation in the atmosphere that poor Andy felt rather choked with it by the time he got away.

But before he was really out of the house he encountered Dick Stamford, who had motored round by Bardswell, and who bore in his hands a bunch of flowers and an immense box of chocolates tied with pink ribbons.

The two young men passed with a nod and a muttered “Good morning,” but Stamford stopped a second later, turned back, and said with some effort, “Jolly morning. Cold, though. Frost in the air.”

“Yes. Beautiful flowers you’ve got,” said Andy, equally uncomfortable, and speaking at random. “Chocolates, too.”

“Oh, I know what girls like,” said Stamford with an uneasy laugh. “Something pretty to look at and something good to eat. All alike.”

But Andy did not pause to discuss this view of the feminine nature, and they parted with another constrained nod.

However, on the way to Marshaven, Andy began to wonder if he could stay on at Gaythorpe when Elizabeth came to the Manor, and Mr. and Mrs. Stamford had retired to the Dower Lodge, as they intended to do upon their son’s marriage. He began to think he could not endure it. Then he turned a corner and felt on his face the cold, salt air that blows across the flat country near Marshaven, and all the sane manliness in him was stirred into activity again.

Give up his work because the girl he wanted was going to marry some one else and live next door!

Ya-a-a-h! howled the winds in contemptuous protest, across autumn fields where men, all bent with age and toil, were following the plough.

Andy whipped up Tommy and sat very straight in the little cart as the wheels twinkled, merry green and red, through the streets of Marshaven.

Mrs. Dixon with her daughters, the Webster girls, was living in a large bow-windowed house facing the sea, and from her post in an arm-chair on the sunny side of the window she waved to Andy as he went in. He felt how elegant and fashionable she was, when she rose in her tight bodice with her tight curls in perfect order and a bluish bloom upon her nose—just as he had always felt when he came home from school or college and she received him kindly. For women gain the same hold on men by being always in full regimentals as soldiers do upon savages.

“My dear Andy,”—she had always been kind, but now she was doubly kind —“how pleased I am to see you.”

“I thought I must run over to say good-bye, as you were off to-morrow,” said Andy, shaking hands with the girls, who seemed, in this strong morning light off the sea, more especially endowed with eyes and hair and neck than ever.

“We’re not going until the end of the month, now. We’ve changed our minds,” said Phyllis. And she closed her lips in a way which intimated that she was in the habit of making up the family mind.

“Such nice people about, and so kind,” said Irene. “Ridiculous idea that we had before about county society being sidey. Of course they *can* be—you can see

that—even your Elizabeth has it in her."

Andy took a breath like a man going for a big ditch; then he said with a laugh—

"Haven't you heard? She is Mr. Stamford's Elizabeth."

There—it could not have been done in a worse or more tasteless way, he knew, but it was done.

"What!" cried Mrs. Dixon.

"Mr. Stamford engaged—you can't mean it!" said Irene.

"Oh!" said Phyllis. Nothing else. But she wore Eastern beads that morning, with a flimsy blouse, and her expression now matched her toilet—she looked somehow like a chorus girl who had strayed accidentally into melodrama.

After a good deal more conversation on the subject, during which Andy really felt as if he were walking with bare feet on red-hot cinders, he rose to depart, in spite of an urgent invitation to remain for luncheon.

"Then you *must* have a sandwich," urged Mrs. Dixon.

He replied most truly that he would rather not.

"Oh, if you won't stay to lunch we shall *insist*," said Irene.

"We should really consider it quite unkind," said Mrs. Dixon.

So he was obliged to masticate another sandwich, and that seemed to add the last touch to his desolation. For though it is a dignified and even heroic thing to be dogged through misfortune by dragons, there is only plain annoyance in being dogged by ham-sandwiches.

But the climax was reached when Andy, long after luncheon time, arrived home and awaited tea in his study, where the maid appeared bearing the tray, while Mrs. Jebb fluttered after with a plate in her hand.

"I thought," said she, signing to her underling to depart, "that you would be glad of a few sandwiches after your drive. We had nothing but ham in the——"

She stopped short with her mouth open, for Andy had seized the plate from her and flung the sandwiches upon the fire.

"Bread and butter," he said thickly.

It was atrocious. It was everything that can possibly be said against such an action. But it did Andy good.

The only drawback was that he had to spend quite an hour, later in the evening, in talking to Mrs. Jebb about Mr. Jebb and the glories of the past.

When they parted, Mrs. Jebb, having forgiven him, eye-cornered him from the doorway and said, very softly—

"I understand. I know what"—she made a pause—"what *tooth*-ache is, myself."

She felt sure he would also understand that by "tooth" she meant "heart."

Only a woman can put these things delicately enough.

But Andy stared after her in heavy amazement as the door closed.

“Toothache!” he thought to himself. “Surely I haven’t been telling her I had toothache, have I? Oh, well, it doesn’t matter.”

For a few minutes he sat staring into the fire, then he got up and went to his desk, and his work gained strength, no doubt, as work always does, from love and sorrow decently borne.

CHAPTER XX

REAL jollity is as antiseptic as sunshine, and when Andy sat in a leather chair opposite Mr. Thorpe, with Mrs. Thorpe presiding over an immense batch of the first mince-pies which had been brought out for his refreshment, he unconsciously felt the bitterness of his grief being sweetened and purified. It had been a lonely and disappointing time lately, and he had watched the autumn leaves hanging thick on the trees ready to fall at the first gale, with a leaden dulness of heart that was sapping his vitality.

When he trudged back and forth to the little church past the resting-place of Brother Gulielmus he thought often that so he would lie, his little day's work done, and he had an intense consciousness of the futility of life, though he worked hard and tried to fight against it.

To-night, he had come down to the Thorpes', because Mrs. Thorpe asked him, with a heavy sense of all places being alike; and now, though they had discussed nothing but the crops and the weather, his bitterness was already changing into that good grief which never yet harmed a man, in a wholesome atmosphere of mince-pies and blazing autumn logs—or rather, in the atmosphere of sane and strong acceptance of life as it is which emanated from the Thorpes present, and the generations of Thorpes who had gone before. They—those older Thorpes—and the Will Ford who was afterwards Gulielmus had doubtless sat through long evenings after harvest-time in exactly the same atmosphere as surrounded Andy at present—and a sturdy sense of a man's right to work and gain strength by working—and of a man's right to suffer and grow fine by suffering—took hold of Andy's soul to the exclusion of that weak dream of universal ease which had been, unconsciously, the outcome of a modern education.

For when Mrs. Thorpe said—

"Have another mince-pie—*do*," she really voiced, quite without it, the brave and kind thoughts of those who had been strong enough to take life gladly, and urged Andy to follow their example.

And when Mr. Thorpe said—

"We shall pull our damsons to-morrow. We waited until they'd had a touch of frost on them to take the tartness off. Have you pulled yours yet?" he really spoke of all those things, deep hidden, which make a man ready to do his day's work here and trust in God for the reward.

And as they sat round the fire, their tongues speaking of the unchanging

springtime and harvest, and their souls of the unchanging day's work and faith in the end, they belonged—those three—to no time or place. They were so absolutely unconsciously above and beyond all that, and any man who has ever thought from the far misty dawn of history until now, might have slipped into the fourth empty chair, and talked with them and understood.

At last Mrs. Thorpe began to speak of Elizabeth's wedding, and wondered what the bridesmaids would wear, and brought out a silver cream-jug which she and Mr. Thorpe were presenting to the young couple.

"I hear the Squire is going to the Little House," said Mr. Thorpe, for so the Dower Lodge was called in the village. "But he fails a bit, week by week, though he isn't an old man. He'll be glad to see his son settled in and managing everything."

"That's why they are hurrying the marriage on so. Only five days from now," added Mrs. Thorpe. "I have heard people say, 'Short a-doing—long a-rueing!' but it can't be so in this case, I think. They do seem to have everything the heart can want."

"Nice-looking girl," said Mr. Thorpe, taking the masculine view. "Very."

"The Stamfords have gold plate, if they like to use it, and no young man ever made a worse husband for having sown his wild oats first," said Mrs. Thorpe, following with the feminine outlook. "Shall you assist at the ceremony, Mr. Deane?"

"No," said Andy. Then he added more quietly, "I don't expect to. They will have Mr. Banks, of course, and probably other old friends."

"Well, anyway, it's poor fun marrying a pretty girl to somebody else," concluded Mr. Thorpe, knocking out his pipe.

Soon after that Andy went home, and he was met in the hall by Mrs. Jebb, who informed him that Mrs. Simpson—with whom she was now on terms of armed neutrality—had been to ask him about fetching her sideboard home. It appeared that an empty removal van would be passing her house early the following morning, and the men had promised to bring the sideboard from the Vicarage, if agreeable to Mr. Deane.

Andy glanced at his watch and saw it was already past eleven.

"I will go round myself and tell her that it is all right," he said.

"Such a shame for you to turn out again after your hard day," said Mrs. Jebb sentimentally. "Mrs. Simpson has made more trouble about that hideous sideboard——"

But Andy was already half-way down the steps, so Mrs. Jebb resumed her candle and went up to bed, leaning awhile from her casement to watch the Hunter's moon shining splendid over the massed tree-tops, and to dream vaguely

of pale-grey satin and orange blossoms. Then she drew down her blind and perused a novel called *An Autumn Rose,* which had a heroine whose virgin heart had remained untouched until she was well over forty.

Andy ran along with his hands in his pockets, for the night was sharp with a touch of frost, and as he turned out of his own gate he paused for a moment to glance, like Mrs. Jebb, at the extraordinary brilliance of the moonlight.

The little village lay asleep; all the windows with drawn blinds on one side of the houses were glittering and shining in the moonlight like golden windows in some enchanted dream. The sky stretched above them, calm and wide and clear, with little waves of gold around the moon. There was scarcely a breath of wind stirring, and Andy stood in the shadow of the tree, quite still, so that he gave no sign of life to the white empty road. Any one passing would have fancied himself quite alone. Any one coming across the field-path from Gaythorpe Manor and standing on the step of the fence might have looked over the still landscape and fancied himself the only waking soul in all that quiet world.

Elizabeth, standing on that step of the fence and looking at the windows of Andy's house, which were pale golden in the moonshine, evidently thought she was quite alone; and her face appeared stronger and more reposeful than any one who had seen her laughing in the daytime would have thought possible. The clear, bright light seemed to have drawn away the girlish softness of her features, and her tender colouring, and to have left her as she would be if the joys and passions of life had all gone from her.

As she stood there, quite still, in the full moonlight, with a white cloak round her and a white scarf over her head, against the luminous darkness of the sky, she was more like some noble abbess come to life again than a young lady who intended to be married in five days.

And it was no chance resemblance, but a strange, momentary impression of a mental state upon the outward appearance—for Elizabeth would have become an abbess if, with her position and her character and her large private means, she had lived a few centuries earlier. She did so fundamentally belong to that type of woman who says to herself, "If I can't be happy, I will be good," which is quite illogical, of course, because that type of woman is always good to start with.

And as she paused, motionless, with her hand at her breast holding the close-drawn scarf, it was clear that the mahogany sideboard, in the guise of a harbinger of fate, had been at it again.

Andy ran forward out of the shadow and said breathlessly, in a voice which he scarcely knew to be his own—

"You were looking at my windows!"

Elizabeth gave a great start, and her face was very white in the moonlight.

“Yes,” she said, half whispering.

“What did you come for?” said Andy, pressing nearer to her.

They stood under a sycamore tree in the lane, but they could not see each other because a cloud sailed across the moon: it was very dark and still. Then the cloud passed—a little wind stirred—and immediately a thousand dusky stars of shadow quivered on the white radiance of the moonlit road.

“Why did you come?” repeated Andy a second time.

There was enough light now for them to see into each other’s eyes, and what they saw there changed, for a moment, that white road with the stars of shadow quivering on it, to the floor of heaven. They forgot, for that one moment, that there was anything in earth or heaven but the love they saw in each other’s eyes.

“Why did you come, dear?” whispered Andy with his arms about her.

“To see your home. To say good-bye,” said Elizabeth. “Oh, Andy, I thought you didn’t care for me. I thought you had changed your mind at the last minute. Why did you keep away until it was too late?”

“I promised Stamford,” said Andy. “We both wanted you, and he had to wait until his year was out. I tried to play fair. I didn’t want to make him lose heart when he had done his best to keep straight.”

“How good of you. Dear Andy, how good of you,” said Elizabeth, smoothing the shoulder, of his rough coat with that comforting touch which women keep for their lovers and their children.

“No; it was not good,” said poor Andy, choking a little, “because I never expected to lose you. I thought you loved me.”

Then Elizabeth threw her arms round his neck and sobbed out—

“I do love you. Oh, I do love you!”

So they stood, clasped together, until Andy loosed his arms from about her for a moment; but he took her into them again with a low cry that came from the very depths of his being—

“I can’t let you go!”

Still, in a little while, it became clear to these two foolish—or wise—young people that they must let each other go. Perhaps it was because they stood on the floor of heaven and so saw things beyond the stars, that even their own earthly happiness began to look a small thing beside the destruction of Dick Stamford’s soul.

“What am I to do?” said Elizabeth. “Poor Mrs. Stamford——”

She broke off, and the memory of that Magnificat in the Attertons’ morning-room swept with desolating conviction across their hearts.

“Why did you accept Stamford when you loved me?” said Andy. “Even if

you supposed I didn’t care, you need not have done that.”

“I thought,” said Elizabeth—and here it all came out—“I thought if I could not be happy myself I could make a great many other people happy. I could do some good with my life. I should never have taken Dick Stamford if I had not felt I could do some good with my life in that way. And I knew I could never be happy without you.”

Oh, it was all foolishness, of course; but shadowy generations of good women stood behind Elizabeth as she said that, and the ladder of useless self-sacrifice on which they stood reached very high up: even as far, perhaps, as the dreams of those who know that their first duty is to themselves.

Anyway, there was something rather wonderful about the look of Andy and Elizabeth when they came forth from the shadow of the tree and walked together across the field. Their young faces were a little stern, and the radiance about them seemed in some strange way to be more a white fire of the spirit triumphing over the flesh than any ordinary moonlight.

They walked quietly, and scarcely spoke, but the things which usually seem unreal were near realities, and those things which usually seem real did not matter. Even though they saw the City of Wedded Love, the Enchanted Muddle, in ruins before them, a light streamed from somewhere farther on that made the ruins glorious—a huge altar to the God of Love.

At last they came suddenly, from behind a clump of trees, upon the garden of Gaythorpe Manor. And things began to be real—or unreal—again, according as you may take it.

“How did you get away?” said Andy in a low voice.

“I went to my room with a headache, but when I looked out and saw the moonlight I thought a turn alone would do me good. They’d given me the great guest-chamber where Anne Boleyn once slept; and it has little stone steps leading from a terrace into the garden. So it was easy enough.” Her lip quivered. “I don’t know how women would get on without headaches, Andy.”

Andy smiled tenderly, for all his unhappiness, at the queer mixture which is a woman: and when a man has learned to do that, he understands a great deal.

“Poor little girl,” he said.

But that somehow touched a chord of human and dear things that nearly broke their hearts, and without knowing how, they found themselves clinging together, their faces wet with tears.

“Good-bye,” said Andy, trying to go.

“Good-bye,” said Elizabeth, clinging to him.

Then it was Elizabeth who tried to go, and Andy who held her fast.

They came so, nearer and nearer to the little stone staircase, and when

Elizabeth put her foot on the first step, Andy felt as if his life were going from him. Silently she went and silently he watched her go, with beads of sweat standing on his forehead that the night wind changed to drops of ice.

At the top she turned and said—

"Good-bye."

He tried to answer, but no sound would come from his dry throat—then the door closed, and he went back across the moonlit field.

CHAPTER XXI

IT was the day before Elizabeth's wedding. For three days a gale of wind had been tearing across the country, shrieking through empty houses, rattling loose doors, beating with blasts of sharp raindrops like stones upon unprotected windows—seeming, in a way, to rejoice in its fierce work of changing the enchanted lane past Andy's house, which had been thick with autumn foliage only three days ago, into something equally beautiful but quite different.

For now it was all over, and the little world rested, tired and lovely, after all the buffeting; there was an exquisite delicacy in the cool sunshine on the fallen leaves, and in the tracery of fine branches on a pale-blue sky, which Andy could not help noticing though Elizabeth was going to be married to-morrow. And it comforted him a little, even in that great sorrow, because there is no grief in life to which such dear sights will not bring a little comfort, when once you learn to really love them.

Andy had been working hard in the wrecked garden for an hour before breakfast, and as he turned to go in he saw the two Simpson children, Sally leading, Jimmy dragging reluctantly, come round the turn towards his gate. So he invited them to walk in and partake of oranges while he ate his bacon; and after awhile, having disposed of her orange, Sally came across to his side with her anxious look on her small face, and said hesitatingly—

"Mr. Deane, I came for something."

"All right. Go ahead," said Andy, drinking his tea thirstily and looking as if he had not slept.

"Something partickler," said Sally. She seemed to find expression a difficulty, but at last continued: "Mother says you earn your living by making people be good. I asked her what you did for a living, and she told me that."

Andy stared at his small visitor, then glanced out of the window towards the place, beyond the churchyard hedge, where Brother Gulielmus slept in faith: then he sighed and returned to Sally.

"I try," he said.

"Well, then," said Sally, dragging Jimmy forward suddenly from his orange, "I want you to begin on him. He's been *so* bad the last three days. He doesn't *mean* to be, and I didn't much mind him breaking my dolly, but now he's pulled the blue china teapot off the table in the best room and smashed that, and we daren't tell mammy, so we came out. I was minding him," wept Sally, descending to tears at last, "but how *can* you mind anybody that won't be

minded?”

Jimmy turned very red and eyed his sister’s tears askance, but he planted his legs wide apart and said sturdily—

“I want to be bad.”

“You don’t love Sally, then?” said Andy.

Jimmy glared at him for a moment, then flew, all arms and legs, across the room and began to pommel such portions of his Vicar’s person as he could reach.

“I *do* love Sally. I *do* love Sally. Naughty Parson Andy!” he bellowed.

“Oh, Jimmy,” cried Sally, shocked out of her tears, and clasping her little thin hands distractedly. “You mustn’t call him that. Mammy said he would never let us come here any more if we did—never.”

That did reach Jimmy’s heart.

“No more chocs. No more noranges!” he wept. “I will be a good boy, I will.”

“He can’t help being a bad boy,” wept Sally in concert. “But I brought him for you to make him *want* to be good.”

“I like you to call me Parson Andy,” said that gentleman, pulling up a weeping parishioner upon each knee, and proceeding to administer choice bits of bread and butter laden with marmalade to each in turn, with the tale of “The White Cat” as a mental restorative.

It was upon this group that Mrs. Stamford was ushered in by the excited little maid-servant.

“Sorry to interrupt you at breakfast, but——” began Mrs. Stamford. Then she broke off. “What’s this?”

“A lady and gentleman who called to consult me in a spiritual difficulty,” said Andy, rising. “I’ll see them to the door and then I am at your service.”

Mrs. Stamford sat down, her old tweed skirt very wet about the hem with crossing the grass field, and her weather-beaten hat well over her eyes, but her appearance indefinably more emotional than usual.

“I’ve come,” she said without further circumlocution, “to tell you we shall be obliged to have the wedding at Gaythorpe Church.”

“What wedding?” said Andy, though he knew.

“Dick’s, of course,” said Mrs. Stamford, and she might just as well have said, “What a fool you are!”

“Why?” asked Andy, and he had a difficulty even in saying that.

“Because Millsby Church has been so injured by the gale that it cannot possibly be put right in time. Part of the steeple blown down. Roof broken in. I always told Mr. Banks that it would happen.”

“Of course,” said Andy, after a pause which he knew to be growing long and

yet was almost powerless to end, “I shall be glad to help you in any way I can.”

“Then if you’ll come with me—I have Sims the head gardener waiting outside—we will go to the church at once and see about the decorations. I have arranged with Mrs. Atterton that we will help with them, as we are so near, though their gardener will decorate the chancel.”

Andy took the keys from their familiar place on the nail in the hall, and as he went up the path past Brother Gulielmus, he had, for a strange second, a feeling as if some voice outside had said, “Be a man. Keep a brave heart, my brother.”

Of course it could only be the association of ideas grown vivid through emotion, but it made Andy square his shoulders and give his best attention to the necessary arrangements for the ceremony.

“Really,” said Mrs. Stamford, when they had finished, “your advice has been quite invaluable. Poor Mr. Banks——”

“He has not been curate in a fashionable London parish,” said Andy grimly. “We’re used to arranging theatrical performances there.”

And that was the only sign he gave of the bitterness which underlay his ready interest in the decorations.

Mrs. Stamford glanced at her watch and caught up her gloves.

“No idea it was so late,” she said. “Dick is coming by the eleven train. We expected him yesterday, but he was delayed—diamonds not finished re-setting, and he wanted to bring them with him. I do hope he won’t miss the train; it starts so early from London.”

“Oh, he’ll turn up all right,” said Andy calmly—while all his being cried out, “Miss his train—when he is going to marry Elizabeth to-morrow!”

They were almost at the church door now, and Mrs. Stamford turned to give a last injunction about the music, when a queer, hoarse voice which neither of them recognised struck upon their ears, and they turned sharply round to see Mr. Stamford standing in the porch on the arm of his man-servant.

“Ellen,” he said, and then he sank upon the stone seat of the porch, motioning the man to go away.

She sat down beside him, schooling herself to quietness, but white to the lips.

“Yes, James. What is it?”

He opened his hand and held out to her a crumpled sheet of paper which lay upon it.

“Our son,” he said.

Mrs. Stamford took the telegram, and what she saw, though it was bad enough, was so much less terrible than she had feared that she broke out into a passion of weeping that could not be stayed, and she cried through it all—

“He’s alive! He’s alive!”

So long as he lived, whatever he did, there would always be something left in the world for his mother, and she gave the telegram to Andy with a brief “This concerns you, too,” which was bitter enough but not hopeless.

> “Sorry to cause trouble. Cannot hope to make you understand. Married to Phyllis Webster by registrar this morning. Will Mother tell Elizabeth at once.”

Then, in a burst of feeling at the end—

> “Awfully happy but for complications, hope you and Mother will forgive.”

“Complications,” said Andy stupidly, while the pews raced swiftly round him and seemed to settle, queerly enough, with a thump inside his head, into their accustomed places. “Of course—complications.”

“What is the use of standing and muttering that?” demanded Mrs. Stamford, wiping her eyes. “It’s all terrible—terrible—but we must make the best of it. She is your connection, and respectable, though she has such eyes and stockings, and it might very well have been the back row of the ballet.”

It is only in such moments as these that the raw truth comes out, and it is infectious.

“She is good enough for your son, and she will see that he behaves himself—I know that,” Andy retorted. “She has a will of iron under a fluffy exterior, and that’s exactly the sort to manage him.”

Then Mr. Stamford said agitatedly—

“You must go to Elizabeth. Poor girl! Poor girl! To think that my son——” he broke off, grey about the mouth, and leaned back against the stone wall of the porch.

Mrs. Stamford pulled her weather-beaten hat farther over her forehead, and started, without another word, down the path; but before she was out of hearing her husband called hoarsely, “Ellen! Ellen!”

She ran back and bent over him as he leaned back, spent, against the stone, and in his bodily weakness and bitter disappointment he whispered to her, “Ellen—I can’t be left—you can’t leave me!”

She saw that it would be quite unsafe either to agitate him still further or to make him move from that seat, and yet—what was she to do? That poor girl—those poor Attertons—they must be told at once—every moment was of value.

Mr. Stamford himself, with closed eyes and fluttering breath, solved the question.

“Let Deane go,” he said feebly. “The parson—it’s the best thing. He can ask to see Atterton and explain—I’m ill—take the telegram.”

“But——” began Mrs. Stamford, when she saw that her husband could bear no more, and she silently held out the telegram to Andy.

“I can’t,” said Andy.

“You must. It’s your duty,” interrupted Mrs. Stamford in an urgent whisper.

Andy drew a long breath. How could he go on such an errand—he who was in such a turmoil of love and hope and amazement?

“I tell you,” he said desperately, “I wanted to marry her myself.”

“What does that matter? Go!” said Mrs. Stamford.

So he glanced once more at the spent man upon the stone seat of the porch and went.

At first he saw nothing about him, but soon the shock of unexpected joy, which stuns for a while like unexpected sorrow, gave place to realisation. Then every dewdrop, on every little blade of grass he passed, seemed like a joybell ringing; and the fine branches of the leafless trees wrote love letters upon the tender sky, and a huntsman’s horn far off was like love’s herald, ushering in the bride.

But when he stood at the Attertons’ door asking if Mr. Atterton were at home, things became more ordinary; and when the man replied that his master had gone to Bardswell, but the mistress was at home, Andy replied in a state of embarrassed discomfiture that he wished to see Mrs. Atterton alone.

In a moment or two the man returned and ushered Andy into the morning-room where Elizabeth and her mother sat together. After one glance at his face, Elizabeth’s own grew very pale, and she stood with her hands crushed together, not offering to greet him.

“If I might have a moment with you alone, Mrs. Atterton?” said Andy, very grave and nervous.

“My husband!” exclaimed Mrs. Atterton. “Oh—that young horse—I have begged him not——”

“No, no. It’s not Mr. Atterton—nothing to do with him,” interrupted Andy hastily. “Nobody is hurt. I have only come with a message from Mr. Stamford.”

“Then why did you frighten me like that?” demanded Mrs. Atterton, not unnaturally. “Knowing as you do that my back will not stand shocks of any kind.”

Poor Andy’s sense of doing it as badly as such a thing could be done, was intensified by this to a pitch where he found the greatest difficulty in continuing; and Elizabeth’s wide eyes, dark with startled emotion, never left his face.

“I was to ask to see you alone, Mrs. Atterton,” he said, lamely enough.

“No,” said Elizabeth, speaking for the first time. “I must hear what there is to tell.”

Andy just glanced her way and turned again to her mother—he dared not trust himself to look at her.

"Mrs. Atterton," he said, "I have been sent by Mr. Stamford, who is so upset that Mrs. Stamford cannot leave him, to tell you that—that——"

It was of no use—the words refused to come.

"Well?" breathed Elizabeth.

"For goodness sake get on," cried Mrs. Atterton.

"Stamford was married to Phyllis Webster at a registrar's in London this morning."

Andy stood, straight and white, in the middle of the hearthrug; Elizabeth buried her face in her hands with her elbows on the table, very still; Mrs. Atterton sobbed out, "My poor girl! My poor little girl!" and ran to throw her arms round her daughter. But Andy was there first.

"You care?" he said breathlessly. "You're sorry?"

And the whole world seemed to wait upon her answer as she lifted her face from her hands.

"I'm so happy—I feel as if I should die," she said.

Then they forgot Mrs. Atterton and everything else but themselves in the lovely view that opened out before them; for they were now almost at the end of that enchanted lane which leads to the City of Married Love—the Enchanted Muddle. And the tall spires towered so close and glorious, the mean streets lay in such a tender haze, the golden gates were so nearly opening, that their happy eyes were blinded to all else in the world beside.

But Mrs. Atterton had not been wandering in the enchanted lane, and she had lived in that city for such a long time that she had forgotten how it looked from the outside, so naturally she felt astonished.

"Elizabeth!" was all she could gasp.

Then Andy and Elizabeth did look back along the shining lane, and see an unimportant figure in the distance which, they vaguely felt, they might find of some importance again, sometime.

"We said good-bye for ever—that night I dined at the Stamfords—it was too late," explained Elizabeth incoherently.

"Then why?" began Mrs. Atterton, but she could get no further, she was so bewildered.

"I thought I had lost her for ever—and now she's mine," said Andy, as much to an astonished universe as to his future mother-in-law.

However, they did manage in the end to make it clear, so far as any one could, how the whole thing had happened; and then Mrs. Atterton was so simply glad with them that even two young lovers in the first engrossment of their new

joy could not fail to be touched by her attitude.

"Oh, mother—I don't believe you care about anything in the world so long as we three children are happy," said Elizabeth, laughing and crying and clinging to her. And in that moment she realised for the first time something of what it means to be a mother.

"You must take care of her," said Mrs. Atterton, over her girl's bent head.

"I will," was all Andy said, looking straight at her; but some of the dearest and most sacred things in life passed in that unspoken conversation between Andy and Elizabeth's mother, though neither of them knew it.

At last Mr. Atterton's voice was heard in the hall, and he, in his turn, went through the same stages of surprise and anger and relief as his wife; and after that Norah and Bill did likewise, until, finally, some one had leisure to feel dreadfully sorry for the Stamfords. But it was Norah who went to the heart of that matter with a clear-sighted—

"So long as Dick's all right, they'll be all right. Don't you worry yourself about that, mother."

"But they wanted Elizabeth," said Mrs. Atterton, wiping away a tear.

"Well," remarked Mr. Atterton, "all I can say under the circumstances is, thank God they haven't got her." Then the memory of Dick's perfidy roused his wrath again, and he muttered fiercely: "That hound—that hound—if he ever comes near me.... What did he get engaged to my girl for?"

Norah looked across at him with her odd little smile: "Look here, father, I believe Dick would have given anything to run away that night mother sent him to Elizabeth in the morning-room. I watched him going through the hall when he thought he was alone—I couldn't make it out, then—but if ever a man was saying to himself, 'I'm in a dickens of a fix,' Dick Stamford did at that moment. Only after asking leave a year ago, before he'd even met the lovely Phyllis——" Norah broke off, leaving the rest to their imaginations, for she was nothing if not suggestive.

"It will be so awkward—such near neighbours," sighed Mrs. Atterton.

"Why, mother," said Elizabeth, "it will be delightful. Every time we see Dick and his wife we shall think how thankful we are, and every time they see us they will think how thankful *they* are, so the oftener we meet the jollier we shall be."

And this was a point of view so in keeping with the sentiments of the Atterton family that by the time the guests had been informed by telephone and wire that the marriage would not take place, they all regarded the unpleasant part of the business as over and done with, and were ready for the next jolly thing. Probably no interrupted wedding ever went like that before, but then there are not many Attertons. And they were so tremendously glad that Elizabeth had

escaped being unhappy.

"To think," said Mrs. Atterton, raising cold beef to her lips at luncheon, "that it is all over; and that we have food in this house to feed a hundred people!"

"What!" said Bill, jumping up with a sort of war-whoop and flinging down his napkin. "Girls—do not eat cold beef when a banquet waits without! Hi! Minion!" to the convulsed Sims, who adored him and regarded his vilest pun as the essence of refined art, "Fetch forth the baked meats which the seneschal has basted for the morrow's feast."

"A seneschal isn't a cook, you idiot!" laughed Norah.

"There is some boned turkey, ma'am," suggested Sims at Mrs. Atterton's elbow, "and a good many of the sweets are made."

"Come and let's see for ourselves," shouted Bill, who was rather beyond himself with all the excitement. "Andy—Elizabeth—Father, come on! Norah, don't be grand to-day. Sims, lead on to the larder!"

So, pulling, pushing, shouting, dancing by Mrs. Atterton's side like a lunatic at large, did that insane Bill manage to get his family out of the dining-room and into the great still-room, where the fine dishes that were ready for the luncheon next day had been already placed. It was only when the cook hurried in, flushed and indignantly astonished, that they knew how utterly ridiculous they were.

"Now, cook," said the brazen Bill, the only one not abashed, "as we can't have a wedding feast to-morrow, we'll have one to-day. We'll take the six best sweets and the boned turkey, and you can have a jollification in the servants' hall with the rest."

"Madam!" said the cook, turning upon her mistress. It was all she could say, but it saved her from bursting.

"Bill—this is really too——" began Mrs. Atterton when the queer spirit which had inspired her husband at the dancing class, months ago, took possession of him again and made him seize a tall tower made of pink and white cream, step forward jauntily, and call back over his shoulder a reckless—

"I'll lead—everybody a dish. Now—Tum-tum-te-tum-tum-tum-tum!"

And it is a fact that they all walked out of the still-room headed by Mr. Atterton humming the wedding march in a sort of hoarse, crowing bellow; and Sims brought up the rear with a jelly in his hand and tears of laughter rolling down his purple cheeks, while he tried to look as if nothing unusual were happening.

"You can never," said Mrs. Atterton breathlessly, suddenly remembering her back, "you can never wonder again why Bill is so idiotic. It's hereditary. He can't help it."

"Andy—make Elizabeth have some of that pink stuff. She has eaten nothing

for ages. But she won't 'want to willow' now. A parson's wife should look solid," called Bill across the table.

Everybody laughed and sat down, while Andy cut off the top of the pink tower; and as he brought the plate to Elizabeth it seemed just the lovely beginning of all the ways in which he meant to serve her throughout their lives. Their fingers touched as she took it from him, and their deep happiness made them grave for a moment.

Then Mrs. Atterton said comfortably—

"After all, it will be great fun getting the furniture."

"Yes, we'll all go up to London and help to choose," concluded Bill. "What fun!"

So there was another jolly side of it, and Mrs. Atterton felt almost consoled for the loss of the Stamfords' heirlooms by the thought of buying furniture for Elizabeth's new home.

"But what is to become of Flitterkins?" said Bill. "The lady with the roving eye—you won't want her?"

"We might find Mrs. Jebb a post," said Mr. Atterton.

"She doesn't want a post; she wants a home," said Elizabeth.

"I should hate to behave badly to her," said Andy.

Then Norah gave her opinion—

"A little fancy shop at Bardswell, where she can be as refined as she likes, and talk about Mr. Jebb to everybody until she sees him in wings with a halo round his head, and really believes she never could have married anybody else."

"We could all buy embroidery silks every time we went into Bardswell, whether we wanted them or not," agreed Mrs. Atterton.

"We'll stock the shop when we go to buy the furniture," said Elizabeth eagerly.

"And call it 'The Ladies' Needlework Club,' " added Norah, with her little smile.

"I say, Elizabeth," remarked Bill, "I shall take back that hunting-crop and give you a new wedding present. What would you like?"

Elizabeth looked first at him and then at her lover.

"A mahogany sideboard with a plate-glass back exactly like Mrs. Simpson's."

"What?" cried Bill. "Go on, you silly! I mean, really."

"So do I," said Elizabeth.

After that they went away from the table, and there was a buzz of talking and laughter, until Elizabeth and Andy found themselves alone at last in the twilight.

"You didn't think it silly about the sideboard?" said Elizabeth.

“No,” said Andy.
But the last unspoken conversation here recorded was quite different.

THE END

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