



OLD
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EDEN PHILLPOTTS



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Old Delabole

NEW SIX SHILLING NOVELS

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MUSLIN. *By George Moore*

THE LATER LIFE. *By Louis Couperus*

OFF SANDY HOOK. *By Richard Deban*

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MRS. CROFTON. *By Marguerite Bryant*

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN

21 Bedford Street, W.C.

Old Delabole

By

Eden Phillpotts



London

William Heinemann

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TO
THOMAS HARDY
IN HONOUR OF HIS UNAPPROACHABLE ART
AND WITH AFFECTION
FOR HIS MOST APPROACHABLE SELF

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CHAPTER I

PRELUDE

THERE is a land that borders the Atlantic and stretches for many a league against the setting sun. You may regard this far-flung coastline of the West Country as nothing but a bleak and inclement region of undulating hills, that are lifted some hundred feet above the sea, to repeat monotonously and tyrannously their contours, to extend for mile upon mile, featureless, pitiless, despotic. They ascend inland to a naked horizon; they fall seaward upon a range of sad-coloured promontories and cliffs. There is, moreover, something lacking from this landscape—an essential, elemental feature, part of earth's familiar garb—and the absence of it is felt to waken a want and add to that uneasiness the spectacle possibly provokes. There are no trees upon these hills; only stones and hump-backed hedges break field from field, and should a dwarfed oak or ash become visible in some hollow below land-level, it lurks there, an alien thing, that lifts its stunted branches secretly and lives on sufferance.

For this is the home of the West Wind. Hither from Labrador he comes, that ancient of ages, ranging for ever the Atlantic, ordering for ever the way of the wave and the pathway of the cloud. This land is bared for his welcome, preserved in primal simplicity by the impact of his landing. Here terrifically he alights and sets his impress upon the solid earth, even as he models the green breakers beneath it and herds the flocks of the cumuli above. He is the overlord, the master, and with him lies the secret of the land. Apprehend that and this earth, that welcomed you so coldly from wilderness or lonely antre, doffs the garment of desolation and shines luminous and explicit. It is discovered as an outwork of the world, framed to brace its barriers against the ocean and spread its bosom to the gigantic wind. It is found to be a great land—great in its simplicity, great in its economy of

effect, great in its propriety of means to an end. To the spirit of man it appeals with the force that comes by stealth. As a fugue, that winds into the soul like a serpent, at first conveying nothing, then wakening into something, finally embodying everything, so North Cornwall conquers. She banishes the first chill doubt, arouses a gradual interest that waxes to enthusiasm, wins final worship in measure of the understanding brought to her courts. She is solemn as the desert, sublime as mountains are. There is nothing rhetorical in her voice or sentimental in her features; but both are subtle and full of grace. Her landscape is restrained, reserved, and sober—a spectacle emerging directly from the forces that have moulded it before the advent of conscious intelligence; and now man colours the great picture according to his need, and paints upon its inexorable face with the fruits of the earth. For while the West Wind denies to the tree his immense amphitheatres, to the roof-tree he grants them, to the least flower and herb, to the corn and root and meadow grasses. A great grazing-ground rolls to cliff edge, the bellow of kine and the bleat of sheep mingle with the song of the surges below. The wind breaks the rain-cloud here to bless the land with increase; the summer sun burns into its heart; there is music of bell and bird and pageant of the seasons. The furzes and whitethorns and blackthorns bring their gold and silver to young Spring, and the eagle-fern unfurls for her kirtle. Presently there are poppies and gipsy-roses in the corn, and the wind, running in amber billows through the harvest, sets the wild-flowers flashing. Autumn brings the stubble and the smoke of field-fires, the clank of the plough, and the grey companies of the gulls behind it; Winter, the old nurse, lowers the light, and draws her curtain of cloud and rain, beneath which all living things sleep awhile or die.

Here generations of mankind have lifted their homes regardless of Zephyr's primal claim, have justified their existence by land and sea; then laid them down and returned their gift of dust to the unchanging earth that lent it.

They are the crown and diadem of this lonely world, the fairest of its fruits, the best of its treasure. They breathe the breath of the West Wind, and, as the land under their feet, attain to strength and power by the restraint he orders and ensues. They dwell undaunted on the edge of earth, and

know no other world than this; they are satisfied with their environment, and influenced thereby. And not only its stern conditions and exactions make them what they are: their lives embrace a greater messenger than the West Wind, and where other men in other climes win their joy of the sun and dwell with Nature in her melting moods, this people, ignorant of much that life may mean and finding Nature but a stern mother, niggard and grudging, set a god over her and worship him. To religion they turn for their light and warmth; religion is their romance and inspiration; they are divided by many puerile distinctions, yet join in this: that prayer represents their vital need, and the right to worship and to praise their first demand. Religion is their daily bread, and music the wine that washes it down. They pray and sing to the God they have established; other æsthetic or spiritual predilection they have none.

They are Christians from the fold of those who protested, and their holy places are in perfect keeping with their lives and their land—stern and naked, full of cool, white daylight, unlovely no longer when understood. All faiths are fleeting, only faith is eternal; but here and now the Christianity practised by these men and women, from force of habit and loyalty to what their fathers practised, rings with the music of reality, fills their need, and fortifies the majority to sustain the battle of living with soberness and self-respect. They are temperate and reserved, and they promise less than they perform; but they are natural, and do not conceal emotions or appetites. Schooled to ask little and hope little from existence, they are not disappointed with it; fearing little, they are at ease. Cheerfulness and content are no uncommon inheritance; while the free spirit who can feel neither here departs to seek them elsewhere.

Strong drink tempts few; but the Celt remains a Celt no matter to what god he lifts his song. He has never been a stranger to passion, and we find among these people many children who have no name, many who are called now one name, now another. They recognize themselves in this matter; their faith does not blind them. Love-children are not flouted, and their mothers are no more cast out than their fathers. An observer of this frequent phenomenon among so God-worshipping and devout a community is puzzled by it.

Yet light may be thrown upon a seeming contradiction, for where religion is stern and joyless, offering little appeal to sense and ruling by fear, then will the younger generation, and those with whom Nature can still plead, fight a very resolute and winning battle against it. Geneva and Scotland of old bear witness. The excesses of a Calvin were met by the retaliation of Nature in secret and triumphant rebellion. And those who are now cooled by the passing of years, those who in middle age are not so far removed from youth but they can still remember it, exercise a charity far greater than their creeds. There was a time when they, too, were not broken, but put out their hands to reality and, perchance, tasted the joys of the flesh in revolt. Therefore they bear with the young and feel for them, and suffer not the fire of the fathers to scorch the children's hearts. Perceiving that the religion of Christ has never yet stood permanently between man and his nature, to silence the cry of his blood, or stay his feet when the drums of war are calling, these wise, patient people pardon the lapses from their Church's rule, and, with a humanist instinct absent from the pietist middle class, condone and pardon, and make their forgiveness no matter of words alone, for their culprits receive social recognition and the little ones such a welcome as their own indiscriminating Saviour would not have withheld. The law of the land, not the heart of the land, denies them their birthright.

The Christian doctrine of forgiveness of sins is, of course, the very last principle to lessen their commission; it must, indeed, provoke just the licence that agnostic ethics retard; and this fact, practised rather than perceived, renders these Cornish Nonconformists a rational and logical folk. Unconsciously they triumph over their own dogmas, and reveal a charity and tolerance with which the eternal spirit of human compassion, the *Aidós* of the Greek, rather than any supernatural faith must be credited.

Proceeding now upon a central point of this unpopulous region, one finds a stone, unfamiliar generally save in one connection, apparent everywhere and playing many parts. Between the fields partitions are thrown of great slates, irregular in form and set edgewise. They awaken an emotion of mournfulness because they strike upon memory and remind the eye of forgotten graves. Everywhere they stand; at the

stile of the field, beside the cottage door, or thrown across the water-tables. They make the pigsty of the farm, the mowstead of the rick. As fence and boundary and wall they play their part, and in the garden patches they rise, elongated into narrow strips, that take the place of poles and prop the clothes-line. Every alley-way is paved with them, every well-head is surrounded by them; the sweet water runs through slate launders. In smaller, solid masses they build the houses and chapels of a whole village; in thin laminæ they are split to cover its roofs and walls.

For this is Delabole, a hamlet created by one industry, whose men and boys to the number of five hundred work in the slate quarries, as their forefathers have done and their children's children will do. Since Tudor times the slate of Delabole has come to market, for men worked here before Shakespeare wrote.

But the theatre of their toil is not immediately visible.

CHAPTER II

DRIVING HOME

AFTER a November day of storm, earth and sky, that had merged into one grey gloom for many hours, fell apart at sunset time. They cleaved true, and between the horizontal darkness and the heavy clouds, whose bases were planed parallel to earth by the wind, there opened a ribbon of angry light. It widened, and the lead and purple above it were shot with fiery colours; while below, the darkness of earth, rendered greater for this sudden illumination, flashed where the radiance fell upon a long wet road. The naked weald spread out more gloomy than the heaviest storm-clouds that lowered above, and its blackness took the form of hedges, deserted fields, and water-logged waste lands, with the road winding in the midst, each puddle and cart-rut a jewel.

Between earth and the great band of stormy, orange light there rolled the little roof-line of Delabole, like the ragged teeth of a saw, silhouetted against flame. It fell from west to east in one slope, whose highest point was a stunted church spire. Then the buildings, chapels, schools, and cottages—here scattered, here strung close together—sank gently in two parallel streets, with fields between and farm-lands round about. Beneath the village there ascended chimney-stacks and the black arms and elbows of machinery, outlined against the heave of low hills that faded to the west.

Gulls flew overhead, crying of the invisible sea near at hand; a cloud of starlings warped together, and their myriad wings made the shout of a falling wave; then suddenly the sun poured out molten splendour from the upper purple as he sank beneath it, and his light turned the road and the water-tables on either side of it into tattered ribbons of pale gold, while the little wet roofs of Delabole flashed and trickled down the

hillside like a necklet of topaz beads. The slates that separated the fields and the road-metal piled here and there sparkled also, while far distant above the quarries a feather of steam caught the brave light too.

Then a whistle sounded, and two men driving towards Delabole in a dogcart, heard the signal.

One was iron-grey and stout. He looked near sixty, but had worn ill, and numbered little more than forty-five years. His face was genial and florid; he had black eyes, round shoulders, a short neck, and a tall, somewhat ungainly, frame. Wilberforce Retallack was first foreman at Old Delabole, and now he drove homeward with the manager of the quarries beside him.

The younger man, while also a native of North Cornwall, had enjoyed advantages of education and possessed intellect. His understanding was receptive, and he had taken all care to profit by his opportunities. The only son of Thomas Hawkey, a quarryman, Thomas Hawkey, the younger, won the fruits of thrifty forbears, went to a school for those above him in station, and advanced himself accordingly. At twenty he was ready for the immemorial work of a Delabole native; but while he had been educated far beyond the labour of a rockman or dresser, the love and lore of slate was in his blood, and he desired nothing better than work in his native village at the great industry which had called Delabole into being. His father represented the case to the manager, and, being a man of authority, received all consideration. But since no adequate appointment for the moment offered at Delabole, young Hawkey considered America and the great slate quarries in Pennsylvania, where many hundreds of Cornishmen prospered. Then, after he had determined to go, a director of the quarry found work for him in Wales, and thither he went as a foreman to Penryn. His success was great, for he proved himself a man of character, probity, and power. For five years he laboured there, his heart at Delabole; then, when eight-and-twenty, the manager of Old Delabole retired, and before doing so urged upon his masters the qualifications of Thomas Hawkey's son. The young man was offered the appointment, not as a permanent one, but for six months on trial, and he declined it on those terms, since his record

in Wales promised certain preferment at no distant date. Unwilling to let a good servant escape them, the Delabole directors met him and appointed Thomas Hawkey. It was a bold experiment, but the event justified it.

Accident ordered a period of great prosperity at Old Delabole to synchronize with the reign of the new chief officer; but when a meeting of the Board considered his application for increased salary, two years afterwards, and reminded him of his good fortune in this respect, his answer, typical of the man, silenced the objectors.

“It is true, gentlemen, that we began to open the ‘Grey-Abbey’ seam just as I came to you. But you know, gentlemen, that a winning hand is the hardest to play. I submit that I have played it well.”

They could not deny this, and he won his increase, founded on a reasonable and moderate basis, the justice of which he proved by figures.

Now Thomas Hawkey’s father was dead and his mother had long departed. He dwelt at the manager’s house alone, with old Betsy Ann Bunt to look after him and beg him daily, for the love of the Lord and out of charity to her rheumatism, to take a wife.

Thomas was dark and hatchet-faced, with a hard mouth and gentle eyes. He shaved clean, and always wore a knickerbocker suit and Norfolk jacket. At thirty-two—his present age—his activity was boundless. His heart and soul and energy were dedicated to the quarries. They were never out of his mind, and he took the literature of the business everywhere, deeming the briefest holiday ill spent if it did not bring an order or two for Delabole. He laboured to extend the radius of commissions and interest architects especially in the quality and colour of his slate.

His work met with great success—a success largely due to prosperity below ground, for the famous ‘Grey-Abbey’ seam promised to be inexhaustible, and Delabole, through all its lengthy records, had never furnished a finer stone.

Now into the life of this energetic spirit deep personal emotions had found a way to creep, and Wilberforce Retallack, who esteemed him, knew it.

By the men Hawkey was respected very completely. They

were proud of him, for he was one of themselves, and each in his heart said: 'I might stand in his shoes, given his chances.' This was not true, since to his advantages Hawkey had brought gifts very much greater than those of the average man, either in a quarry or anywhere else; but it pleased the workers so to regard him: their attitude contributed to their own self-respect. He lifted them all by his own greatness, and their interests were his. He understood their good, and sought and shunned what they sought and shunned. He prayed with them, sang with them, shared their welfare, and set no barrier between himself and them. Therefore they valued him, and took pride in his good fortune. He had enemies, but they were few. The staff at Old Delabole consisted of five hundred men and boys, and when Thomas thought upon them he could not number a dozen who were not upon his side.

But now he loved, and Mr. Retallack, desiring to speak upon the subject, yet dreading to do so, felt that this drive in the manager's company must now be turned to account. Nevertheless he was unwilling, for the elder little liked to hurt a fellow-man. He stood next under Hawkey at the quarries, and though of a more genial disposition, had fewer admirers than the other.

The steam whistle shrilled and the steam flew.

"Knocking off," said the manager. "Nature wastes a lot of our time, Wil, when the short days come."

"She makes up for it with the long ones, Mister Tom."

As 'Mister Tom' did Delabole address Thomas Hawkey. There was that in him which made it impossible to accost with perfect familiarity, yet his fellow-countrymen would not grant him the fullest respect possible, and thus entirely translate him out of their own circle. They compromised with 'Mister Tom,' and he liked it. For himself he would have been 'Hawkey' willingly enough, save for the question of discipline and respect demanded for the authority he represented.

"We work quite long enough," continued Retallack. "Labour's labour, and though you never knew manual labour, I did, and I remember what a day's work felt like. Never forget, Mister Tom, that a man's made of muscle and bone, not iron and steel."

“Not I, Wil, though we don’t see quite alike there and never shall. To level all down and fix a mean, and say to the strong man, ‘You shan’t do more work than the weak one’—it’s not fair to human ambition.”

They talked of Trades Unions, and Hawkey declared them a doubtful blessing. But this the elder would not admit.

“If the masters feared God like they fear Labour, there might be no need for ’em,” said Wilberforce. “But they don’t, so God have sharpened our wits, and taught us how to arm ourselves against ’em. But God’s put the fear of Labour into their hearts for His own good reasons, and put pluck and resourcée into ours likewise. We’re going to be top dog—and it’s time. Our children will live to see themselves pensioned by Capital and a minimum wage for all. Yes, they will. Not by the State as it is now—I don’t say that, but by Capital.”

“It’s no use killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. Capital must live too.”

“Why for? Capital must die, Mister Tom. ’Tis an invention built up on an order of things that is out of date. Might has always been right and always will be, and when might was on the side of Capital, Labour was a slave; but now might is turning over to the side of Labour, and they won’t waste time making a slave of Capital; they’ll chop the head off the tyrant and have done with him.”

“Like the frogs,” answered Hawkey. “But if that happened, Labour would live to find King State was a worse tyrant than their fellow-men. I hate and fear the State, though I’m all for law and order, as you know.”

“So do I hate the State—as it is now,” replied the elder. “But when we get our say, and when Labour can hear its own voice—but there, you’re a Conservative, Mister Tom—a Conservative at heart.”

The other laughed contemptuously.

“Not I. But there’s a middle road.”

“Leading to nowhere. The world’s in the hands of the red Radicals and Methodies now. And so it should be. Fine things both, and I’m glad Delabole be both.”

“Yes—granted. Delabole is both.”

“You’re as lonely as the church,” continued Retallack, pointing to it with his whip.

“I’m not lonely. A place with empty church and empty pubs stands in the very forefront of progress, I say, though we do belong to the other end of the world.”

They laughed and chaffed. Then Wilberforce plunged into the matter weighing on his mind. He was not, however, quite direct.

“I suppose you’ll renew the contract with the Bakes?” he asked.

“Certainly. Why not? Newhall Mill has had the quarrymen’s corn to grind time out of mind.”

“That’s right. Did you ever hear tell of the fun at Padstow? Our grain was stopped there owing to some railway trouble, and they wouldn’t let it through. Then down went Delabole, five hundred strong, and the authorities were powerless against them, and very soon yielded up the corn. I may tell you, Mister Tom, we at Quarry Cottage are a good bit interested in Newhall Mill just now.”

“Why, Wil?”

“What think you of Wesley Bake?” asked Mr. Retallack without answering the other’s question.

“A very good man—clever, keen, honest as the daylight. Sometimes you can see Providence working, Wil—sometimes the ways of it are hid. But at Newhall any man may read the wisdom of God made manifest. It was a mighty good thing for the mill and the Bake family when Nicholas Bake dropped and his younger brother filled his shoes.”

“Not his shoes—a very different pair, so to say. Nicholas was a weak man—lazy and hazy in his mind, and doubtfully straight in his dealings. But Wesley is a bit out of the common—so my Edith thinks.”

Silence fell between them, and it was some time before Hawkey spoke.

Then all he said was: “Yes, yes—a rare good man.”

Retallack regarded him from the corner of his eye without turning his head. Utmost sympathy sat on his face.

“It was time to name it, Mister Tom. I won’t say I’m sorry, for that wouldn’t be fair to Wesley, but I’m terrible sorry—for you.”

The younger made no attempt to conceal his deep emotion, but he did not answer. Wilberforce talked on, as the best thing to do.

“The Bakes are a very ancient race. In fact, high in the land once on a time. They’ve got tombstones at St. Teath two hundred years old. They’ve come down, like a lot of them ancient families; but they have been honourably connected with Newhall Mill for a hundred year and more, and the first Bake in living memory to threaten trouble and blot the name was Nicholas. And it looked almost as if the Almighty held ’em a favoured people, and so took Nicholas out of mischief. For ’tis the kindest act of God to cut off a sinner sometimes. That means the greatest good to the greatest number as a rule, and the righteous never suffer for the guilty in the long run—else God wouldn’t be all-powerful. And no man ever had anything against Wesley Bake to my knowledge. And—and love will out, Mister Tom.”

“So it will. Somehow I thought——”

Then Hawkey stopped. Circumstances amply justified his consternation and surprise before the news that Retallack’s eldest daughter, Edith, was thinking about Wesley Bake, for he had reason to suppose that she was thinking about himself. But it appeared impossible to discuss such a matter with Edith’s father. He broke off therefore and asked a question, almost under his breath.

“Are they engaged, Wil?”

“I can’t tell you that. I don’t think they are, but ’tis all over bar the shouting. So my wife says.”

Hawkey could not speak, and desired to be alone. The other guessed how hard he was hit. He had indeed planned to meet the manager at Camelford and drive him home, that he might break what he knew must be painful news.

Now they drew up at a little inn, and both men alighted. Hawkey took his portmanteau and proceeded to the manager’s house hard by, while the other led the horse and trap into the inn yard, handed them over to an ostler, and went into the bar to drink. He had just come through a trying ordeal and needed refreshment.

But the matter was not quite done with. Indeed, the first

words that the newcomer heard as he entered the 'One and All' concerned his daughter.

"What's this I hear about your eldest and Miller Bake?" inquired Richard Male from behind the counter.

"A drop of special Scotch, Dick, and what do you hear?"

A man who was in the bar made answer while Mr. Male served his customer.

"We hear that Edith Retallack's the favoured wench, and that they be tokened, Wil."

It was a short, hard-featured veteran who spoke. His expression was sour, his hair thin and grizzled; the lower lid of his right eye hung down and showed the red, while his eyes themselves were small and dim and surly. He was underhung, and his face suggested both a mastiff and a bulldog. This canine person worked in the quarry still, and had done so for more than fifty years.

"It looks a good bit like it, Moses."

"We thought 'twas going to be the manager, however. And so did he!"

Moses Bunt vented an explosion which indicated merriment, and Wilberforce drank his whisky at a draught and looked glum.

"Another, Dick—yes, things fall out so. Surely never a maiden had to make choice between two such men. Both good as gold, and both a husband in ten thousand. And the mischief is she liked 'em both."

"You can't be surprised at that, Wil—two such fine and promising fellows as them. 'Tis a thousand pities that one of 'em didn't go for your next girl—then you'd have had 'em both. Though I dare say that's almost too much fortune for one family."

"I haven't heard that anyone wants Julitta," confessed the father, "though to my eye she's the finer piece."

"You say that because she's like your old woman," declared Moses Bunt. "You watch her, foreman," he added. "Because you haven't heard that anyone wants Julitta it don't follow nobody do. 'Tis always they dark creatures that make history. The fire be in 'em. That's why such a cruel lot of our girls get into trouble."

"You're an evil-speaking old devil, Bunt," retorted Wil-

berforce. "Not a spark of charity in you. A proper old selum-cat that scratches with your tongue if you don't with your paws. You ought to go to school to your sister, for she's got more human nature in her finger-nail than you have in your whole carcass."

"Betsy Bunt's a damned fool," retorted Moses. "She was born a fool, and have lived a fool, and will die one, according to her Maker's will and ordinance."

"A pity there ain't more fools like her, then," declared the innkeeper.

CHAPTER III

GRANDFATHER NUTE

IF Wilberforce Retallack was old for his age and had worn ill, it could be said with equal truth of his father-in-law, James Nute, that time treated him lightly. Given a constitution, it is the personal factor of disposition that decides, for anxious mind and fretful spirit gnaw the flesh that holds them, as a sharp acid corrodes the vessel that contains it.

Grandfather Nute's tranquil soul looked out of blue eyes, and his seventy-two years of life still found him straight in the back, full of energy, steadfast of heart, and rich in faith. 'If you believe in God, you be bound to believe in man,' declared Grandfather Nute, and he lived up to the conviction. But he was no mere optimist, and his philosophy embraced a second axiom. 'If you believe in man, you be bound to believe in the Devil,' was another of his reiterated observations. But in his opinion the powers of evil retreated. The world was a better place than he remembered it in his youth. His sphere of action had been entirely limited to North Cornwall, yet he judged the whole from a part, and affirmed with confidence that while Delabole moved steadily in the right direction, the rest of the earth could not be lagging very far behind. Whether his native village merely took part in the upward drift, or actually occupied a place in the van, James Nute would have admitted himself incompetent to judge; but at his heart he believed that Old Delabole did rather more than its share in the advance movement. He attributed this fact to John Wesley. The spirit of the great evangelist still moved in the heart of the land. It ran through the minds of men as the slate-beds ran through the earth on which they dwelt, and none proclaimed it more triumphantly than Grandfather Nute.

He was a little man with white whiskers and white hair, still thick and shining. His wife had died thirty years ago,

and when that happened he came to live with his only child, Anna Retallack, the wife of Wilberforce. Now he said that he was growing up with his grandchildren, and, in secret, his daughter and son-in-law sometimes confessed that Grandfather proved as great a handful as the rising generation. The old man's energy was unbounded; he shamed his grandsons and granddaughters, still lifted his quavering alto at the chapel of the United Methodists, still played his flute in season and out, still was ready with advice and caution, encouragement or disapproval, in the affairs of all who sought him.

Some found him helpful and comforting; some did not. Of the latter party were his son-in-law and daughter. "A prophet is without honour in his own country," confessed Grandfather. "Wil tells me nothing about himself, and never wants my opinion—no more does Anna."

There were plenty, however, who rated his wisdom high enough, and as a local preacher he had enjoyed great reputation in his circle during the past. He had worked in the quarries as a slate-dresser until the death of his wife; then he retired. He was worth a hundred a year, but retained only twenty for his own needs, and had handed the rest to Retallack in exchange for his food and lodging.

Now Grandfather, full of business, bustled up the little street of Delabole. It was nine o'clock, and the tardy sun still swung low easterly over the black bulk of Brown Willy and Rough Tor, where they were piled upon the horizon; but Mr. Nute had been up for hours, and his day was already far advanced.

Now he visited the manager's house without the quarry precincts, walked into the kitchen, and accosted a stout, elderly woman who was washing china.

"Good-morning, Betsy Bunt, and how are you faring?" he asked, then answered his own question: "Well, without a doubt. We Uniteds make our own good air, as I always say."

"And very stuffy air 'tis sometimes," she said.

"The odour of sanctity be a human odour, my dear," declared Grandfather. "Where two or three are gathered together——"

"The Uniteds don't take enough baths," declared Betsy. "There's a lot of things that come after godliness, but cleanliness ain't second—not in Delabole."

"You're a masterpiece in that direction, as we all know," admitted Mr. Nute, "but it ain't given to everybody to have your great talent for it. Your brother Moses, for instance—a dirtier old man don't live, to say it kindly."

"Dirty inside as well as out," declared the sister of Moses Bunt. "Surely to God you don't want for people to be like him?"

"Far from it, yet a stout Methodist full of good faith."

"Full of beastly pride and conceit," said Betsy. "I wonder you praise him—it makes your praise cheap if you can do that. A man who would buy his own gravestone and spend his spare time decorating it. Surely never was heard such a vain thing. But well I understand why he's done it."

"Then tell me, Betsy, for I've often wondered."

"Just because right well he knows that nobody else would! If he was to drop first, should I buy a bit of the best Delabole slate and cover it with gold letters, and spend pounds on the stonecutters for a man that's treated me like my brother? Not likely. And there's none else to lift a finger, so in his pride and vanity he's going to do it himself. But whether they'll put up his own flourish of trumpets over the old toad when he dies, I don't know. I wouldn't."

"'Tis a nice question for the future," declared Mr. Nute, "and we'll leave it for the future. I assure you, Betsy Bunt, that 'tis just as foolish a thing to be too much beforehand with some matters as it is to be behindhand with others. There's great wisdom in not helping a hen to hatch her own eggs, and the future's a hen that will save us a lot of trouble if we leave her to hatch a good few of the questions that time will put to her. But that's not to say we must blind our eyes and take no thought for to-morrow. Far from it. Why am I here now?"

"Lord knows," said Betsy Bunt. "To waste my morning seemingly."

"There's another lunch in the wind," declared Grandfather. "As you will remember, the last United eighteenpenny lunch fetched in the brave sum of five pounds and ten shillings, or thereabout; but we want another five, and as it is going to be

spent entirely on ventilation, you ought to be the first to be pleased. I've ordained an eighteenpenny lunch for January the fifteenth, and I'm looking up for promises."

Betsy Bunt nodded.

"'Tis rather soon after the last," she said, "but no doubt you know best."

"Mister Tom is always willing to oblige, as well he may be."

"There's no difficulty here. 'Twas a brace of ducks last time."

"Let it be something else, then," advised the elder. "A duck don't go far, and them that fail to get a bit often feel disappointed. I heard Mrs. Bake say last time, when the duck finished with her right-hand neighbour—and a good plate, too—that, in her judgment, where all paid equal, all should feed equal. There's a good deal in that, eh? You want ten ducks for a complete round, and they can't be counted on this year."

"How would a couple of my cold rabbit pies do?"

"Make it four."

"And if I'd said 'four,' you'd have asked me to make it six—you know you would."

"Perhaps it's only greediness on my part," said crafty Grandfather. "Your cold rabbit pies are very well known—farther than Delabole. I've seen a pair of eyes brighten at 'em so far off as Boscastle."

Miss Bunt attempted to conceal her pleasure and failed.

"Four it shall be, then."

"And of course you're good for a ticket—you and Mister Tom?"

"No doubt he will be there, if I'm not."

"Mind you come, however. I mean it to be a bit out of the common."

"You always say that every time."

"There's to be a concert after. And a good bit of fun, I shouldn't wonder."

Then Grandfather noted Miss Bunt's promise in his little black pocket-book, bade her a very good-morning, and went his way.

He visited Richard Male at the 'One and All,' and won a promise of three dozen bottles of lemonade.

"I'd make it beer," said the publican, "but I know you never have intoxicating liquor at a United feed."

The gift was duly noted, and Grandfather, having extracted a further promise that Mr. Male and his wife and son would take tickets for the luncheon, proceeded on his quest. He tramped out into the country now, and visited half a dozen outlying farms. One only was drawn blank, for the master of it happened to be ill with bronchitis, so Grandfather, whose tact rarely failed him, said nothing about the lunch, but a great deal about patience and fortitude, and the wisdom that sees in temporal ills a watchful Father's purpose. He prayed heartily by the sick man, cheered his wife, and then started off again.

Presently he returned to Delabole, and entered a little shop where various things were sold. Sweetmeats, chocolate, and cheap editions of story-books filled the window; while within the shelves were filled with stationery and the counter was covered with newspapers. Here dwelt John Sleep, his sister Sarah, and others of that family.

Sarah stood behind her counter. She was a neat, thin woman of sixty, with a wrinkled brown face and sharp black eyes. Her hair was grey but ample, though she wore a little black cap upon it. A plaid shawl was over her shoulders, and her dress was made of dark red stuff. She was reading when Mr. Nute entered, but rose instantly, and her concentrated glance at the printed page gave place to a bright and genial smile. She took off her spectacles with one hand, and shook Grandfather's outstretched palm with the other. She made no attempt to hide her extreme pleasure at sight of him.

"Morning, James. Nice open weather, and you so peart as ever, I see."

"Never better, Sarah, and never busier. I say 'never busier,' but, of course, at my age one can't do a young man's work. But there's a good few things the old can do better than the young still, though the young don't believe it."

She nodded and admired him frankly.

"And there's some things the old might do and won't, which the young oughtn't to do and will," said Sarah. "By

'old' I mean them who have come to understanding. You're not old, for all your seventy years, Jimmy."

"I'm not," he confessed. "I surprise myself. It's the plain living and close thinking. I'm a close thinker, Sarah, and if you keep your brains from growing rusty it sets a good example to the body. Look at you—a reader and thinker from your youth up. You'll never grow old. 'Tis the mortal surroundings of a man or woman age 'em—not their years. I grant your brother John be ageing to live with, however. Take his wife—died at forty-five, and older than you at sixty."

"'Twas her wayward son killed her, not her husband."

"By the same token do you hear from him?"

"Not for years now. His wife bides here—Jane."

"I know her well enough."

"She took to singing when my nephew ran away to America. Took to singing, like some take to drink. It saved her."

"A very tower of strength at it," declared Mr. Nute. "Then there's her daughter, Philippa. I'll give you a caution there. Philippa Sleep is a very on-coming maiden, and sees a bit too much of my grandson Edward."

"Philippa! She's not seventeen."

"Exactly so, and Ned's little more—not wife-old nor husband-high, that pair. You said a very wise word two minutes agone, namely, 'there's some things the old might do and won't, which the young ought not to do and will.' So enough said. Make Philippa work in the shop and improve her intellects. Nature's a very wilful invention, Sarah, as some of us know to our cost. She will be pushing—can't let us alone, so to speak. She pushes the young into mischief and the old into their graves. She's always moving us on till she moves us off altogether—a very impatient party, and won't have no laggards if she can help it."

"A pity your grandson, Ned, ain't more like his brother Pooley, and not so fond of dolly-mopping with the girls," said the shopkeeper.

"Pooley has the Methodist mind and Ned has not," admitted Mr. Nute. "Ned's gifts run in another channel. He's feeling out for the joy of youth, while Pooley wants the joy of truth. The fire has come to him early. But we're too

hard on youth, as I've always said. There's too little pleasure in the life of the young at Delabole. So Nature gets her way too often, and they seek their fun in the wrong place. And there's a free luncheon for January the fifteenth—no news to you, for you put the idea into my head."

Sarah nodded.

"We'll help and we'll be there."

She looked out of the window, for the austere but large chapel of the United Methodists stood on the other side of the road. It was of yellow brick under a roof of Delabole slate. A large notice-board hung on the right side of the entrance, and an iron railing separated it from the street.

"It's for the ventilation, as you know."

"Yes, John will be pleased at that, for he always says his breathing be fogged for an hour after every service."

"What shall it be, my dear?"

"A sirloin of beef from John and a hundred oranges from me—how will that do?"

The black pocket-book was in Grandfather's hand.

"Handsome is as handsome does," he said. "You're a large-hearted woman, Sarah, and others beside the Lord know it very well."

She looked kindly at the gaffer as he made his notes.

"Any news?" he asked, glancing at the papers spread neatly before her.

"The social tea at Padstow was a great failure seemingly. They make all the fuss they can; but figures speak."

"The tea at Padstow a failure!" exclaimed Grandfather. "That's frosty news! They Padstow Wesleyans be too stiff-necked. They're young and self-confident, and they quarrel among themselves. But I'm terrible sorry their tea was a failure."

He bought a newspaper and shook Sarah's hand at parting.

"Name the lunch to your customers," he said; "I like to see all the persuasions at our lunches. The Father's house has many mansions, and them that dwell therein should go in and out freely among one another: we may be sure of that."

Tired and hungry, Mr. Nute prepared to return home to Quarry Cottage, for the hour was noon and his dinner awaited him. But he knew everybody, and most of the men and

lads, now streaming out of the quarries, saluted him as they passed.

Again he stopped to talk to one who was building a house by the wayside. It stood in a green croft all alone, and had reached to the height of the builder's head.

"Ah, Antipas, it moves, I see," said Mr. Nute, and the builder set down his trowel and nodded.

"It moves as I can make it. We're getting on. There'll be some surprises."

"The surprising thing is that such a busy man as Antipas Keat have time and courage for the task, in my opinion. To build a house with your own hands is a thing few, if any, can boast," replied the old man.

"Every stone, every floor, every lintel, every pane of glass shall I put in place," declared Antipas. "If I was a stonemason, or carpenter, or suchlike man, it would be wonderful enough; but being, as I am, a baker, you may call it something a bit out of the common, no doubt."

Antipas surveyed his future abode with keen satisfaction. His grey eyes flashed. He was a spare man with an intelligent, keen face.

"I stood by while you laid the foundation stone, and I hope I shall live to see you finish it," said Grandfather. "You'll want your fellow-creatures to help you with the scaffold-poles, Antipas, and you mustn't grudge them that. I shouldn't think better of you if you did, because that would be to puff yourself up. Man must call on man; 'tis only the Almighty can do anything single-handed. Don't forget that bad fall you had when you broke your thumb backalong."

"I know," admitted Mr. Keat; "but still I'm very unwilling that anybody should touch it but me. To my mind the mastery I've shown will be a good bit spoiled if I have any help. I'm thinking out a plan by which I can work without scaffold-poles. If it comes off, there's no doubt I shall be on the track of another of my inventions. Anyway I won't be helped. I'll fight for it."

"There's the fire of genius in your eye, as I've always said," answered Mr. Nute, "and if one didn't see the strain on *your* face we've only got to look at your wife's. A very anxious thing being the partner of such a quick-witted man as you."

“ She’s proud of me.”

“ Yes, and the hedge-sparrow’s proud of the young cuckoo she rears, but it don’t prevent her being a bit careworn.”

Grandfather patted the amateur builder on the back a little longer, and then reminded him that he was a professional baker.

With a promise of ten quartern loaves for the United luncheon he presently returned home.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE QUARRIES

BENEATH Delabole an artificial mountain of shining stone rolls out upon the slope of the meadows, and creates a landmark to be seen for many miles. Behind these mounds the earth vanishes suddenly, and there yawns an immense crater. It sinks below the surface of the land, and the mouth of it is more than a quarter of a mile across. Round about the pit stand offices, shops, and engine-houses. An iron structure ascends upon the landing-stage, or pappot-head, above a stark precipice of six hundred feet, and every way at the surface there threads and twists a network of little rails. They run round about to the shops, to the larger gauge of the main line, to the forehead of the mountains of waste stuff, whose feet are far beneath in the green fields. Here open the quarries of Delabole, and though they have been yielding slate for some hundred years, the supply continues to meet all demand. Of old a dozen separate workings stood in proximity; now they have run together, and their circumference is a mile.

It is an oval cup with surfaces that slope outward from the bottom. The sides are precipices, some abrupt and beetling with sheer falls of many hundred feet, while others reveal a gentler declivity, and their sides are broken by giant steps. Here and there the over-burden has fallen in, and moraines of rubbish tower cone-shaped against the quarry sides. They spread from a point high up on the cliff face and ooze out in great wedges of waste, whose worthless masses smother good slate. The sides of the crater are chased with galleries, and burnished with bright colours spread and splashed over the planes of the cliffs. Some of these rock-cut galleries are now disused, others are bare and raw, with the bright thread of tram-lines glittering along them; but in the neglected regions Nature has returned to weather the stone with wonderful colour and trace rich harmonies of russet and amber upon it.

Here, too, growing things have found foothold, and bird-borne, air-borne, water-borne seeds have germinated in the high crags and lonely workings. Saplings of ash, beech, and willow make shift to grow, and the rust of deserted tramways or obsolete machinery is hidden under ferns and grasses and wild blossoms. To the east, where falling waters sheet a great red rock-surface, wakens the monkey-flower in spring-time to fling a flash of gold amid the blues and greys, while elsewhere iron percolations and the drippings from superincumbent earth stain the sides of this great embouchure to a medley and mosaic of rich colour. Evening fills the quarry with wine-purple that mounts to the brim as night falls upon it; dawn chases its sides with silver, and sunrise often floods it with red-gold. Sometimes, at seasons of autumnal rain, the cliffs spout white waterfalls that thread the declivities with foam and swell the tarn at the bottom; while in summer the sea mists find it, fill it, conceal the whole wonder of it, and muffle the din of the workers at the bottom.

The active galleries wind away to present centres of attack, and terminate at the new-wrought and naked faces of the slate. These spots glitter steel-bright in contrast with the older workings. They open grey and blue where man's labour is fretting the face of the quarries at a dozen different points. Chief activity was now concentrated upon the great 'Grey Abbey' seam, under the northern precipice, and there laboured two hundred men to blast the rock and fill the tumbrils that came and went.

The great slate cup is full of light; it is gemmed and adorned so that no plane or scarp lacks beauty. On a bluff westward still stand half a dozen trees that bring spring green hither in April, and make a pillar of fire at autumn-time, until the shadows swallow them, or the winds that scour the quarry find their dead leaves and send them flying. Along the galleries that circle the sides of Old Delabole are sheds and pent-roofs, where a man may shelter against the hail of the blastings; while aloft, beside the trees on the knoll, stands a whitewashed cottage, high above the bottom of the quarries, but far below their surface. Other dwellings once stood here, but they have vanished away for the sake of the good slate seams on which they stood. Now only Wilberforce Retallack's home remained, and that, too, with the cluster of trees beside it, was doomed

presently to vanish. The house and its garden of flowers and shrubs might exist for a few more years, then it would follow its neighbours that once clustered beside it, like sea-birds' nests upon an ocean-facing crag.

Beside the cottage there fell the great main entrance to the quarries—a steep plane of eight hundred feet that ran straight into the lowest depths and bore four main lines of tramway to the bottom, with other shorter lines that branched upon the sides. Up and down this great artery the little tumbrils ran. Steel ropes drew and lowered them. They rushed down swiftly, and slowly toiled up again laden with treasure or rubbish.

Beneath the cottage, against a cliff that fell abruptly from the edge of the foreman's garden, stood two great water-wheels, jutting from the rock, and a steam-pump also panted beside them. These fought the green-eyed tarn beneath and sucked away its substance, that it might not increase and drown the lowermost workings. At the bottom of all things it lay and stared up, like a lidless eye, from the heart of the cup.

Besides the great plane that bore the chief business of the quarries and by which the rock-men descended and ascended from their work, there existed another means of lifting the stone and 'deads' to the surface. From the pappot-head there slanted threads of steel to the 'Grey Abbey' seams, and by these also the little trolleys came and went, or the great blocks swam aloft—a mass of a hundredweight flying upward as lightly as down of thistles on a puff of air. To the earth they rose, then the flying waggons alighted upon the tram-lines, and a locomotive carried the trucks away.

Against the cliff-faces these steel ropes stretch like gossamers, and behind them, upon the rosy and grey stone, light paints as on a canvas, and makes the quarry magical with sunshine and vapour, the shadows of clouds and rainbow colours after rain. From the pappot-head the immensity of the space beneath may best be observed. Like mites in a ripe cheese the men move, and among them, shrunk to the size of black spiders, stand cranes and engines, and a great steam-shovel scooping débris from a fall. From these engines come puffs of white steam, and sometimes a steam-whistle squeaks. The din of work arises thinly, like hum and stridulation of insects; but Old Delabole is never silent. By day the blast

and steam-whistle echo, and the noise of men, the quarryman's chant at his work, the chink of picks and tampers, the hiss of air-drills and chime of jackdaws cease not; while night knows an endless whispering and trickle of little sounds. Water for ever tinkles through the darkness, and there is a murmur of moving earth and rustle of falling stone obeying the drag of gravitation through nocturnal silences. That iron law is written on more than senseless matter, for Delabole has its full story of human accident. You shall not walk through the streets without seeing maimed men who have lost an arm or leg in the battle, and the long years of quarry chronicle are punctuated by black-letter days of disaster and death.

The rock-men are scattered everywhere—white, grey, and black. Now they combine to heave a block on to a trolley, now they hang aloft on ropes or ladders, now they push the tumbrils to and from the cranes, now they control the engines and handle the great steam-shovel. Into a moraine it drives with a grinding crash, then strains upwards, and scoops a ton of rubbish at a thrust. Pick and shovel are at work everywhere. The long snakes of the air-drills twine down the quarry sides to fresh places of attack, and a distinctive, steady screech arises where their steel teeth gnaw holes into the rock, and the dust flies in little puffs.

From time to time a whistle sounds, and the midgets take cover. From a pit or ledge the last man leaps hurriedly, having lighted a fuse before departing; then a billow of smoke bursts outward, and the ignition of black blasting-powder or dynamite rends the stubborn rock-face. First comes the roar of the explosion, then the crash and clatter of the falling stone—a sound like the cry of a receding wave on some pebbly beach. The cup of the quarry catches and retains the din, reverberating its concussions round and round until they fade and die.

Toward noon on this winter day the rock-men began to assemble at the foot of the great plane, and when a hooter sounded to cease work trolleys laden with men and boys crept to ground from below. The living freight sat or stood tightly packed upon the little wains, and from time to time dropped off when a gallery was reached. Soon strings of men hurried away from the quarries by various routes to their outlying homes; but Wilberforce Retallack, who had ascended from

the 'Grey Abbey' seam, jumped off his trolley as it climbed past the white cottage on the cliff. At the door he met his son Pooley, who worked in a dressing-shed. The foreman entered his home at once; the lad stopped to wash his face and hands at a little sink outside the kitchen door.

The family, save one, was assembled for dinner. Grandfather James Nute sat at the foot of the table, and his nieces, Edith and Julitta, occupied places to his right and left. Next came the younger boy, Edward, while the mother, Anna Retallack, sat at the head of the table with Wilberforce on one side and her son Pooley on the other. They often joked about this arrangement, and it was on Julitta's side of the table that four sat, because she was thin and occupied but little room.

As for the master, he gladly ceded the head of the board to his wife, for he disliked the trouble of serving dishes.

Edward only was missing now, but he came to his place a few minutes after Grandfather had called a blessing on the meal. There was a great 'herby' pie of mingled vegetables under a crust of flour at one end of the table, and cold bacon at the other end. The men had plates of both together; the woman ate the pie alone. A bread-and-butter pudding followed, but only Mr. Nute and his nieces partook of this. The other men and Anna ate bread and cheese. All drank water.

Edward Retallack had been to the shop of the Sleeps—for a newspaper—and now he handed the sheet to his father, who read as he ate.

The Retallack lads were very different, for while Pooley had a thin Celtic cast of features, with dark eyes and black hair, like his parents, Ned was much fairer, and reverted to some more blond racial strain. His mother's brother was a flaxen type, and her grandfather also had been fair. Edward differed from Pooley in every respect, and lacked the elder's gravity, earnestness, and sabbatical order of mind. The blue-eyed Ned concerned himself little with solemn subjects, and religion held only an outward part of his observation. He sang for joy of singing, not for any instinct of praising, and he attended chapel regularly because he had to obey his parents, but he never worshipped therein. Indeed, he had never worshipped anything in his life save the girl Philippa

Sleep. He was light-minded and light-hearted. He knew no care, and took no joy in work. But the joy of life filled him to the brim, and his family loved him, for that he was always merry and always sanguine.

Pooley, as Mr. Nute had said of him on his twelfth birthday, 'was born a Methody.' He stood exemplar and type of that spirit still acute and alive in the land that bore him. He loved his religion; it was his resource and solace, the business of his mind and the occupation of his leisure. He had no sense of humour, but he was by no means narrow-minded, and felt a charity and good-will to his more worldly neighbours which is rarely revealed in the pious young. He did not thrust his opinions upon his fellows, but he lived them, and only the baser sort laughed at him. His elders respected him, and prophesied that he would some day fill his father's shoes. Pooley, however, held other ambitions. He much desired to enter the ministry, and both his mother and father knew it; but he had never explicitly declared this hope, and since the family's means were small and none could offer help, Pooley's dream was not recognized or encouraged. That he would soon be a local preacher all knew. He had, indeed, preached privately to Julitta and his grandfather; and Mr. Nute declared that for a boy of eighteen the performance was more than creditable.

"The doctrine is there, and the fire is there," said Grandfather to Anna, when she inquired concerning Pooley's effort; "but as yet the words ain't there. He was feeling out, and now and again I helped him—not so much with a thought, you understand, but with a word to clothe the thought. In fact, his ideas are too big for his power of speech as yet. And that's a very good fault in a nipper. 'Tis generally the other way, and they chatter like parrots, but say nothing. He'll make a fine preacher in fulness of time."

The talk at table did not concern the quarries.

Mrs. Retallack discussed Christmas, which was approaching. Ned debated with Julitta as to the length of holidays that might be expected; Pooley considered the subject of choir practices with Edith; Mr. Nute foretold success for the coming free lunch. His efforts and those of others had won many generous promises, and the feeding promised to be triumphant.

"The luncheon's getting on brave," he said; "but the

concert must be up to the mark also. For the moment I don't see very many good items—nothing out of the common, that is to say."

"How would a bit of boxing do?" asked Ned.

"Not afore females," answered his grandfather. "For my part, I'm very well inclined to boxing among the young men. It takes the steam out of 'em, and larns 'em to keep their tempers. But it would never do to stage a boxing bout at a free lunch."

"The trustees would not allow it," declared Wilberforce, putting down his paper. Then he turned to Pooley, and asked him a question concerning his work. The young man was a slate-dresser.

Meantime Grandfather continued to speak of the coming entertainment.

"Singing it must be," he declared. "We can't go out of the beaten track. I hear that at a free lunch in St. Teath, not so long ago, one of the slate-men home on a holiday from America danced a negro dance and played his own measure on a banjo. It raised a good deal of excitement, chiefly because he blacked his face and had a red seat to his pants; but those who knew best felt, though harmless in itself, it wasn't in keeping with the occasion."

"Dancing is the way the Devil goes," said Anna Retallack; "and you're wrong to say 'tis lawful at any time, father, and well you know it."

But Mr. Nute defended himself against this attack.

"I grant the Devil has had a lot to do with dancing," he said; "but 'tis the art of him—to spoil many a perfectly proper and innocent contrivance by meddling with it. David danced before the ark, and nothing was said, though such is the feeling against it now crept into serious minds, that you and many others don't think the better of David for doing so."

"He was a light man and a bit of a baffle-head," said Anna, "and them that would dance would do the other wrong things he did."

"All human cleverness can be put to poor purpose, however, and even singing, which is our stand-by and dear to us as the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land—even singing may do the Devil's work. 'Tis the spirit that quickens. Think of the songs that old, dead bedman* to Tintagel used to

* *Bedman*—sexton.

sing. And report says that he used to give 'em tongue at his work, though I'd never have believed that against the man unless I had heard it with my own ears. 'Twas naughty stuff remembered from the old droll-tellers. I mind the last of them. A crowdy he carried and sang to his scraping—songs we wouldn't suffer in these nicer times."

"But singing to our Maker be the mainstay of the Uniteds, and always have been," said Anna.

"Song takes the place of drink in Delabole," declared Wilberforce Retallack. "And I've known it to have very much the same effect in some cases."

"You shouldn't say that," answered his wife, whose serious spirit no ray of humour or imagination had ever lighted.

"I do say it. A good volume of harmony along with fine words of praise or prayer to God do often get into the head—don't they, Grandfather?"

"It can't be denied, Wil. Song do make our choir's members more genial and more gentle and more uplifted. And more hopeful. And drink can do all that, too. I'll go further, and say that after a proper fiery practice, long drawn out, we know what it is to wake with a headache in the morning!"

Ned laughed and Pooley listened. At this stage in the young man's experience he usually found himself on his mother's side against the larger and more tolerant outlook of his father and grandfather.

Their meal ended, Wilberforce and his boys returned to work as the hooter blew. Mr. Nute took the newspaper to a window corner, and the women washed up.

CHAPTER V

AT NEWHALL MILL

WHEN Ned Retallaek offered to join his sisters on Sunday afternoon they were surprised. It was seldom that he accompanied them for a walk or desired their society, but on hearing that they were going to tea with the Bakes, at Newhall Mill, he graciously proposed to escort them.

"There's always a doubt whether Thomas lets his bull run in the path-field," he said, "and I'll see you through it."

The bull was a myth, but Julitta thanked him, and hoped he would also join the tea-party.

"They'll be gay and proud to see you, Ned," she assured her brother.

"I might, or I might not," he answered.

They started in their best attire.

Edith was a big auburn girl, with deep brown eyes and a clear-cut, pale face, faintly freckled. She possessed beauty, and her gracious figure and free gait did not detract from an air of refinement and distinction that belonged to her. Her hands and ankles were not small, but finely modelled. Her face reflected something of the soulless perfection of a Greek statue. There was a large placidity of forehead, a stolidity of the beautiful features that showed at once something higher and lower than a sculptor's dream. Only time's chisel could finish the fair thing, and make or mar it. She wore a dark russet gown and a jacket of the same colour. A little muff of brown fur she carried, with a wrapper round her neck to match it, and on her head a brown fur hat, quite unadorned. The hair that waved out from beneath was the colour of the dead brake fern when wet—a splendid true auburn, dark as the waters of a burn in spate. Only sunshine could wake the hidden fire of it, but in shade something akin to purple brushed the beautiful colour. Her face was clear-cut and strong, with

a firm round chin and a mouth cleanly modelled and waved to the corners. But the lips, though full, lacked colour.

Julitta had nothing in common with her elder sister. She was dark and slight, and three inches shorter than Edith. She had dressed herself in a stout winter jacket of bright red cloth, and kept her hands in the pockets of it. Her hair was black and her bright little face highly coloured.

With Ned between them they passed down beneath the great rubbish-shoot of the quarries, where its mass arose above the meadows and its feet trampled the valley beneath. Here spread a wide combe that opened westerly between the hills. Within it, under the lee of the land, trees grew to maturity, woods throve and sank to deep dingles by a streamlet. Beech and oak, spruce and fir flourished, and from the larches, at every breath of the winter wind, flew the dead needles, like a cloud of gold dust.

Away below stretched a vale watered by the brook, and at a hamlet by forest edge a bridge spanned the stream and cottages climbed the eastern hill together. Then spread water-meadows and waste land about the passage of the rivulet, while beyond, earth rolled away in undulating leagues to the grey mists that hung low above the horizon. St. Teath's squat tower rose at the bottom of the valley among the last autumn brightness of trees; but Edith, Ned, and Julitta were not bound thither. They followed a field-path or two, climbed a few slate stiles, and skirted the wood.

Here presently a meadow opened, and their way ran through it to a point where the Newhall brook purred into a brake of fern and briar and dead meadowsweet. The mill-stream soon emerged upon a flat of rushes, the haunt of moorhens and water-voles.

Then came the mill-pond, a respectable reach of open water upon whose tide sailed white ducks, and whose grassy banks were scattered with feathers and puffs of down. Alders rose upon the farther side of the pool, and beyond them extended an orchard, where a few red and yellow apples still clung to the boughs, though most of the harvest had been garnered for the cider-presses.

Now rose the lichened roof of Newhall Mill House, the ancestral home of the Bakes; but the mill itself hung on the slope of a gentle hill fifty yards distant, and the stream,

curved in a narrow launder of Delabole slate, gained force as it fell to leap upon the wheel.

In sight of their destination a girl met the party—a blue-eyed, small, dark-haired thing of sturdy, solid build. Her face was attractive but not pretty; her Sunday finery sat untidily upon her.

“Here’s Philippa Sleep!” said Edith, and her brother pretended astonishment.

“Why, so ’tis!” he said. “What be she doing down here?” But he did not deceive Julitta.

“Waiting for you by the looks of it,” she answered. “Now we know why you were so kind as to see us through the meadow where the bull runs.”

He laughed, and they greeted Philippa.

“You needn’t pretend,” began Ned’s younger sister. “We know you haven’t come by accident.”

Philippa peeped at them.

“Nothing happens by accident, I reckon,” she answered. “I wasn’t going to pretend, Julitta.”

“The flickets* are in your cheeks, however.”

“I’m always red—’tis nature.”

“And now you won’t come to the mill, I suppose?” asked Edith of her brother.

“I suppose not,” he answered. “Of course, I can’t let this poor child go through the field, where a savage bull might lie behind a blade of grass somewhere.”

They joked for two minutes, then Edith and Julitta went on their way, and Ned sauntered off with his sweetheart. But when the other maidens were ought of sight, Philippa and the lad turned into a woodman’s path and sought a familiar haunt under the spruce firs. They loved one another with the heedless, hearty, brainless ardour of youth. They lived in the joy of their present attachment, and were sublimely indifferent to the future, its cares and calls. Ned voiced the exact situation in a sentence.

“I never seem to get a bit of fun in the world unless I’m along with you, Phil,” he said.

“Same here,” she assured him. “There ain’t no fun in Delabole out of sight of you. Everything that’s worth doing be wicked—except singing, and I can’t sing.”

* *Flickets*—blushes.

“ I’d sooner hear thicky wood-dove sing than all the choirs in all the chapels,” he answered.

“ Why can’t the people wait ?” said Philippa, with a twinkling mouth. “ They’ll be able to shout their heads off in the next world by all accounts. There’ll be streams of music all day long there. But they won’t be able to do a lot of fine things there that they could do here.”

Her unconscious appeal to the senses pleased him.

“ The cleverness ! Sometimes I think I’ll smash my savings and break loose and take you to Plymouth, and we’ll go to theatres and music-halls every night till I’m broke; then we’ll come home and face ’em. They couldn’t *do* anything when all’s said.”

“ I’d go,” she declared, “ if ’twas only to see Aunt Sarah’s face when I came back.”

They entertained themselves for a long time by planning the details of this devilry, and by considering the comments of Delabole upon it when they returned.

Meanwhile Edith and Julitta reached the wicket of the Mill House, ascended a path of cobblestones flanked with ‘ Cornish diamonds ’—great lumps of glittering quartz—and knocked at a door garlanded with a monthly rose, which still presented a few weather-worn clusters of flowers.

Within, a harmonium was grunting and children’s voices accompanied the dreary sound. But the music ceased at their summons; there was a scurry of small feet and the swift tramp of heavy ones. Then the door opened, and a young man stood there with a little girl on each side of him.

Wesley Bake was a fair youth, with straw-coloured hair, bright grey eyes, and a sanguine complexion. His features were regular, his small, pale moustache did not conceal his mouth, which was strong. He stood six feet, and his limbs were muscular, but loosely put together. For a man of but eight-and-twenty he was inclined to be stout; but his energy was tremendous, and he proved well able to undertake the burden of life that had somewhat unexpectedly fallen upon his shoulders.

Within two years his father and elder brother had died, and the mastership of Newhall Mill accrued to him. It was an important industry, for all the quarrymen’s corn was ground here. Now, with two widows, Wesley dwelt, for his

mother and the wife of his dead, elder brother kept him company, and the little girls that stood beside him as he welcomed Edith were his nieces. The bright-faced children of nine and ten years old resembled each other, but their natures differed, and while the elder, Mary, had never given her mother one uneasy thought, Betty revealed an original spirit. Originality in children is always a nuisance to the mind framed for peace, and Susan Bake, the mother of the little girls, loved Mary best, because she gave least trouble. Mary belonged to the order of those who do right because they are never inclined to do wrong; Betty was wayward and wilful. Mary was often an unconscious humbug; Betty proved indifferent to the feelings of her elders, and had less tact and more pluck.

Now Mary fastened on Edith and Betty upon Julitta; then they all went into the big kitchen of the mill, where tea was spread.

“Wesley was for the parlour, but I said you girls would make no bones about that,” began the miller’s mother as she shook hands. “The parlour strikes cruel cold from October to April, though a very nice room in summer.”

A generous meal was spread, and Nancy Bake poured out the tea while Susan looked after the guests. Edith sat beside Wesley, and he ministered to her needs and watched her eat with frank enjoyment. The elder Mrs. Bake also set Edith first, for she knew what was coming. She was a large woman and corpulent. From her the young man had received his great limbs and Saxon colouring.

The children chattered.

“Did ’e thank Miss Julitta for the story-book?” asked their grandmother, and Mary answered:

“We did, Granny. And I told her ’twas a brave book. And I like it more than any book ever I read—except the Bible.”

“And I like it better,” said Betty, “’cause it ain’t so terrible long and there’s pixies in it.”

“And we hope Miss Julitta will tell us one of her beautiful stories come presently, don’t we, Betty?” asked her sister.

“Yes, we do,” said Betty; “and we hope it won’t be a Sunday one.”

“ Oh, Betty—how wicked !”

Mary's eyes grew round and sought her mother's face; but Susan Bake, unheeding the children, was stealing many a glance at Edith. Her own romance had been cut short suddenly, but she was still young, and the thought of Edith presently reigning where she had thought to reign moved her.

People spoke respectfully of Edith. None knew very much about her character outside her own home.

Susan had studied the girl before, and learned little save that she was beautiful, and had a stronger character and better education than she could claim. The widow was not jealous, but she was anxious for the future of herself and her children when the change came. Wesley, a modest and ingenuous spirit, true and honest as light, had not hidden from his mother or Susan the thing in his heart. They knew he loved Edith, and guessed that she loved him; but of this they could not be sure.

“ She idden too good for you, Wesley, for the maid ain't born that be; but she's a cut above me and Susan in her intellects, and I don't suppose, if it happened, that her and me would be so friendly and understanding as me and Susan. But that's not to tell a word against her.”

So said Mrs. Bake, who was always a plain speaker, and liked nothing hidden or mysterious in her relations with her fellows.

Her view, however, did not commend itself to her son.

“ If she takes me,” he said, “ she'll be a proper, perfect daughter to you. That goes without a thought. She thinks a lot of you, and has said it in so many words.”

The party was a success, and Wesley, when he found what a good tea Edith was making, followed her example.

“ The United are to have another lunch, I hear,” said Susan Bake. “ Sarah Sleep at the paper-shop tells me your grandfather, as usual, is the moving spirit. He's been the most wonderful man in Delabole for twenty years, and long may he so continny.”

“ He is wonderful,” answered Edith. “ Almost too wonderful we find him sometimes. The energy in him would light Delabole with electricity, father says.”

“ Satan never found no mischief for his idle hand,” declared Nancy. “ For why ? He never found his hand idle. If the

man's resting in his chair, his hands be waving a knife and fork or playing the flute."

Edith and Julitta looked at each other and simultaneously sighed.

"It's a sore subject, Mrs. Bake. We love him dearly; but oh, that flute!"

"Gets on the nerves, I dare say. Yet he's a great musicker and seldom blows a wrong note, they tell me."

"Ask him to tea one day and bid him bring it," suggested Julitta. "Mary and Betty would love him—even if you didn't."

"I do love him," declared Betty. "He's my best friend in the world."

"We all love him, for he's made of sense and charity. I'll go further than that, and say that a middle-aged woman here and there be in love with him. I'm sure 'tis no disgrace to 'em neither, for you can't call him old, except to the eye of youth."

"We wish he was older," answered Edith, "don't we, Julitta? He's an unrestful dear."

After tea Wesley took Edith out to look at some puppies, and Julitta stopped with the children. They sat, Betty on her lap and Mary beside her, in the deep embrasure of the kitchen window, while Nancy and her daughter-in-law cleared up.

"Don't let 'em torment you, Julitta," said Susan Bake. "The toads never give you no rest, I'm sure."

Betty eyed her mother until she judged her out of earshot. Then she whispered to Julitta:

"Tell us a tale, but not about God."

"Why not?" asked the story-teller, and Betty whispered again.

"I don't much like what I hear about God."

"Betty—you wicked child!" cried Mary.

But Betty only pouted and shook her head.

"I don't care. It's all very well for Mary, because she suits Him, and I don't suit Him, so mother says. And we never like people we don't suit."

"I'm sure you suit Him beautifully when you're good, Betty."

"I never am," said the little girl. "Leastways I feel good,

but I didn't ought, seemingly. I'm cliky-pawed,* and 'tis very much against me, mother says. But why for did God make me cliky-pawed if He don't like it?"

Julitta felt unequal to answering this difficult question.

"'Twill come right, be sure, if you make your right hand work," she said; "and now I'm going to tell you about good Saint Petroc, the greatest of all the Cornish saints."

Mary viewed the prospect hopefully, but it was clear that her sister expected small pleasure from the narrative.

"Let me stroke Edith's muff, then, while you do," said Betty. "I suppose as it's Sunday it's got to be a Sundayfied story."

"There's nothing Sundayfied about it; and get off my lap, Betty, you're too heavy." Then she proceeded, with a child nestling close on either side.

"When dear St. Petroc went to India, he was very, very tired one day, and, finding himself on a beautiful, white, sandy shore, where blue waves broke gently and made a pleasant, murmuring sound, he thought it would be rather nice to have a nap. Along the edge of the silvery sands there grew cocoanut-trees, with great leaves hanging down and nearly reaching the earth. There was beautiful shade under them, so the holy man found a snug corner and put his head on his arm and curled up, and soon went to sleep.

"I don't know how long he slept, but when he woke up the sun had gone and the moon was shining and making the shore as white as snow. Then St. Petroc walked down to the sea and, much to his surprise, found that while he had slept, a beautiful silver bowl had floated to the beach. It was like a junket bowl, only a thousand times bigger. He much wondered what the bowl could mean, and then he heard a voice telling him to take off his robe and drop his staff and get into the bowl. So he obeyed, and then away went the bowl with St. Petroc in it over the sea.

"All night the bowl floated over the dark waves, but when the sun rose St. Petroc saw a little cloud which seemed to be coming towards him, and presently it came nearer, and grew larger and lovelier, and turned into an island. And the bowl stranded in the foam on the shore, and St. Petroc got out and walked through the crystal water to the beach. He thought

* *Cliky-pawed*—left-handed.

that he would just have a look round and get a drink from a spring and oranges from the trees, and then return to the bowl and pursue his travels. But after he had eaten some oranges and grapes and prepared to start again, what was his surprise to find that the bowl had vanished!

“So then of course he knew that it was meant for him to stop on the island. He stopped, and as there was nobody else there, he had all his time on his hands to think fine thoughts and become very wise. In a lovely pool—like the pools you know among the rocks at Trebarwith Sand—he found a fish—just large enough for one good meal. So he caught it and made a fire and cooked it and ate it, and flung its bones back into the pool. But the moment the bones went back into this magic pool they all joined together at once, and the fish became alive and well again. So the holy man had no trouble about his breakfast, for he caught and ate the fish every morning regularly, and he never felt hungry after eating it until the next morning.

“For seven whole years he lived there all by himself, getting wiser and wiser every minute. And then he began to feel that he was ready to go into the world with all his wisdom and help other people, who had not had such a splendid opportunity to grow wise as God had given to him.

“Then he prayed to go back into the world to help it, and the very next morning after his prayer he found the great silver bowl waiting for him, just where he had left it seven years before!

“So he prepared to set sail, and said good-bye to the fish, for he did not eat it that morning. And he thanked the fish with all his heart for its extraordinary kindness; and the fish begged him not to mention it, and said it had been quite a pleasure. It even wished him good luck, and hoped that they might meet again some day.

“The second voyage lasted just as long as the first, and when the moon came out, the bowl touched ground again on the silver beach under the cocoanut-trees. And there lay St. Petroc's robe and staff, just where he had thrown them down!

“But of course they would have been stolen by somebody in the course of seven years had no messenger been sent to guard them, and when the traveller returned he found that

a very large and beautiful wolf was watching his property. And the wolf wagged his brush, and was perfectly thankful to see him, because to keep guard seven years in one spot is rather a dull duty for a busy, bustling creature like a wolf. He stretched his hind paws and then he stretched his front ones, and then he yawned till his jaws cracked, and rollicked about and howled with happiness, because his long and faithful vigil was ended. And his green eyes glittered with joy in the moonlight.

“The saint was very pleased indeed, and he patted the good wolf on the head, and said that he should never lose sight of him again. Which, of course, made him a very proud wolf. Then St. Petroc and the wolf set sail in the bowl together, and came presently, after a long voyage, to Cornwall. And there the holy man began to be a saint in real earnest, so that everybody in Cornwall was happier and better for his coming. And the kind and good and wise things that he did in Cornwall would take a thousand books to tell. But to this day the beautiful emblems of St. Petroc are a silver bowl and a splendid wolf. And that’s the end of the story.”

The children glowed, and Betty paid the warmest tribute she knew to the story-teller’s powers.

“You dear, precious Julitta!” she said, and flung herself into Julitta’s arms and kissed her. Then, while the more sober Mary put questions, inspired by St. Petroc’s earlier adventures, Betty huddled up with her secret thoughts and stared before her, seeing nothing.

At intervals she whispered under her breath: “Darling fish! Darling wolf!”

Elsewhere Edith and Wesley Bake, in a gathering gloaming, followed the stream to the valley levels, where it sank away through bottoms of sedge and blackthorn and tallows to little muddy backwaters loved by the woodcock. He talked fitfully, as a man in love talks, and was watchful for her every step. Now he held back a briar, now offered his hand at a stepping-stone. She praised the sunset light, and he agreed. Then he ventured to be personal.

“It burns on your hair something wonderful, Edith.”

“To think you can like my red hair!”

“‘Red’! I’d kill the man who said it was red. There

never was such a colour before. I've puzzled this autumn-time a good bit to match it, if you'll excuse me for saying so—but I can't; it changes every minute. Now, when you catch the red sun going down, your hair is very near as splendid as the cherry-leaves; and then again it 'minds me of the bright agate stone my mother wears at her throat Sundays; and then, when the brook under Brown Willy's in spate, as it was the last time I fished there, I called home your hair in a minute. But nothing gets near it really."

She smiled at him, and wondered how long the diffident man would postpone his inevitable word. For herself she was still uncertain, though her parents had believed that her mind was affirmed.

Between Thomas Hawkey, manager of Delabole Quarries, and Wesley Bake, of Newhall, it proved exceedingly difficult to decide. They were alike in an outlook upon life that appealed to Edith; they were both strong and pleasing to the eye; they both courted her with a modesty and delicacy that made her happy in their company. And while the one was of livelier soul and more cheerful disposition, that advantage seemed fairly lost against the better education and wider outlook of the other. That she could thus hesitate between them might have led a student to guess that in reality she loved neither; but the truth was that Edith had found in each those qualities demanded by her own nature from a man. She might have loved either, the other away; either might have found in her a wife to complete his life and make him a happy man; but since both had entered into her existence, a certain stability and balance of mind that belonged to Edith now created in her no small perplexity. So contrary was the situation from all that seemed proper to love, so improper did it appear to her that a woman should care for two men to the verge of love, that secretly she was somewhat ashamed of herself, and suspected a very abnormal and undesirable weakness of mind. She felt that, for one of her decided opinions, doubt on such a question was extraordinary, and she threw the blame upon herself rather than the psychologic situation.

So absolute was her impartiality that for a time she told herself she would accept the man who first asked to wed; and now a man did offer.

Wesley had framed the momentous words a thousand times, and doubted not that his memory would stand firm at the crucial moment; but the fine phrases rehearsed on sleepless nights are apt to vanish in the storm centre of a proposal, with a woman listening and life hanging on her answer.

He came well out of it, however, stood quite still, looked Edith square in the eyes, and told her that the happiness of his life depended henceforth upon her will. He was brief, but clear and forcible.

“I’ll beat about the bush no more,” he said, as they turned to go back. “Tidden dignified, Edith, and a poor compliment to my pluck and your beauty and goodness. I must hear it now—this living hour. I want you with all my soul and strength, and I love you with all my soul and strength. You know me—just an everyday man, but capable of rising if I had you to rise to. You’d lift me up a lot, Edith. You have already. And I hope, please God, you feel that you could wed me, and if you can, I’ll leave no stone unturned to make a husband worthy of you, so far as such a man as I am can do.”

He stretched out his hand to her and was silent, while she felt the words were exactly what he ought to have said and exactly what she knew he would say. Yet they sounded a little tame. Men whom she had liked less had offered marriage with greater charm. She was silent for a moment, though she took his hand and let him hold hers. Then she recollected her own determination: to accept the first of these two who offered. She was perfectly calm—so calm that she could find time to feel shocked to think she had ever come to such a cold-blooded decision. He waited eagerly. His face put her in mind of a dog’s that was begging for a biscuit. Her thoughts ran, and he spoke again.

“Don’t say ‘no’ all in a moment. Think it out. I’ve no right to expect an instant answer.”

This offer was too good to be rejected.

“That’s like you, Wesley, and I don’t think the worse of you for saying it. I think the better of you for saying it. Give me a few days; then I’ll come over and we’ll tell about it.”

“Thank you, Edith. Days will be years, however,” he answered, a little chilled that she should agree with his sug-

gestion so swiftly. "Of course, a man's but a man. Would it be going too far to ask you if there was hope? But yes—of course, it would. You'll answer me when you can."

"Don't fear I'll keep you long," she said. "I care a lot for you, Wesley. I dare say I could say 'yes' this minute, and be happier for saying it; but 'yes' or 'no' is a mighty matter, and the word once given could never be unsaid again by such as I am. So I'll take your offer, and turn it over and pray to God about it."

"That's all right," he answered. "All the same, I'm mortal sorry now that ever I gave you the chance! It was meant well, but it was a weakness, and I'll dare swear men have paid a long price for such weakness before to-night!"

"I think no worse of you for saying it," she repeated; then, with silence between them, in a dusky gloaming where the blackbirds cried 'Good-night, good-night, good-night!' shrilly, they went back together.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW DINNER-HOUSE

THE immensity of the quarries might well be marked from below. Over the green pool at the bottom of the pit there passed a trestle-bridge, and around it the space, that appeared shrunk to nothing when seen from above, spread out in some acres of apparent confusion and chaos. A village might have stood here. The main incline sloped upward like a mountain-side, and the whole bewildering region was scored with glittering tram-lines on different planes, that ran hither and thither, rose and fell, and ended at the various centres and galleries where work progressed. The pappot-head towered six hundred feet above on the western cliffs, and round about wheeled the amphitheatre of crags and precipices, now lifted in giant steps, now stark, now furrowed and wrinkled, and overhanging with threats of implicit peril. At this season much water was finding its way into the quarries, and the pool often rose a foot in a night. Many a rill spouted against the purple and olive sides of the slate, and from rifts and cracks in the quarry walls came threads of water. Elsewhere, over ledges and old workings, a thin rain of scattered torrents misted, and sometimes, when the low sun burned into the depths, it touched these vapours and set a rainbow there. Then the faces of the rock were transformed, and their wetness shone orange-tawny, gold, and crimson. One heard the eternal whisper and murmur of many waters, the clank of the pump, and the steady thud of the great water-wheels that sucked day and night at the tarn beneath them. The floods were drawn off by unseen ways through the side of the quarries, and the water was used aloft for the steam-engines that hoisted the slate from beneath and ran the machinery for cutting and dressing above.

To-day an event was to mark the dinner-hour, and instead of assembling at noon to ascend as usual, a large number of

the rock-men collected about a new stone building of one large room that had been built at the bottom of the quarry.

Here were Thomas Hawkey, the manager, Grandfather Nute, Wilberforce Retallack, the foreman, and his colleague, Sidney Nanjulian, a thin, romantic-looking man of five-and-thirty. Certain of the elders—masters of gangs and so forth—stood beside Hawkey, and among them were Moses Bunt, a crusty and carping spirit already mentioned, Noah Tonkin, Jack Keat, and a score of others, all grey-headed now after a life of service at Old Delabole. A few of the hill-men—dressers and splitters—had also descended, though the new building at the quarry bottom did not concern them. Among these came Pooley Retallack, with the priestlike eyes. He stood beside his brother Ned and listened to Thomas Hawkey. Rain fell and filled the quarry with a grey veil while the manager spoke, but no man heeded it.

“This is hardly matter for a ceremony, neighbours,” said Hawkey. “As you know, for those who did not want to return home to dinner, the Directors made this gift of the dinner-house, which has been built here for our comfort. And before we go in, it is our duty to record a due sense of the kind spirit that put up this shelter.”

Then Mr. Keat spoke for the men. He was a local preacher, and possessed the gift of oratory.

“Such things were not done or thought of for the workers in my young days,” he began, “and it shows that the world is moving on to a better understanding of the great truth that Jesus Christ brought into it; and when you hear of discontents and strikes in the land, we may be glad that our time has fallen here, where the spirit of kindness and understanding is alive between us, whose lot is to work, and them whose lot is to be masters. ‘Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s,’ as we have always done——”

“Dinner’s getting cold, Jack Keat!” said a thin voice sharply, but he was greeted with ‘Hush!’ ‘Shut up, Bunt!’ and, ‘Where’s your manners?’

Mr. Keat flowed on.

“And if that rule was observed between labour and capital; if the stormy petrels of labour were caught and put in cages a bit quicker, we should have less troubles than we do have. And I voice you one and all, brothers, when I ask Mister

Tom to tell the Directors that we're glad to have this room down here—we old chaps, whose labours are nearly at an end. And I hope that many generations of rock-men will find the house come handy in rough weather, and not forget the good spirit that built it for 'em. And for us, dear brothers, as Christian men in a Christian land—for us, we have got to look deeper than the goodwill of our masters, to the God who put that goodwill in their hearts and to the spirit that it shows. And as one sparrow cannot fall unmarked of the Lord, so be sure one rock-man don't lose life or limb without God Almighty's visitation and for His purpose. He is always with us, and what He doeth we know not now, but we shall know hereafter, for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen."

'Amen!' 'Amen!' said the men, and Hawkey opened the door.

It was exceedingly characteristic of those for whom he stood that this trifling matter should have been thus conducted. The ceremony typified the mind of Delabole, where the least function becomes a ceremony, develops into a solemnity, and takes a religious turn at the first excuse. Even now Mr. Keat was not satisfied, and desired to sing the verse of a familiar hymn; but Antipas Keat, the baker, who had charge of the free meal, and who had been at work in the dinner-room for some time, begged him to delay any singing until the food was eaten. They were cousins, and Antipas spoke freely.

"Chuck it, Jack—else the mutton will be rags," he said.

Now five-and-thirty men of the seniors followed Hawkey, who took his seat at the head of a long table, while the rest returned to the tumbrils, signalled aloft, and were soon drawn up out of the quarries. With them went Mr. Nute and his grandsons.

"I'm glad they've got it," said Grandfather. "'Twas time, for the seeds of a lot of rheumatics have been sowed in the dinner-hour at Delabole. Now 'twill be different."

Retallack and Nanjulian sat on each side of Hawkey, and Mr. Keat occupied the bottom of the table, while Antipas and an assistant served them. The meal had been cooked in the quarry, for among the advantages of the new chamber was a good kitchen stove.

Two courses comprised the dinner, and plenty of tea was drunk with it. The meal occupied but five-and-twenty

minutes, then most of those present lighted their pipes. Tom Hawkey and the foremen departed; Antipas began to pack up his baskets.

"And how's the house getting on?" asked Noah Tonkin. "To my eye it hangs fire a bit."

"I'm busy inside," answered the baker. "It won't be no ordinary house, you may take my word for that. I was showing my wife a surprise or two last Sunday. I've got a sure feeling that we don't have enough cupboards in our houses; but my house will be a proper nest of cupboards."

"And what did Mrs. Keat say?" asked Moses Bunt. "You'll be a clever man if you build a house to suit a woman."

"She said that it would be a terrible difficult place to keep clean, but, coming from her, that's nothing," answered Antipas. "She's got a mania in that matter, and sees dirt where none else do. You must have reason in everything, and Nature will be heard. To speak unkindly of dirt is to lift your voice against the Lord in my opinion."

"The world is His workshop, and He can't make and unmake without a bit of a mess, or if He can, He don't," declared Jack Keat.

"And, after all, dirt is only how you look at it," argued his cousin. "'Tis only a human word for a lot of stuff that happens. Dirt to my wife means a happy home for a black-beetle, and her savage feeling against a beetle goes outside charity and religion, as I've often told her, for we may be sure the Almighty didn't plan even a cockroach for nothing."

"A very deep question," said Noah Tonkin, "and I've often wondered, when I see human nature up against other nature, where the fault was. House-beetles couldn't have come in the world before there was houses for 'em to dwell in, and they wouldn't have been sent into our houses without their Maker had sent 'em, and yet 'tis a common human opinion that they're much better away. Same with mice—and worse than mice. In a sense you may say that when we take life we disagree with God. At least, so it looks to me."

"Then my bake-house be a scene of daily sin," confessed Antipas. "I've gone among 'em of a night like Samson among the Philistines. No, you're out there, Noah Tonkin. Because, if that was pushed home, 'twould be wrong to uproot a weed, or shoot a hawk, or teel a trap for a rat."

“It’s like this,” argued the preacher, “we share the earth with a lot of other things, and they’re put here, not for their own purposes, but for their bearing on our characters. The Lord, in His wisdom, said, after our first parents failed so fearful, that too much ease and contentment was a bad thing for men and women. The Almighty saw with half an eye that Adam and Eve couldn’t carry corn, as we say. So out they went, to a life of toil and grief and pain—to make a man and woman of them. And the Everlasting didn’t build up no more grown folk from a rib of the man—that being an easy and painless business; but He invented cheeldin, and gave the weaker vessel the work. And, in His wisdom, He called up nettles and thistles from the earth, and frost and tempest down from the air. He made the bug and the east wind and the viper, and the peril that flies by day and the danger that lies hid by night. Many such unloved things He created—all for the chastening of man. And ’twas not hate but love that quickened the Almighty’s wits—be sure of that. He saw, if we were to be saved, that we’d got to fight hard for it; He discovered, much to His sorrow, no doubt, that we weren’t by any means so close to the angels as He had hoped and planned we should be. You might say, to speak it in all humility, that the Almighty was a lot disappointed with Eve. She didn’t come off as He’d meant her. In fact, He thought she was made of finer stuff, or else He’d never have trusted her—a green, new-created creature—with the Old Serpent. But she failed Him, as her daughters have failed a good many people since, and as a rib of Adam was pretty sure to do. And so God saw ’twas a case of spare the rod and spoil the child, and He treated them accordingly.”

“What’s that to do with house-beetles?” asked Moses Bunt.

“Just this, my dear. These painful things I’ve named be sent in this world to remind us it is this world and not the next. And we’re expected to fight them like brave men, and conquer ’em, and come through the fires of tribulation purified and ready for the wedding garment of the Lamb. Life’s a battle, and we’ve got to fight the least as well as the greatest; and as our souls are called to fight the Devil, so our bodies are called to fight all the earthly evils and dangers. Beetles be put in the houses to raise our ideas of cleanliness, and weeds in our gardens to challenge us and remind us that

we can only win the fruits of the earth by the sweat of our brow."

"And we do it and rise above such things," declared the baker. "We're a powerful race—we Cornishmen—and more than equal to our stations in my opinion. A strong people, as we deserve to be, seeing where we draw our strength."

The talk drifted to striking and the Trades Unions. Upon this subject they were not agreed, though for the most part the local preacher, who was a Conservative of reactionary ideals, found himself in a minority of one.

They were still arguing when the hooter blew from aloft and work began again.

A trolley descended for Antipas Keat presently, and he, with his dishes and plates, knives and forks, teapots and kettles, ascended. He had never in his life before been at the bottom of the quarry, and he declared on reaching home that it was a remarkable experience he would not willingly have missed.

CHAPTER VII

TREBARWITH SAND

CORNWALL is the freest county in England, and the field-paths are legion. Everywhere along the northern coast, stiles of Delabole slate open cheerfully to the pedestrian, and invite him to leave the highway for the meadow and the down.

Now Edith Retallack, face to face with problems that none could solve but herself, set forth to spend some hours alone, and so, if possible, come to conclusions concerning the momentous business of making up her mind. 'I must get out of my heart and climb up into my head, and stop there till I've decided,' thought Edith; 'or else I must—no, it's no use saying that my heart must decide, because it can't.' The situation so stated cast her down, and she blamed her heart in that it held the balance so evenly. Had Wesley Bake and Thomas Hawkey represented different emotional interests, had they stood for opposite or diverse attractions in that many-sided experience, a woman's life, she might have found material to work upon, and balanced the promise of the one against the promise of the other. But they appealed to no different needs of her nature; they did not represent the practical against the ideal, or working life on the one hand, high-days and holidays on the other. They were alike, and challenged the whole of her. She was not versatile herself. These sober-minded, steadfast men both chimed with her outlook, both promised to suffice her needs and happily crown her ambition of home, husband, family.

She was puzzled, and could not explain her own impartiality. And now she set out against a stiff north-westerly breeze with her face to the sea and her mind affirmed to make itself up. She was not impervious to Nature, as are most who live in the lap of Nature; indeed, she loved the sea, and often trusted the open air to sweeten thought and clarify thinking. She was sensible, indeed, almost sensitive, to the moods of earth and

sky; they would lead her away from the matter in hand, and yet, by most devious and unforeseen channels, influence her opinions upon it. This happened now. The westering sun shine and fierce wind fortified her, the thunder of the sea invigorated her, as she sank towards it through Trebarwith Coombe.

Edith had hoped to take a favourite tramp along the sands and let the salt wind sting her where she walked by the fringes of the waves; but the tide was high, and a welter of shouting breakers beat against the land. Therefore she sat on a rock in sunshine, overlooked the water, and watched the waves from a little bluff above them.

Ridge upon ridge the deep-breathing rollers came and swept the shore. They swelled to their greatest on the shoals, then towered to onset. As their crests thinned and a ribbon of dim emerald glittered translucent under their white manes, their necks bent; above them the foam was torn off and sent ahead in a dust of gold, then each watery mass fell and toppled, to mingle its might with the tumult of the wave that preceded it. There was a movement and shout of battle. The besiegers were alive and alert; deep called to deep, and the great captains of the sea brought up their allied armies to make common war upon the land. It seemed that the majesty of the earth shook and throbbed, but stirred not, while its van of ocean-facing rocks tore gaps in the green waves, and its crags and precipices and massive planes beat back the waters, churned them, scattered their masses into an agony of impotent foam, hurled them down again indifferently, all torn and stricken, into the ranks that followed. Over every rock still unsubmerged the broken water swept irresistibly and buried them a fathom deep under each billow, then, like leviathans, they heaved up out of the white water, and a thousand streams bearded their flanks and boiled back to the labouring sea; while against the cliffs those waves that escaped impact with the outlying rocks leapt with thunder and spouted upward in heavy columns and sheaves of silver. These seemed to open at the crown and bloom in brief rainbows; then, with a sob and a sigh, to the surges they tumbled again.

Organ-music of wind and water fitly accompanied this huge unrest and strife, while the patient sea toiled without ceasing and loosed the pent-up forces of Atlantic winds upon the land.

To the ephemeral observation of man these forces raged in vain, yet the ocean better understood the secret argument and drift of that wide war. She knew that not one of all her legions had burst and broken in vain, not one of all the myriad waves but had written its story on the stone, not one of all her earth-shaking billows but had added another throb to that eternal energy for ever moulding earth's confines anew, for ever changing earth's contours, for ever driving back the battlements of the land. Human ears marked only the roar of the invader, and in that thunder the lesser tinkle of falling stone and crumbling earth was lost; human eyes saw nothing but the turmoil of the sea and the confusion of shattered waves that spread a pattern and fret of white froth far out upon the green waters; but to the eyes of the stars earth showed a movement as active and complicated, planets might note whole precipices sink and the forehead of each headland wrinkle into a new frown. Such gigantic secrets written on the frontiers of continents are hidden, behind their own immensity, from human measure. The significance of a century showed nothing to the creature, but the rocks knew in their dark clefts and crannies, and their conqueror likewise knew, that in a battle where time is nought and æons avail for the issue, the dynamic must conquer the static, as surely as a summer ripple saps and swallows a child's little castle of sand. Life lies in the forces that hold the power of change, and when earth grew solid she accepted mutability as a condition of her seeming immortal steadfastness. For the rock samphire on her forehead and seaweed in her lap, the least flower at her throat and the bird that nests upon her finger shall last longer than her own mightiness, now lifted, in far-flung coastlines of light and darkness, to stem the unconquerable sea.

Edith Retallack breathed the wind and reflected upon her own approaching adventure. The immediate issue evaded her, and before the riotous spectacle of waves under a stormy sunset; she concerned her mind with matrimony itself rather than the choice between those who desired to share it with her. She surprised herself by the similes struck out of the place and hour.

A little stream ran down the coombe to the waves and was swallowed in the foam. So, thought Edith, a girl is lost in matrimony, and her maidenhood engulfed by the turbulent

waves of married life. The idea depressed her, for she loved her individuality and was proud of it. Surely no husband could suffer a loved woman to be but one more ripple in the sea of his activities and interests? No, she must heighten, deepen, strengthen him. She must be herself still, and marriage for her should never be eclipse of personality and power—only the means of its finest expression. She was no little thread of fresh water to be consumed and forgotten in an ocean of salt. No woman worth calling one could live content as the shadow or the echo of a man.

She chose a happier image presently, and compared herself to a rock of fine symmetry moulded by the waves into a shape best able to resist them. Again and again it was smothered by the flood, only to emerge cheerful and gleaming to the kiss of the sunset—the brighter and more beautiful for its drowning. Marriage should not drown her. She would emerge from it still herself, for would not the man she chose wed herself? Would he not expect her to be still herself after marriage? If she changed, might not the man grumble and blame her for not keeping the bargain?

She was very wise with maiden wisdom, and doubted not that if women would only continue to keep their souls virgin, after their bodies had met man's, that there would be fewer unhappy marriages and sad homes. 'They wed maidens,' she thought, 'and we ought to go on keeping the hearts of maidens in our breasts, and look at life and laugh at life with the spirit of maidens. It's because we change so, and get anxious and worried about the babies, and forget ourselves, and give up nice clothes, and care no more for our teeth and hair, that the men get out of love with us. But can we be the same? Perhaps we can't. Anyway, I mean to.'

These great aspirations cheered her, and the salt spindrift off the sea flecked her face. She watched the sun go down, and for a brief while, where emerald had glittered along the thin wave-crests, now ruby flushed them. Then darkness gathered, and as she turned to tramp away Edith saw through the welter southward a lighthouse wink its red eye on Trevoise Head.

There was a cottage in the coombe where dwelt Aunt Mery Inch—an old widow and no relation to anybody at Delabole, but she was always 'Aunt Mercy' to her little world. Edith

called now, and the ancient but energetic woman made a pot of tea, and insisted upon the visitor remaining for a meal.

“Put home the door and bide a bit,” she said. “Nowadays I don’t see a soul but poor tootling* Davie from up over, and though the Lord’s chosen do often say very deep and clever things with more in ’em than meets the thought, yet ’tis vitty us should have a tell with quick-witted folk now and again.”

Aunt Mercy was grey and withered, and had a weeping eye. This affliction somewhat correctly indicated her character, for she wept on one side of her face at a sad world, and laughed on the other at a mad one.

“They tell me you’m so good as tokened to Tom Hawkey,” she said. “Now that’s a brave bit of news, if it’s true; and if ’tidden, then you must pardon my manners.”

“It isn’t true,” declared Edith. “I’m not engaged to anybody.”

“Well, well—people will be talking—especially when there’s naught to talk about. ’Tis a human failing, my dear. You can tire out every member of the body but the tongue, and since it don’t want no rest seemingly, no doubt we was meant to talk. Mister Tom’s a very nice man, now-ever.”

“There’s lots of interesting things to talk about beside other people’s affairs, Aunt Mercy.”

“Of course, my dear; never a truer word, I’m sure. There’s your own affairs to begin with, and Lord He knows they’re interesting enough, with the holiday people gone and the money spent, and winter staring us in the face. Not that I’ve got anything much to grumble about, and shouldn’t if I had, for grumbling don’t make you friends in my experience. How’s your family? All pretty clever, I hope.”

“Yes—all well, though father isn’t all we’d have him.”

“They short-necked men have a good deal to suffer after middle life,” said Aunt Mercy. “’Twas so with my own father. A barrel-ribbed chap he was, with too much room in his breast for his lungs, and his tubes a bit too short. He’d choke with coughing sometimes of a night, but a visitor gave him a packet of lozenges, and you might say they added a

* *Tootling*—weak-witted.

year to his life. They'd go straight to the tubes and clear 'em, like a sweep's brush clears a chimney!"

"I'd very much like to know about them," said Edith. "They might comfort father."

Aunt Mercy rose, fetched a box, and emptied some pins and buttons out of it.

"There's the name on the lid," she said. "You can take it down in writing, or I'll give 'e the box if you mind to."

But Edith noted necessary particulars, and did not need the box.

"Your family offered a good bit of food for thought in bygone generations," declared Mrs. Inch. "It's different now, and 'twas your own father, Wilberforce Retallack, that changed the luck, so to call it; but when I was young and knew all about everybody, you could always see, much to your surprise, that the good Retallacks were always terrible unfortunate and the bad ones lucky. Time and again the chapel-goers came to grief through no fault of their own, while the rash and reckless members got took up by their betters and made much of. The bad ones was always the best-looking by the wonderful will of Providence, and your—let's see—your great-uncle on your father's side—his Uncle Bob—from being a gamekeeper, married a lady, the only child of his master."

"Ran away with her," said Edith.

"He did, and though by all the law and the prophets it did ought to have ended in fearful disasters and the Hand of God, it didn't. He was forgiven, and so was she, and their stock goes among the gentlefolk to Bodmin to this day."

"They don't know us, however," said Edith.

"Of course they don't. The parents be gone, and the childer came into their mother's rank and place. Most women drop down when they look down; but such was her cleverness and your great-uncle's charm and modesty that nobody ever snubbed him much, and his wife held with the bettermost for all her folly."

"Yes, because her father forgave her and left her all that he had, which was a great deal," said Edith.

"So the world goes round, my dear. But I was saying that your fine father is the first proper good Retallack to find his reward here. 'Tis a great thing to justify the ways of God

to man, as you'll find in years to come. Of course, it ought to be our pride and pleasure so to do; but a terrible lot of the triers don't manage it somehow."

"As to that, my father's got plenty to trouble him," declared Edith. "He doesn't put much trust in me—though seeing the education I've got, he might do so without hurting himself; but, of course, he tells mother, and they'll often lie awake till the small hours talking of things that are not pleasant."

"Nobody do talk of pleasant things in the small hours," said Aunt Mercy. "If the mind goes to its rest at peace, it goes to sleep, and when you hear married folk awake chattering at two in the morning, you may lay your life they ain't amusing each other."

"Come to the quarry and have tea with mother next time you're in Delabole," begged Edith, as she prepared to start for home. "We were talking of you a day or two since, and she said that she hadn't seen you this longful time."

"I certainly will do so," promised Aunt Mercy; "but not till this here tempest be tired out. 'Twill blow me to Delabole like a leaf, but 'tis the getting home against it—unless I can count on a lift. I've promised your grandfather a fine stubble-fed goose for the free lunch, and you might tell him I ain't forgot it."

Edith ascended the hills and went back through the gloaming. Now Trevoise light flashed through the murk a ruby red, and the shout of the sea slowly died behind her as she climbed away from it. The woman was standing to rest a moment, after mounting the steep road that led from Trebarwith Coombe, when she fell in with one of the men who occupied her mind. Thomas Hawkey appeared on his big bay horse.

"Just come from Tintagel," he said. "Wish I could give you a lift; I'd have brought the dogcart if I'd guessed we were to meet."

"Don't stop," she begged; but he dismounted and walked beside her.

At that moment had the man been pleased to plead his cause Edith might have considered it, but he did not. Since the time when Wilberforce Retallack had hinted that his daughter's affections were engaged at Newhall Mill, Thomas

had taken the truth of the foreman's statement for granted, and modified his love-making. Once he thought that Edith was puzzled by the change in him, and hope dawned again; then he had asked her to come for a Sunday walk, and she had replied that she was going by appointment to the Bakes upon the day he named. Since then he had fought with himself to abandon the ambition of his life and cease to court her.

"I've been watching the sea," said Edith. "It makes you feel small and lonely to look at the sea all by yourself."

"I wish I'd——" he broke off. "It's a good thing sometimes to size yourself up and clear your mind."

"What were you going to say when you began?" she asked.

"Nothing that mattered. In fact, I hardly know. A lonely walk is rather wise sometimes if your lot is thrown in a big family like yours."

"You're always lonely, I suppose? Education makes you lonely if you don't share your life with other people as clever as yourself. Even I know that."

"Of course you do. But there's a lot of people in Delabole can teach me. Books only——"

"Oh, don't say obvious things like that! I'm not a fool."

He was startled, but did not answer. They walked in silence for some distance, each waiting for the other to speak again. Edith's patience exceeded Mr. Hawkey's, and at length he spoke.

"The free lunch promises to be a great success," he said, and she was disappointed. She did not guess that her father had spoken to him; she still wanted him to be personal, to be tender, to assume the mood that always drew her; but he was indifferent. Not so would Wesley Bake have walked beside her.

"You slight education," she said, "you slight it now you've got it; but you don't know all it means, or you might even slight it more."

"I don't understand that," he said.

"We hide behind education," she explained. "You do—I do. The people here don't. They can't—they've got to be themselves. You always know where you are with—with uneducated people. You never know where you are with trained minds. I'm just half and half, you see—not perfectly

educated or perfectly trained; but I've learned enough and seen enough of educated people to understand the difference. And, if anything, my sympathy is with the sort I sprang from. Education hasn't done much for me beyond making me discontented."

"Don't say that."

"It's true. Educated people make quite as many mistakes as the other sort—stupid mistakes, too. For instance, they hide themselves at the wrong times and retreat behind their education just when they ought to come out into the open and be themselves. Do you understand that?"

"Blessed if I do, Edith."

"Then you're duller than I thought."

"I am dull—with you—always."

"Not always. Not—well, yes, on the whole I think you are. I don't strike the sparks out of you. No doubt it takes a man to do that—an educated man."

Again he was silent, only dimly feeling the challenge. Then he gave an inward gasp, forgot Mr. Retallack's warning, and took up the glove that Edith had thrown down. But it was too late. In the long minute that elapsed between her last speech and his next one her whim had changed.

"You're so subtle; but if you mean I'm different with you—there's a reason."

"I don't want to know it if there is. I'm not at all subtle—just an everyday girl, who finds life beat her at every turn—like everybody else. Here's my stile. I'll cut off the corner."

He hesitated. Had he asked her to keep on the road with him it might have changed the tenor of his life. But he felt light-headed and giddy at a suspected discovery. He believed now with all his soul that she was not lost to him; that she might yet be won. He wanted to be alone, and was actually glad for the moment that she intended to leave him.

"It will save you a quarter of a mile," he said. "Good-night, then. I'm more glad than you can tell to have met you, Edith."

She had grown hot that he consented thus to leave her without a murmur, and she scarcely heard the latter part of his remark after the first sentence. A wave of indignation touched her, and, profoundly ignorant of the emotion in his heart, her own grew very hard.

She left him without a word, nor did she answer again when he shouted ' Good-night ' from the dark. Then he mounted, and she heard him gallop away. Hawkey found himself excited and happier than he had been for two months. The clouds seemed to be breaking from his sky and letting a gleam of sunshine through them. It had never occurred to him to suspect that Wilberforce Retallack was mistaken. Now, in the light of Edith's enigmatic utterances and a certain petulance that accompanied them, he believed that it might be so. Therefore he rejoiced while she, all ignorant of how she had succeeded, and shamefaced that she had even attempted to waken him, decided with herself and felt this interview providential.

" The bitter truth is that I like them both so well I don't love either," she told herself, " for till now it was always the one who had my ear suited me best. By rights, then, I shouldn't take either. But now—now that man has shown—glad to go—glad to get the excuse to leave me ! How heartily he said ' Good-night ! ' as if it was a weight off his mind. Would Wesley have let me save my feet a quarter of a mile ? Not him ! He'd have picked me up on the horse willy-nilly, and made me ride pillion, and put his arms round me tight—for safety. Of course, you wouldn't ask an educated man to do that, or even think of it, and that's the difference between an educated man and an educated maid, I dare say. A man can't hark back to the common ways when once he's schooled above 'em: a woman always can—if her heart says it's good enough."

She decided to wed Wesley Bake.

CHAPTER VIII

SPEECH IN THE DARK

SOMETIMES when the chronic catarrh from which he suffered kept Wilberforce awake at night, and the noise of his coughing prevented Anna from her sleep, they would fall into conversation, and though their speech at these times was not always of a mournful tenor, it happened not seldom in the hours of lowest vitality that talk ran on painful themes.

There fell such a night, and Anna rated her husband.

“ I know you inside out, as a wife ought,” she said, “ and very well sure am I there’s something on your mind, and if ’tis money you’d better tell me, and by now you ought to have found out it’s always wiser so to do.”

“ There’s two things on my mind,” he answered, “ and one you know very well a’ready, and t’other you do not. There’s the thousand to Jane Lobb, and the thought of that don’t get no lighter.”

“ You do make me wild,” she retorted, waking up instantly. “ To see a clever man being such a buffle-head, and him your husband ! ’Tis enough to make angels wild. Didn’t Abraham Lobb say in so many words, and didn’t his wife hear him say, that he remitted and renounced the debt once for all ? He was your kinsman, and when his own aunt died didn’t he come into five thousand pound—a thing he never dreamed about ? And then man to man, and quite properly, too, didn’t he feel your thousand was well spent, and say as clear as man could say that he wouldn’t take it back ?”

“ That’s all true, but look at it. From the time he got his old aunt’s money the luck turned against Abraham Lobb, and when he died, his wife told me in so many words that he’d cut up very different from what she hoped and expected. When he died ’twas found he’d put his money into Cornish tin—every stiver—and now tin’s down in the depths in more ways than one, and poor Jane Lobb hasn’t got a penny more

than two pounds a week to bless herself with—and her house, of course.”

“ I don’t believe it,” answered Anna. “ She’s a thriftless, silly sort of woman, and having lived in the lap of luxury all her life, be very put about because things ain’t the same now her husband’s dead. Things never are the same when a husband dies—we women all know that—and if we’ve got any sense, we look ahead and face it. If you had more than you knew what to do with, which a man like you never will have and never could, I’d be the first to say, ‘ Give Mrs. Lobb a thousand pounds and be done with it ’; but you can’t. We’ve had an expensive family, and you know the size of your savings quite so well as I do—perhaps better. The gift was a plain, honest gift, and there’s no obligation whatever and no call whatever for you to think of the matter again. Tin or no tin, Jane Lobb is a mighty sight more prosperous than us. Haven’t she just taken into her home that nameless little boy—reared at St. Tid’s Farm ? People don’t adopt orphans if they be short of cash.”

“ She’s an impulsive creature, and she took the little child for something to do,” answered Wilberforce. “ She’s a woman all nerves, and seeing the child was homeless and the folk at St. Tid going to send him to the Union Workhouse, because the money have stopped and the people interested in him have gone away, Widow Lobb stepped forward. She’s got no childer of her own, and if she hadn’t took him she’d have kept dogs or cats or birds for company. It don’t alter the fact that she’s come down a lot in the world.”

“ Did she ever name that thousand ? ”

“ Yes, she did. Not nasty, understand me, but she thinks that I’m a lot better off than I am, and she just said once ’twas funny her husband doing that and then going straight into a run of bad luck himself. She said: ‘ Of course, a thousand’s naught to you nowadays.’ ”

“ Little she knows ! All the same you might have told her that we ain’t no luckier than other people.”

“ I couldn’t do that. If her property was all sold, she’d come out with three thousand or thereabout, so the lawyer told her.”

“ And should we ? ” asked Mrs. Retallack.

He did not answer.

“No—we should not,” she continued. “And us with four childer and her with none. You look at home and remember the uncertainty of life—that’s what you’ve got to do. There’s no more call to think yourself in her debt than there is to think yourself in any other body’s debt.”

“I’ve never owed any man a penny—I can say that.”

“Well, say it, then, and put the thing out of your mind. Life’s been one long battle for money in this house since I came into it, and you’ve spent dollops on other people, one way and another; and it’s time now to get a bit back and begin saving in earnest. You cast your bread on the waters for Edith, and gave her more learning than people in our state of life dream about for their childer, and now she’s going to marry Wesley Bake, I suppose, so that’s to the good, and fair interest showing on your money; and for the others, it’s all clear—the boys, I mean. Julitta’s a puzzle and always have been to both of us.”

He granted this, and she smothered a sigh of thankfulness that she had turned his mind from one needless anxiety.

“She’s a puzzle, as you say. Wife-old now and pretty as a picture—the sort some men set greater store by than even Edith, so fine and splendid as Edith is. But Julitta’s heart’s a stone seemingly. No use for a man, and never will have.”

“’Tisn’t as if she was a mother’s right-hand sort of girl either,” argued Anna, “because she idden. She don’t take kindly to woman’s work, though she does her part. But it ain’t meat and drink to her. I can’t see into her heart, and never could. She’s different from the others, though like me to the eye.”

“A very romantic mind, I believe,” said Julitta’s father; “A great reader, I notice, and very thick with Sarah Sleep to the paper-shop.”

“Story-books be the bane of the rising generation,” declared Mrs. Retallack. “She knows I hate ’em, and she’s dutiful enough not to flaunt ’em under my eyes; but she’s got her hiding-places, and she burns two candles for Edith’s one—that I know.”

“Grandfather’s a thought to blame there. He upholds her.”

“He’s a regular old mumphhead where Julitta’s concerned.

I was grumbling but yesterday, and saying 'twas time and more than time she was tokened, and he upheld her, and argued that freedom's a very fine thing for a spirit like hers."

"As to being tokened, there's nobody even after her," asserted Wilberforce. "There's that about her—Lord knows what—that chills the men instead of drawing them. Always bright and civil and smiling, for that matter; but men have their instincts. They get no forwarder, and they know they ain't going to. You never hear a man on her lips."

"Not that I worry now, but I look ahead," declared Anna, "and I'm pretty sure she's one of the neuter sort, and never will have no use for a man."

"Such a lovely thing as her, too! You don't often see a real pretty woman unwed."

"Oh yes, you do, unless you're blind. The world's full of handsome old maids. I could name a score, I believe."

He was breathing easily now, and she bade him try to sleep.

"Get off while your chest is clear," she said.

"No, I'm not in a sleeping mood. There's another thing looming ahead, and it may mean big trouble, too—in the quarries."

"Trouble in the quarries!"

"This Saturday business. The men are wanted on Saturday afternoons for two months."

"They'll never do it."

"So I say, and so Nanjulian says, and a good few others who know them. It's madness to ask them, and they'll make a proper bawk* about it."

"Is it necessary?"

"It's desirable, but you can't exactly say necessary. Some are willing enough. Keat is for it, but even he allows the danger of asking. They'll think it is being aimed at their old liberties—just the thin end of the wedge. There'll be an upstore."

"What does Tom Hawkey say?"

"I haven't asked him—it's too ticklish. He stands for

* *Bawk*—Obstacle.

the Company, of course. I wouldn't be in his shoes for a good bit."

A clock beneath them struck two.

"For the Lord's love go to sleep, or let me," said Anna. "To-morrow's washing-day. Time enough to face this if it comes. So like as not they'll change their minds—the Directors, I mean — when Mister Tom shows them the danger."

"It's only in the air, and I hope it may stop there," concluded Wilberforce. Then he was silent, and his wife soon slept. But the man pondered his affairs for a long while. His savings were smaller than his wife knew, and his health gave him cause for anxiety.

CHAPTER IX

THE FREE LUNCH

THANKS to the energy of Grandfather Nute and the generosity of the congregation, the Free Lunch of the United Methodists promised to be a success. Indeed, before the company sat down, at two o'clock on a Saturday afternoon in the big new schoolroom of the sect, it was understood that from seven to eight pounds would be produced for the excellent purpose of improved ventilation.

About a hundred people came to the feast, and there was ample for all in the variety provided. An unwritten law ordered that the women should have the choicest viands, though the men and children also partook of them when there was sufficient.

"A feature of this meal is the geese," said Grandfather, who presided at one of the two long tables. "I've never seen such a brave lot of birds on one board before. Six there are, and there ought to be goose for half of us."

Thomas Hawkey took the second table, while Wilberforce Retallack, with his family round him, sat at the foot thereof. Hawkey, as the company settled down, asked Edith if she would sit beside him, but already her right hand was allotted to Wesley Bake, while her brother, Pooley, sat on her left.

With Wesley came his mother, Nancy Bake, and his sister-in-law, Susan. Her children, Mary and Betty, sat on each side of her.

Anna Retallack sat beside her husband, with Julitta on her right; but Edward had deserted his family for the Sleeps. Philippa sat on one side of him, her Aunt Sarah on the other; while John Sleep, the news vendor, took the end of the table opposite Grandfather Nute.

Mr. Sleep was one of the leaders of the United Methodists. He asked a blessing on the banquet before all sat down. Then rose the din of the feed and steam soon settled heavily

on the glass of the windows. Some chattered and laughed from the beginning, but few were there to waste their time, and the feeding proceeded steadily. Antipas Keat controlled the staff of girls who waited, and with two other men did the carving. He helped his wife and family very carefully, and issued directions that the dishes should reach them. He also set aside a plate of goose for himself, when his turn should come. Presently tea went round in large cups and ginger-beer began to pop.

Aunt Mercy Inch from Trebarwith, in a moment of friendship that she afterwards regretted, had taken her place beside Moses Bunt from the quarries. None desired to sit near that crusty member, and when Aunt Mercy arrived, somewhat late, the place was vacant.

He grumbled from the beginning because the goose did not reach him.

"I don't want that belly-vengeance stuff," he said, when a maiden offered him lemonade. "'Tis the blot on these feeds that they idden washed down with something seemly. We be so frightened of beer in this village as if the devil brewed it."

"Some people say he do," declared Mrs. Inch; "though for my part I never see no harm in it along with victuals. It don't make a man taddy-oodly* except on an empty stomach."

"There's more chapels than pubs in this place," answered Moses. "'Tis all very well to put the fear of beer in the young men; but surely to God when we're up in years we can be trusted with a pint? We ban't school-children."

"How's the tombstone?" asked Aunt Mercy.

"As for that, I've got un," answered the old man. "Ten year it have took me to find a piece of slate to my liking; but now I have, and I'm working on it. Bought, mind you—they didn't give it to me, though you might think that after very near fifty years in the quarries they'd make a man a present of his own gravestone. Not that I'd have took it if they had. I shall buy my grave, and I've bought the stone, and now I'm to work on it."

"I lay there'll be some great invention on it," said Mercy,

* *Taddy-oodly*—tipsy.

glad that her goose was gone, for Moses regarded the plate moodily.

"It won't be no common words, you may bet your life," he said. "I'm at the Scriptures, and if they fail me I shall do it out of my own head."

Grandfather Nute spoke with the foreman, Sidney Nanjulian, who sat beside him.

"'Twas very good of you to promise a song, Sidney," he said. "For you be among our best in that line. The piano's round behind the screen, and from the sound Keat's using it to put dishes upon, which he oughtn't to do."

"Who's going to play the accompaniments?" asked Nanjulian. "A good deal depends on that."

"My granddaughter, Julitta."

"Can she play?"

"'Can she play'! To think you didn't know! Why, the cleverest at it in Delabole, if you leave out the Vicar's wife."

"I sang at the Church of England concert for their new organ," declared the foreman. "I felt sorry they didn't ring in more people."

"It's a nice question, Sidney. You see, we like to keep our sixpences for our own chapels; and though I'm sure we're all wishful for their singing to be as good as ours, yet you can't expect us to make it a matter of money. The best items they had didn't come from Delabole, 'tis whispered—excepting you. And I admire you for being so high-minded as to sing. Not that I wouldn't have done the same."

Mary and Betty Bake had never been to a free lunch before. They ate enormously, and joined in a ripple of merriment which continually rose from the children scattered among their elders. But the room was familiar to them, for here they learned their lessons.

A thought presently depressed Betty, and she stopped in the middle of a plate of apple-tart and cream.

"It won't look like this on Monday," she said. "If it always looked like this, I'd never mind lessons; but the flags and flower-pots in the windows will be gone on Monday, and the maps will be up on the walls, and the blackboard and Miss Male out again."

"Miss Male's here to-day, for that matter," answered Betty's grandmother. "And a very nice lady too."

Betty glowered up the table.

"She won't look like that on Monday, either. She'll show her teeth till the gold in 'em glitters on Monday. And when the gold shows, it's 'look out'!"

"Oh, Betty, how can you?" cried her sister. It was a question that Mary often asked.

Anna Retallack's pleasure in the free luncheon was spoiled owing to the attitude of her younger son. When she found that he intended to sit with the Sleeps, her large face grew red and her eyes clouded. She cast many glances across at Edward, and little liked the terms on which he and Philippa appeared to be. But none saw their hands meet under the table sometimes, or his boot press against her shoe. Ned, at any rate, looked after his little friend well, and saw that plates of the choicest courses stopped before her.

Grandfather Nute ate but little. From his presidential seat he ruled the feast and directed the waiters. Once he caught the murmur of a subject ill-fitted to the occasion, and shook his head at Noah Tonkin and Jack Keat, who sat together. They were discussing the possibility of Saturday afternoon work in the quarries and disagreeing on the subject.

"It's capital and labour in a nutshell," declared Mr. Tonkin, "and I've always had a very sharp eye on capital, as you know."

"I wouldn't call it that," argued the other. "Old Delabole idden like that, and masters and men stand to each other as friendly folk united in their interests and moved by a common idea. And that idea is to get all mortal man can get from the quarries and sell in the best market the world offers us. Their good's ours and our good's theirs."

"That's the point," replied Tonkin, putting down his knife and fork. "Is our good theirs? And even if it was, don't you see that work on Saturday afternoon, though it may mean a few more shillings for us and pounds for them, idden for our good in the long run? Men as work with their hands want quite as much rest as them as work with their brains—more, in fact. Ess fay, Jack Keat, more! For why? Because muscle gets weary quicker than brain

and takes longer to build up—especially when you're on in years. So now, then!"

Mr. Tonkin drank a cup of tea at a draught and watched Mr. Keat as he did so.

"As to brains, Noah, I've no doubt they wouldn't allow it for a moment," replied the other; "and, whether or no, you won't make me believe that four hours' work more or less is going to make our arms and legs weary out of reason. Cornishmen ain't so nice as that. What about your garden patch? I lay such a man for herbs as you work quite as hard with your hands of a Saturday afternoon as we're working with our jaws and stomachs just now."

"Just so. And what about it? Who's going to look after my vegetables if I idden there to do it? Mind you, I'm a just man, Jack—never a juster. I don't say nothing against one Saturday, nor yet two; but it's the principle. It never was, and therefore it never did ought to be."

Here Grandfather caught Noah Tonkin's eye, as several others had already caught his voice, for he raised it. Tom Hawkey was also endeavouring to still Noah, and felt relief when the subject dropped.

An unusual feature of free luncheons was greeted with satisfaction by the younger United Methodists, for two prosperous greengrocers had promised a head of bananas apiece, Miss Sleep sent a hundred oranges, and certain farmers were able to supply apples. Thus the dessert formed a great attraction.

Grandfather Nute was pressed to eat a banana, but refused.

"I've nothing against them," he explained, "but before playing the flute my custom is to keep the stomach as empty as possible. The flute on a full meal amounts to nothing. That's why I like to play before breakfast, and my family will tell you that the sound of my flute is often and often what rouses them of a morning. My daughter and her husband are heavy sleepers, but I'm light as a bird in that matter, and you'll often hear my flute before the sparrows begin to twitter. As I always say, for wind music, you want your wind, and if I'd loaded up with goose and bananas this afternoon, my playing would have been thin as a lamb's bleat."

Those that heard him praised the self-denying old man; but some secretly sympathized with his family.

“You always was a great musicker, and what you do you do thorough,” said Miss Sarah Sleep.

The people were now moving about, and she had heard his remark.

“And so I was; and when my voice ran up thin, along of gathering years that pinched the throat, I took very steadfast to the flute. Julitta and me open the programme; and I dare say, after I’ve done my little lot, I’ll pick a bone with Antipas Keat behind the screen.”

The piano was thrust forth, the tables were cleared and the concert started.

But nothing of a public nature could begin or end at Delabole without a solemnity, and before the music Mr. John Sleep made a few remarks. Others listened critically, for opinions were divided as to his oratorical powers. Jack Keat held him to be dull. He never said anything that he was not expected to say, and this provoked an indifference that sometimes led to somnolency on a summer morning in chapel. But he was ‘terrible sound’—even Jack Keat allowed that. Mr. Keat, however, argued that the essence of preaching was surprise. The mind must be arrested, shaken out of itself, disarmed, and so led to God. He permitted himself some extravagance of diction when preaching, and had a luminous way of pressing the passing hour into his discourses. People never quite knew what old Jack would say next, and he confessed that he never did himself. ‘If I did,’ he declared, ‘then everybody else would know too; and when I feel myself going too fluent and regular and like a book, then I pull up. A sermon didn’t ought to be all canter, or all trot, or all gallop, but a clever mixture.’ Mr. Sleep, on the contrary, was classically minded and framed his addresses on a model that often prompted the young and giddy to link them with his name.

To-day, however, he spoke but briefly, announced the sum achieved by the entertainment, and hoped that all were well filled and well satisfied. He proposed a vote of thanks to the givers of the feast and to those who were now about to sing and play; and he warned the younger members not to leave the schoolroom until all had sung the hymn destined to conclude the afternoon’s work.

Then Mr. Hawkey seconded the vote of thanks, which

was carried with acclamation, and Grandfather and Julitta opened the programme of music.

Both were quite collected, and Julitta waited upon the old man, whose time left much to be desired. He played old country dance music to the best of his poor powers, and his eyes goggled and his veins swelled in the course of the performance.

Mrs. Bake whispered a criticism to Anna Retallack, who now sat beside her.

"I don't like to see your father doing that. It idden worthy of him. A very masterly thing in an old man, I grant you, seeing as he never touched a flute till over fifty; but——"

"I wish he never had touched it," answered Grandfather's daughter. "His awful energy do bring him out of bed with the birds, and often sooner. Then he casts loose on that thing and shatters our morning sleep. The Trump of Doom won't be no hardship for us, my husband says—not after father."

"He's a great wonder, and years sit light on him—almost too grand a sort of man to stand up there like that for a show," declared Miss Sleep, who sat on Anna's right; but Mrs. Retallack knew her weakness in that direction and pursued the subject in a spirit of warning.

"I'd sooner far have your brother in the house," she declared. "John Sleep, though a busy and a prayerful well-doer, would be peace beside my dear father. A very tiresome man, and an ordinary woman who was called to do for him would soon find herself worn to the bone and an invalid for life. Like a running flame in the house, I do assure you."

"But Wisdom made alive. You've got Wisdom in the chair so long as he's with you."

Anna smiled. Her answer was lost, for Grandfather had shot his bolt and his tootling was at an end. The folk applauded him, and Julitta, turning round on the music-stool, clapped her hands with the rest. Whereupon the soloist bowed, smiled, and nodded, shook the moisture from his flute upon the floor and came down among the people.

Mr. Antipas Keat looked round a corner of the screen with his mouth full. He beckoned Grandfather, and the old man disappeared.

“ Now you’ve got it off your chest, you can let down a bit of food,” said the baker, and Grandfather Nute joined him in a slice of goose.

The concert progressed, and Thomas Hawkey sang a sea song in a deep bass voice. He was popular, and Edith rather liked to hear the applause.

“ A pity you don’t sing,” she said to Wesley Bake, who sat beside her.

“ So ’tis,” he admitted; “ but the mischief with me is I can do nothing but grind corn and——.”

“ And what ?”

“ Haunt you.”

She laughed.

“ You’ll soon be tired of that. When you marry, you should choose a girl who can sing.”

“ I have.”

Hawkey approached them through the applause, and sat down on a chair beside Edith. But he noticed that her animation ceased on his arrival, and Wesley fell silent.

“ An old song,” he said. “ Your sister’s wonderfully clever at music-reading. Not a note wrong.”

“ She can read anything, she——”

“ Order !” cried a snappy voice; “ order for Moyses, if you please !”

It was Moses Bunt who had silenced Edith and Mr. Hawkey. They subsided and Moses triumphed. He had but one friend in the world—a man of like outlook upon life; but Benny Moyses was younger than Mr. Bunt, and he had music to lessen his asperity and support him against an unfortunate marriage. Benny played the English concertina, and now gave an exceedingly long solo on that depressing instrument.

Grandfather Nute, who soon returned, listened critically and contributed to the applause that awaited the stolid and gloomy Moyses when he had done.

“ A very fine accomplishment, Benny,” said Grandfather, “ and a very clever touch; but it wants tuning. There’s some flat notes in and out—half a score, if my ear don’t deceive me—and they fall on the trained ear something cruel and spoil all.”

Mr. Moyses, or ‘ Mr. Parsons,’ for he was called indiscrim-

inately by the names of his parents, though his wife regarded herself as Mrs. Moyse, nodded and granted that the concertina was out of tune.

“My ear have got to allow for her. I know what’s coming, and if you expect it, it don’t hurt; but doubtless to you she came as an ugly surprise now and again. If ever I can run to it, I’ll have her tuned.”

Then Sidney Nanjulian sang a love song of the most sentimental character to be imagined. There was some whispering between him and Julitta over the music score, and he confessed it a very difficult achievement both for himself and for her; but she showed no lack of confidence, and acquitted herself with the utmost credit.

Nanjulian could sing well, and his tenor was a feature of the United Methodists’ choir. He won an encore now, and then he sang a patriotic piece of his own composition, entitled, ‘One and All.’ It was well known and always gave pleasure. Whence the air came none knew, but most people credited Sidney with that as well as the words. He stood up by the piano, tall and flashing-eyed, with dark, thick hair and long, thin hands. It seemed absurd to imagine him as the foreman of a quarry, for he looked an artist, and nothing but an artist, to his finger-tips. Indeed, at heart he was an artist, yet knew it not, nor understood the emotions which often filled his fierce bosom and poured from it into another and gentler breast. Art in him took the form of adventure, and he desired for its expression secrets and mysteries and an existence whose sweetest moments were hidden from all eyes save two—as dark and flashing as his own.

It rejoiced him in that assemblage to think that he was singing to one pair of precious ears and pouring out his heart for the joy of one fellow-creature. While he sang ‘One and All’ he thought of one alone—his own, his very own; and nobody knew it but herself. His secret exalted Mr. Nanjulian in his own eyes. He felt that he moved on a higher plane than the people, breathed loftier and rarer air, had risen to heights of love and romance beyond the imagination of ordinary men and women. But he was gentle with them and did not blame them for lacking his finer feelings and inspirations. He was at peace with the world, and exceedingly thankful to Providence that within the restricted

limits of Delabole he had found a nature which could not only share his flights, but itself soar to altitudes where only he was able to follow. This secret possession had done a great deal to improve Mr. Nanjulian. The joy of finding a kindred spirit had sweetened his spirit and improved his manners. Of old he had been somewhat austere and conducted his department of the quarries with severity; but during the last six months an increased sympathy and geniality appeared—to the satisfaction of those over whom he was set in authority.

A few more items completed the concert, and a general restlessness indicated that the people had now received their fill of entertainment and wanted to go home. Men, evading Grandfather Nute's eye, slipped out, and mothers departed with their children; but a fair crowd remained for the hymn with which the entertainment ended. It was a popular item from the United Methodists' hymn-book, and most of the singers knew it by rote.

CHAPTER X

LOVE AMONG THE TOMBSTONES

ST. TEATH is a cheerful village of neat houses in rows and clusters. Many of the cots have little gardens before them, wherein grow fuchsias and yellow jasmines, roses and hollyhocks, with world-old herbs—balm and marjoram, tarragon and sorrel. In the midst, among good trees, for St. Teath lies in a dimple of the hills, and is protected from the west, there stands the stout, grey church with a golden weathercock perched on the northern turret of the tower. The dead have called for more room than the original burying-ground could furnish. On either side of the highway they now repose, and the later cemetery has a lofty Cornish cross to mark the portal. The original churchyard is a place of many slates, some upright and some aslant, some covering flat tombs of crumbling brick, wherein little ferns have found a dwelling. But those to whom are granted no memorials far outnumber the recorded dead, and rest as well beneath the trampled herbage. The homes of the living cluster about the sleepers and ring them round. Close to the lich-gate the 'White Hart' inn offers its smart face to the sun and the main street stretches; while round the village spread farmlands, larger dwellings and homesteads, with a schoolhouse that looks too great for such a little thorp.

One Sunday morning, when the catkins on the willows were swelling silvery, Edith Retallack walked here beside Wesley Bake. From within the church there came organ music and the singing of psalms; while across the way from a Wesleyan chapel other melody ascended; but the man and woman played truant from all worship save that of each other. The hour had struck, and they knew it. Edith accepted an invitation to dinner at Newhall Mill and had arrived early by appointment. She had then started with Wesley for the

United Methodist service at St. Teath; but when they arrived, he had persuaded her to stop out of doors instead. Now they roamed through the churchyard together, and he was showing her the graves of his yeoman ancestors. First, from his mother, he laid a little bunch of lenten lilies on his brother's tomb, and they regarded pensively the recent slate that marked it.

"Cut off in his prime," said Wesley. "A kind chap, though difficult. None of us ever could understand him. We all loved him, you know—sometimes. He's learning now what he couldn't learn here."

"Who wrote the verse?" she asked.

"Sidney Nanjulian at the quarry. He's got a very clever touch at such things—quite the poet, you might say."

She nodded, and scanned the simple lines :

"Just in the flower of my age
I was called off this mortal stage,
And I pray that my God will bless
The widow and fatherless."

"Be sure He will," said Edith. "I should think Susan will marry again, such a comely woman."

"I don't think so. She says she loves him a lot more than when he was alive. You can't marry a man if you love another man—even though the man you love is dead—so Susan says."

"A big question, Wesley. Some couldn't, of course."

"You couldn't, I'll warrant."

"The wish on the grave will hold for Mary, that's certain. I never saw such a good, sensible little girl as she is. Betty's different—more her father in her. I always feel that Mary and Betty are like Julitta and me. I'm quite solid and sensible and straightforward, like Mary—the dull, good sort—the sort that parents say have never given them one troubled moment. But Julitta and Betty—I don't know how to put it: they feel more, and they fight more, and there's more of them hidden. Nobody understands them—no woman at least. It takes a man to understand that sort; and if they find the right man they're lucky; generally they don't. But often they think they have, only to find they're

mistaken. It has got to be a clever man and a man with patience in him and understanding in him, and, above all, fun in him. Women haven't much fun in them as a rule, but if a man hasn't, he can never manage them—at least, not the Julitta sort."

Wesley did not in the least desire to discuss Julitta.

"What a wonder you are for reading character," he said. "Now, I can't do that. I take people at their own valuation, until something happens to prove me wrong."

"You judge others by yourself, and that lands many an honest man in a mess," she declared.

"The rogues have the pull of us there," he admitted. "A rogue's a better judge of character than a man like me, and he can trust an honest man to be honest. When a rogue wants his chestnuts pulled out of the fire, he seeks an honest man, if he can. Not that there's much virtue in honesty. You *must* be honest—if you've got a conscience."

She remembered that speech long afterwards.

"Julitta puzzles even mother, who knows us pretty well. We often talk about her, and wonder how such a lovely thing should have a stone for a heart. Nature's done everything she could, and then forgotten her heart altogether. Men are less than dust under her feet to her."

"Leave her," he said. "I want—now—before the people come out of church——"

"Let me look at the famous stone—the old one to Robert Bake. To show you the cleverness of Julitta, I'll tell you something about it that nobody has ever guessed but her."

They sought an oblong and ancient slate fastened upon the outer wall of the church. It stood at the North side of the East end, and, though it dated from January in the year 1686, the lettering was still clear and sharp, and the legend easy to be deciphered.

"A rare good stone," said Wesley. "Never a better came out of Delabole quarries, you may be sure. The Bakes were the masters there in those days, and this man dropped when James the Second was King. There was another hero centuries later, who lies at Lanteglos, and his slate tells of him that he bore the character of an honest man. 'Twas

he who gave John Wesley slate and stone from the quarry, and forty pounds from his purse to build the first Methodist chapel in Delabole—that nigh the quarries at Pengelly. He was Church of England himself, but held such a man as Wesley could do no wrong; and for that matter, Wesley was Church of England too, and would have been a good bit put about if anybody had shown him the future drift of his work."

"Read the verse and I'll tell you what Julitta found," said Edith.

He obeyed, and recited the following rhyme:

"But . what . cheerup . altho . oure . sonne . begone .
 Altho . his . body . must . be . racke . and . toren .
 With . filthy . bitter . bitinge . worms . of . dust .
 And . be . consumed . as . all . oure . bodies . must .
 Yet . still . cheerup . comferte . youre-selves . in . this .
 Tho . the . body . died . the . soule . emmortal . is .
 And . now . in . heaven . most . joyfully . shall . singe .
 O . grave . where . is . thy . strength . death . where . is .
 thy . victory .
 And . so . shall . reign . in . immortallite .
 With . God . above . for . all . eternyte."

"I used to shake like a leaf when I was a little lad and read about the worms," said Wesley, laughing, "and it ain't pleasant reading even now."

She agreed with him, and he asked what Julitta had discovered.

"A bad rhyme and the right one," explained Edith. "In the last line but two, you may be sure the poet didn't write 'victory,' because he had to rhyme with 'singe' in the line before. But the stonecutter had the Bible in his mind, and so got mixed up, and put down 'victory,' and couldn't alter it afterwards."

"The cleverness! Fancy Julitta noting that."

"It should be 'sting,'" declared Edith.

He applauded, and they examined the slate.

"More than two hundred years old, and good for another two hundred, I should say," prophesied Wesley.

They strolled in the churchyard a little longer, and turned to the graves of those they had known. Then, after a silence, the man braced himself and spoke.

"All the same, I didn't come here about the dead. I came about the living—you and me, in fact. What's the good of hanging round it? Come on home, Edith. I can't say what I want to say here. It wouldn't be lucky."

"I know what you want to say. I've heard it already. Say it again."

"Sit here for a minute, then. They're at the sermon now."

There was an old crumbling tomb in the sun, and a primrose had opened beside it. Wesley picked the flower and gave it to Edith. Then he came close to her. Her hands were in her lap, and she looked straight before her and sat stiff and motionless as a graven thing.

"You know, you know; of course you know, you lovely, glorious Edith. For Christ's sake marry me. I can't go on much longer without you. You're everything in the world to me. The thought of you and the hope and the longing—they run through every hour of the day—and the night too. Properly terrifying it is, Edith. Life's a sort of dream, and you're the only real thing in it. Naught else matters; naught else is real. Not the people, nor my work, nor my prayers, nor nothing. All a mist, and God knows how I keep going and treat life as if it was real. I can't do it much longer—it's fire one minute and ice the next—fire and ice trickling through my veins instead of blood. It's like as if I was mad, I believe—one throb from head to foot. Oh, Edith, you wonderful, blessed thing—come and be my Edith for ever and ever. Little to offer—little to offer but love; but oceans of that, Edith."

He stopped, for she had turned and was looking straight into his face. His words had served a greater purpose than he dreamed.

"I've wondered if I loved you, Wesley," she said; "I've wondered ever since I knew you loved me. But I don't wonder any more. You're greater far than me, you humble man. But you'll have your love back with interest—if that's anything."

"'Anything!'—by God, it's everything! The love of you and me will shake the solid earth!"

He leapt up panting and she rose also. Then, standing together, he put his arms round her, not fiercely, but gently,

wonderingly. Neither was their first kiss a flame between them, but a slow, solemn rite. She loved his reverence.

"Beautiful Wesley," she said, "how well you understand!"

"Come," he answered. "I can't talk no more for a bit. 'Tis almost too great a thing to happen to a man."

They went away quietly together, and passed through the deep, empty lanes that led up the valley to Newhall. For a long time neither spoke; then Edith broke the silence.

"It has brought the spring nearer for me," she said.

"And the summer for me. I can't believe it yet. To think how I went out of doors this morning, and how I came home again! A lonely wretch torn with all manner of doubts and fears—and now never lonely no more—married—married to the woman of all women in the world."

She smiled.

"How clever you are at words to-day! And they're true ones. I married you when I kissed you, my own dear man."

They walked hand in hand. Then came Moses Bunt in his broadcloth, tramping down to St. Teath alone. He gave them the slightest nod, but did not answer their greeting.

"Sorry we met him," said Wesley. "I'd sooner have met a pleasanter creature for the first after the great change."

"He reminds us that life isn't all love."

"Please God it will be for us—warmed through and through I'd have it."

"How glad they'll be. Especially father. He thinks the wide world of you. He wants to put his affairs in your hands. The boys are too young."

"I'll gladly pleasure him in that matter."

"The Retallacks are not a long-lived folk, you know."

"Don't say that, Edith!"

"The men, I mean. Father always feels he's going to drop out in a few years, and he'd be glad if you promised to look after things and wind up his affairs for mother when he is gone. It sounds brutal even to think of such a thing on such a day."

"I'll gladly pleasure him," repeated Wesley; "and for that matter I want to pleasure you all. I'm sure Grandfather

Nute and your mother will never forgive me for taking you out of the home nest."

"Oh yes, they will," she answered. "It's rather a tight fit is the home nest, as you call it; and though they'll miss my company, they'll value my room."

"You won't be far off. I shall do the Mill up from top to bottom for you, Edith."

She laughed.

"That's the last thing I'd wish. You'll find me very well content if I can get on with your mother and Susan and the little girls. Mary likes me, but Betty does not."

"What nonsense!"

"No; she likes Julitta. You'll find she'll be very much annoyed at this news."

Wesley laughed; then nigh the stream they came in sight of Newhall, and Edith stood still a moment.

"My new home!" she said.

"A poor little palace for such a queen as you."

"'Tis the queen makes the palace, not the palace the queen, dear heart. A happy home is always a palace, I reckon."

His eyes burned as he looked at her, and they went in together.

Their news was not delayed, and both received the affectionate kisses of Wesley's mother. As for Susan, she hid her heart and prepared to say 'good-bye' to Newhall; while her children took it as Edith had foretold. Mary rejoiced, Betty showed no pleasure whatever.

When the dinner was eaten, and the betrothed had departed to bring their mighty news to Edith's folk, the man's mother and her daughter-in-law discussed the situation.

Nancy Bake viewed the engagement happily. She even showed a spark of imagination.

"Mark me, their childer will be so red as squirrels," she said; "and there'll be a proper crowd of 'em."

"I must go in service, I reckon," answered the other.

"Don't you meet trouble half-way, however. There's plenty of time to think about you."

There was a secret spot whither Betty was wont to withdraw and enjoy her own company. It stood nigh the mill-pond, and she had woven boughs and brought dead fern

and made herself a 'cubby hole,' as she called it. Here now she knelt alone and prayed aloud.

"Oh, dear Lord," she said, "please change Uncle Wesley's mind and make him marry dear Julitta, because it would be ever so much nicer for me. I have not asked for many things, dear Lord, but I do hope you will do this, for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen."

CHAPTER XI

THE MEETING

THOMAS HAWKEY had found life complicated at a critical moment. While his private affairs and the prospect and hope of all his future demanded grave attention, unfortunate chance thrust upon him other considerations. He pensively regretted the circumstance, and even felt mildly amused at the irony of events that had delayed their fruition until the most inopportune moment. But love was a personal matter; the passing discontents in the quarry belonged to his duty, and had to be set first. They meant certain interviews and discussions and a considerable demand upon his time and thought. Incidentally his business thrust between him and Edith Retallack. He had seen very little of her since their meeting in the twilight above Trebarwith Combe, and she had found it impossible to make any appointment when he proposed one. But on the morning after her definite engagement to Wesley Bake the manager saw a few clear hours ahead, when his presence would not be demanded at the quarries or elsewhere, and since a stroll represented the ordinary means of private communion between men and maids at Delabole, he proceeded now during the dinner-hour to Quarry Cottage, that he might engage Edith in a moment's conversation and beg her to walk with him on the following Thursday afternoon.

The day was Tuesday of the week of Edith's betrothal, and as yet the great news had not reached Tom Hawkey's ears.

But he did not arrive at her home, for on the slant path that descended to it he met the girl herself. Therefore he turned and walked beside her.

"Well met," he said. "I was just coming with a petition. Do say you're disengaged on Thursday and will give me the delight of a little walk. Or we'll drive if you'd rather. Let me drive you to Brown Willy, and we'll have tea there.

I've been wanting to see you badly, but life's come between. There's a good deal on my mind just now."

She was concerned to find him ignorant of her great news. Yet there flitted through her thoughts that whatever his desire towards her, he had set other things above it. He said that 'life had come between.' Therefore she felt no particular regret for him now, though his request told her that his purpose was unchanged.

"I'm so sorry. Perhaps another time if—if—— You don't know?"

"Know what?"

"I'm engaged to marry Wesley Bake."

He stood still, and after a long pause, she heard him give a deep expiration. Then he passed his hand over his eyes and held it there a moment.

"This rather staggers me, you know; and yet—your father told me it might happen. But when——"

He stopped, and she did not speak.

"I give you joy—I hope you'll be a gloriously happy woman, Edith."

"Thank you, Tom; I'm sure you do."

He had nothing more to say, nor had she.

They ascended side by side, then stood a moment at the top.

"I'm sure everybody will be very glad."

"Yes; my family and his are pleased about it."

"You're going to Newhall this minute, I expect?"

"Yes, I am."

It seemed a hundred years now since he had met her. He forgot what he had said three minutes before and repeated it word for word.

"I give you joy—I hope you'll be a gloriously happy woman, Edith."

The words woke a memory, and he wondered where he had heard them.

"I'm sure you do. I'll go this way by the path over the mound."

"Yes, do; it's shorter. It cuts off a quarter of a mile, I should think."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye; God bless you."

She was moved and turned her back on him, while he stood and watched her walk away. When she knew that she was out of sight Edith drew out a handkerchief and wiped her wet eyes; while he still stood looking at the spot where she had disappeared. Presently he came to himself, and strolled back upon the tram-lines. The works were silent and deserted during the dinner-hour. A few engine-men sat by their machinery eating their lunches, and here and there in the sheds a man or two was doing the same; but unusually few appeared; and, proceeding to the pappot-head, Hawkey found the reason. He was not thinking of the quarries now, or the problems for the moment thrown upward by passage of events. His mind had fallen in upon itself, and he faced the ruin of the great fabric that hope had builded there. A certain quality of his mind, to hold as of minor importance affairs directly affecting himself, had ever driven this dream into the background; but of late, fired by the meeting on the cliffs, forgetting how long ago it was, and still stimulated by something in Edith's attitude to life on that distant occasion, he had been very busy, and even sanguine that his ambitions did not swell in vain. He perceived his mistake, and the revelation was bitter. He considered whether he was himself to blame for this crushing tribulation; and he decided that he was. Doubtless Edith had in reality said nothing which, rightly translated, meant that she still felt more than friendship for him. Drearly he recalled the incidents of that conversation, and as he did so in the light of his present knowledge he felt puzzled.

Certainly she had shown indecision and a measure of dissatisfaction with life. She had said that it beat her at every turn. Then words kept ringing in his ears: 'It cuts off a quarter of a mile! You save a quarter of a mile.' When had he told her that? Was it just now, or on the occasion of the previous meeting? She had left him at a stile—she—He turned it over and remembered. He and his horse kept the road and she went by the fields. And now he had used those words again, a few moments before. The futile coincidence held his thoughts. He found himself turning it over, as though there were something in it. Then, impatiently, he shook his mind free.

Unexpected voices fell on his ear nigh the pappot-head,

and to his astonishment he found that a hundred men and more were holding a meeting in a large, disused building which stood here. It had been a trimming and sawing house; but now a new shop had taken its place, and the older erection was waiting to come down. As he passed, Hawkey saw through the entrance, where tram-lines ran into the place, that the men were grouped about an old saw-table and that Benny Moyse stood perched upon it.

Fearful that they might suppose he was eavesdropping, the manager hastened away unobserved. Indeed, the quarrymen were much too interested in their subject to bestow thought on him at that moment. Many had sacrificed their dinner to be present, and the sense of the meeting was clearly with the speaker. Beneath Benny's feet was a great iron saw-table with a rusty Hunter's saw rising in the midst. Its steel teeth, like screws, set round the wheel, were broken and yellow. Light fell through a glass roof overhead, and on the beams and broken white-washed glass were many names and initials written there by generations of vanished hill-men and dressers. It had been a pastime of old to climb the beams and leave a sign aloft, and now elderly quarrymen, their days of activity ended, could point to past evidence of it above their heads. Ribald inscriptions were scrawled there also, beyond the reach of any Puritan to efface.

Benny was all against the proposed work on Saturday afternoon, and he had just invited his hearers to pass a vote and chronicle their agreement with his opinions.

"It's the thin end of the wedge, neighbours," he declared. "I don't say there's any harm in it in itself, but we be a part of the great whole of Labour, and the Directors be a part of the great whole of Capital. I'm speaking now in a very large spirit that reaches far out beyond Delabole to the mines and railways and manufacturing districts; and though you might think that was going too far——"

"I do, Benny—I say it's going much too far," interrupted Jack Keat.

"And I say it ain't going a rap too far," vowed Noah Tonkin.

"Hear me, and then you'll have your turn," answered Mr. Moyse. "I say we're all members of one body, same as

we're all members of one Christ in the spirit; and that body is Labour. And if we be commanded to work on Saturday afternoon, it's no good telling us that we've got to do it for special reasons, and shall benefit in our way just as much as the Company will benefit in its way. It's no good telling us that; because we don't want to benefit in that way."

"I do," said Jack Keat. "And a lot of the older generation do. What I say——"

Mr. Keat was shouted down.

"You'll have your turn, Jack," snapped Mr. Bunt. "Why the hell do you keep throwing the man out of his stride?"

"It's for the meeting," explained Mr. Moyse. "If they don't want to listen to me, I've done. I only say that we're out for a principle, if you know what I mean. To work of a Saturday afternoon is against our principles and our practice, and I say we must tell the Company that in a firm and proper spirit. I've nothing to say against them for asking us to do so. But I say we oughtn't to do so; because if you give Capital an inch, it will take a foot afore you can look round. Let there be no feeling and naught unpleasant to it; but let us just tell Mister Tom that we shan't see our way if axed to do it. And then, in my opinion, we shan't hear no more about it."

Benny was applauded. He descended from the saw-table, and, before silence had fallen, Mr. Keat mounted the rostrum and began to argue for obedience. He spoke temperately and to the purpose; but the meeting would not be influenced. The men fired countless objections at his argument, and refused to admit that any compromise could be made which must not leave open the way to a future attack on their liberties. Perfect good-temper marked the moment. They approached the problem without heat or animus. None but spoke with friendship and understanding of the management and personal goodwill to the manager; but upon the crucial point the majority inclined to the opinion of Tonkin and Moyse. Tonkin, indeed, addressed them after Jack Keat had done. Then, since ten minutes only remained before the hooters shouted to work, a vote was taken, and a very large majority decided that Saturday afternoon must be held sacred. The tyranny of custom unconsciously ruled them. They granted that nothing but personal advantage would

accrue to those who fell in with the coming requirements; but for the most part they were disposed against it, animated by a fear that acquiescence in this matter, if only for a week or two of special stress, was certain to establish a precedent and cripple them against possible subsequent demands. So they passed the vote and, with fun and jesting, returned to their labours at the appointed time.

An hour later Wilberforce Retallack visited Tom Hawkey at his office and gave him every particular of the meeting and the decision to which it had come. He had learned the facts from Mr. Keat.

CHAPTER XII

THE POINT OF VIEW

THE issue of the trifling difference between employer and employed was interesting for several reasons. First, it threw a benignant light on the relations obtaining between them, and showed that a foundation existed which no transitory opposition of ideals could destroy; in the second place, it illuminated character. The dispute was fought out in a laudable spirit. Neither side imported acrimony or bitterness into it; both displayed a tolerance rarely manifested at such collisions.

In Retallack's cottage talk drifted to the matter, and his mind fairly represented the minds of most quarrymen.

"Be it as 'twill," he said, "there's little to pull long faces about, as a few here and there are doing. Good-temper's the vital thing, and so long as man and master keeps his temper, you'll seldom find the way out barred. There's no go-between here, unless you can say Mister Tom's the go-between; but he's got the confidence of both sides—that's the point. In the big disputes you'll seldom find that. The men's representatives—professional fighters—come in from outside to voice them; and the masters' representatives, when they consent to have representatives, are chosen because they stand for the interests of capital. It's the secret of half these bitter, long-drawn-out rows, that masters don't meet men, but only middlemen meet middlemen."

"This is the biggest thing Mister Tom has had to do," said Grandfather; "and such is my belief in him and the Power that leads him, that I view the result without a pinch of fear."

Edith was practical. For subtle reasons she felt a little jealous that Tom Hawkey was bulking so large in the eyes of Delabole. She wished—or would have done so if she could have formulated her self-conscious thought—that it was Wesley Bake, rather than the other man, who now challenged attention.

“It’s no good being vague like that, Grandfather,” she said. “There’s a difference of opinion about facts, and I don’t see how Tom can do such wonders as you all seem to think. He’s cleverness made alive, as we all know; but—why, you yourself, Grandfather—suppose it was you? How could you reconcile such a flat difference of opinion as to whether they’re going to work next Saturday afternoon, or whether they’re not? And if you couldn’t, with all your knowledge and experience, or if father couldn’t, how can he?”

“The final answer lies with the men, of course,” replied Grandfather Nute; “but it’s the spirit that they’ll find themselves in when they’ve got to decide—that’s the point. And Mister Tom will inspire that spirit in a sort of way. That’s where his nature is ahead of mine, or your father’s.”

“It’s not his nature at all,” declared Edith. “It’s his education. He’s no stronger than you, or father, or Wesley Bake, for that matter. He’s been brought up differently and taught to look all round a thing.”

“And sometimes these people who look all round a thing only end where they started,” said Anna Retallack. “I don’t see what he’ll do.”

“He’ll keep both sides in the best of spirits and temper, at any rate,” prophesied Grandfather. “That’s half the battle—to call it a battle. But battle it ain’t.”

They agreed with him, save Edith. She stood for the men against the masters and declared that Hawkey did not.

“He can’t,” she said. “He’d like to, but in this case he has no choice. He represents the Directors.”

“And so does everybody,” declared Wilberforce Retallack. “That’s the fine thing about it. There’s never been any class-feeling here. We stand for their good and they stand for ours, and we all stand for Old Delabole. And is a difference of opinion going to break down a spirit of friendship like that? Is our Cornish motto of ‘One and All’ going to fail us because a question’s got two sides? Old Delabole is the point we’ve got to think on—men and masters alike—and for my part I’m astonished we’ve found ourselves in two minds. For the good of the quarries, which is the good of the place, we must do some work of a Saturday afternoon now and again. The trade demands it. Then where’s the argument against? It’s life.”

“That’s right,” declared Grandfather Nute. “Life’s all a question of not being frightened; so’s death for that matter. There’s no sting to either for the man who keeps his head. We’ve got to keep our heads; and I’ve too much respect for us to think we’ll do anything different.”

“It sounds all right,” said Edith; “but they won’t work on Saturday afternoon. A man’s self-respect is a bigger thing than the welfare of the place he lives in.”

“It ain’t bigger than the welfare of his wife and children, though,” answered her father.

“Yes, it is—all strikes show that. The women and children are the first to go to the wall.”

“Exactly,” declared Anna. “And that’s where the pinch will come in. And the wives are on their men’s side. Nobody likes being asked to do what he’s never done before. It’s lengthening the working hours—that’s what it is—call it by any name you like; and labour will always fight that.”

“You take too small a view,” replied her husband. “You women always look at a question through a microscope. That shows you one little bit of the problem out of all proportion to the rest, and you think that’s all there is to it.”

Pooley spoke.

“They prayed about it—to be shown right—at the Primitives last Sunday,” he said; “and so ought we to have.”

“Not a case for that,” declared Grandfather Nute. “Where there’s doubt, then pray for light; but God gave us our reason to use, and most of the things that come into life are for the reason to tackle. We don’t take magistrates’ cases to the High Courts of the land, or to Parliament; and we oughtn’t to go to God unless the wits He’s given us are too small for the problem He’s set us.”

Thus the women were left on the side of the men, and the men on the side of the masters. Mrs. Retalack had indeed regarded the question as an abstract one; but Edith, though she would have denied it indignantly, was perhaps a little disposed for unconscious reasons to take the opposite side from Tom Hawkey. But, in common with the rest, she was quite ignorant of the manager’s real attitude, opinions, and intentions.

They presently appeared, for, two days before the expected order, notices were posted in the quarries that work would

be continued on the afternoon of Saturdays during the next six weeks. The announcement was courteous and not peremptory. It gave ample reasons for the demand and recorded the fact that it was not the creation of a precedent, but a temporary measure to meet trade requirements.

The men held another meeting after hours, but the conclusions arrived at were not divulged until Saturday came. Then, at noon the hooters whistled for the dinner-hour, and at one o'clock they whistled the men back to work again. But the men did not come. About fifty or sixty appeared, but no more. The number was not sufficient to proceed with any useful work, and Hawkey sent them home after noting their names.

Then he returned to the office, where the managing director awaited him. There came also Wilberforce Retallack, Sidney Nanjulian, and Jack Keat. Hawkey sought some representative of the men for this informal conference; but not one was in the works.

"Everybody's in his garden this afternoon," said Nanjulian. "They've all suddenly found plenty to do there. In fact a lot of 'em told me the end of the world would come if they didn't work among their cabbage-stumps to-day."

He was indignant with the men, and so was Retallack. The managing director, an old soldier, declared disappointment and surprise at the line taken; only Tom Hawkey appeared to estimate the situation at its exact value. He frankly sympathized with the men.

"I'm sorry that Tonkin, and another here and there, who ought to have understood, did not do so," he said; "but to expect the men to understand was not reasonable. This place has been run on such close and friendly terms between us and you, that after a generation or two has passed the tradition becomes settled. It was just as much a part of the basis on which we live, and just as much to be taken for granted, as sunrise. But when the old tradition had to be broken and unheard-of demands made, a staff that's never had to think about the relations of capital and labour is shook up and startled into anger and dismay. Now, as they can't grasp the situation all in a minute, you'll have to be patient and help them to see it from another point of view."

"It's such a bore—all these hands——" began Major Polwarn, and then he stopped. He was a kindly man, but lacked imagination and loved metaphysics.

Hawkey uttered a short laugh.

"So it is, Major, when what we thought were merely hands turn into bodies—when what we thought was a machine drops to pieces and turns into men just like ourselves—yes; it's a bore."

"Not like ourselves, Mister Tom," corrected Jack Keat; "they haven't got our reason."

"Nor yet our power of synthesis and many-sided vision," said the Major. "They only see their liberties threatened, and don't perceive that we must often step back in order to jump forward."

"To step back into the pit on Saturday afternoon will help us to jump forward, no doubt, Major; but the difficulty is to make them see that it will help them too."

"It does directly, in the shape of money. It is for you to explain to them that, as a matter of fact, they are the first solid gainers," declared the soldier.

"You undervalue them," answered Hawkey. "They take a very high hand where money's concerned. The rich can't believe there's anything lies out of range of a silver bullet; but it isn't so. We North Cornwall folk are very independent. We've got what money can't buy, and so we don't put a false value on money, like the rich. Money makes a man material—that's the curse of it. So the rich are subdued by their riches and worship them. Probably money really can buy all that most rich men want, because it's ruined their higher senses and made them cease to care for the things it can't buy."

"An interesting argument, and there's something in it," admitted the soldier. "But for the moment it is beside the question. You must ask them to listen to you, Hawkey."

"They won't listen," said Jack Keat. "I've proved that. The mob has got hands and legs and throats, but no ears. And so I told 'em."

"That wasn't the way to make 'em listen, Jack," answered Retallack. "The mob's got a stomach anyway, and you can always make a man's belly hear, however deaf his head may be."

“ I hope they will listen, I do indeed,” said Major Polwarn. “ I never guessed that our discipline hung on a thread, so to speak. The point is what to do about it. You say their temper is amiable. Good. Then let us not be the first to lose our temper. But if you suspect violence, or sabotage, we must be prepared. We are responsible to the Company.”

“ There will be no violence,” said Hawkey. “ The men are straight and honourable and for the most part just. I’d trust them with my life, let alone my property; and so would Retallack here, or Keat.”

“ They’ll make this a matter of prayer to-morrow,” added Wilberforce. “ Be sure they’ll pray in their chapels to be shown their duty.”

“ For us to be shown ours more probably,” suspected the Major. “ Theirs is evidently quite clear to them. With their present narrow outlook they are in no doubt whatever. So far as I can see, this lies on your shoulders for the moment,” he continued, turning to Tom Hawkey. “ But if you feel it is more than you can fairly be expected to tackle——”

“ On the contrary, I wish for the responsibility. I believe I can put this right.”

“ They’ll come back to work on Monday ?”

“ Assuredly—as things stand.”

“ You would not call it a strike ?”

“ No,” answered the manager. “ I’d beg every reasonable man to keep that word off his lips most steadfastly. There’s no strike, only a difference of opinion on the subject of an order—a difference between me and them. I ask to have the whole responsibility. I want it and I want them to feel it is mine, and that I’m the cause of all.”

The Major considered.

“ What do you design to do ?”

“ I’ll tell you, of course, if you wish it; but I’d much rather not. I’d rather have a free hand and the absolute trust of the Company. Then, if I fail, you can repudiate everything.”

“ That would mean serious trouble for you, I’m afraid.”

“ It would mean ‘good-bye.’ I know that. My only concern is for the quarries, and if I fail, the Company will have no choice but to drop me.”

“ Do you want to take such unnecessary risks ?”

"Yes, I do," answered Hawkey. "I don't think the risk is very great; but, such as it is, I court it. I make a favour of being allowed to take it. If I'm right, then no harm is done; if I'm wrong, then I'm the sole sufferer, and the Company can make me the scapegoat; but if I act, as I mean to act, without the knowledge of the Company——"

"The Company is not a coward, my dear Hawkey. The Company either trusts you and stands behind you, or it does not."

But Hawkey declined to involve the Company and presently he had his way.

"I love these men and I understand them. If I fail, then I will resign," he said.

"You will work single-handed?"

"If you will grant me that privilege."

"No physical assistance?"

"It is not a physical matter."

"And what do you rely upon?" asked the Major.

"On himself," answered Retallack.

"No—on them," declared the manager. . . "I know them as employers seldom can know their people. I belong to them; I'm on their side, and see what they see and feel what they feel. I'm going to open their eyes—that's all. It makes a deal of difference when we don't see alike, if we know what the opposition is really thinking. This isn't right up against wrong. It's right up against right; and when right clashes with right, you'll often find terrible wrong is bred of it. And that's what I'm out to avoid."

"I need not ask you to be perfectly firm," said the managing director; "and I need not ask you not to make terms, or anything of that sort; because you are not empowered to do so. You are working without the Company at your own wish."

"And at my own risk. That's what I beg, and I think it generous of you to permit it."

The Major nodded.

"That idea of yours—of right clashing with right and breeding wrong—there's a good deal in that. I suppose that's the bitter fruit that every big strike bears. We know that two wrongs don't make a right; but it would seem that two rights may, and often do, make a wrong."

Such a problem delighted the old man. He would have liked to examine it on the spot; but Hawkey was practical.

"It's not a strike and we're not within sight of a strike," he said. "We're up against a difference of opinion, where neither side is wrong, but where one side naturally don't see as far ahead as the other. There's no question of terms—merely a question of throwing some light on the relations of capital to labour. They are bitter clear in most industrial places, but here centuries of good-fellowship and kindly feeling have dimmed them a trifle—that's all."

"Do nothing to imperil that kindly feeling—nothing," urged Retallack. "But we can trust you there, Mister Tom."

"If I don't increase it, then I fail," answered the other, and the informal meeting closed.

An hour later Tom Hawkey was on his way to Launceston, and before midnight, thanks to special influence, procured certain large bills in heavy type which he actually brought home with him to Delabole. He drove both ways and did not return until the small hours of Sunday. But he was in chapel as usual, and the focus of many interested eyes.

He designed an act that would upset every home in Delabole; and he knew it; but thanks to an understanding of his material—an understanding and estimate that was as perfect as a man's knowledge of men well could be—he felt not even a shadow of concern about the result. He saw his plan in action, and no argument would have shaken his assurance of its triumphant sequel.

At one o'clock on Monday morning, when Delabole slept, Hawkey himself went out with his bills and posted them up at the entrances of the quarry—in Medrose and Pengelley and other districts round about the mighty pit.

Probably Grandfather Nute was the first to read them, and he confessed afterwards that he had received the surprise of his life. He rushed home with the tremendous news that the quarries were closed.

"A lock-out," he said, "and by the manager's orders—only the manager!"

None believed him, but when Retallack and his sons reached the nearest bill at the main entrance to the works, they found fifty men already at a standstill before it. The quarries were closed by the order of Thomas Hawkey, manager.

Old Delabole soon hummed like a beehive. Large crowds collected at all the places of entrance and men began to swarm on the pappot-head. A gang of a dozen had walked down into the quarries, but Hawkey himself descended and directed them to leave. The pappot-head was also cleared. There was no display of force. Not a policeman appeared.

At noon Retallack and Nanjulian went to the office, where Hawkey was working quite alone.

"You've got the bettermost of them, Mister Tom. But what's it to be? They want to know."

"I've not got the bettermost of them," answered the manager. "Don't let them talk like that, or think like that. It's all the point of view, Wil. They didn't see with my eyes on Saturday, and I don't see with their eyes this morning. But we're going to see alike presently."

"Is there anything more to tell them than the notice does?" asked Nanjulian.

"Only this. Of course they know it is very unusual for a big company to hand over the whole conduct of the works to one of the men. But that's what has been done. Tell them they are not differing from the Company; they are only differing from one of themselves. I've undertaken to get the point of view to my friends here, as I'm on the spot, and belong to them, and can make them understand, I hope and believe."

"And if you fail?" asked the younger foreman.

"If I fail, Sidney, I go. That's a thing I thought beyond the power of life to make me do once. But who knows how powerful life can be, or the driving force let loose by accidents of good and bad luck? If I fail, I go; but I'm not going to fail. I know us too well."

"You're the last they want away," said Sidney Nanjulian.

"All the same, don't let them lie in any doubt. This is my work and only mine. I've got a free hand and they're dealing with me and only me. There's nobody behind me. I wouldn't let anybody share the responsibility; because I want the men to feel this begins and ends with me."

"How long is it for? They've a right to know that."

"Can't tell 'em, Sidney: I don't know myself yet."

They left him, and in the course of the day Hawkey moved about among the men in the friendliest spirit. He spoke

of everything but the quarries, and when they were mentioned deplored the necessity for stopping work, and hoped it would soon cease. He puzzled them, but they showed no anger against him, for the tale of his work at Delabole could not be told without proving him a hundred times their friend. He had always been so, and the most jealous of his power could cite no occasion when Hawkey had pressed upon their liberties, or unjustly sought to strengthen the Company's position at their expense. It had always been the other way

On the evening of Monday the manager was at home when Noah Tonkin called, and Betsy Bunt asked if Hawkey would see him.

"Of course, and glad to."

Noah explained that he stood for the men

"And who doesn't, Noah?"

"Delabole can't put up with this," said Mr. Tonkin, "and nobody knows that better than you."

"D'you think that I want Delabole to put up with it? I know I don't."

"You say so; but it's your work—single-handed you've done it, by all accounts, Mister Tom?"

"That's so, Noah. But don't make any mistake about the reason."

"We can't see it."

"I believe you can; I believe you do—clever men like you."

Noah was silent a moment.

"Have a nip of whisky," said the manager. "You look tired, and your throat's hoarse."

"We've been doing a good bit of talking—us leaders."

"And thinking, too, I'll bet."

Hawkey poured out some spirits for Mr. Tonkin, and drank with him.

Then the visitor took up his hat.

"I must be gone," he said. "They're waiting for me. The question was, Will you see a deputation to-morrow morn? Say a dozen—a leader from each department; but not Retallack or Nanjulian?"

Hawkey considered.

"It's real good of the men to want to help me," he said.

“ I know they appreciate how difficult this is for me—single-handed, too. Tell them I think it real sporting. But I won’t see them. I’ve got my own ideas. I didn’t do this without plenty of thought. It’s a big thing, you know, and a serious loss of money.”

“ You won’t see a deputation ?”

“ No, Noah. They’d help me if they could; but they can’t.”

“ The question in their minds is whether they can help themselves and their wives and children,” answered Tonkin bluntly.

“ They’ll soon be able to say ‘ yes ’ to that, I’m very sure,” declared the other.

He shook hands, and Noah returned to his friends, more puzzled than ever.

They debated it until midnight, but saw no light.

The lock-out continued on the following day, and consternation increased. But it was soon diminished, for the foremen were able to announce resumption of work on the morrow.

“ It’s all the point of view,” explained Retallack at the ‘ One and All ’ to a full bar. “ Mister Tom tells me that he hadn’t been able quite to see the point of view between the Company and the men, and how each depends and looks to the other. He said that he had never quite realized that capital and labour are a pair of cogged wheels working in and for each other—one no good unless the other turns. And he wondered a lot how to bring it home to his mind, so as he should never forget it again. And so, being all-powerful with you chaps and the friend of every man and boy—at least he likes to think so—he hit on an idea which should make it clear to himself and everybody else. ‘ There’s nothing like an object-lesson, Wil,’ he said to me, ‘ and so that I may get a real grip of this problem and never put one point of view up at the expense of the other, I’m going to lose two days of my salary—just to drive it home. You see, the men drove home their point of view on Saturday and made me see their idea; and now, always wanting for the increase of knowledge and understanding among us, I’m showing them and myself the other point of view. And whichever point of view you take, it comes out to the same conclusion: that one cogged

wheel can't move without the other.' He put it something like that," concluded Wilberforce Retallack, "though in better language. Still, I've made his meaning clear, I believe."

The event proved that he had.

Next morning, when the whistles blew, work began as usual, and proceeded as usual; and on the following Saturday, when the notices setting forth the need for Saturday afternoon work were posted again, unseen hands did not tear them down as on the first occasion. Not a word was said concerning the past; but the workers stopped in the quarries.

Chance took the manager past Noah Tonkin on this occasion.

The old man grinned at him, and spoke.

"And what do 'e think of it, Mister Tom?"

"'Tis well a' fine, Noah, and I believe we've all done dead right," he answered. "I never thought it was possible we could be better friends with the Company than we always have been; but there's no doubt we shall be after to-day. 'Twas well worth a few pounds to bring it about."

"They be saying we'm bested, however."

"Then tell them not to talk such rot, Noah. We and the Company have only wiped a bit of dust out of each other's eyes, that's all. Each has been a friend to the other, my dear man. There are stars in the sky, Noah, that circle around each other—twin stars they're called. And so it should be with master and man. Socialism wants to put out one of those stars; but nature's built her bedrock to endure for ever, and equality is no part of it."

"More's security," answered Tonkin. "There's no security in nature—till the gamekeeper comes to side with the gamebird against the hawk. But the workers rise above nature in that matter, and look to their own security; so why can't they soar higher still, Mister Tom, and reach equality also?"

"The ideals start on different ground, Noah. Security makes appeal to the justice in man. There's reason behind that. But equality takes no account of reason. It's not rational and it's not instinctive—neither heart nor head stands for it. Brains have got to be more and more the measure of men, and till brains are all turned in the same mould, and will is ruled out and character levelled down, you can't have socialism. The ideal for progress is to see that

every man and woman born into this world starts fair and is not handicapped out of the race at the start by evil circumstances and bad blood ; but, given a fair start, the race must still be to the strong; and to ask the few strong to lie at the mercy of the many weak is to flout human nature. Greatness will always be greatness. But the reason of mankind is going to see presently that greatness is founded on worth and power earned by a man's own brain and sweat, not through the sweat and brain of his forbears."

"Brains be just as much an accident as birth, however."

"So equality is folly anyway, and great brains, along with great hearts, will ever be the masters. Mastery lies at the root of progress, and from evil mastery we rise, steady and slow and sure, to good mastery," foretold the manager. "The ideal State will be that where only the pure in heart can get to the top; but he'll have to be great in head too. At present the pitfalls for the self-seeker and the knave with brains are too few. But hedge about power with right and honour; make it a sacred thing; and then only the real big men will get to the top, where they're badly wanted, and where all history shows they've been terrible scarce and terrible misunderstood. That's the secret of education—to know our great men when we see them, not to mistake ourselves for their equals."

So the manager preached tinocracy, but the other hardly comprehended.

CHAPTER XIII

A TRUSTEE APPOINTED

THERE came a day, long postponed, when Wesley Bake visited the quarry cottage to talk with Wilberforce Retallack. Both were very busy men, and the opportunity to discuss and arrange their business relations was long in coming, since neither would enter into secular undertakings on a Sunday.

Edith had showed no immediate desire for marriage, and, rather to the miller's disappointment, proposed that a year should pass before she wedded. She came to the little conference on a summer day, and her mother and grandfather were also present at it. Indeed, Wilberforce himself was the last to arrive, for an accident had happened in the quarry, and he was called to it.

Ignorant of the cause for this delay, the others talked, and, by unlucky chance, in all ignorance, Wesley said things that hurt his betrothed. They should not have troubled her, and she knew it: and that troubled her the more and annoyed her with herself as well as her lover. Talk ran on the quarries, and Grandfather chronicled the great period of success through which they were now passing.

"I say 'passing' because it's contrary to nature it should go on for ever. We must have light and shade, Wesley, same as we must have rain after fine, and winter after summer. But there's no doubt all goes well, and there's more first-class stone in sight than I ever remember."

"Mister Tom's a wonder," declared Anna Retallack; "and, what's better far than being clever, he's amazing lucky. It properly bumfoozles me how fortune smiles on that man. He can't go wrong."

"I wouldn't say 'twas luck," answered Bake. "Call it brains, and more than brains. 'Tis will-power, in my opinion. He's got a will and a heart, and has the wit to run the two in double harness. He's a leader of men, and he wins them as

well as leads them. If I envy any man his character, 'tis Hawkey."

Edith bit her lip behind his back, and, unconsciously, her grandfather voiced something of the emotion in her mind.

"You mustn't say that, Wesley. 'Tis a thought poor-spirited in you to envy another man his character—even a good man. I don't like to hear a young fellow giving anybody best so meek and humble as that. Hawkey's been tested and proved a very useful man, and it was right and to be expected that such a religious chap should find support in the hour of trial; but for you to say you wish you was as fine as much as to say you ain't. You mustn't allow that even to yourself, let alone other people."

Wesley laughed at this lecture.

"I never did have a very great conceit of myself. At wrasling, in my wrasling days, the stickler* would say I was thrown by my mistrust of myself oftener than by t'other man. But I hope in things that matter, grandfather, there's no doubt in my mind. I'm not such a big man as Tom Hawkey, and it would be vain pride of me to say I was."

"Have done!" cried Edith. She had turned a little pale, and the delicate freckles showed on her pure skin. "If you're going to sing small before folk, don't let me be one of them. 'Tis poor speed for a woman to hear the man she's going to wed mistrust himself."

Bake was bewildered at this strenuous attitude. He laughed nervously and expressed regret, while Mr. Nute preached self-reliance.

"Modesty's a virtue," he said, "but only in reason. A Wesleyan has always got to remember what's behind him; and to cry stinking fish, as you're inclined to do, is as much as to say the weapon in your hands is not to be trusted."

Retallack returned at this moment.

"Another cripple," he said. "There's naught more mournful in Delabole than the number of halt and maimed that crawl our streets."

"Who's hurt?" asked Anna. "Can me or Edith go to the poor chap?"

"No; he's been carried away. The doctor's going along

* *Stickler*—umpire.

with him. It's Adam Rush. A tumbril came down the incline, and he was on the line and didn't hear the shouting. It knocked him over and broke his pin-bone* and a rib or two. A wonder he wasn't killed."

"A pity it happened to him," said Anna, "because his mother's such a fusser. 'Twill weaken her faith, very like. Adam is the apple of her eye. She's always made a hero of him."

"And yet a very stupid man, really," declared Grandfather Nute. "And this proves it. Nobody but a weak-witted chap would be so fond as to stand on the down-line with his back turned to the incline."

"I sent for Pooley," explained Retallaek. "When we'd got him up to the top in the engine-room, poor Adam was terrible feared that he might die there and then, and he called for Pooley, who is a great friend, to come and say a word or two. And the boy knelt beside him, like an old un, and put up as good and comforting a prayer as you could wish to hear."

"If he's got a fault, it is that he's too personal to the Almighty," declared Grandfather Nute.

"How d'you mean, father?" asked Pooley's mother; for Pooley was her favourite child, and anything concerning him challenged her at once.

"I mean he don't mark the gulf between creature and creator enough. He allows himself to get too close to God."

"You can't be too close to God, surely?" asked Wesley Bake.

"I mean—well, it's rather a nice shade of meaning. It's more the letter than the spirit, and only education saves you from being so familiar. We local preachers get too familiar. We're prone to talk to the Almighty as if He was only one step higher than a director of the Company. In fact, some of us be less respectful to our Maker than to our master. It's education. It ain't vulgarity—I wouldn't say that; but it's ignorance. Because God made man in His own image, we take it for granted He made our minds in His own image too, and what's the result? Why, we've got to apologize for God every time we open a newspaper, because He's been doing

* *Pin-bone*—thigh-bone.

things we wouldn't do! We judge Him by our standards, and that's sheer insolence. That's what I mean by getting too close to Him. You never hear a professional do that, along of their theological education."

"Pooley would dearly like to go into the ministry," said Wesley Bake. "He's told me time and again that he feels the call."

"'Tis never out of his head," declared Anna.

"He might so well seek the stars," declared Pooley's father; "and now we'll get to business, please. I wanted my wife to be joint trustee of my estate along with you, Wesley; but she don't wish it. She feels to you as I feel to you, and we all do, Grandfather included. You understand business, having had so much upon your hands, and you've proved yourself well able to tackle it."

"Though such a mistrustful man and so fearful of yourself," said Edith.

They were assembled round the kitchen table, and Wesley, who sat next to her, patted her shoulder.

"Don't rub it in no more," he said. "I'm not frightened of myself—if I was I shouldn't have got you; and I shouldn't be undertaking this job. If you trust me—such people as you—then I can trust myself."

They talked awhile, and presently Wilberforce bade the women leave them.

"I wish there was more money to go along with my eldest daughter," he said when Edith and Anna were gone; "but, to be plain with you, the money's sunk in her already. It was a choice between hoarding for her and spending on her, and at seventeen she was so terribly set on higher education that we let her have her way—at some cost too."

"Don't name it. I'd rather have her as clever as she is than worth a thousand pounds."

"I doubt as to that. It's what they've got by nature, not what they learn from books, make women useful to men. Though what they've learned of late years no doubt will make women a good bit more useful to themselves. From our point of view they are little bettered by learning; for it alters their outlook on us a lot—and for the worse. I wouldn't say that it makes for their own happiness either."

“That’s old-fashioned talk, father. Happiness is power. Edith’s a lot more powerful for her knowledge.”

“I doubt about happiness being power, however,” chimed in Grandfather.

They discussed this, then returned to the matter in hand.

“She’ll have a hundred pounds and her new clothes, and no more,” said Retallack.

He was depressed and now discussed his own affairs; but a reticence marked his speech. He clearly desired Grandfather to go, yet did not like to ask him.

“I shan’t be here ten years,” he said. “I don’t like to tell the women, but I know it. There’s body evils gaining upon me. I’m living my father again in my own flesh. Things happen to me that remind me of things that happened to him I’ve forgot. The machine’s wearing out. Not that I grumble.”

“The length of a man’s life’s what he gets into it, not the time it stretches over,” said Mr. Nute.

“Why don’t you put yourself in the doctor’s hands?” asked Wesley. “You look right, master.”

“I want to leave all suent and no trouble for anybody. Nat Forrester, in the engine-house, owes me fifty pound. That’s the only thing outstanding to credit. And I’ve got debts—little ones with Sleep at the paper-shop and with Farmer Tresidda to Bodmin, and half a dozen others. All little ones. They’ll be paid inside two years. Two hundred, all told, I dare say. Sometimes I think Forrester’s forgot that fifty.”

“He ain’t forgot it and he ain’t forgived it,” declared Grandfather Nute. “Nat Forrester’s that common type of man that can’t get over a kindness. There be many that turn sour under favours—a very common littleness. Jealousy of the power behind the favour is the trouble.”

“Forrester’s a very religious man,” said Wesley; “they men that have to do with steam machinery often are.”

“Exactly,” answered the veteran. “’Tis the strength and goodness that made Wilberforce help him that he recognizes. And he gets out of his obligation by putting it on God—and only Him. As to the agent, the Lord’s minister—Wilberforce Retallack—all Nat has to say of him is that he ought to have done twice as much as he did do. There’s no gratitude except to God. He regards the debt as a debt to his Maker, and we’re

all in debt in that quarter and can't pay. So he salves a very mean sort of conscience by ignoring my son-in-law."

At this moment Edith returned with a message for Mr. Nute. Sarah Sleep had called and desired to see him at once. He hastened away, and Retallack, glad that he was gone, continued:

"The law will have it out of Forrester when I'm dead," he said. "I don't bear no grudge against the man; but I shall cut up a good few pounds worse than folk think, and I order you to get that money for my family's sake."

Then he went into figures, and handed Wesley Bake his papers.

"We'll go to lawyer when we're next in Launceston together," he said, "and have you put in your place under hand and seal all regular. I may not die these good few years, and I'd like to think that the estate will be a bit fatter before I do. Of course, you keep everything to yourself. I don't want for Anna to be cast down about it. She's no woman of business, though full of sense. But she'll be very well content to know it's all in your keeping."

"I respect the trust," declared the miller; "and you needn't be told when the time comes—and far ways off I hope it is—that I'll do the very best in my power for all concerned."

Wilberforce thanked him and they went out together.

Meanwhile Grandfather had spoken with Sarah Sleep and departed with her.

"A proper confloption!" she said, "and all in the middle of the night. My brother called me half after two of the clock, and I found him creaming all over and so white as a dog's tooth. With that I made a fire in his chamber, though the night was warm enough, and sent Jane off for the doctor. He came and said 'twas a grave upset, but he could make nothing of it, and thought it had to do with John's stomach and what he'd been eating. He'd been to Padstow and had a lobster to his dinner, but they Padstow lobsters are sweet as a shrimp, and I haven't heard tell of one hurting a man afore."

"Not straight out of the sea, certainly," said Mr. Nute. "I've eaten scores of dozens in my time, and never a pang."

"Doctor's coming again—in fact he'll be there when we get back; but John, though he's had a brave sleep, was terrible

restless and most wishful for your company. He little liked to trouble you, but, knowing you, I came right off the minute he longed to see you. Of course, I wouldn't have sent Jane nor yet Philippa; but I thought if I came, mayhap you wouldn't say 'no'."

Grandfather's answer was to get his hat and stick.

"Can we do anything or help in any way?" asked Anna Retallack, who had heard the news.

"You would if you could and well I know it, but we're doing all that's to do. Little enough. We can only be full of hope that 'tis nothing and the danger's past."

They departed together, and in order to distract Sarah's mind from her great anxieties the old man talked on general subjects. He even stopped a moment before the ascending walls of Antipas Keat's new dwelling.

"There's genius in Keat," he declared, "but it's linked to something we'd call childish in anybody else."

"He's a chattering tim-doodle in my opinion," declared Sarah, "and he'll never finish his house, because he knows the minute the roof's on all interest in him will go out and he'll be like anybody else—just a baker and no more."

"Far from that. You undervalue the brain of Keat," declared Grandfather. "Once he's finished this, he'll be on to something else. He'll never let his intellect lie idle. Already he's got ideas and spends a good few evening hours drawing out plans on paper. No; what I mean by 'childish' is just that quality in him which refuses all help and will do everything with his own hand. That's small; besides, it wastes a lot of time. There's rather a silly sort of pride in that, and a larger man would not object to help where help was natural and proper."

A trowel clinked, and Antipas looked down from a scaffold.

"I hear your voices," he said. "Come up the ladder, Mr. Nute. You'll find from up here you can see the plan in all its parts."

But Grandfather would not ascend.

"Another time," he said. "I'm none too sure of your scaffolding, neighbour. There's some things one pair of hands can't do, however clever the head that runs 'em. Remember the past."

"D'you think I'd trust myself if it wasn't safe?" asked the

baker. "I set a value on my bones, I promise you. My accidents were never my own fault."

"Everybody's so *coorious* in Delabole," declared Miss Sleep, as they proceeded. "Was ever such a place for odd characters? I believe you're the only man in it without a bee in your bonnet; though that's not to say you ain't a wonderful sort of man, because you are."

"'Tis only my age and experience and a good digestion and a good memory," he explained modestly. Then he asked a question.

"Do 'e see much of my grandson, Ned?"

"We do—too much, I was going to say. He's after Philippa, of course. She denies it, but her mother, Jane, sees through her. Jane was married herself—to her cost—and she says that Philippa's her father over again."

"Why can't they be tokened and have done with it?" asked Grandfather.

"Just what I said to the giglet girl in so many words; but there 'tis: she tosses her head and twinkles her eyes and says 'tis no good talking any foolishness like that. She don't want to be married—says she's seen too much what goes to it—axes her mother if she'd marry again if she could go back. And Jane's a truthful creature, and isn't going to pretend that marriage is all it might be."

"Not that we should judge of the state from our own experience alone," said Grandfather. "You must strike an average, and not say 'tis a failure just because you've found it so."

"No doubt you're right. Yet most humans judge of things as they find them. My poor niece can't be expected to praise marriage—her with a runaway husband in Pennsylvania."

"Doesn't he send her money?"

"Not him. But he's got the cheek to send her advice; and he tells her she can draw a bill of divorcement any time she likes, and he'll be only too pleased to help the execution of justice. That's the sort of man he is. He sent home twenty shillings a bit ago, to pay for Philippa's likeness, which he was very desirous to have; and Jane, in one of them queer moods that come over her, went and got photographed herself, and sent him that instead!"

“What did he say?”

“I don’t know what he said. We didn’t hear anything. And now, if you please, Philippa is all for going out to him. There’s no doubt she’s more her father’s child than her mother’s. And if you could keep Ned off her, you’d be doing poor Jane a kindness. Her life’s none too gay, and her eyes be troubling her. You see the cast more and more.”

“I’ll put it to Ned,” promised Grandfather Nute. “Ned is a good-hearted sort of boy, and I understand him pretty well. There’s no vice in him, and your Jane needn’t fear danger from his wickedness, only from his weakness.”

“That’s it—Philippa’s twice so strong as him, and what she wants she’ll have out of him. I don’t think any grandchild of yours is likely to be wicked; but a child of Philip Sleep is very likely indeed to be wicked. ’Tis a case of ‘Satan finds some mischief still,’ for she’s as idle as they make ’em.”

But Grandfather was nothing if not didactic. At the name of Satan he always pricked up his ears, and his attitude to the Enemy of Mankind never changed. He entertained a profound respect for him, as a result of living in the world for threescore years and ten; but, fortified by the true light, Mr. Nute believed that he was able to see the Evil One’s fundamental errors in his campaign against humanity. He noted where he was wrong; and he also noted where he was right. He analyzed the fiend’s sweeping successes and regretted mournfully that the history of mankind so much abounded in them. On this occasion he upheld Satan against the familiar criticism.

“You must give the devil his due,” said Grandfather Nute. “It can’t be denied him, and to scoff at him is only to blind ourselves to his power. It idden only idle hands he finds work for. The biggest blackguards I’ve known have always been the busiest. In fact, you may take it from me that the devil’s far too good a student of character to waste much time on the idle. ’Tis the busy folk—them that never let the grass grow under their feet—be most useful to him. The busy man has got character, and you can no more draw real, useful wickedness—to speak in the devil’s words—from a weak and lazy nature than you can get any real, high goodness.”

She listened to his reasoning and praised it.

“The way you turn a thing inside out is a lesson to us smaller minds,” she said.

Then they reached the newspaper-shop and met the doctor walking out of it.

“Sleep’s going on very well,” he told them. “In fact he’s cured. It was something he’d eaten. Keep him on milk food for twenty-four hours and he’ll feel no more of it.”

They went in, to find John Sleep shedding tears and Jane Sleep patting his hand.

“The Lord has saved me; the Lord has given me back my life,” he said. “’Twas just a message, Grandfather, just a reminder that in the midst of life we are in death. But I’m to be useful a bit longer and I thank the Giver for allowing it, for I’m only sixty-four, and it would have been a terrible shock to go.”

Mr. Nute offered to say a few words, but John Sleep declined to hear them.

“Not now,” he answered, drying his tears. “The Lord’s done His work single-handed, and it would only be thrusting in for you to say anything now. ’Tis just a case for my own personal thanksgiving to the Throne, and so soon as I have had some weak brandy-and-water and a good sleep, I shall be able to say all that’s called for myself.”

“And nobody could say it better,” answered the visitor, “and I’m properly glad, as we all shall be, that it wasn’t the Call, neighbour.”

CHAPTER XIV

AT LANTEGLOS

MR. MOSES BUNT found little in the affairs of the world or his fellow-creatures to commend; but he had not much personally to complain about, because his own circle was extremely limited, and none chose to enter it unless driven to do so by circumstances. He was avoided as the wasp is avoided.

But now the old man clashed with his betters and smarted under a reverse.

On a Sunday morning Moses called at the manager's house, entered the kitchen, and found his sister, Betsy, making an apple-pie.

"Leave that mess and list to me," he said. "A thing have been done that will make the county ring with shame. That beast at St. Teath—the parson."

"Good Lord, Moses, you idden calling the Reverend Tucker a beast?"

Betsy set down an apple half-peeled and stared at her brother.

"Yes, I am; and so he is. Us all knew he was no better than a fool; but us didn't know he was a wicked, audacious creature. But I'll show him up. St. Teath shall properly heave with it afore I'm a week older."

"What's he done to you?" asked Betsy.

"I went to the man a month ago and told him as I meant to lie at St. Teath when my time came, and I wanted to buy my place. He was cold about it from the first, but civil. I said all my folk were teeled* at Lanteglos, and that I didn't want to go in with them, as they'd never been anything but a trouble and a drain on my pocket, and that I couldn't think with patience to this day of all the good money wasted keeping my father and mother out of the Union Workhouse. Then I told him my stone was in hand and that I'd got a very hand-

* *Teeled*—buried.

some slate a bit bigger than some people's. I was civil to the man, and promised the slate would be a credit to St. Teath yard, and the parish, for that matter."

"Well, what could he say?"

"He said he'd come and see it at my invitation when next he was up to Delabole, and I told the man he'd have a treat and was welcome. I went out of my way to be civil to the wretch; and he came, and all he said was that my stone was too big by half! 'You must have a stone like other people,' the creature said to me, and put it in plain, brutal words, that if I didn't take twelve good inches off it, he wouldn't have it at St. Teath."

"He's all-powerful of course," said Betsy.

"Is he? I very soon showed him he weren't. 'If you think you're going to dictate to me about the size of my tombstone, Reverend Tucker,' I said, 'you be damn well mistaken. And 'tis like you Church of England parsons to dare to do it. Not a grain of slate do I take off for you, or any man, and a more ondacent offer I never heard. You ought to blush,' I said, 'because well you know if it had been the squire, or yourself, or any of the so-called bettermost people, you'd have raised no quarrel whatever. You can't cabobble* me,' I said. 'I see through you; and now, if you was to go down on your knees to me, I wouldn't lie at St. Teath. You've done for yourself now! 'Tis a slate in a thousand,' I told the fool, 'and it shan't stand in your churchyard not if you was to offer me a pound to let it do so.'"

"What does your friend Benny Moyse say about it?"

"I've just left him. He says I'm right. He says I was too patient and gentle with the creature, and did ought to have given him all the law and the prophets."

"And what did the Reverend Tucker say?" asked Betsy. "I warrant he answered back."

"He did. Not a particle of self-control in that man. He was properly mad to think that I'd seen through him and found him out. He tried to hide it; but I could mark it in his eye. He pretended he wasn't angry, and said: 'We shall be sorry to lose you, Mr. Bunt'; but that was just to put me off the scent. I dare say he'll think better of it presently, and

* *Cabobble*—deceive.

come back; but I'll not listen if he do. I go in at Lanteglos now."

"The Bunts all lie there."

"That's why I wanted to lie somewheres else. But it don't matter when you be dead. Our family be all huddled together at the bottom of the hill. I can have my grave up top."

He left her then, to publish his news more widely, and timed his way to be outside the meeting-house of the United Methodists at the moment when morning service was ended. He arrested Jack Keat and Wilberforce Retallack as they emerged, and others stopped to listen, including Antipas Keat, the baker, and Aunt Mercy Inch from Trebarwith Sand. Moses, however, failed to waken that sense of outrage in their minds under which his own bosom panted.

"You'm too greedy, Mr. Bunt," declared Aunt Mercy, who remembered the free luncheon. "You want more'n your share of the earth. 'Tis a common thing among the living, but I never heard of a dead man hungering after grave enough for two. I call you dead, because you will be then."

"We're all equal in the grave," declared Jack Keat, "and why for you want to catch the eye of the living public more than anybody else, I can't see."

"For my part, all this taking of thought about your tomb idden to your credit," continued Aunt Mercy. "'Tis as much as to say you can't trust the living to see you properly put away."

"More I can't," answered Mr. Bunt. "Who cares a tinker's damn except myself if I have a decent monument? My own generation haven't got no more use for me than I have for them. But that's no reason why I should be slighted by the next. 'Tis all very well for you to say I can trust the living, Mercy Inch; but please tell me which of 'em I can trust. I don't know 'em."

The congregation thinned away, and some laughter fell on Mr. Bunt's ear and annoyed him. He went home, where he lived alone in a cottage at Medrose, and after his dinner he set off to Lanteglos to see the sexton.

Accident willed that he met Mercy Inch again, for she had come to Delabole for the day, had dined with friends at Medrose, and was going to the quarry cottage at Anna Retallack's invitation for tea.

Mr. Bunt resumed the conversation where it had ended outside the chapel.

"I be going to see bedman Billy Jose at Lanteglos this minute," he said. "I've ordained to lie there now, though not for choice."

Beside the waters of the infant Camallen stood Lanteglos church, in a cradle of little hills. Great sycamores with grey stems threw shade over the church porch in summer, and scattered the graves in autumn with a myriad leaves. The churchyard sloped steeply, and the rows of the dead lay above each other's heads on the side of it. A fountain broke from the hedge, and great ferns sprang beside the sparkling water. Some venerable Cornish crosses, rescued from elsewhere, lifted their battered heads among the slate gravestones, and beside the church porch there stood a still more ancient relic, an inscribed monolith, or family pillar, whose legend, translated into modern English, was set beside it.

From a bough of one of the sycamores hung a scythe, which the sexton had left there until he should use it again on the morrow. Mr. Bunt perambulated the churchyard. He favoured the upper reaches of the burying-ground, and noted with satisfaction that there was plenty of room where the slope ascended to the southern hedge. His own people clustered below, and he went down presently and regarded them. They were neglected, but the mark of the scythe approached, and to-morrow they would be clipped.

Moses struck a match on his mother's tombstone and lit his pipe. Presently he spat on the resting-place of a paternal aunt, and turned away to salute a tall, thin man who approached.

"The very item I wanted to see," he said. "I was running my eye over my graves, Billy Jose."

The sexton shook hands.

"If you'd made it next Sunday, you'd have found them tidier," he said. "I work out the yard by rule, and take each part in turn. They'll be gone over to-morrow."

"I ain't troubling about them. You'll mind I told you I was going to be buried down to St. Teath; but that's off. I've had a bit of a flare-up with Tucker. He's getting too large for his place, and must needs decide how big the gravestones are to be. He'll tell us how big our coffins are to be

next, and when 'twill be convenient for him for us to die."

"Our Reverend ain't like that," said Mr. Jose. "A very gentle, learned man—wiser than all the rest of the county put together, and can read all living and dead tongues so easy as we can read the Bible."

"So much the better. Then no doubt he minds his own business, which be a rare feat in these parts. I may tell you that I shall lie here; but not along with the Bunts. There's lots of room up over, I see, and I've got my gravestone very near ready."

"A great piece of forethought in you, for certain."

"Ess, and you can come and see it next time you be in Delabole, if you mind to," said Moses.

Billy Jose promised to do so.

"I shall be very pleased indeed to set it up," he said simply.

"'Tis a majestic stone—too big for St. Teath, if you please. 'Tis very near done now—all but the text and date. I won't have no rhymes out of Wesley, nor nothing like that. But just naked Bible, telling the man I was. I be working through the Book from end to end to find the fitting word. It ain't too easy neither. Then there's a skull and bat's wings up top. I've copied them, line for line, from an old stone at St. Teath set up to a man of renown."

Billy Jose nodded.

"I like they skulls," he said. "They be a good bit out o' fashion in these days, yet I never know why. They stand for the King of Terrors, and call home what lies afore us all. Have 'e got any other adornments?"

"No, I ain't. I don't want no fantastic flummeries. Just 'Moses Bunt' and 'God' in gold, and the rest plain and simple. 'Tis the size that carries it. And that anointed rogue at St. Teath wanted twelve inches off, because I'm one of the people and not a gentleman! And God'll judge him for it; and I wish I had the making of his tomb. If I had, I'd put up a bit of ugly truth over the man, and cut it so deep in the slate that it would still be holding out at Judgment."

Mr. Jose was not easily roused to wrath. His work had affected his character, and he lived a contemplative and pensive life. He spoke of the dead as his neighbours spoke of the

living, and went on terms of amity with the dust. He was not more than fifty, but cared little for pleasure or amusement. He lived near the churchyard, with a childless wife, ten years older than himself, and they were contented.

"The silent people idden the worst company in the world," Jose said now, and Mr. Bunt agreed with him.

"There's no more hateful backbiting and lying and slandering among 'em, anyway," he said.

"And lucky there ain't, seeing how close they be called to lie sometimes," answered the bedman. "You can get a lot of interesting thoughts out of the way they go in, Moses Bunt. Chance will often bring opposites together and draw them close beneath the earth who shivered to pass each other on top of it. And, again, you'll find them who were crossed in love, with fate and a sword between them all their days, will sometimes go in so nigh and neighbourly that hand could touch hand in the dark below. 'Tis well all passion dies with death."

Bunt was looking at a new grave. The turf gaped, and a little bouquet of columbines and a moss-rose lay upon it.

"Who be that, then?" he asked.

"'Old Turk.' Edwards was his name, but he'll be called 'Old Turk' till he's forgot."

"That baggering poacher?"

"Yes, him. And I can't help feeling how well content he'd be lying there between two fine women. Such an eye he had for 'em."

"More than an eye, the damned old scamp!"

"He was very fond of 'em to the end. His wife forgave him, however. She put that nosegay there with her own hands, because columbines was his favourite flower."

Suddenly there appeared a man and a woman. They came from behind the edge of the church tower, and knew not that others were so near. Julitta Retallack and Sidney Nanjulian hesitated, but there was no escape, so they strolled on.

Sidney had heard Mr. Bunt outside the chapel in the morning, and now plunged into the conversation.

"Better luck here, Moses, I hope?"

"There's justice here, as I expected to find it," answered the old man. "I don't want no luck, and you didn't ought to use the word."

"How's yourself, Jose?"

"Very well, thank you, Mr. Nanjulian. Taking a walk, I see."

"We met by chance, Miss Retallack and I."

Bunt sniffed. Julitta had strolled away.

"We was talking of the histories on gravestones and the way you can link 'em up and put two and two together," explained the sexton.

Nanjulian nodded.

"There's often tragedy in a bare date," he admitted; "just one date seen along with another."

"And queer natural things," added Billy Jose. "Look here now. This is Henry Tresilion's mound. You'll always find a crop of fine mushrooms here every fall. A terrible curious thing—eh?"

"Why curious?" asked the quarry foreman.

"Because the man was so addicted to 'em! His favourite food, as he always vowed," replied Jose. "I don't say there's anything to it, and I don't say there ain't; but why the mischief did I never find a mushroom here till we teeled Tresilion?"

"Perhaps you never looked," said Julitta. She had returned, and was listening to Mr. Jose.

"The man would have seen 'em, whether he'd looked or not," snapped Moses Bunt. "You don't look for sovereigns on the highroad, unless you be weak in your head, but if they're there, you find 'em."

"I don't think you can explain it away," continued the sexton mildly.

"Not unless you're an atheist," declared Mr. Bunt. "They explain everything; but they won't explain hell fire."

"So there it is," summed up Billy Jose. "Afore he went in, not a mushroom; and since, a good crop every year. Just another mystery. And life's full of such puzzles, I believe. Anyway, death is."

They parted, and the younger pair went their way together.

There was a lane that ran up the hill westerly. It had been an old pack-horse track in medieval times, and generations had worn it down and down until the hedges towered above it. The way was lonely and seldom used. Now Nanjulian sought this path, and in the cool silence and

shade beneath the twined branches of the hazels he put his arm round Julitta and kissed her with passion.

“How stupid meeting that old wretch,” she said.

“He’ll forget it. He’s too full of his grave.”

“Not he. Didn’t you see his snake’s eyes when you said we’d met by chance?”

They were lovers, and had been lovers for three months. Their intimacy was complete and their romance the salt and glory of their lives. By mutual consent they kept their attachment the profoundest secret—not because there existed the smallest need to do so, but because it added enormously to the splendour and fascination thereof.

They amused themselves now by recalling the little joyous incidents and ludicrous accidents of their compact. They laughed over the free luncheon and Sidney’s guile, when he pretended to Grandfather Nute that he did not know Julitta was a musician. A thousand cunning things Nanjulian had done, and Julitta had even excelled him in her delightful impostures.

“Edith thinks I’ve got a stone heart—so does mother,” said she. “Edith is funny. She honestly believes that she knows all about love, and is quite sorry, in her cold, stately way, for me because I’ve missed it. She pities me, and I try to look sad and say I’ve got no use for the men, and know they don’t like me. And father tries to cheer me up, and says the right one will come along some day. And I—I just whisper, ‘Sidney—darling—heavenly Sidney!’ to my heart, and conjure up the place where we met last.”

“It never grows flat,” he said; “I wake in the night and say, soft and gentle, but not loud: ‘She loves me—she’s my very, very own—the precious!’ And Edith’s sorry for you? That’s a rare joke. Why, good God, you’ve forgotten more about love than she ever knew, or ever will know. Your little finger could make a man madder than her whole body.”

They caressed fervently. Then he put her hat straight.

“I often ask myself why we don’t tell people,” she said. “I wish we could go on for ever keeping it a secret. If it wasn’t a secret, I’ve got a horrid fear it wouldn’t be so fine.”

“Fine for ever, secret or not,” he assured her, “because we’re fine. But different when known to all. It’s romance, and we were born romantic. That’s what drew us and

brought our arms round each other. We'd both been feeling out in the dark for something off the beaten track—something alive and real. It's poetry, and poetry never can be an everyday thing. Any pair of fools can make love in the open, and show the world they are tokened. The birds can do that. But it was in our blood to make the thing a secret and a wonderful mystery. And we've proved the joy of it, and it lifts us above the common people and makes us the equal of the famous lovers in the story-books."

"There's such a lot of fun to it too," said Julitta. "I often die of laughing very near to hear the maidens talk and the married women sigh and shut their secrets away in their hearts. And it's beautiful—beautiful—the trust on both sides."

He nodded.

"I know that—the honour you pay me in that trust—putting yourself in my hands without a chain."

"The chains are there," she said; "but they'll never gall us. They're woven of little links, Sidney, links that don't fret even a woman's tender flesh. The little confidences, the little understandings, the shared hope, the shared faith, the shared fun. Never did man and woman understand each other so well or close as we."

"I'm sorry for Ned," he said presently, "because he's like you, only without the brain power. He wants a ray of light too, and a bit of freedom and the taste of the joy of living."

"You needn't be sorry for him," she said. "Of course, I can't tell him I know all that's in his mind, because that's not to play my part. I've got to be the frosty maiden, even to him; but I understand him very well, and I know what he's after. It's as funny as anything to see myself reflected in Ned, or to feel him reflected in me. And he's hiding it too—not for the delight of hiding it like you and me; but for fear of trouble if he doesn't. He's in love with Philippa Sleep—little sly thing—and she's as sharp as a needle, whatever Ned may be. Of course Ned can't afford to marry; but they'll be tokened before long if she can bring it about."

"He's too young."

"He doesn't think so. They've got their plots, no doubt. I'd love to help Ned. Perhaps some day I shall."

They wandered along together, sublimely content and

happy. Marriage would be the inevitable sequel: they admitted that; but they were pagans, and regarded the goal as utterly unimportant contrasted with the sunny road that meandered with many a twist and turn towards it.

Before they reached the open fields, and not until dusk had fallen, they bade each other farewell, and returned to Delabole by different roads.

CHAPTER XV

NED'S HOLIDAY

THE dressing-shed and saw-house at Delabole was a long, lofty building, full of light and air. Tramways ran into it from every side, and conveyed the great blocks of raw slate from the quarries to the hillmen. Aloft the beams of this workshop were whitewashed, and a revolving rod, from the giant steam-engine of the works, ran the length of the shed. Wheels spun upon this rod at regular intervals, and from them fell a system of endless bands to the machines beneath. Some dropped to the saw-tables, some to the dressers sitting behind their guillotines. The main tramway separated these operations, and from time to time little tumbrils entered, dragged by a horse. They brought fresh slate, and removed the masses of splinters and débris. The air was misty with slate-dust, and through the haze whirled the endless straps, flashed the steel wheels from which they came and moved the drab figures of a hundred men and boys. The prevalent colour of the shed and all therein was a grey-blue, dim on dull days, brightened from the glass roof on sunny ones. Then golden light winnowed down through the dusty air, flashed on the faces of the saw-tables, and struck brightly along the surfaces of polished metal and the wet planes of the slate. Beside each saw-table stood the great masses of native rock, and men prepared them for the saw. First a steel gouge made room for the cutter, then followed the picker, and as it divided the main masses into thinner layers one might mark the consummate skill and accuracy that accompanied the labour of the splitters. Old Moses Bunt, looking like a muddy beetle in his working clothes, held the picker, while a young giant smote with a great hammer upon its head. Each blow crashed down within half an inch of Bunt's hand. Had he quivered, or had the great hammer deviated by a fraction from its perfect stroke, Moses, with fingers

smashed to pulp, would have been ready for hospital. But the nerve and skill of both men made the possibility of accident remote. Anon the mass was flaked to a thickness for the saw-table. The great slab was lifted upon it and wedged there. The table started. Inch by inch the stone crept to the revolving saw on the midst of the table. Then slate touched steel; there was a hiss and a puff of vapour; a jet of water played on the friction-point, and the saw slipped through the stone as though it had been cardboard.

A terrific din filled the dressing-sheds, and each worker of the hundred contributed his share of the noise in staccato pulses against the steady roar of the engines that brought life to the machinery and set the leathern belts whirling. To the chatter of the saws, the rattle of the hammers and beetles, and the shout of the workers, another sound was added when the trolleys came; but the paramount, hideous noise that punctuated all this uproar was the ceaseless jar and jolt of the knives that edged the slate and trued it on the dressers' guillotines. The crashing of the revolving knives hurt an unfamiliar ear with its cruel, harsh percussion. Against it the ringing of the hammers was a harmony and the shout of the overhead wheels a song.

The 'hollaboys' came and went, for ever collecting the débris and rubbish into mounds for the trolleys; while through the great length of the shop, where the splitters sat, ran a rhythmic uplifting of arm and fall of blow where beetle fell on chisel—the slate-man's historic tools. To these workers came the slabs from the saw, and with a broad-nosed chisel and a heavy mallet of wood they split the slices of slate into thinner slices, and divided and divided again until the laminae had attained the requisite thinness.

Great expert knowledge is demanded by this work, and good splitters know, by an instinct bred from experience, the grain of every slab that falls to their share. The art is to divide it in proper thickness, for if a block be split—say for six slates—then, after the first splitting, a man is left with two layers for three slates each. But the thickness of two will break the thickness of one, and good slate is sacrificed. If the splitter spilt for eight slates, he gets two 'fours,' then two 'twos.' The right-handed splitter works on his left side and presses his mass of slate against his knee,

protected against the stone by a knee-leather—a shield to prevent his trousers wearing out. The day's 'journey' of an expert will represent from thirty to forty dozen of slates ready for the dressing-machines, which square them on the guillotines in various sizes, according to measure.

But slates are still cut or dressed by hand in the old way sometimes, and certain men of the past generation were labouring with ancient tools, though their results appeared small beside the work of the guillotines.

Benny Moyses was one of these, and worked with old-time 'cutting-horse' and 'zex.' The horse was a block of wood fitted with a travel iron; the zex, a heavy knife, like a long meat-chopper. Benny was cutting 'scantles,' the smallest slate sent forth from Delabole.

Elsewhere Pooley Retallack worked at a guillotine. He sat on a wooden seat, and the knife revolved in a trough before him, while he held the slates to its edge and it bit them true with a crash, lopping the ragged pieces into form. Round and round it sped, and at each turn Pooley presented an edge of the slate-flake. Four crashes and the slate was 'trued,' to stand with a growing pile of others like itself, while from beneath the knife oozed out a pile of fragments, to be gathered up from time to time by the boys.

A previous operator at this guillotine had decorated the wall behind and the beam above with pictures of football players and noted boxers. The portraits doubtless served to enliven his mind and cheer it; but Pooley won nothing from them. Steadily he worked, though his thoughts were far away, and he proceeded with his mechanical labours while in his brain moved sentences of prayer and phrases that had flashed to him during the labours of religious composition. For a great event dawned on the life of the young slate-dresser. His grandfather had heard him preach, and approved. He had reported to the Trustees of the United Methodists, and Pooley was aware that presently he would be invited to address a congregation. Rapture and joy filled him; he glowed at the great opportunity, and his thoughts were never far from the coming ordeal. But as an ordeal he hardly regarded it. He did not trust in himself, but felt a very perfect belief that his words would flash straight from the fountains of all wisdom, and that, though

the messenger was of no account, the message could not fail. He opened his heart, lived with the Bible, and so identified every waking hour with the tremendous privilege before him, that real life, as represented by the squaring of slates, the eating of food, his attitude to his family and fellow-creatures, became a dream. He passed through it daily; but only when the dark came and he was alone did reality awaken for him. Then, on his knees, or in his bed, the preparation for his first public prayer roused both heart and soul into full and sleepless energy.

Dreaming now, and turning over a choice of opening phrases, the lad was reminded of reality and his metaphysical mind brought up sharp against the physical force of steel driven by steam.

He erred by a hair's-breadth in the handling of a slate, and the whirling knife touched his knuckle. It was but a scrape, but it tore the skin away to the bone. He dropped his slate, stared at the guillotine as though it were a strange creature never seen till now, and drew out a red cotton handkerchief, which he bound round his hand. For some moments he looked straight in front of him, moved by thoughts that made him give an unconscious shudder. His glance at the knife changed. Before, there had been resentment in it; now there was interest. And then a very strange expression came into the lad's dark face—an expression of respect, almost of awe. His mind ran into a dark channel, for dangerous thoughts had found it and strove to harbour there; but he thrust the impulse away, and was just picking up another slate when Benny Moyse, setting down his zex, lumbered over to him.

"What have you done?" he asked, seeing the handkerchief.

"Touched my hand—'tis nothing."

"'Nothing?' Don't you say it's nothing," said the elder, looking serious. "These here blasted things have made more cripples than the quarry, and if I was beginning again and had to choose between them and the pit, I'd go down. You keep wider awake, my son, and mind there's a place for everything, and the guillotines ain't the place for wool-gathering."

Pooley was apologetic, and blamed himself.

"Don't mention it," he said. "They'd think me a fool."

“And they'd think right,” declared Benny. “All work has its dangers, though not much work here is dangerous, I reckon. Carelessness makes more trouble than bad luck; not but what bad luck has a share. If you set a flawed slate under the knife, for instance, it will burst and very likely put your eye out, as happened to Aaron Thomas. Or in the pits bad luck may drop a stone on a man's head and kill him. But carelessness is different, and the man that gets under the guillotine, or in reach of a blast, is careless.”

“The Employers' Liability is good for all,” said Pooley, and Mr. Moyses admitted it.

“Most times it is, I grant. 'Tis man's duty to save the fool from the consequences of his folly, because the staple of men are fools, and must be treated with the same thought and care as the clever ones. But we've got to shelter the clever ones too—not against silliness, because they ain't silly, but against bad luck, which is the Will of God and beyond the wittiest human to escape if it is sent.”

Then Moyses spoke upon the subject which had brought him, concerning the ‘scantles,’ and while he was doing so, Wilberforce Retallack appeared and approached his son.

“Hast heard anything of Ned since breakfast?” he asked. “He's not to work.”

Pooley shook his head.

“No, father. He was down early and away. I haven't seen him.”

“More has mother, nor anybody.”

“Not grandfather?”

“No.”

“His holiday was coming round. Maybe that's something to do with it.”

“For sure he'd have said something?”

But Pooley was not certain.

“He likes a bit of mystery, I believe. I've heard him say the only bit of fun you can have in Delabole is secrets.”

Ned's father went elsewhere; but it was not until the dinner-hour that some light appeared on the disappearance of Ned. Then Mr. Nute brought it from the village.

“I've got a bit of a shock for you, Anna,” he began, as they sat down. “Your children was always marked by a very original turn of mind, as we all know, and in the case of the

girls and Pooley—I say it to their faces—we’ve got nothing against them; and I’m not going to blame Edward neither—until we know more.”

“What we do know,” said Wilberforce, “is this: that Ned’s got his holiday beginning to-day; and what we also know is that he never whispered a word about it. I’ve just been to the office and found out he’s off till Thursday.”

“And the first time in his life that he did such a thing without telling us,” added Ned’s mother.

“That’s nothing,” declared Grandfather Nute. “Any young lad would do that much; but now I must tell you that Ned’s took a friend with him on his holiday; and that’s very unusual and out of the common.”

“Who is it?” asked Edith. “I should have thought he was a lot more likely to go off by himself.”

“Here comes in the originality,” said Mr. Nute calmly; “and I want you to remember, Anna, and you, girls, and you, Wilberforce, that evil be to him who evil thinks. Ned’s been brought up in a good, hard school, and he’s a clean-living, clean-thinking boy; but he’s fearless, and because a thing has never been done before, it don’t follow that to do it is wrong or unrighteous.”

“What on earth are you going to come to, grandfather?” asked Julitta.

“Just this. I’ve been round to the Sleeps for a newspaper, to see if the Liberal got in at Truro, and I’m sorry to say he didn’t; but it’s like this: Philippa Sleep is a very great friend of Ned’s, and she left a letter for her mother; and I’m going to see the mother after dinner and lift her to a higher point of view. At present she’s quick to think evil and fear the worst.”

“But Ned?”

“Well, Anna, I’ll call upon you not to think evil neither. In a word, they two have gone off together. Philippa says that they have long wanted to have a bit of fun, and they’ve micked off to Plymouth, as brother and sister, to spend a pound or two and see the sights. I grant ’tis a very out-of-the-way invention on Master Ned’s part; but I don’t see we’ve got any call to look like you’re looking now, Wilberforce, or to cry neither, Anna.”

“I’m not crying,” answered his daughter; “but I’m a good

bit cast down, because for anything like that to happen in our family is a facer."

They argued long upon Ned's unconventional achievement, and while Pooley took his cue from Mr. Nute and was merciful, his heart secretly condemned. Edith did not hesitate to say that Ned was wrong and that Philippa was ruined; but Julitta protested at so harsh a view.

"How can you say that, or think it?" she asked. "Why do your thoughts always run that way? They're only a boy and girl stretching out for a little of the joy of life. And why not? And why can't they go and have a lark at Plymouth without all the world saying they're disgraced for ever? I call it mean and small and nasty-minded. There's nothing mean and small about Ned, and because he just does what his instinct prompts, and because he cares a lot for Philippa and wants her to have a great time with him, so that his own fun may be doubled, why should we all think the end of the world has come?"

Wilberforce flushed and his jaw grew hard.

"You're as lax as him seemingly," he answered, "and I little like to hear such easy opinions in your mouth. It's very well for a cold and frosty nature like yours to talk so; and I'd rather think you argued from ignorance of human nature than from lightness of mind; but be that as it may, men and women in the lump will judge this one way, and only one way. Edith's right: the girl's done for herself."

"It isn't as if she was a fool, either," declared Anna. "She's a very sharp piece, and knows perfectly well what this means, and how it will be understood. She'll hope to catch Ned on it, of course, and so he'll have a millstone round his neck for evermore."

Some heat was struck out of the argument, and it might be said that Julitta and her grandfather found themselves in a minority. With the old man Anna and her husband did not attempt to argue: it was enough that they hinted pretty openly that he was sinking beneath his creed in taking so favourable a view of such a discreditable proceeding; but they resented Julitta's support of her pleasure-loving brother, and presently her father told her to shut her mouth. She obeyed, and the meal was finished in general silence.

Then Grandfather took his hat and returned to the home of

the Sleeps. There a conventional attitude obtained towards the runaways, and from their experience of life did Mr. Sleep and Sarah, his sister, judge the incident. They blamed the lad; while Jane, Philippa's mother, adopted a very fatalistic attitude. But she wept and exhibited sore distress. She was a young woman with a face stronger than her character. She had deep-set, blue eyes, one of which squinted, a broad brow, and dark eyebrows. Only her pretty, small mouth and chin reported her truly.

"We must put our faith in their upbringing, and pray to their Maker to keep them straight, though, for my part, 'tis a poor chance," said Mr. Sleep.

"Not at all, and I wonder at you," replied Grandfather. "The Law—even the Law—holds a man innocent till he's proved guilty; and if this young pair have been properly behaved at Delabole, why should they misbehave at Plymouth?"

"'Tis human nature," answered John Sleep. "When a man and woman, or boy and girl, run away—— But I won't pursue it."

"Little good to pray to God to change the blood in our veins," said Philippa's mother. "She's her father again—a rash and reckless thing—and so like as not she'll pay men back what men have paid me, and break somebody's heart same as her father broke mine."

"My dear creature!" cried Grandfather. "Idden the Lord of Hosts stronger than a drop of blood in a maiden's veins? Can't Him as turned water into wine turn bad blood into good? You do make me wild, Jane! 'Tis madness to look at the childer through the sins of the fathers, instead of through the might of God Who made 'em. Wasn't you her mother? Ain't your blue eyes in her head? Then why not your virtues in her heart?"

"Because they ain't, Gran'father Nute," answered Jane; "and what if they were? He'd soon have made her like himself. My virtues be only woman's virtues—shared with my donkey. Patience—everlasting patience—that's all."

"'Tis contrary to nature that the young should be patient," answered Mr. Nute; "but it ain't contrary to nature for the young to be good. They often are; for my part, I'm surprised to find how good. I'll lay my flute they'll come back

as they went; and if 'twas a recognized thing in the world that a boy and girl could go pleasuring together without shame, then 'tis a gain to the race and to freedom in general. Two's company and three's none, and nobody knows that better than the Devil."

"Ah, my old dear, if we was all so fine and high-minded as you, and put such faith in human nature, it might be so," answered John; "but the Devil's never very far off when a man and woman get together on their own."

"'Tis my way to back human nature," answered the veteran. "We must judge of it as we find it, and I've got a great respect for it. I believe Ned and Philippa love one another so nice as need be, and I also believe, along of their education and so on, that they are quite alive to what they owe themselves and the parish. I talked to Ned awhile ago, as I promised to do, Sarah, and he opened out a bit. I don't say he's a saint; but who is a saint at eighteen? But because you ain't a saint, it don't follow you're a sinner."

"And if he is, charity covers a multitude," murmured Sarah.

Mr. Nute beamed upon her.

"You always say the right word in season," he declared; "and 'tis a very unusual and splendid thing to see an old maid—from choice, however, as we all know—so large-minded."

Then he and Miss Sleep strove to cheer Philippa's mother; but they did not succeed.

"They come home Thursday, and then we shall know the worst," she said.

"Don't you say it, or think it, Jane," answered Grandfather. "Such is my opinion of them young people, that I'd have a band waiting to welcome them and congratulate them on a bold stroke for freedom. Yes, I would. Mind you, I don't say I should feel like that if they were up home in their thirties or forties. That's the fearsome age, when passion roars like a raging lion, and men and women have learned the cunning of life; but these children—no—I believe, on my conscience, that they've just gone off for a frolic and ain't up to no more mischief than a pair of lambs playing in a field."

"If I ain't a grandmother inside a year, I'll believe you," answered Jane Sleep; "but very well I know I shall be."

CHAPTER XVI

THE WRITING ON THE EARTH

GREAT things may take their date from small ones, and Ned Retallack's escapade was always remembered by his family in connection with the dawn of a much mightier business.

Wilberforce spoke with Tom Hawkey concerning the incident on the following day, and was surprised in some measure to find that the manager did not regard the incident with very great indignation.

"Time enough to judge him when he comes back," said Tom. "Whatever happens, don't fret yourself. We want all your energy and will-power at the quarries. I was in them yesterday, and I shall be glad to meet you and Nanjulian at the 'Grey Abbey' to-morrow."

"What's doing?"

"Well, we're in far enough. I've raised the question of tunnelling as they do in Wales; but I know we like our own ways, and Delabole has always been worked in the open."

Retallack undertook to meet Hawkey at noon on the following day and investigate the workings of the 'Grey Abbey' seam; but the appointment was never kept, for a greater matter soon occupied the heads of the quarry.

Wilberforce left the office and proceeded presently to where two men with an air-drill were cutting holes for blasting. They hung over the eastern edge of the quarries, and were breaking open the slate bed of a working that had been long neglected. In the ancient archives of Old Delabole—a mass of documents and memoranda from the past upon which Tom Hawkey often pored—was mention of these seams. They extended round a region called 'Wesley's Hole,' because here, a hundred years earlier in the history of the quarries, John Wesley had been wont to preach to the men in their dinner hour.

Retallack witnessed a blast and examined the naked blue

face of the stone when the work was done. But the slate was of a character too hard for useful purpose, and he directed them to make further examination ten yards lower. They went for ropes, and meantime he travelled round the lip of the quarry, over great mounds of shining débris, across which narrow tracks, stamped by the feet of the men, ran here and there. The day was fine, but a thunderstorm had swept the district by night, and a good deal of water had found its way into the pit. Beneath, the wheels and pumps toiled to reduce it.

To the north of the pit the railway runs, and here Retallack passed over a barren stretch of naked earth above a cliff five hundred feet in height. From this point the whole immense amphitheatre of the quarries swept in a circle before him. On the opposite side were the manager's office and sundry shops, where the larger slates were worked. To the right came the great plane that sloped into the quarries and carried the main artery of the whole. Above them rose the dressing-sheds and engines; while to his right wound crags and scarps that extended to where Retallack's own house nestled on the side of the pit. At hand towered the pappot-head, to which steel ropes ascended from the 'Grey Abbey' seam under the precipice on which he stood.

Wilberforce saw all, but he perceived nothing. His mind was turned in upon itself and occupied with his own affairs. For some time he stood inert, concerned entirely with his son Ned, and the attitude that religion demanded he should adopt towards him. Then he drifted forward with his hands in his pockets and his neck bent. His face was turned to the ground, and he walked slowly some twelve or fifteen yards from the edge of the cliff.

The time was early autumn and the hour approaching noon. Suddenly he stopped, bent his eyes on the earth, and started back as though he had been about to tread upon a snake. A layman's glance would have marked nothing but muddy soil and débris of stone scattered over it; but Retallack's eye saw more. He knelt down and stared at what appeared to be a black hair stretched on the ground. So like a hair it looked, that he made sure it was not. Then he rose and, stooping low, quartered the cliff-top carefully for fifty yards, and left not a square foot of the surface unexamined.

Two more of the hair-lines he found. They were disposed at a considerable distance from the first discovery, and lay farther inward from the quarry edge.

The man had gone purple in the face, partly from continued stooping and partly from the tremendous emotions excited by his discovery. His feet shook under him and his breathing became difficult. He panted and sat down suddenly upon a shelf of slate, where the ground was broken by a two-foot step. For a moment he closed his eyes; then he opened them again, drew out a pocket-handkerchief, and mopped his wet brow. He looked round him, and his expression was dazed. He drew deep breaths that lifted his big chest; he stared blankly at the earth. The sound of blasting ascended from far below. First came the thunder of the explosion, then the hiss and rattle of falling stone, lastly the echo and reverberation as the noise swept round the quarry and faintly died. The explosion aroused him, and he came to himself, stood up, and drew a whistle from his pocket. Thrice he blew it, and one of the 'hollaboys' at the pappot-head marked him and ran to do his bidding.

"Get round to the landing-stage," he said, "and stop Mr. Tonkin and Mr. Nanjulian. They'll be coming up in a minute. And tell them I want them on the top of the 'Grey Abbey.'"

A steam-hooter announced noon as he spoke, and the boy ran off, to intercept Noah Tonkin and Retallack's colleague when they reached the surface. Five minutes later they came up in the same trolley, received their message, and proceeded to join Wilberforce where he stood on the cliff. Behind them, along a path beside the railway, strings of men were hastening away to dinner, and Wilberforce said nothing until they were gone. Then he spoke.

"I can't trust myself to-day," he declared. "I'm not very well, and I've got private troubles on my mind. I'm hoping my eyes are out of order, and that I'm seeing what's not there. Just look this way, you two, and tell me if there's anything the matter with me, or if it's true."

He had marked the hair-lines with stones, and now let Nanjulian and Tonkin see if they, too, observed them. They did. Then only in lesser degree than Retallack they exhibited their alarm.

"My God! it's all up—it's 'good-bye,'" said Tonkin.

“This means the end of the ‘Grey Abbey’; and that means the end of Delabole!”

To the older minds the tremendous discovery promised to put a period to their ancient industry; to Nanjulian, one of a younger generation, the impact of this discovery, while crushing enough, did not unman him.

“You never know how these things are going,” he said. “It may be a good fall.”

Retallack was impatient.

“Man alive, don’t talk foolishness,” he answered. “This can’t be a good fall. At best it’s the end of ‘Grey Abbey’; at worst it’s the end of the quarries.”

“However did you come to find ’em?” asked Noah. Limp and dejected, he sat on the ground, with his eyes fixed before him where the phenomena appeared.

“Just by a mumchance I was passing this way—a thing I don’t do once in six months; and my head was down and my thoughts the Lord knows where. And I saw ’em.”

Nanjulian was measuring the distance to the quarry edge and casting up and down. His anxiety began to increase.

“It’ll be a big thing—a fearful big thing,” he said. “It may be a million tons—it can’t be less than half a million.”

“Has Mister Tom heard tell?” asked Tonkin.

“Not yet,” answered Retallack. “I wanted to see if I was in my senses.”

“Wipe ’em out and keep dumb and see how it is in a week,” said Noah; but Wilberforce declined.

“What’s the sense of that? ‘Wipe ’em out!’ Have this turned your head? You might as soon talk of wiping the sun out of the sky. There’s no power in Nature can hold up this cliff now, nor yet in man.”

“Prayer can, however,” said Tonkin.

“Nor prayer neither,” answered Retallack, “for God don’t work miracles no more. Only His hand could stop this; but His hand won’t be put out. The cliff’s coming down.”

“’Tis the shadow of death over Delabole,” groaned Noah Tonkin. “’Twill fill the whole pit, I shouldn’t wonder, and then we shall be forgotten out of the land.”

“Hawkey must know,” declared Nanjulian. “He’ll be gone to his home now. We’d better run right along and tell him, Wil.”

Bidding Tonkin say nothing for the moment, they let him depart; then they started for the manager's house, a quarter of a mile distant.

"We was to have met him to-morrow and looked into what we were doing below," said Wilberforce. "He began to think we'd gone in about far enough. 'Tis a shattering piece of history—the end of the tale in my opinion. Give me your arm, Sidney; I be gone so weak as a goose-chick."

He stopped to rest after they had walked two hundred yards.

"'The Lord's doing, and marvellous in our eyes,'" he said.

CHAPTER XVII

CALAMITY

FOR the space of a week silence was kept respecting the pending catastrophe; then the hair-lines had expanded and were a third of an inch across. They extended over a surface of seventy yards, and indicated pretty accurately the nature of the imminent disaster. The overburden of the quarry was coming in, and the fall was unfortunately destined to submerge the 'Grey Abbey' seam. Months might elapse before the landslip: Hawkey gave it four, and Retallack calculated that it would take six; but the end was inevitable, and no physical powers within the control of man could have held up that enormous cliff-face. The greatest fall ever recorded in the history of Delabole was coming; but when it would come remained a matter of doubt. The writing on the earth might be expected to afford data and tell the nearer approach of the downfall from week to week.

According to their minds and bent of perception, men measured the doom hanging over the works. Some appeared quite incapable of believing it at all. They put it from them, as a bad dream at waking. They refused the evidence of their eyes and their reason, and for a little while pretended that so colossal a disaster was beyond the power of Nature to effect. Only the voices of their wives brought them to their senses, for the women very correctly measured the truth as soon as they heard it. They learned what those best able to judge had to say, and for the most part took the darkest view. Some, however, were not so cast down, and some, though they dared not show by any sign that they welcomed the catastrophe, in reality did so. For at worst it meant the end of Delabole; at best a probable crippling of the output and decrease of the staff. Therefore a feminine spirit here and there, who longed to be free of the place and begin life anew, guessed that her men would soon be called to seek

work in another sphere, and at heart was glad. These, however, were exceptions. For the most part, as the full significance of the future was grasped, Old Delabole grew profoundly anxious. An active season of lamentation marked the first reception of the news. The folk took their trouble to their God, and the chapels were full of it. Then, as the cracks in the earth steadily grew wider, a period of apathy followed the first stroke. The larger number of the men were content to do nothing but labour on and find in work distraction for their thoughts; but some, looking ahead, already began to seek fresh fields. There was a rumour that many designed to emigrate with their wives and families to America, yet few individuals admitted this when asked if it were so.

Many turned to the leaders and strove to win comforting words from Tom Hawkey, Retallack, or Nanjulian; but the manager and foremen were unusually occupied at this season, and only Wilberforce permitted himself any spoken opinions. He took the darkest possible view from the first, and did not attempt to hide his hopelessness. He spoke no encouraging word, and his family endured much from him, for he was ill, and his mind acted on his body and made him worse. His pessimism caused men to fly him, and Nanjulian's silence also offered little consolation. It was to Hawkey the quarries turned, and when he spoke he always maintained an even mind, and heartened the men rather than cast them down.

His activities were devoted to two points, and one the many eyes that were now upon him could appreciate; but the other formed matter for debate, and there were different theories respecting it. His first and obvious care was the coming fall. Upon that depended present work, and the length of weeks or months it might still be safe to have men and machinery in the 'Grey Abbey' workings. Daily the manager visited the head of the cliffs and measured the opening clefts. The earth movement was irregular, and after a rapid preliminary advance it hung fire for a considerable time. Within a month from Retallack's discovery the seams gaped three inches wide; then for a month they made scarcely an appreciable increase. But then came a period of heavy rain, and the rifts steadily opened. As far as Hawkey could at present judge, it would be several months before the first danger threatened. Therefore he turned the whole strength of the rock men's forces on

to the 'Grey Abbey' run, and kept as many working there as could find room upon the face of the slate.

Immense activity marked the quarries. The men welcomed labour, and were glad to escape from their homes and the torrent of anxious questions their wives poured upon them. And none laboured harder than Hawkey. His mind was hidden indeed, and the masses of the men could only speculate upon what passed therein; but his body had never been so active, and his presence cheered the workers. He was in the quarry as regularly as the rock-men. He was everywhere—above and below. He proceeded alone, and once, high up on an old working, found himself in difficulties, having climbed to a ledge from which he could neither move up nor down. He signalled with his whistle, and a rope was soon lowered to him from above.

The object of these inquiries was not at first apparent, nor could any but Retallack or Nanjulian understand why Hawkey consumed sleepless nights with the quarry archives. There were masses of documents no living man had ever read. They extended back for more than three hundred years, and recorded the history of Delabole from earliest times. Into these he now plunged, and lived with them while others slept. The history of every forgotten hole and corner of the quarries he strove to collect, with the tale of all it had to tell and the reason for its desertion. Weeks of research proved unavailing, but from time to time memoranda that cheered him would come to light from the mass, and the next day would see him climbing in the quarries alone, or with one workman for company. He needed a helping hand on these explorations, and it happened that often he chose Ned Retallack to wait upon him. His adventure on the cliff-face warned him of peril that he had forgotten; so Ned was generally in attendance, and once Hawkey spoke to him as they went to work.

"Your father told me about your pranks on holiday," he said. "Young people can't do that sort of thing without making talk, if not trouble."

"I swear to God I'm straight, Mister Tom," the youth answered. "I'm very fond of Philippa Sleep, and, come she's wife-old, I'm going to marry her. And we had the time of our lives, and a pity more chaps don't do the same. You can learn a terrible lot in Plymouth worth knowing, and we did."

We went to nine picture palaces and three theatres, and saw the soldiers and the battleships, and had a moonlight trip to the Eddystone Lighthouse, and enjoyed ourselves something tremendous. And I looked after her like her brother, and she's told her people the same; and they haven't believed it, though it's true."

"I do believe it," said Hawkey. "You've done a very unusual sort of thing, and if the girl's father was home, no doubt you'd get your jacket dusted for your fun; but I believe you're telling me the truth, Ned; and if you are, then I can't say that you've done anything very wicked from my point of view."

"I wish you could make father and mother feel the same. Only my sister Julitta and my grandfather are on my side. I've been thankful to this coming trouble, because it's distracted their silly minds a bit. Mother thinks what I done was a lot worse than the quarry falling in, and so does Edith and my brother Pooley. Father balances one against t'other—the fall that's coming and what I've done—and don't see a pin to choose between them for horror and terror. He's fearful down-daunted, and talks of nothing but death and the grave."

Hawkey, however, only heard that Edith had taken a sinister view of her brother's escapade. He did not answer, but reflected upon that.

He knew something of her character, and was aware that she took an introspective view of life, but she had never struck him as a girl with a narrow bent of mind, or one given to great strictness in criticism of other people. She was wont even to smile at her brother Pooley's outlook upon life.

He speculated somewhat drearily of how love alters environment. He was humble enough, yet suspected that any approach to a censorious outlook in Edith might have been modified if she could have cared for him. But henceforth Wesley Bake would help to mould her character and influence her point of view. He knew the miller for an honourable man, and guessed that certain disasters connected with Wesley's dead brother had done their part to make him more strict and tender in all matters of justice and plain dealing than had otherwise been the case. Hawkey was reserved even with himself. There were some subjects he resolutely

put away when they knocked at the arcanum of his heart. And Edith was one of them now. He had lost her after she seemed to stand at the very portals of his life, and the blow had been very severe, for the man knew how to love. She was the only woman for him; life revolved around her for a season, and when she departed he had drunk a bitter cup to the dregs. But of a stoic spirit, he rebelled against the shadow of self-pity, shut his grief out of his own sight, and fought to frustrate and conquer the empty outlook, the dull pang that throbbled through his mind daily at waking. He reiterated words of reason to his baffled heart, reminded it that he loved her and desired the woman's highest good, asserted that Wesley Bake was a better, because a happier and more contented man than himself, and would doubtless make for Edith a finer husband than ever he could. She had a tinge of Celtic melancholy in her mind, and that he was not built to banish. Indeed, he might have intensified it, for the streak of sobriety which belonged to his own character grew deeper rather than less. But Bake was different. He took happiness where he found it, and now, in the halcyon hours of his successful love, was a joyful man well calculated to brighten Edith's outlook and lift her from the somewhat morbid fancies that often haunted her spirit. It was very good for her to have won the miller, and what was good for her was good for Tom Hawkey. So he argued and faced his own loss with the repetition of this assurance.

Now he came back to himself, and he and Ned Retallack went about their business.

"I'm going over every one of the old galleries," he said, "and I'm leaving my mark where I shall open the slate later. There's coming something that's going to stop work for a good term of years on the north face; but I'm not satisfied that because we've forgotten the rest of the quarry of late it deserved to be forgotten. Time will show that. You can keep this information to yourself for the present, Ned. I'm reading up the old days in the quarries, and what was doing here in the far past. And very interesting it is."

The youth felt flattered at this confidence, and his heart warmed to Hawkey. Thus did the manager win lesser men to himself—with no calculated effort, but by his own nature and his attitude to his fellows. There was a trick in him to

trust men for choice, yet thanks to some native quality of reading character, he seldom erred in putting trust where the event proved him mistaken.

The approaching calamity continued to absorb the thoughts of Delabole, and a European war had interested the quarrymen less than the widening cracks above the north face. For a time these ceased to open. They were now a foot across; but Hawkey judged the trouble increased below, and so it proved, for with the advent of some heavy rain the rifts again began to stretch. In a fortnight they had increased by six inches.

Company met at the 'One and All' on a Saturday night, and the situation was debated by Richard Male, the landlord, by Jack Keat and Noah Tonkin, by Benny Moyse and his friend Moses Bunt, by Antipas Keat, the baker, and others.

"It's all over with the works, and we know it, and 'tis silliness to pretend different," said Tonkin. "And if I wasn't so old, I'd go to America to-morrow."

"A good few of the young men are looking into it," declared Male, refilling Tonkin's mug. "There's been a foreigner chap very busy among 'em."

"There has, and Sidney Nanjulian turned him out of the dressing-shop yesterday," asserted Jack Keat. "He says it will be plenty of time for that after the rock comes down and we see where we are."

"All the same, you can't blame men with wives and families for looking on ahead, surely?" asked Male. "A man don't sit down and wait for doom with a woman and childer to work for."

"You trust Hawkey," advised the baker. "I'm a pretty good judge of folk, I believe, and if he haven't thrown in the towel, 'tis no sense you others doing it."

"It don't depend on him. It depends on the adventurers,"* declared Moses Bunt. "They've got the last word. And if they be full up with Delabole and won't put in no more money, then it's got to go. And if I was one of them, I'd cut a loss and have no more truck with it."

"I hope they think different," retorted Jack Keat. "When you consider the dividends we've paid the last five years, I don't see they've got much to grumble at. There's always

* *Adventurers*—shareholders.

ups and downs in works, whether 'tis slate, or iron, or tin, or biscuits, or bacon, or anything else; and you've got to take the rough with the smooth, and remember there's no human outlook without its rainy day."

"Adventurers be scarey folk," said Antipas. "They ain't got no bowels for anything but dividends. Old Delabole idden a charity institution, and if the managers tell 'em they can say good-bye to any interest on their money for ten year and ax 'em for more cash to keep the thing afloat, they'll chuck it. And I don't blame 'em."

"What about all the wives and children, Antipas?" asked Tonkin. "'Tis a Christian land still by all accounts, and Christianity reaches farther than Delabole."

"Not if you go East," answered Benny Moyse. "Christianity's a dead thing in London."

"And besides that, the people with money in the quarries have got wives and childer so well as us. You must remember that," said Richard Male. "It never was and never will be that a man puts the welfare of another man's family above his own."

"It's the pensions be fretting my gizzard," growled Mr. Bunt. "I'm coming to my pension time, and, of course, the first that will be struck is the old. They'll go into bankruptey, or some suchlike damned contrivance, and everybody will get a bit off the bones but us old men."

They exhausted the subject, and retraced ancient problems.

"There's a fault somewhere. The thing didn't ought to have happened," said Benny Moyse. "Here we was on the track of fortune and too greedy, in my opinion. Overburden be overburden, and 'tis the natural instinct of overburden to come in if you don't watch it."

"Such stone, too," murmured Jack Keat pensively. "'Twas a joy to handle it apart from its worth. The best that ever came out of Delabole, and that's saying a lot. Rings like a bell if you touch it, and splits clean as peas out of a pod. The greatest run that ever was."

"We ain't done yet," promised Moyse. "The end must come; but we'll fetch out a good few thousand tons before we're called off."

"That's as may be, Benny. One thing's certain. Mister Tom won't take no risk. We shall stop a good bit before the

fall. He won't run it fine. That would be murder against him if anything happened," answered Keat.

"I dare say the adventurers would keep us there till the earth began to drop, if they could," said Bunt. "It may be dangerous now. Only God knows when it's going to come down; and He won't tell us. He's smashed a good few honest men as feared and obeyed Him before to-day."

Jack Keat shook his head.

"You let your thoughts run away with you as usual, Moses. You forget the Tower of Siloam. The just and the unjust be taken, according to the Almighty's pleasure, and it ain't for you, or any other worm, to question that right be at the bottom."

"The Tower of Siloam ain't no consolation, if you find yourself buried under fifty ton of earth, or your head blown off by dynamite," answered Mr. Bunt. "And I always have said, and will again—at Judgment, if need be—that I don't see eye to eye with God Almighty in the matter of sudden death. We pray against it, but 'tis His favourite trick and common as dirt. And if 'tis wrong for us mortal men to avoid it, and if 'tis murder in you or me to send a fellow-creature to his account with his sins on his head, then 'tis murder for God Almighty to do it. Wrong be wrong, and what's wrong for a man be wrong for a God; and 'tis no good for God to say to me, 'You do what I tell you and not what I do,' because I won't hear it from Him. So now, then!"

A moment's silence greeted these staggering observations. The men were uneasy. They looked to Jack Keat as a leading religious thinker. He panted and prepared to wrestle with such defiance.

"Good Powers! you're a atheist, Moses Bunt!" he gasped.

"Nothing of the sort," answered the old man. "I'm as good as you—and better, though I don't make such a noise to chapel. I know there's a God so well as I know there's a nose on my face; but I'm not going to knuckle under, and I ain't a worm, though you called me one just now. And don't you call me a worm again, Keat, because I won't have it. We've got a right to the brains in our heads, ain't we? And if our brains be of opinion that another party, high or low, is going wrong, then we've got a right to say so. 'Tis cowardice and hypocrisy to bleat the bettermost be always right,

just because they be the bettermost. We'll say our say, and we ban't afeared to say the King on his throne may be out of bias here and there. And what's God but the King of kings? And if my brain be wrong to say, 'tis a pity He kills men, and leaves their wives and children to the parish, and sends their girls on the streets, then I ax you who gave me that brain and who built it to think as I do, and look at facts and decide according?"

"It ain't your brain, 'tis the maggot in it, and that maggot goes by the name of Satan," answered Keat stoutly. "The Lord have given us thinking parts, and, for His own good reasons, above our knowledge, He's given Satan the latchkey to 'em. And when you be tempted to doubt the watchful mercy and far-sighted loving-kindness of your Maker, that's only to say you've let the Dowl pop in and not kicked him out again."

The landlord was looking at the clock. He much disliked all argument on religious subjects, but since his customers seldom argued about anything else, he was obliged to tolerate their favourite themes. To-night, however, he smelled danger, and was exceedingly thankful when closing-time came.

Keat, Tonkin, and Bunt went out together, still arguing, and after they were gone Mr. Male turned to Antipas Keat, who remained a moment to finish his glass.

"I've seen danger in that hateful old man these many days," he said, "and I could wish, for his own sake, the grave would close over him while there's yet hope for his eternity. He's drifting into sin terrible fast, however, and if he's spared much longer he'll go to the wrong place as sure as he's born."

"He'll take good care to keep on the windy side," prophesied the baker. "For the sake of his baggering old slate in the churchyard he'll do that. Why, if it was whispered against him the man wasn't a Christian, he well knows they'd never put it up."

CHAPTER XVIII

RIGHT AND WRONG

EDITH RETALLACK went to Newhall Mill on a Sunday in the fall of the year. She had promised Wesley to decide the time for their marriage, but circumstances were such that she felt in no mood to do so.

"I can't yet—life's too uncertain," she said, when he met her by the mill-pool and kissed her under the alders. "You know it isn't I who hold back; but everything seems to be happening at once. There's the quarry coming in, and we don't seem to be able to breathe at Delabole till that happens and we know the worst. And in our home it is the same. Father is ill—worse than he will say—and mother's fretted about it. Then there's the business of Ned—they can't feel the same to him again, and it has made a cloud. And Julitta takes his part, which they don't like. And grandfather's inclined to take Ned's part too. And I don't know what I should do without you, Wesley."

He comforted her and they went in together.

"Relations are always the most difficult fellow-creatures," he said. "Because they reckon they're justified in putting aside all the common decencies of reserve that lie between us and other people. They always want your secrets, and think they've a right to know how you stand at the bank, and with the Lord, and everybody else. But if there's one person more than another that you ought to feel on tender ground with, it's a relation. And that's why I'm glad I haven't got many."

Mrs. Bake met Edith with friendship. She had learned to know her better, and found that they saw alike. For the most part the younger woman's outlook was large and placid, but both Nancy Bake and her daughter-in-law, Susan, the mother of the two little girls, went somewhat in awe of her learning and wisdom.

They did not know Edith's attitude to the recent adventures of Ned and Philippa, but now they were to learn it.

Judging that she would regard the matter much as Wesley did, they took it lightly.

"The pair of 'em was in here last week full of their fun. My word! what they saw. Didn't waste a minute. A proper education Plymouth can be, seemingly."

"And so clever with it. Pretended they was brother and sister," said Susan. "I lay now other young people will follow their example. And why not?"

But the visitor stared.

"I wonder at you, Susan," she said. "Surely if they can't see it was an outrageous thing, that's no reason to applaud them?"

"There was no harm you can put a name to."

"How do we know that? The mere act of pretending was the harm. They knew they were doing what nobody would have agreed to let them do. And so they went by stealth. All stealth is harm. And as for the rest, how can you take their word for it, when they don't know the difference between right and wrong?"

"They must know that," said Nancy.

"Ned says openly he doesn't. And that's enough to break mother's heart."

Wesley spoke.

"It's a difficult subject, and you can have different opinions about it. Some people have got no sense of smell, and some no sense of music, and some no sense of sin."

"Yes, it's that," declared his betrothed, "and it's interesting in a way. Ned's got no sense of sin at all. He doesn't feel that he was born a sinner—he actually said he didn't, and mother wept to hear him. I don't believe he knows what sin is—not even deadly sin. It takes a mind like Pooley's to shade off sin and give every sort its proper height and depth. You wouldn't expect that from everyday people. But not to know sin when you see it, and not to have a sense of it when you do it; and that after being bred in Christianity for two thousand years! Julitta's the same in a sort of way."

"It's commoner than you think for," declared Wesley. "I've known a lot without any sense of sin. My brother was

such a man—to say it kindly. The sense of sin is dying out of people, by the look of it.”

“Then Christianity will die out of them,” answered Edith, “for the sense of sin is the backbone of Christianity. That’s what it works on. Without it we should just go back to the pagans, who felt no sense of sin. They allowed for crime and passion and suchlike great impulses, but they didn’t understand sin.”

“A great escape for them,” murmured Susan. “But it’s true that there be those about us who feel the same. No doubt they wouldn’t dare to confess it; but there it is. Take my childer. Mary’s a proper little Christian, and will sob her heart out and fairly yowl to God for forgiveness if she’s done wrong—and it ain’t once in a month o’ Sundays she do—but Betty—a fair tartar she can be. She miched from school last week, along with some other naughty ones, and went gathering filberds. Brought home a pinny-full, and can’t see to this minute what she’d done.”

“Surely you and the schoolmistress could make her see?” asked Edith.

“Not us. Miss Male made her feel, however; for she was whipped the next day, and came home like a little devil. ’Tis no good making ’em feel, in my opinion, if you can’t make ’em see too.”

“If Miss Male couldn’t make her see, she’s a fool,” said Edith. “Her cane covers a lot of her own ignorance.”

Susan applauded this.

“And so I say, and, but for mother here, I’d have gone up to the school-house and give her a bit of my mind,” she declared.

“I believe in the whip,” declared Wesley. “I had it, and am none the worse. We was talking about right and wrong, and I do honestly believe they’re often very hard to part, however good a Christian you may be.”

“You oughtn’t to say that,” replied Edith. “The fault is in us, not Christianity, if we feel a doubt.”

“Perhaps so,” he admitted, “but when you get two points of view it often confuses a fair mind.”

“You’re the last to say that,” answered his mother, “for none sees clearer. Else you wouldn’t have been chosen stickler for the wrestlers as often as you have. Justice be

your strong point, I reckon; there's a great sense of justice in you, and all men know it."

The children came in at this moment, for it was tea-time. Mary had been tidying Betty, with fair success.

"We've been catching pagety-paws,"* she said, "and Betty wouldn't wear her 'save-all,' and got a bit of mud on her froek; but I've washed it clean again."

"And I've found a dear little nanny-viper with a green tail," cried Betty, producing a large caterpillar from a match-box. "It knows me a'ready, and I be going to be kind to it."

"And us seed a hugeous gert raven down the vale," said Mary; "didn't we, Betty?"

"Ess, we did, and a went 'crunk! crunk! crunk!'"

They chattered, and their elders listened to them.

"I hoped Aunt Julitta was coming, and I hope very much, as she haven't, that you'll tell us a story, Aunt Edith," said Betty.

She promised to do so.

"But I can't tell stories like Aunt Julitta," she added.

"No, you can't," admitted Betty; "but you tell better ones than mother."

"I ain't got any left to tell," declared Susan.

"Then you did ought to invent 'em, like what Aunt Julitta does."

"We haven't all got the cleverness, my dear."

"Betty invented a story last night," said Mary. "'Twas about a little girl as went nutting, and got along with the fairies and never come to school again."

"I wish it was true," said Betty.

"So do Miss Male, I dare say," answered her grandmother.

Betty's face hardened.

"When I'm growed, I'll have it out with that beast," she said.

Edith changed the subject.

"How are the samplers getting on?" she asked.

"Mine's half done," answered Mary; "but Betty's found some new words, and given up the old one and begun another."

She got up and fetched the incomplete works for Edith to see. Mary was chronicling in red worsted letters on a green ground that 'The Fear of the Lord is the Beginning of Wis-

* *Pagety-paws*—newts.

dom'; Betty's sampler began, 'A pleasant thing it is——'
She had done no more.

"How does yours go on, Betty?" asked Edith.
The little girl beamed and repeated her choice.

"A pleasant thing it is to see
Our dear relations come to tea,
And better still it is to know,
That when they've had their tea, they'll go."

Wesley laughed heartily.

"You sly toad!" he said. "That's pretty much on all fours with what we were telling a bit ago—eh, Edith?"

"Not a very kind thought for a child, all the same," answered his betrothed.

"It's true, because I've heard mother say it," replied Betty. "And I'm working it for a Christmas present for Grandfather Nute. He's the best friend I've got in the world. And Grandmother Nute would have been a good friend to me if she hadn't died."

"She died before you were born," said Edith.

"Ess; but I know she'd have befriended me."

"No doubt, no doubt; and you've got me still, you know, Betty," said Grandmother Bake.

"And I love you dearly, grandmother," answered Betty. "Some days I love everybody, and some days I hate everybody; but I always love Grandfather Nute."

"Because he's always got sweeties in his pocket for you, perhaps," said Wesley.

The promised story had to be told before Edith could escape, and after tea she told it.

"A story about the quarry," she said, "and a beautiful story too."

"Is it true?" asked Betty.

"I think it is."

Betty sighed.

"I hate true stories; but Aunt Julitta always puts in a few little things that aren't true, when she tells them. Then they're better."

"I think this is true," declared Edith, "because it's too beautiful not to be true. There was a quarryman once, and it was the dinner-hour, and he brought out his dinner and sat down to eat it. You know how the jackdaws fly about

in the quarry and make their nests in the cliffs? Well, at dinner-time, which the jackdaws know quite as well as the men, they get very bold and hop about ready to swoop down on any fragments that are left about or flung away."

Betty looked at Mary.

"Hush!" said Mary.

"The quarryman had a big pasty for his dinner, and he broke it in half," continued the story-teller. "He meant to eat it half at a time; but just as he set to work on the first half, a jackdaw—with blue eyes and a grey head—hopped down from a rock that overhung the place where he sat, and actually took the second half of the pasty and walked away with it!"

Betty sighed and wriggled.

"And then?"

"And then," continued Edith, "the quarryman, who was very angry to see half his dinner being taken away, jumped up and ran after the bird. He had hardly left his seat when the great overhanging rock fell with a crash; and if he had stopped there a second longer he would have been crushed to pieces underneath it! And doesn't that show how God——"

"We know the rest," interrupted Betty. "We didn't say anything till you'd got there, but Aunt Julitta told us the story ages ago—didn't she, Mary?"

"Yes, she did; but where's your manners, Betty, with Aunt Edith so kindly telling it again, and stopping her just when she's coming to the Sunday part?" asked Mary.

"It's very hard to listen to a story twice," said Betty; "and I did listen, didn't I, Aunt Edith? And we hadn't forgot the Sunday part, so you needn't tell it over again. And I hope as that jaekdaw had the bit of pasty for his trouble. Because he properly deserved it."

"Tell us another," suggested Mary; but Wesley intervened.

"Aunt Edith came to see me to-day, and we're going for a walk," he declared. "And if I hear you've been good children, I'll tell you a fine tale afore you go to bed."

At this they let Edith depart, and presently she and her lover walked through the lanes in the gathering gloaming together.

"You can't say when it is to be, then, after all?"

"You see I can't. The will's not lacking, my dear—only the power. We must wait a bit till the end of the year. Then we shall know how we stand. You see for yourself how difficult it is, with father so poorly and the great doubt about the quarries."

"I met Mister Tom a bit backalong," he began; but Edith stopped him.

"You needn't call him 'Mister Tom,' surely?" she said. "You're as good as he is, and can trace your family a lot further back, for that matter."

"One gets in the way of it. What's in a name? I met Tom Hawkey, then, and asked him how it was to be, and he told me frankly that from the present the future was hid. He felt hope, however, and said in his opinion the fall wouldn't mean the end. 'There's as good fish in the sea as ever came out,' he said; 'and I believe there's as good stone in Delabole as the fall will bury.' He's at work now, high and low, to see if he can strike a good bunch of slate; and if it's there, he being what he is will find it."

"And if it isn't, he won't."

"That's true; but I've got a sort of faith in that man that goes deeper than reason. I could almost believe——"

He broke off, for he remembered that Edith did not like him to over-praise the other.

"There was a thing I said at tea you might have wondered at," he went on. "And I dare say it did sound a bit doubtful. About right and wrong being mixed up according to the point of view. Of course, it depends most times upon the other party, and if a crooked man, or a double-dealer, questions you, then you feel all the more certain that you're in the right. But suppose a man quite as straight as yourself, and older and wiser into the bargain, don't see eye to eye over a matter that rises as high as right and wrong—suppose that? Then you see how difficult a thing may come to be."

"He's not older and wiser," answered Edith. "Or if he's older, he's not wiser."

"I'm not speaking of Hawkey," he answered. "Hawkey's on your nerves, seemingly. I'm speaking of your father, Wilberforce Retallack."

She was astonished.

"Why, he made you his trustee just because he trusted you

so well, and knew you always looked at things the same as he does."

"I know, and that's it. I can't go into the matter, because it's private, and he wished it to be so; but he bade me study his papers very carefully, and—and—I have, and found things that puzzled me."

"Go to him with them, then."

"I did do so, and that's why I say that right and wrong often get tangled up when least you expect it."

"They ought not when two honest men tackle them," answered Edith. "Truth's truth, and two like you and father, who love truth and honesty—why, I'd never believe you could differ."

He nodded doubtfully, but did not reply.

"Be it as it will," she said, "there's nothing for you to feel anxious about there. Father's the most honourable man you'll find, seek where you like, and when he speaks, you can very easily say ditto, and feel you're safe enough."

She cheered him, and he admitted that it must be so.

"I'll talk it out with him some day. He's a most reasonable, religious man. He granted there was a difficulty, when I raised it, and he was glad I raised it, and he said the same thing had struck him; but it seems that when he laid the problem before your mother, which he did do, a good bit ago, she saw very clear indeed about it, and didn't leave the objections a leg to stand upon."

"She would," answered Edith. "But if she persuaded father, you may be sure it was not against his conscience. Mother is a very good woman, and as straight as any woman with a family can be, but she's not as high-minded as father."

"You see he's not well, and when you're sick——" began Wesley; but again he broke off. "I'm sure it will come right, and 'tis silly talking about it," he said. "Let's talk about you. That's all I want to think on now."

Edith was lovely.

"I'm dearly longing to wed you, Wesley. You're pretty well all I've got, you know, for my family, save father, ain't much to me, and somehow I know he's going to pass out of it before very long. It's hanging over us. Mother knows it too. I can see it in her face; but the others don't. Even my grandfather doesn't see it, or feel it."

“ How does the old man take the coming trouble ?”

“ Patiently. It must be a matter of prayer without ceasing, he says. It’s one of those things that is out of man’s hands altogether. So we must take it to God. Pooley feels like that, too, of course.”

“ He’s to preach, I’m told.”

“ Sunday fortnight.”

“ Doesn’t he dread it ?”

“ He’s thirsting for it.”

“ I wouldn’t be in his shoes.”

“ Don’t always belittle yourself,” she prayed him. “ It vexes me. You could preach quite as well as Pooley—or any local preacher in Delabole—if you were called upon to do it.”

“ I wish I was half the man you think me, Edith. Then I should be a wonder without doubt.”

CHAPTER XIX

POOLEY'S SERMON

AUNT MERCY INCH from Trebarwith met Anna Retallack outside the United Methodist chapel on Sunday morning.

"By good chance I was able to get a lift up over, and here I be to listen to the boy," she said.

Anna was pleased.

"A good few are coming out of compliment to his father, if not to me. He's run over the heads of his discourse with his grandfather, and it promises very well. He'll strike a good blow for God, I believe, if he idden too nervous."

The meeting-house was generally full on Sunday morning, but to-day fewer attended than was usual. A good many indeed came who were not accustomed to do so, out of interest in the Retallacks; but still more regular worshippers, knowing that a youth was to preach for the first time, and inspired by no special knowledge of him and his family, went elsewhere to hear preachers of established power.

Pooley saw many friends as he prepared to deliver his discourse, and his grandfather contrived to take a seat as close to him as possible. Beside Mr. Nute sat the practised preacher, Jack Keat, and others of the chapel trustees; while in the body of the congregation were Pooley's family, the Sleeps from the newspaper-shop, the Bakes from Newhall Mill, Antipas Keat and his family, Richard Male with his wife from the inn, and many of the quarrymen. Indeed, hardly a man was missing from the dressing-shop in which Pooley worked.

There was no little rivalry among the local preachers of Old Delabole, and the hillmen were somewhat jealous of those who worked in the pit. Jack Keat at present stood easily foremost among the rock-men; but aloft it was hoped that in Pooley Retallack a new star was about to rise, and perhaps, in time, eclipse the fluent and fervid Keat.

Pooley stood forth under the clean bright illumination of

a sunny morning, and looked over the faces lifted to him. A pattern of light and shadow lay upon them, for the hour was near noon, and the sunshine came dazzling in. Then Richard Male, signalling to Antipas, rose, and together they pulled down the southern blinds over the windows and modified the glare. The preacher handled a little bundle of notes. He had, however, written his sermon and largely committed it to memory, for a manuscript was not deemed desirable, and was thought to kill spontaneity.

His theme was peace, and he took two events of the moment and built upon them. The first was the approaching catastrophe at the quarries; the second, a recent camp of Territorial forces that had been stationed for evolutions on the neighbouring wastes about Brown Willy and Rough Tor.

He was nervous at first, and his mother confessed afterwards that save for her husband's presence she would have stolen away; but the youth soon grew steady, and after a faulty and hesitating phrase or two forgot his audience and only concerned himself with his own thought. The words committed to memory were also forgotten, and he admitted when the service ended that the best he could do with pen on paper was very tame compared with the spoken word as it flashed to him at the moment of delivery. He was a natural preacher. He stood well, kept his head lifted, and managed a strong and pleasant voice with fair precision and control. Practice alone seemed his need. The pause and inflection only required use to perfect them, and it was noticed that Pooley shone most in his more fervent passages. His language was of the simplest, and he repeated himself a little, and copied certain faults familiar in the preachers he had heard; but he had something that many of them lacked: an unconscious art that helped to lift his discourse occasionally to higher planes, a graphic touch and a sense of vision. These were his own gifts, capable of very great development. He preached in the vernacular, for he had received no secondary education beyond that of his own reading; but while homely, he was also dignified, and his earnestness made criticism vain. The most doubtful could not deny his extraordinary aptitude, his choice of words, or his effective delivery. Nor was it possible to undervalue what he said. He had thought and reflected for himself. His sermon was no mere echo of what elder men

had written and thought before him. Grandfather Nute, indeed, foretold that it would not be. But Grandfather himself was surprised at the actual address, which differed for the better from what he had heard and approved. He praised a passage afterwards which had run somewhat as follows.

“ ’Tis no good being religious on Sunday,” urged the preacher, “ if you’re going to put it off with your black coat, and not don it again till Sunday week. Religion isn’t a matter of Sunday medicine, it’s weekday, working-day food. You ought to take it with everything, and mix it with everything, and let it colour your mind and clear your thought and strengthen your soul, same as meat and drink strengthens your arm. Coming to this chapel idden religion, any more than walking into the quarry is work. ’Tis what you take out of the chapel is religion, same as what we send out of the quarry is work. ‘ By their light ye shall know them,’ and it is the outlook of a man to everything that happens that will tell you if he’s got religion. And I’ll say this: there’s often a danger in a thing that we’ve got accustomed to praise. We say, ‘ He’s a large-minded man, and don’t fly into a passion at evil, because he knows human nature, and knows that we’ve got to forgive it till seventy times seven.’ That’s all very well; but if the sinner knows that he’s going to be forgiven till seventy times seven, ’tis a great temptation to him to sin to seventy times eight. You mustn’t put too much faith in the easy, tolerant man, because it’s far easier to forgive than to condemn, and the instinct in us is to follow our Saviour, and say, ‘ Go and sin no more ’; but we’ve got to keep our light shining before men, we’ve got to remember that every one of us is an example. We can’t help it. We can’t sit on the fence. We’ve got to take sides, and it ain’t enough to hate the sinner and forgive the sin; the sinner’s our business all the time, and if he persists in his sin, then we’re playing a very dangerous part if we hold out the hand of friendship. Tolerance is a virtue, but Christ’s self knew when to use the scourge. And the world is full of people who want scourging—the liars and hypocrites, the clever ones, who make sin a science and do evil, but know so much that they escape the results of evil; the strong ones, who use their power to abuse the weak and hide their wickedness under the cloak of piety;

them that lay foundation-stones of new chapels to-day and devour widows' houses to-morrow; and many suehlike wretches.

"If a sinner don't know better, then forgive him and teach him better; but don't forgive them who sin and know they sin. 'Tis only for their God to pardon them, when they've paid His price."

He spoke of the Territorials and patriotism, and warned his hearers that patriotism did not mean battleships and armies.

"You've got to ask yourselves what is your country," he said, "and whether it's bounded by the black and white cliffs of England, or whether it embraces every faithful follower of our Master. You've got to ask yourself if patriotism means England, or if it means this world and the next. People are terrible confused over patriotism. They mix it up with kings and flags and dying for their country; but they never stop to ask themselves what is their country. We're Englishmen first and Christians after, and I say we ought to be Christians first and Englishmen after. And if we were—in truth and not only in name—and if the French and the Russians and the Germans and the Italians were all Christians first too—then the world would be another place, brothers—another place, root, stock, and branch, and the flower of it would be fairer to see, and the fruit sweeter and finer far than we know it. For this is how it is: we call ourselves a Christian people and the servants of the Prince of Peace, and yet the lords of Parliament wouldn't dare to put their Christianity above their politics for an instant, because if they did, they'd be swept out of power in a twinkling. In Parliament you've got to be a Liberal, or a Unionist, or a Labour member, and only that, and every man there—*every man*—chapel members included—has put his Christianity in his pocket and lied to the Prince of Peace. He's got to do it. He's sent there to do it. When he offers himself for election to Parliament, he knows, as sure as he knows the sun be going to rise, that time and again he'll have to vote against his Saviour, because his party demands that he shall do so, and because what's good for England ain't good for Heaven. That's party politics, and no man's a right to parade his Christianity again after he's fouled his hands

and his heart with it. We don't back Christianity, we don't trust Christianity, we don't look to it to conquer the world. Religion's a station off the main line, and mighty few passengers call there nowadays. There's no soul in England—only a huge, fat, rich, frightened body, that goes shivering, with its eyes on its ill-gotten gains, and builds battleships and bleeds its poor to keep its carcass safe. We've got to fight for the rich or starve—that's what the rich call 'patriotism' in us—and where that can happen it's not a Christian nation, and the sooner we know it and grant it and confess it, and begin again to be one, the better for our land. And if we want to be patriots in the true sense, we shan't talk battle and murder and sudden death, and how to send more honest men to their Maker in the next war than ever we did afore; but we shall talk Christ crucified and try to make Parliament believe in Him, and only send men there who do. We shall try to make England something to be proud of, instead of something to be ashamed of; we shall strive to say we are citizens of a great country, and fight to lift England till we can feel she's a good sending-off place for Heaven. Then to be children of England will be a blessed privilege; but now England's way makes us turn our eyes from her, and only think of our heritage above, and not our home below."

After these considerations, it appeared that young Pooley had put the coming tribulation at the quarry into a new perspective and diminished its significance. He spoke of it now, but not as the paramount and master thought, not as the dominating factor of affairs, in which light it was regarded by other people. It was a quality of his mind to balance temporal and eternal against each other directly, and create antitheses of ideas. These were primitive, without light or shade, or any of the crepuscule of metaphysic; but, seen as he presented them, they were effective in their stark appeal to simple minds.

"A good few tons of earth and stone are going to fall in the quarries presently by the Lord's will," he said. "There are natural laws and there are supernatural laws. By a natural law the overburden must come down, and we cannot say how our work will look when it has fallen. I heard a man speak coming up from the pit yesterday; and he said: 'God knows

what'll become of Delabole.' Well, that was true, and there's nothing more to be said about it. Only the man said it as if it wasn't true. A sparrow does not fall to the ground without God, and no more does the side of a quarry. We're content, as Christian men and women, to trust our Maker most times; but in this matter there's a great lack of trust and a great spirit of doubt among us. And what does that show? Weak faith, and I hope we'll hear less about it in future."

Then by an inspiration he was subtle, and looking back, afterwards, he declared himself not less surprised at the thing he said than those who heard it.

"God have worked miracles at Old Delabole, and given us and our forefathers stone for bread. And good bread, too, for ourselves and our children. The quarry has run under God's direction for near three hundred years, and if He's going to shut it, shall we say 'No'? God's a good employer, brothers, and He never turns off any that's willing to work for Him. David never saw a righteous man begging his bread. And shall we beg our bread while the Almighty's our Master? Don't think it; don't fear it! He knows to a pebble what's coming, and He knows, to the last little hollaboy that works at Delabole, what employment He's planned for our future. Trust Him! He's given us a grand faith—the only true and everlasting faith brought into the world by Christ, and we're never grateful enough for it; we never think of the millions of heathen and them that sat in darkness and died in darkness before it came. And are we, with this Light in our hands, to go groping because the north side is going to fall? Is our God going to fall with it, like a graven image? Are we to find our faith in ruins because the 'Grey Abbey' seam is to be lost to us? Take heart and look over these tottering cliffs to the sky above them! That's not going to fall! Him that sits above the clouds don't slumber nor sleep. Does a child cry because his father fires a gun? No. The little one knows that the weapon was let off for his father's purpose. 'Tis part of the order of things, and done with due forethought. And if we can look ahead, can't God? What He does we know not now, but we shall know hereafter, and it may be that not a man, woman, or child that sits here to-day but will soon see as clear as God Himself that it was

well this is to happen, and welcome it as His will and plan. God don't work against us—always remember that. He works for us, and if your heart doubts, look back as well as forward, and ask yourself where Delabole would be without Him. Keep your hands in His, and He'll not let them slip, nor yet your feet, no matter how difficult the way. And if He wills to lead his sheep to fresh pastures, we will praise Him; and if He means to let us bide where we were born, then still we will praise Him. God helps those who help themselves, and He little likes to see anxious eyes and fretful foreheads and shaking heads before the sight of His plans. Stand up to it, then, and do your part; trust the Lord of Life, and show Him that He can trust you!"

He made an end with this, and when they had sung a hymn, which thanked God for His manifold and wonderful gifts, Pooley prayed.

The prayer was pitched in a quieter key; it acknowledged the weakness of man, and called for strength and patience from the eternal fountain of strength and patience. Then the service came to its close, and the people passed out. Some took an unfavourable view of young Retallack's efforts, but some were greatly pleased, and remained to shake his mother's hand and wish her joy of the preacher.

"He's got the gift," declared Jack Keat; "the tongues of fire have come down on him, and the faults are natural to the young. He's too one-sided about politics and——"

"No; you've got to be one-sided if you're a Christian, Jack. I'll take the blame for that," said Pooley's father. "I've brought him up to see there's no truck between politics and religion, and never has been really, and them that pretend there is humbug themselves. You can't touch pitch without being defiled, and politics is pitch; and the true Christian knows it before he's been in Parliament a month, if he didn't before. And since my Pooley was a reader, he's found that out for himself."

"The details matter little. 'Tis the spirit," said Jack Keat; "and I tell you that boy is going to be very useful to the Uniteds. He held 'em—that's the test. There was something a bit fresh about him. He kept off doctrine, and that was good sense in him, for oftener than not a young un will go for

that and think to throw light on subjects of which his hearers have forgot more than he ever knew. Doctrine is for us men, not the boys, to expound. But he gave us a peep into his young mind, and a very good peep it was."

"And a good delivery," declared Antipas Keat. "You could hear him, and there was nothing about his actions and manners to distract your mind from what he was saying."

"I helped him there," declared Grandfather Nute. "'Your actions show your mind,' I told him, 'and if you've got dignified thoughts, you'll have dignified actions to go with 'em; and if you've got empty thoughts, you'll have empty actions.' There's nothing worse than a clown in the pulpit, and the wisdom of Solomon wouldn't stand against some of the antics I've seen."

Others came up, and Anna grew flushed and excited under praise.

"We shan't be ourselves any more," said Julitta, as they went home. "We shall only be Pooley's family."

"He ought to go into the ministry," declared the mother. "I've always said so, and who can doubt after to-day? He's got the face for it."

But her husband was annoyed.

"No more of that," he said. "We've made all the sacrifices we can for our children. I've spoke on that subject once for all, and Pooley has the strength to understand, if you have not."

It was very seldom that Wilberforce spoke roughly to Anna, even in private, and to hear him thus address her startled the party as it returned home.

Edith looked almost with fear at her father, and Anna grew red.

"It's natural that a mother——" she began; but he silenced her.

"No more of it, I say! I've done what man could do for all my family. I can do no more. I shan't be here long, and——"

"Don't, don't, father!" burst out Edith. "Don't say things like that. 'Tis more than we can bear."

They went in silently together, and when Pooley arrived only Julitta kissed him and congratulated him. There was a

cloud in the house, and he felt troubled at dinner-time to see that his mother had been weeping.

He had hungered for their praise, and not until a silent meal was ended did his Grandfather explain to him the unfortunate incident. But when he did hear it, it cast him down too, for he had dreamed and hoped that the day's work might advance his master ambition and incline his father more favourably towards it.

CHAPTER XX

IN THE QUARRIES

THE quarries were full of darkness, and only dimly might the bottom be seen through the murk. The rain poured down as though it would fill the cup, and the lightning flung diamond-bright arches over the abyss. Above rolled the thunder, and its reverberation died hard in the haunts of a thousand echoes. Presently the centre of the storm drifted south to Brown Willy and the moors; light strengthened and water flashed through it, dropping off the precipices. Beneath men streamed out from the shelters and returned to work.

The great rifts on the north face now gaped a yard wide and descended far into the earth. The pending fall could be roughly computed, and the whole side of the quarry was doomed for a length of more than fifty yards. Hawkey judged that work might progress for another six weeks with safety at the present rate of progress, but to-day he doubted, for thunderstorms had broken up a season of good weather; much water was moving, and any marked increase of the apertures above would mean that the 'Grey Abbey' slate seams must be abandoned.

He stood now in shining tarpaulins and a 'sou'-wester,' gazing where the cavities yawned. Then he took the measure that stood thrust into the earth beside them, and applied it to the range of rifts. Some had enlarged by an inch; some were not increased.

It was the dinner-hour, and a good few men, on their way to their homes, left the footpath and approached him.

"Be the rain opening 'em, Mister Tom?" asked Noah Tonkin.

"No—nothing much doing yet, Noah."

"Us can trust you to watch 'em. There's a few down under who begin to feel shy of it. When it comes, it'll come in a hurry without 'by your leave.'"

"They needn't think twice about that. I wouldn't play with the life of a quarry rat, let alone a man. Don't they know it?"

"Of course, of course. But some of 'em be little better than mumpheads, and they're all tail on end for what's going to come next now. If a stone falls, they fly afore it."

"Tell 'em to keep their nerve and be cheerful. I may have a bit of good news before long."

"If you have, you won't hide it—we know that."

Wilberforce Retallack approached and Tonkin, with the little group that had listened to this conversation, went on his way. Then the foreman stood by Hawkey. His coat was wet, and he coughed. Something wild and feverish marked his manner.

"You ought to be home, Wil," said the manager. "Everybody knows you're a sick man, and you'll knock up in earnest if you don't take more care of yourself."

"No time for thinking of self," said the other. "My troubles are like these holes—they open wider and wider; but open as they will, you can't see the bottom."

"I'm properly sorry. I thought all was pretty right with you."

Wilberforce shook his head.

"It may look right, but it's far ways short of being right."

"Come down with me to the south gallerics," said Hawkey.

"I want to show you something. We can talk as we go."

They started, and Retallack spoke.

"For the minute there's a thing dividing our house a bit. Ought I to let my eldest boy go in the ministry?"

Hawkey considered.

"I heard him. He's got a gift and a brain. You see, it's rather difficult to advise without knowing your position. There's no hurry. What does Mrs. Retallack say?"

"She's for it, and Edith's for it. Grandfather says it's up to me, and they can't for the life of 'em understand why I say 'no.'"

"Why do you? It's reasonable on their part, and on Pooley's, to wish it; but no doubt you've got very good reasons against."

"The best, but——"

He hesitated, coughed, and spoke again.

“ I’ll tell you, because if I don’t tell somebody, I shall go wild. It’s money. I can’t afford it.”

“ Well, surely that’s sufficient reason ? They could say no more if you told them that ”

“ I can’t tell ’em. It means a proper downfall. I haven’t the heart. They think I’ve got tons more money than I have.”

The delicacy of such a situation struck Hawkey silent.

“ Things have gone very bad with my investments,” confessed the foreman. “ I moved my bit of money into something that promised a better return, and it’s all up, seemingly. I’ve had no luck but bad luck, and I haven’t the heart to tell ’em.”

“ Well, Pooley can’t be kept back. He’s full young, and what is right to happen for him will happen. He knows that, with all his faith. He’s wise—you can trust him to keep your secrets. I should tell him the reason. Let him go on doing the work to his hand and preaching sometimes. He’ll get as much of that as is good for him at his age.”

“ If God Almighty means him for a minister, a minister he will be—eh ?”

“ That’s certain. Put it to him. If he’s on your side, you’ll have no further trouble.”

“ Of course, things may mend, but there’s little hope, and if the quarry is going to be finished——”

“ I won’t think it,” declared Hawkey. “ It’s unthinkable, as they say. A certain amount of overburden is coming down, and, with our system of outside work, that’s got to happen from time to time. It may be a blessing in disguise. It may show the men that tunnelling is just as well suited to Cornwall as Wales.”

Retallack shook his head.

“ Outside work is in their blood for generations. They stick to the old ways. You can do miracles, but you’ll never make Delabole men take to tunnelling, or go underground.”

“ It may be the only way of keeping the quarries open presently. Convince them of that, and they’ll go underground fast enough.”

They descended to the southern galleries and walked beside a stream of water that ran along a wooden chute supported by

trestles. At a point on their way Wilberforce stopped, sounded some timber, and took out his pocketbook.

“Wood’s going sleepy,” he said.

He examined the trestles, condemned six, and made a note.

“I’ll tell carpenter. I marked you very busy with the air-drill up over last week, Mister Tom, and my son Ned told us you was a good bit interested. Be anything like to come of it?”

They were in ‘Wesley’s Hole,’ at a point where hung an ancient tree from the cliff above them.

“Here, by all accounts, the man preached to our great-grandfathers a hundred years ago,” added Retallaek, as Hawkey did not answer his question.

The other nodded, but his thoughts were elsewhere.

“The veins of slate here,” he said, “run north and south, while those in Wales are nearer the horizontal, and dip east to west, with only a slight fall from north to south. That’s why they quarry differently. I thought I was into a promising vein last week, but it broke up in spar quartz and silver-lead through the elvan. The cleavage had been destroyed by heat.”

Wilberforce regarded an exploration and nodded.

“It takes away the nature of the slate and makes it refractory. ’Tis all about the same round this side—too hard for any use.”

“You can’t be sure.”

“My father-in-law—old James Nute—has got an idea, though I never put it to proof. He was talking in his way—you know him—turning common things into wisdom and drawing a moral out of the stones. And he said that men were like the different quarry slates—good and bad and rubbish. ‘There’s the good and very good,’ he said, ‘and the “commons” and the “hardah,” good for naught, and the “shortahs,” of no worth in themselves but “good feeders of slate,” as we say, because where they be you’ll often find valuable stuff at hand.’ He was going rambling on, but I stopped him, and asked if that was true as a fact, and he said it was.”

“I believe him,” answered Hawkey, “and that’s why I haven’t done here, though there’s little very promising opened yet. If we could only find something on this side, it won’t

mean the end of us when the other side comes down. I'm set on running tunnels presently, if there's anything to justify it, and if I can once make Delabole take to that, I shan't have lived in vain."

"If you died to-morrow you wouldn't have lived in vain," answered Retallack. "You're a good man, and you've done great things for the quarries."

"I've only begun, I hope. You see such a lot hangs to it if we can only stem the tide and pay our way. There's half a million tons coming down, and maybe more; but if we can find and work paying slate for fifteen years, we may get it all away, or our children may. It all depends on finding enough. There are plenty of good bunches, but without a big seam there'd be nothing to show."

"It'll have to be a strong showing to make them keep it open."

"As to that, the directors are very wide awake to the situation. They know how much depends upon it. They'll do everything men can do. They know about the human side. It's been rather good to me, Wil, to see their spirit. They hold most of the shares themselves. For practical purposes they are the company. That's where the great hope lies. They're prepared to lose in reason, and will be very willing to go on if there's a rational excuse for so doing."

"There's something in the Conservatives after all, Mister Tom."

"They won't do it because they're Conservatives; they'll do it because they're fine men with a fine feeling about what the country owes to the might and dignity of labour. They'll do to others as they would be done by, which is the last spirit you'll find moving in party politics."

"It's the mean-minded men without tradition or honour behind 'em that are dipping into the pockets of the rich," said Retallack hotly. "If the managers of this quarry were Radicals, they'd work the 'Grey Abbey' till the men flung down their tools to save their lives, and then they'd shut down all and sack the lot of us."

Hawkey laughed.

"Don't think so badly of my side, Wil."

"You can't think too badly of it," declared the foreman.

“ And I hope I’ll live to see it out, for it would add another pang to death to know it was still at its wickedness.”

“ You must get away after the fall and rest for a bit.”

“ ‘ Rest ’ ! There’s no rest for me—night or day. By day I long for night, and when night comes my sleep, so to call it, is such a worthless and broken thing that I call for day to come again and welcome the light.”

Hawkey condoled with the other’s physical miseries.

“ They’re naught, however, against the mind. I’d laugh at bad breathing and bad sleep, and all the rest, if only my mind was more at peace,” continued Retallack; “ but there’s things even your own flesh and blood can’t be asked to share. And, of course, the quarry’s the last straw on my back. There’s only hope left. Hope never turns sour with me, else I shouldn’t be here now.”

“ Get home and eat your meat,” answered the manager, “ and don’t go about in wet clothes. They’ll do you little good, I’m thinking.”

They left the quarries together, and while Anna presently blamed her husband for letting his dinner spoil and made him doff his jacket, Betsy Bunt similarly protested when Hawkey returned home.

“ I wish the datted quarry would fall in and have done with it,” she said. “ There won’t be no peace for you till it has, and not a decent meal seemingly. The spoiled victuals is properly cruel in this house, and you can’t scoff at Nature, same as you’re doing, without paying for it.”

“ It’s a busy time, Betsy,” he answered, “ and there’s many things to be thought about. Great changes may be coming, and my mind has got to run on.”

“ Yes, and Delabole’s like a stuck pig—at a standstill, squealing. Everybody’s afeared to breathe, or blow his nose, seemingly. Here’s Antipas stopped building his house—I wonder he don’t stop baking his bread; and my old fool of a brother, Moses, be going about saying ’tis manslaughter to keep the men in the pit; and John Sleep can’t understand why the newspapers idden ringing with it. Everybody’s daft but me and a few other ancient women. Haven’t the silly old quarry fallid in before ? If the end of the world was in sight, we couldn’t make more fuss.”

“ You’re quite right, Betsy—you always are,” answered the

manager. "You tell the people not to make fools of themselves."

"We be all run to nerves, seemingly," continued she. "I was dog-trotting along by Trebarwith a bit ago, and fell in with Aunt Mercy Inch, and the foolish creature confessed she couldn't sleep by night for fear of being woke by the crash of the downfall. And she lives five mile off, if a yard! Where's God—that's what I want to know? Not in the people's hearts, anyway. They did ought to call home what that fiery-eyed young boy—Wilberforce Retallack's son—said to chapel. 'Tis a proper disgrace to the church-town the way we're taking this, and a wisht poor show for Methodism. We want another John Wesley to stand up in the midst and shame us. That's what Sarah Sleep said to me not an hour ago, and I said. 'Right!' And if Jack Keat and John Sleep and a few others that preach Sundays were to take that line, instead of shouting afore we're hurt, it would be a manlier thing, and a better tone of voice to put on when you speak to the Lord."

"A pity you can't give them a sermon, Betsy."

"It is and it idden," she answered. "I'd rub it in; but I should lose my temper for a certainty, and chapel's no place for that. All the same, they're looking for more than trouble. Because the Book shows us that 'tis well in God's power to lose His own holy temper now and again, when humans pass the limit. And if we don't watch ourselves closer than we're doing, that's what will happen. He's trying our faith, for no doubt it had come to the Everlasting Eye that our faith was growing weak along of being too prosperous. And if Delabole don't mend and remember it's a stronghold of Methodies first and a quarry afterwards, there'll come bigger trouble than a fall of mud and stones."

Tom Hawkey ate a good dinner while she chattered, and the spectacle of his meal, together with the expression of her own opinions, relieved Betsy Bunt's emotion and put her into a pleasanter frame of mind.

CHAPTER XXI

A CHRISTMAS BOX FOR NANJULIAN

THE dawn of Christmas morning came like an army under banners of fire. A frost had touched the earth, and every green croft and fallow field was white and glittering. The birds were humped like feather balls in the hedges. A robin saluted the day. Presently the sky grew red behind Brown Willy, and the tor rose black against the gathering splendour of the south-east. The ground rang and flashed. Dim blue planes, flushed from the sky and touched with woolly flakes of frost, spread where the duckponds had rippled and shivered under the east wind's breath on yester-night; but now the wind was still, an awful silence reigned over the earth.

It had already been broken at Quarry Cottage by the sound of Grandfather Nute's wooden flute. Before half-past five, while yet it was night, the old man awoke, remembered that it was the anniversary of his Saviour's birth, arose at once, and dressed. Then, with a fearful energy, he began to play 'Christians, awake, salute the happy morn!' He stood at the bottom of the staircase, and shattered sleep for six people.

Wilberforce Retallack had slept ill, and his bad breathing only eased in the small hours. He woke to the aubade and cursed.

"Damn the old fool!" he said. "Now I shan't slumber again!"

Anna bounced out of bed and met Edith on the landing.

"Julitta's got a bad headache—please stop, grandfather," said Edith.

But his daughter spoke more sharply to the old man.

"Where's your sense?" she cried. "Here's Wil been fighting for his breath all night and only just got off, and you wake him with that screaming horror! Cruel silly, I call it, and only past five o'clock. And a holiday for a little more

rest than usual. I couldn't have believed it of you. Go back to bed, father, and don't let's hear no more of it."

The coughing of the husband punctured her speech, and she turned back into her bedroom and slammed the door.

Mr. Nute made no answer. He stood with his fingers on the holes of the flute and his eyes lifted upward to the white shadows of Edith and her mother on the landing. When they had disappeared, he put on his coat, his scarf, and his hat, and went out into the morning. He took his flute.

The quarry was dark and full of vapours. A dim light marked the east. The old man considered, and turned up the inclined way from the cottage to the village. The frost in the air invigorated him. When well out of range of his home he played again, and his breath puffed like steam upon the air. He won a response, for from two fowl-houses came muffled but defiant crows. Grandfather smiled, and was filled with an inspiration. He walked up the slumbering village, and stopped at John Sleep's newspaper-shop. He knew that the master of it slept in a front room, therefore he drew up and played once more. His fingers were a little stiff with the cold, and he brought a pair of red mittens out of his pocket and put them on. Then again he began to play 'Christians, awake!'

Two Christians instantly obeyed his summons, and two white blinds over Grandfather's head were agitated. One went up, and the form of John Sleep was revealed. The other moved from the side, and the head of Sarah Sleep, with a shawl round it, peered into the morning dusk. She smiled and nodded doubtfully. Then Mr. Sleep opened his window. He was by no means awake, and seemed less genial than his words.

"Morning! Morning, Nute! A merry Christmas! Don't you bide no more—there's a good man. 'Tis a late morning, and we want our extra sleep."

He shut his window and drew down the blind; while at the same moment Sarah opened the bottom of hers behind the blind and addressed him.

"A merry Christmas, James Nute; but do you get home, like a dear soul, else you'll catch your death. You're too wonderful altogether, and tidden the morning for you to be wandering about in this here piercing frost."

“ A happy Christmas to you, Sarah Sleep, and plenty of them ! D’you know the Merry Dancers were in the sky last night ? Even the works of Nature understand the glad day. The Lord of our Salvation’s born again, and not one but me up to welcome Him, seemingly.”

“ We all shall come presently. Now get home, I do beg and pray of you.”

She shut the window, looked round the blind again, nodded and smiled, and watched him hurry down the road. Grandfather was damped. Not a chimney as yet sent its smoke into the breathless dawn. He considered further experiments and abandoned them. He began to feel his epiphany energies a failure. But he did not blame the world: he blamed himself.

“ I belong to a past generation,” he considered. “ This here excitement about Christmas morning grows out of date. The weather’s all against it, too.”

The cold, indeed, proved intense, but silver light had threaded into the east, though the morning star still shone like a lamp. Mr. Nute turned and proceeded down a lane homeward. The lane ran through two rows of back-gardens, and at a broken fence in the corner of a little field was a pigsty. There were young pigs in it, and they grunted and sent up steam from their nostrils. The spirit of St. Francis touched Grandfather; he drew out his flute and played ‘ Christians, awake ! ’ to the pigs. They crowded together and looked up out of their little eyes. They stood with their feet in an empty trough and grunted apparent approval.

“ They know—they know ! ” thought Grandfather.

Heartened by this adventure, he proceeded to the quarries, examined the rifts above the north face, which had not widened of late, and then went back to his home.

Anna and Pooley were down, and the fire was alight. Grandfather expressed sincere regret at having wakened his son-in-law, and felt relieved to learn that Wilberforce had gone to sleep again. He shivered somewhat, and was glad to drink some hot tea. Edith came ‘ down house ’ presently, and then Ned appeared. It seemed that there were two invalids, for Julitta wanted breakfast in bed, and Mr. Retalack, so his wife determined, was not to be awakened. Edith took her sister’s meal upstairs when it was ready, and Anna’s

husband presently awoke, whereupon she bade him stay where he was, and brought his breakfast to his bedside.

Nobody appeared in a very seasonable spirit. Grandfather found himself a little weary and subdued. Anna was restless and anxious; even Ned felt perturbed, because he desired to ask a great favour, and suspected that the sense of the house that morning would set against favours. Edith soon disappeared; she was going to spend the day with the Bakes at Newhall Mill, and departed, somewhat thankfully, to do so. But she saw her father first, and asked him whether she should stop. He was up and shaving when she came to wish him a merry Christmas, and he hid his heart and assumed a cheerful demeanour. Indeed, all cheered up presently, and even Julitta, rising superior to her pain, came down and presented the little presents she had planned for the household. She heartened Ned and lessened the gloom. Wilberforce would not hear of Edith sacrificing herself, so she departed, and presently when Ned, who was now openly tokened to Philippa Sleep, asked if his maiden might eat her Christmas dinner with his family, permission was granted. Whereon Ned's heart grew glad, and he declared his intention of going to chapel with his mother. This reward served to cheer Anna's Christmas, and presently she started with Wilberforce, who insisted on coming, her sons, and her father, while Julitta stopped at home to begin preparations for the great meal. They were to dine at two o'clock, and her mother would be home again before the cooking reached a critical period.

A little before noon Julitta had a visitor. With immense precautions Sidney Nanjulian entered the lonely purlieu of the workings, and, looking down, saw a white towel hanging from a window of the Quarry Cottage. This was the signal that Julitta would be alone. She had promised to feign indisposition, and let the rest of the family go to chapel without her. Seeing the coast clear, Sidney hastened down and entered boldly, to find his lover in the kitchen.

She kissed him, and then went upstairs to take in the towel.

"Funny," she said on returning to him. "I'd plotted to have a sham headache this morning, and I woke up with a real one—cruel neuralgia."

He expressed his sorrow, hoped that it was better, and

strove to amuse her. Sidney occupied Grandfather Nute's chair by the fire, and made Julitta come and sit in his lap.

"I'll tell you a funny story," he said, "showing the fools there are in the world. I met a man from Launceston yesterday—a cousin of mine—and he'd heard about the trouble in the quarry. A sensible man, too, I'd always thought. I showed him what's coming, and he said quite seriously: 'But it's high time you took steps to prevent it, surely!' It's just as if he'd said we ought to take steps to prevent the moon turning full on Monday week. I asked him what he advised us to do about it, and he said there ought to be some way to prop it up!"

Nanjulian laughed at this story, but found Julitta in no laughing mood. She was indeed strangely silent, and sat with her arms round his neck and her eyes upon his. He, too, relapsed into silence at last, and just cuddled her and rubbed his cheek against hers. Then a clock struck noon, and the sound broke Julitta's dreaming.

"I kept your Christmas present till now," she said. "I know you're just full of wonder to hear what it is. And thank you for the six handkerchiefs with 'J. R.' on them, Sidney. They're lovely, but the 'R' will have to be changed into 'N.'"

She spoke whimsically and affected a weebegone speech, though the intonation and expression that accompanied it were not weebegone. She regretted her news, but was aware that he would delight in it; therefore no concern accompanied her speech.

"Of course, it will be 'N' some day. You are Julitta Nanjulian really, and have been, thank the Lord, for many a day. I sometimes wonder what it will feel like when the secret's out. You say the romance will end then, Julitta. But I don't believe it will. We've had a pretty glorious time loving in secret; but there's nothing like a bit of novelty, and to be married and free, and to go and come—it's got a bright side after all."

"I've loved the stealthy love-making," she murmured. "There was a day we spent on Brown Willy last summer I shall never forget."

"We'll spend many such another. The game's not up yet."

"Yes, it is," she answered. "We shan't go to Brown Willy alone next August, Sid."

"We certainly shan't go with anybody else," he said.

"If we go at all, there'll be another with us."

"You're full of puzzles to-day. And who will it be, I wonder—a man or woman?"

"Neither—something in a perambulator."

"Good Lord! Julitta—you mean it?"

"Yes, faith. I told you a fortnight ago that I'd got a Christmas present for you. And I'm sorry, Sid."

"'Sorry'! 'Tis the best news I've heard for a long month of Sundays!"

"We must be married, I suppose."

"And make quick sticks about it, too," he said.

"I thought it would seem natural if you broke the news that we were engaged to-day. They'll come home in half an hour."

Nanjulian revelled in the situation.

"Properly romantic," he said. "Now, if anybody had told me the big things that were going to happen to me to-day—— But I must run first and tell Antipas Keat that I can't eat my Christmas dinner with him. He'd planned for me to do so, and then go over his new house and see his inventions. I'll be back in twenty minutes. Just you tell your people there is another coming to Christmas dinner. They'll never guess who it is."

Julitta, cheered that the murder was out and glad to see the man's pleasure, talked now of matrimony and their new home. He could ill contain himself, for this was an adventure he had long desired. He had not dared to confess to Julitta that their clandestine courtship began to bore him. Indeed, he delighted in their meetings, and worshipped her as of old; but all the petty business and discomfort of secrecy had lost charm of late, especially since the winter. He wanted Julitta for his own, and he wanted her in comfort. His mind began to perceive that there was a ridiculous side to this romance, but he had not confessed as much, for fear that Julitta would blame him as a traitor to their poetic ideals. But now he was glad, and felt that even reality might be gloriously romantic when pursued in the spirit which inspired Julitta and himself. He rushed off to Antipas Keat, and found

that he was at chapel, so his wife heard that Nanjulian could not be their guest.

"Master will be a good bit disappointed," she said; "but no doubt you've got your reasons, Sidney."

"The best," he assured her. "I dare say I and another person will be round in the afternoon to look at the new house. For that matter, nothing interests me more than new houses for the moment."

She stared, but he was gone before she had time to ask any questions.

He did not return to the home of the Rectallacks, however, until the hour for dinner; then, knowing that his appearance would have all the charm of mystery and sensation, he appeared at Quarry Cottage.

Julitta, meanwhile, had astounded her family by explaining that an outsider had accepted her invitation to dinner.

"He's well known to you all," she said, "but you'll be a good bit surprised, I dare say. Anyway, he's my guest to dinner, and will be here at two; and if you've got any quarrel with me about it, you must keep it till afterwards, because it won't be fair to him to make a fuss while he's here."

Thus romance did not die with Julitta's confession, and very active excitement filled the minds of her family when Sidney Nanjulian's knock fell on the door.

The theatrical effect of this entrance was entirely in keeping with Sidney's spirit. He loved it. He was supremely delighted at the turn of events, and had he planned things to suit his own romantic ideas, they could not have fallen out more agreeably. He appeared, entered, drew himself up in the kitchen door, and bowed to the company. He had prepared a little speech.

"I come among you as an old friend and as a new one," he said. "And I trust that you will regard me in that light. Julitta and I have long felt a great respect and admiration for each other, and it has ripened into affection. I hope you will let me be a son and a brother."

They were much taken aback.

"The slydom! You cunning creatures!" cried Anna. "And what becomes of my Christmas appetite after that?"

"He's like a flame of fire!" declared Julitta, putting her arms round Sidney's neck. "It isn't enough that he's won me.

He wants to wed this instant moment. And we kept the secret, not from disrespect to you, father, or you, mother, but just for joy of having a secret. We neither of us ever had a secret before, and never shall again; but we thought it was so lovely that we'd just hold it up till Christmas Day as a big surprise."

Wilberforce Retallack regarded Nanjulian with moist eyes.

"To think of it! And here's Ned and Philippa tokened too! What a marrying family! Well, bless you both, I'm sure."

"And I'll set them all an example," declared Nanjulian. "I'll take no denial. In three weeks, or less, I wed."

"That's for me to decide," declared Julitta. "Perhaps I'll say six months; perhaps Edith won't let me wed before she does, and that's next summer. Perhaps mother won't let me go at all."

"Have you thought what happens after the fall, Sidney?" asked Retallack.

"Yes, be sure I have. If we shut down here, I can easily get work in Wales or America. So we needn't trouble about that."

"There's only Pooley and grandfather going to be left single in the family now," cried Julitta. She was a little hysterical.

"And grandfather's more like to wed than Pooley, ain't you, grandfather?" asked Ned.

"That's as may be," declared the old man. "But with three weddings in sight, Pooley and I can afford to wait a while."

They went to dinner with good appetite save Anna, who could not get over this astonishing event. She had long regarded Julitta as one of the cold women who die unwedded and unsought. That her own opinion should have been so mistaken, bewildered her. She looked back for the signs and wonders that seeing eyes never fail to observe in such cases, but she could remember none. Julitta had hidden her romance completely.

"The slydom!" murmured Anna from time to time, more to herself than for any listening ear. She looked oftener at Julitta than at Sidney Nanjulian during the Christmas dinner,

and the look was not one of pure affection. Another also regarded Julitta curiously from under her eyelashes. This was Philippa, who sat very silently between Ned and Pooley. Julitta, too, looked at her, and knew that Philippa was exceedingly interested. They caught each other's eyes sometimes, and signalled a dawn of new friendship.

Nanjulian talked a great deal, and devoted his remarks to his future mother-in-law. But she was abstracted, and paid him no particular attention. Anna wanted her daughter alone. The air begotten of this revelation was fortunate for Philippa. She had feared to be the embarrassed centre of the family and the alien of the company; but she and Ned were quite unimportant people to-day. The focus was shifted to Nanjulian, who proved much better able to endure it. As for Philippa, she felt quite like an established member of the family before this shock.

Nanjulian's masterful way impressed them all.

"Mark me," said Grandfather Nute, when the young couples had gone out walking after dinner. "That man won't take 'no' for an answer. And Julitta won't give him 'no,' neither. He'll wed the first minute he can. The Nanjulian race was a very useful one in its time, and has nearly died out. I dare say he'll revive it to good purpose, and very certain it is that he couldn't have found a better wife. Though how he found her, and when and where they went courting, be as great a mystery as the love of the little birds."

Anna's dinner had not agreed with her, and she was sitting by the fire.

"The slydom!" she repeated. "It ain't like any child of ours to be so double."

"I wouldn't call it 'double,'" argued Wilberforce. "It's no more than what she said herself—just the fine novelty of having a secret. The young are very fond of secrets. They only get a cursed trouble to the elderly."

Pooley was holding a service for children, and presently he went up the village with Grandfather Nute.

When they were gone Retallack exhibited a rare cheerfulness, for of late he had much fallen into gloom.

"This makes me forget my ill health, mother. Think nothing but good of it," he said. "A very great relief to me

—both girls provided for—and well provided for Nan-julian's all right, and steady too."

"I've nothing against him, of course," she answered. "Nothing particular for him and nothing particular against him. In fact, I hardly know the man."

"He's a very good, straight, saving sort of man."

"Good he may be; straight he isn't. No more than Julitta. That's what's given me heartburn without a doubt: not the engagement, but the slydom!"

CHAPTER XXII

JULITTA LAUNCHED

JULITTA and Sidney declared themselves superior to a honeymoon.

“It’s no time for it,” said Mr. Nanjulian, “with the quarry coming in and the future so uncertain.”

He took a little house that stood upon the road to St. Teath. It was one of four, and Antipas Keat, a friend of Nanjulian’s who considered himself an expert in the matter of house-building, approved of it. Julitta chose new wall-paper and Sidney promised her a bathroom if he stopped at Delabole.

“No use spending money on luxuries like that until we know what happens to the quarries,” he said. This she admitted and amused herself with planning the new garden.

The betrothal had been so sudden that, even a week before the wedding, Mrs. Retallack failed to realize what was upon her; while Wilberforce, before the anxieties of his public position and private affairs, continually forgot all about the business and had to be reminded that on such a day, now fast approaching, Julitta would be wedded.

Edith was rather pained at the circumstance and expostulated.

“A girl’s wedding-day is an event,” she said, “and I think we ought to fuss more over Julitta.”

“It’s her own fault,” answered Anna. “If she had come to it easy and natural, as you did, and let the thing grow up in our minds slow and sure in the usual way, then we should have took it as became parents; but springing it like that and then rushing it like this—who the mischief can be expected to rise to it? The idea haven’t gone home yet, no more than a death do in the first few weeks; and when you tell me our Julitta’s going to be married Thursday fortnight, I can’t grasp it—no more can father.”

"Yes, I can," declared Wilberforce. "I didn't until I wrote out her cheque for fifty pounds for needfuls. I've grasped it all right since then; and so have my banking account."

There certainly was a spirit abroad that might have chilled some young lovers; but when Nanjulian professed to deplore it, Julitta only laughed at him.

"That was bound to be," she said; "and I think it's rather interesting—almost funny. As a matter of fact, we were married a year ago—privately—and this business is all ridiculous pretence really in our eyes. But its got to be, because unmarried mothers and their children are treated with less respect in England than anywhere else in the world. Of course my people don't know the truth, but they feel that there's something in the air. They've always been a thought uneasy about me, and our engagement and wedding being out of the common, it makes them look at it with doubt. They feel a sort of dim discomfort, because we kept our secret to ourselves and didn't run after each other down the road and make love for every fool to see. Then father never likes to be hurried either. If you take him out of his stride, he's done. We shall all be very glad when it's over."

"And this spirit stretches out beyond your home," said Sidney. "It's wonderful how conservative a Radical can be. Here we pride ourselves on being ahead of all North Cornwall in our political opinions, and a proper stronghold of progress, and yet let any little social matter go a step forward, like Ned's bit of fun, or our wedding without the usual keeping company—as they suppose—and some shake their heads and some protest as if we were injuring society in its tenderest place."

"And I dare say some even guess the truth," she said; "and if they did, you may be sure their consciences would blame them for being uncharitable and quick to think evil against us."

"A thing all depends upon circumstances whether it's evil or not," he answered. "For instance, if you'd been a trusting fool, instead of a wonderful clever girl born ahead of all the opinions of the age, and if I'd been a rascal and a philanthropist, instead of a man full of romance and quick to understand your worth and wonder, then this thing might have been

evil and the people would have been right. You'd have been disgraced and I should have stopped a bachelor. But because we are what we are, there's no evil in it—owing to our wisdom in bending to the opinions of our fellow-creatures—silly though we know them to be. Still, you can't build a rule on exceptions."

"We shall be neither more nor less to each other," declared Julitta; "but a child's a child, and for the parents to marry after it's born doesn't help it in England, though it puts the little, defenceless thing all right in most other civilized countries."

"We'll have two and no more," declared Nanjulian. "My children are going to get a chance in the world and a proper education and a proper send-off. I don't want you to bring more children here than I can start well on their way."

Thus they talked, and elsewhere the young couple were in many mouths, for the coming marriage had wakened some interest even at this moment, when one idea and dread dominated the people.

A company met in the new dinner-house at the bottom of the quarry and ate their food and debated a proposition arising from Sidney Nanjulian's approaching wedding.

"Ought we, or ought we not, to give the man a gift?" asked Jack Keat. "In my opinion we ought. I don't say he's hit on a proper time for his adventure, and I do say it would have been better and showed a finer spirit in the man to put off pleasuring until we know where we stand; but it's a free country, and as he's fixed next week for marriage, and as marriage is marriage, and he's been a very fair foreman, it might be a good thing to send round the hat and buy him an inkstand, or some such thing, and her a tea-service—her, of course, belonging to the quarry too."

They listened, and Noah Tonkin spoke

"The thing have moved in my mind also," he said, "and Benny Moyse, and Richard Male at the public-house will both bear witness, for we spoke of it in the bar and left it an open question. And for my part I think we ought to do it."

"I lay Benny didn't think so: no friend of mine would think so," declared Mr. Bunt.

"He did not," admitted Tonkin. "He said it weren't the time."

“It’s never the time,” vowed Moses Bunt. “No man, nor yet woman, will ever cabooble me with that nonsense. If you want to make a bally muck of your life, hitch it to a woman’s; and the man who can look at marriage from outside and then walk into it is a buffle-headed fool every time. And you see it all around you. And every married man knows he has lost his tail, like the foxes in ^{the} fable; but they’re all in a conspiracy to keep it dark.”

“We was in the keel-alley* on Friday eve,” said Tonkin, “and I put it to Benny and Mr. Male, same as Jack have put it to us, and Male said he didn’t know but what we might, and Benny said he wasn’t going to be touched for a penny for such a cause.”

“And why should he?” asked Moses.

“You talk as if marriage was a mistake instead of an institution ordained by God Almighty,” answered Keat. “And you an old bachelor, too. What the mischief do you know about it?”

“What them as look at a thing from outside do know—and that’s the truth. I never put a woman before beer but once in my life; and that was once too often. And you’ll never catch me rewarding marriage with a gift. And I’ll go further and say that marriage is contrary to nature.”

“That’s silliness, Moses, and you be judging the world from your own cranky self,” declared Tonkin. “Because you haven’t ever felt love for the opposite sex, and because such a thing is contrary to your nature, it don’t follow that it’s contrary to the rest of us. You go through the world, like a lot of other narrow creatures, thinking you’re the rule and everybody else is the exception. And all the time the bitter English of it is that you’re the exception and everybody else is the rule.”

“No such thing,” answered Bunt. “I’ve never pretended I was the rule—quite the opposite. Sense ain’t the rule, and if you’ve got sense you don’t neighbour with the fools—men or women. And least of all neighbour with a woman for life. Nine out of ten women be fools, and their friends be fools, and if you marry one, you get drawn in and find yourself hemmed round by fools and choked by fools before you can blow your nose. Keep single if you’re a clever man; if you ain’t, it don’t

* *Keel-alley*—skittle-alley.

matter a damn what you do—because in that case you're bound to make a mess of it in the long run."

"It isn't contrary to nature, whether or no," argued Jack Keat. "You can't say that; for nature works in that pattern and love makes the world go round. 'Tis by pairing we keep life in the world."

"Pairing's one thing and marrying's another," answered Bunt. "A brace of thrushes will have a hand in the next generation of thrushes and do their duty by the little birds and launch 'em in the world; and then they part—and damn glad to part most times, I reckon—and properly thankful to think they'll never see each other's faces no more."

"What about bullfinches, then?" asked Tonkin. "'Tis well known they never part, but keep so close together through the year as in the nesting season."

"Just a silly thing bullfinches would do," answered Mr. Bunt. "A bullfinch is a beastly bird all the year round, and never beastlier than when the pear-tree buds be swelling. And if they've got nasty human habits, so much the better reason for shooting 'em at sight, as the gardeners do."

"You be past praying for, Moses, and you've made Benny Moyses as stiffnecked as yourself, though I remember a time when he had a little human nature in him," declared Keat. "But the question is a wedding gift for Nanjulian and Wil's daughter; and I'm for it."

Others who listened to this conversation agreed with Jack Keat, and in the end a sum sufficient for the ink-bottle and tea-service appeared. Julitta, indeed, was surprised and touched by the number of the gifts, for unexpected people remembered her. Aunt Mercy Inch from Trebarwith sent a tea-cosy worked with her own hand; Jane Sleep, Philippa's mother, and Philippa herself both brought a present, and Sarah Sleep and her brother between them produced a memento in the shape of a 'Doré' Bible. Hawkey and the Bakes sent gifts, and Betsy Bunt, whose heart was larger than that of her brother, gave Julitta six pairs of stockings.

An unexpected present was received from Julitta's kinswoman, Mrs. Jane Lobb—she whose husband had once assisted Wilberforce with cash and afterwards made it a gift. That Jane Lobb should have recognized the occasion surprised the Retallacks somewhat, for they heard little of her;

but the gift was not wholly disinterested, and Wilberforce knew it, though his family did not. The widow sent a cabinet photograph of her late husband in an ornate frame, and she knew, or guessed, that the familiar features of his benefactor would remind Mr. Retallack of events now fifteen years old. Jane Lobb wrote with her gift, and took occasion to mention that it was the best that she could afford, owing to her reduced circumstances. It appeared that she had been called upon to give up the little boy she had adopted, and was indeed a good deal pressed in the battle of life. Fortune, not content with deserting her husband before his death, had ill-used her since, and with all the will to give Julitta a finer present, she lacked the power.

This communication cast down Wilberforce a good deal, and when Jane Lobb refused an invitation to the wedding, on the grounds of anxiety, poor health, and no clothes, he was still more concerned. But he strove to banish care and put a bright face on the coming event for his daughter's sake. A further difficulty presented itself when he discussed the marriage with Sidney Nanjulian, for it was a weakness of Retallack's to suggest greater prosperity than he really enjoyed. He liked to feel that people thought him a snug man, and seldom refused a subscription to the many calls that echoed about Delabole; but from time to time arose the necessity of stating facts, and now Nanjulian was added to the list of those who knew the truth. He felt surprised that Julitta would come to him without a dower; he also had imagination enough to see the discomfiture of his father-in-law before need for the confession. He made light of it, however, for his sense of humour stood him in good stead, and the contrast between poor Wilberforce's flamboyant pretence of means and crestfallen confession of poverty amused him.

"He little knew, when he used to blow to me about his good fortune and many blessings, that some day he'd have to make a clean breast of it," said Sidney to Julitta. "I was far sorer for him than for myself. It cut him to the quick—poor man!—being called to confess that he couldn't give you any money—especially after his talk in the past, when he never dreamed there'd rise a need to tell me the truth. But I relieved his mind, and showed him I wasn't at all vexed. A

man's wife is his first care, and it's right and proper that your mother should have all he can leave her for her life."

Julitta, however, felt much disappointed on Sidney's account. Her father was abject and humble before her, and made her very uncomfortable. He apologized to her as though he had done her a wrong. Then Anna flamed up, bade him not be so craven, and adopted a defiant manner to Julitta, which hurt the girl, since she had uttered no word of lamentation. She resented her mother's attitude, and a coolness sprang between them begot of nothing but human stupidity on Anna's part. Grandfather Nute strove to banish this cloud, and failed. Then mother and daughter came together, and Anna, in a melting mood, wept and asked for Julitta's forgiveness. Whereupon Julitta also wept, and they were friends.

Indeed, Mrs. Retallack might have been pardoned at this moment for a little loss of self-control. Life weighed heavily upon her. That Wilberforce could give Julitta no more than he had was an implicit confession of a position worse than Anna guessed. But she never mentioned it, for the man was too sick to trouble. Other cares she also harboured, because Pooley, with that self-centred egotism common where a streak of genius hides, made no secret of his own desires. She alone was sympathetic, and had to bear the brunt of his spirit's needs. But his confidences did not bore her; she shared his ambition, and entertained maternal admiration for his gifts. That one so endowed should be doomed to work in the quarries caused Anna ceaseless regret. She turned over the problem of helping Pooley, and proposed to devote all her energies to it when Julitta was out of hand. But here again she was met by uncertainty and the doubt that hung over all future plans until the fate of Delabole should be known. What the womb of earth concealed none might determine, and life and hope continued suspended upon the brink of the approaching tragedy.

At Newhall Mill Julitta's nuptials formed matter for much conversation. Wesley Bake, Nancy, his mother, and his sister-in-law, Susan, combined to give a wedding present, and it took the shape of a piece of furniture that Julitta always much admired. This had belonged to the Bakes from old

time, but none of them entertained much admiration for it; and after Nancy had proved that both she, her son, and Susan might be regarded as joint owners in the fine Georgian side-board, they decided that this should be their gift. Julitta was overjoyed, for she loved the beautiful thing; but she hesitated to accept so great a treasure, not out of consideration for the Bakes, for she knew they delighted to give it, but from a suspicion that Edith, who would reign at Newhall Mill anon, might regard the gift as a loss to herself.

Edith, however, cared nothing for such a possession, and was only surprised that her sister could win such joy of it.

The children, Mary and Betty Bake, held conferences concerning their wedding present; but Mary arranged the matter, for the approaching wedding met with Betty's hearty disapproval. She had long been praying to God to change her uncle's mind and turn him from Edith to Julitta, and now that Julitta was lost to her Betty felt disheartened and out of spirits. She became exceedingly naughty, and was often in disgrace.

Once, when Sidney Nanjulian, his mind full of affairs, passed by the school-house yard in playtime, he chanced to glance up and saw a small and malignant face glowering at him over the wall. A dark-haired little girl, with black eyes, was insulting him. But he knew her not.

"Don't you poke your tongue at me, you imp," he said, "or I'll box your ears."

"I hate you," declared Betty. "Aunt Julitta's going to marry you because you've overlooked her, and I hate you!"

He laughed.

"She's overlooked me, more likely. You're one of those little Bakes from the corn-mill, I suppose? Don't you be silly, or we shall call you 'half-bake.' You'll see plenty of Aunt Julitta and Uncle Sidney too, if you're a good girl."

"I'm not good," said Betty, "and I never will be good if I can help it, because I heard Aunt Julitta tell my mother that she liked a spice of the devil in her friends. And I'm her best friend, and she's my best friend in the world, after Grandfather Nute."

"I'll be your friend, too."

"Will you let Aunt Julitta come and see me when she's a mind to?"

“Of course I will. She’ll always do what she’s a mind to, I hope.”

“May I come and see her in her house?”

“So oft as you like.”

Betty wriggled over the wall, revealing a good deal of her long, slim person as she did so. He helped her down. Then she kissed him.

“Then I’ll give up everybody in the world for you—all except Grandfather Nute,” she said.

“Don’t do that. You can’t have too many friends.”

“I don’t want no more friends but you three. I’d come and live along with you if you could get grandmother and mother to agree to it.”

“Very kind of you to offer,” he answered, “but I’m sure your mother couldn’t spare you.”

“’Tis all according as I go on,” explained Betty. “I’ve heard her say sometimes she couldn’t, and other times she very well could. If you’ll take me, I know just how to make mother feel she can let me go—and grandmother, too.”

Julitta’s wedding was quiet, and the company not large. A party of a dozen sat down to breakfast after the ceremony, and a spirit of somewhat forced cheerfulness marked the event. But none could escape from the cloud now hanging low and heavy over Delabole. It was darkening men’s minds and invading every hearth like a presence. Perhaps only two hearts beat with pure happiness on the occasion, for Betty and her sister were Julitta’s bridesmaids, and both wore new frocks of blue serge and light blue ribbons.

The wedding was on Thursday, and the bride and bridegroom went off to Tintagel. But on Monday morning they returned. Then, and not till then, Julitta Nanjulian was happy. Despite reason, inherited instincts, far stronger than reason’s power to shake, had made her unsettled and disquiet until she lay, a wife, in her husband’s arms.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GUILLOTINE

OVER Pooley Retallack the events of real life passed like a dream, for the only reality in his mind belonged to the soul, and he regarded existence on earth as but a stepping-stone, or series of stepping-stones, that led from time to eternity. Before this tremendous conception, so often declared by devout persons and so seldom displayed, young Pooley stood, and his heart was torn and his conscience troubled.

A temptation haunted him during his working hours, and often, in the midst of night, he woke with fearful agitation from dreams that made him think he had fallen to it. But as a temptation he did not always regard this allurements. From some angles and in some ethical lights the yearning, that now so deeply stained his mind, called to him rather as a command than repelled him as an offence. It might, indeed, be regarded as a cowardly means of reaching to his soul's desire; but, on the other hand, it was possible to view it and exalt it into a noble martyrdom and act of splendid self-sacrifice. To give your life for your friend was always great; to maim your body for your neighbour's soul—might not that be a very notable and praiseworthy surrender?

There lived once a man in Delabole who had worked in the quarries when he was young. An accident struck off his arm, but he made a good recovery, and, since he possessed great gifts and was famed as a local preacher before the misfortune, his friends had come forward to assist him. The man had been tamping, or ramming, a charge of powder, which exploded and maimed him very seriously. It was, of course, an accident, but it had resulted in the sufferer winning strong support, and what at first appeared the destruction of his usefulness in reality opened the door to it, for he was helped to enter the ministry, and had done noteworthy work on a wide circuit for many years.

This instance now dominated Pooley's hieratic mind, and for many days he laboured under the belief that what came to his predecessor by accident might fall upon him even more grandly by deliberate sacrifice. He was blinded for a season, and yet in his honest heart there existed instincts which made him hesitate. Reason cannot be entirely destroyed until man has moved far along a fanatic path, and reason, battling with Pooley, laboured to defeat the sophisms that a deep and noble ambition wove about his mind.

He desired to injure himself physically in such a manner that he could no more work in the quarries, for if this happened to him he felt very sure that swift help would be forthcoming and the door to the ministry thrown open. He had preached again and commanded a wide hearing. Everybody said that he was marked for service, and he believed it. But only his own exertions could challenge the necessary attention and win the necessary aid. And since his father was powerless and none offered, it remained for him to take the first step. He inquired, but could learn of no means to win his object save one, and that, from being a shadow long latent in a cranny of his thoughts, had now emerged and bulked into an active obsession from which escape was impossible. Nor did he feel at all times the need to escape. It has already been explained that what was to-day a temptation to do evil that good might come appeared to-morrow in the light of a great duty—a trial to be faced, a demand from on high, to be obeyed for heavenly purposes connected with his destiny.

There was a text that haunted him like the melody of a song, and when that rose uppermost in his mind, he felt impelled to act and end this dreadful season of dark nightly dreams and painful waking hours.

“Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.”

These words appealed with fearful force to Pooley; but even at the hour of its most triumphant insistence, reason would stoutly challenge the command and cast him down. For did it apply to him? Gradually he perceived that the direct injunction could only be followed at a cost of breaking all natural instincts, and, perhaps, by ignoring other sacred

injunctions equally vital and valid. Was his eye quite single in this matter? The very longing to maim himself and cast his hand from him made him doubt. No self-sacrifice would the action be, no act of martyrdom could it be called by the secret voice of his own heart. For he longed to do it; he hungered horribly to feel the knife of the guillotine, and know that, through that sharp pang, the door of his delivery would be unlocked. It was harder far to do his daily work properly than to abandon it, and with it a hand. Then, did the text apply to his dilemma? If he met with an accident and so entered into the calling, none could gainsay him, and the deliberate work of his Maker would appear and be justified to men; but if he took the law into his own keeping and destroyed a member for his own purposes, could that be similarly justified as admirable and fore-ordained? In some moods he answered that it could, since all things were fore-ordained, and man can only do what God puts into his heart to do; but he believed in free will, and when other trains of thought rose uppermost, Pooley perceived that accident and intent could by no means be regarded as of equal significance in this matter. For what must be the sequel? What must be his own attitude to the situation when the deed was done? It would not be an accident, and he could not lie and say that it was. Yet would he come into his kingdom without a lie? What would the people say when he told them that he had cut off his hand and cast it from him, that he might go into the ministry? Would they not rather suspect that the madhouse should be his portion? Some, indeed, might support him and proclaim him a martyr for the faith, but others would as surely say that a man must not cut off his hand to force God's.

Thus, without a falsehood, the ultimate success of such a stratagem was threatened, and the young man knew that any action must be of doubtful import, no matter the nobility of its object, if the achievement of that object depended in the last resort upon a lie.

Having reached this position, great gloom settled upon his spirit, and his family observed it. But all were gloomy at present, and they supposed the general doubt and darkness had touched Pooley too, despite his protest against it and assertion that Delabole lacked faith.

He sat at the guillotine and squared slate daily. With

meticulous care he did his work, and sometimes caught himself looking at the long knife-blade as one looks in doubt upon a stranger, who may be a friend, or who may be a foe. He sometimes longed for a sign to decide him. He would have leapt at any oracle or omen as a portent from on high. He strove to read such a thing into the trivial events of passing days, and failed.

Then accident opened another channel to his yearning heart, and a course of action that he had once considered and put away rushed suddenly upon him. By surprise the prompting mastered him, and he yielded to it and set his problem before another. Even as he did so, he guessed what the answer would be; but it proved more precious than he expected. Already he had thought of speaking to his grandfather concerning the subject; but desisted. Now, however, the accident of sudden impulse made him take another into his confidence, and the issue enlarged his mind and lifted his faith in man to loftier heights. Until the present he had believed only in God and doubted of humanity; henceforth, under the light of what now unexpectedly happened to him, Pooley Retallack found his opinion of humanity ennobled.

There was a great chamber of the works where endless bands ran from a revolving rod aloft as in the dressing-sheds; but the purposes of this workshop and the implements within it were different from those elsewhere. Great 'Hunter's' saws worked here, and steel planes cleaned the surface of the largest slates. Other machines put a face on the stone with sand, and examination of the purposes for which these slabs and squares were prepared had surprised most people by their great variety.

For wall coverings and dairy benches they were cut; for floors and flag-pavements, for hearths and skirting-stones, lintels, sills, and steps. They were used for platforms and lighthouse floors, for copings, cisterns, corn-chests, tanks and troughs. Brewers' squares and vats and stillions were made from them, and launders for waterways and leats. They were employed for lavatories, mortuary tables, refrigerators, and milk coolers; while the slate of finest substance and grain was usually reserved for graves. In this capacity it outlives most other material and defies decay. So enduring is it that

fragments of slate may not seldom be seen set in mosaic upon less durable marbles and granite.

Pooley, coming hither with a friend's chisel, watched the operation of sharpening upon a great grindstone. The fire flew, and the tool was quickly set.

Then walked Tom Hawkey through the shop and, seeing young Retallack, entered into conversation.

"How's your father?" he asked.

"Pretty bad, Mister Tom."

"I wish he'd go away for a bit. This east wind is punishing him."

"It's the governor's mind," said Pooley; "my family have got fidgety sort of minds."

The other nodded.

"It's only a very large or a very small pattern of mind that don't fidget, Pooley. We can only do our best. If we do our share, there's nothing to charge against ourselves."

"He's done more than his share, I reckon. I don't mean in his work, but in his way of going through life."

"A very generous, high-minded man."

"Too generous, mother says. Don't fancy she blames him; but sometimes, when she thinks of—what might have been done if he hadn't been so ready to help the world in general——"

"I understand. It's a delicate matter, and a man must judge for himself how far charity should take him outside his own door. Your father is goodness made alive, and he has a heart bigger than his head, as I've often told him." He put his hand on Pooley's shoulder.

"I know what's in your mind, Retallack. It's natural you should feel that way. But practise the trust you preach. If you're meant for the ministry, into the ministry you'll surely go."

The sympathy of the voice inspired Pooley to speak.

"It's a very great thing to be so understanding as you. When I speak to you, Mister Tom, I know what education means. I'm just clever enough to see what a great thing it is to be educated. Of late I've got to long for knowledge. And things have come of it—queer things that puzzle me a lot."

“That’s all to the good, Pooley. We’re called—every one of us—to fight two battles all the time—the battle of the body and the battle of the soul. There’s the battle of life, as we call it, and the battle for eternal life. And sometimes we’ve got to let one go for the sake of winning the other.”

It was at this point in their conversation that the younger man felt suddenly drawn to put a part of his trouble on the elder’s shoulders. Hawkey was strong and wise. For a moment the youth doubted whether he might with propriety trouble a busy man about his own affairs; but he trusted the impulse, and put aside a suspicion of selfishness for the blessing that confession might bring.

“May I take up a bit of your time, Mister Tom?” he asked suddenly. “Well I know its value, but you’d do me a very great kindness if you would let me speak.”

Hawkey looked at his watch.

“Come and share my dinner,” he said. “It’s just noon. Then you can talk while we eat.”

“I’ll wash and come over,” answered the lad, “and thank you dearly.”

A quarter of an hour later, having hastened to the Quarry House and told his mother of the invitation, Pooley proceeded to the manager’s. He had polished himself up before doing so.

They ate in silence for five minutes, then his host bade Pooley speak.

“It’s like this, I want to go out of the shops I want open-air work—away from the guillotine.”

Hawkey was much surprised.

“Why, you’re one of the best cutters at Delabole! It’s taken you some useful years to know what you know. What do you want to waste all that skill for, now you’ve got it?”

Then Retallaek emptied his heart and told how the guillotine offered a means of escape, how mutilation might mean the ministry, how he had been sorely tempted to injure himself irreparably, that he might reach to the mission in life for which he was born.

“You said a minute ago that we might have to lose one battle to win the other, Mister Tom, and that’s how I’ve felt this longful time. And I don’t know now; but yet deep in

me there's a feeling against. Something pulls me away; something makes me feel the guillotine is from hell and not the true friend I'd like to think it was. If I do it, then what? I can't say I've done it on purpose, for then the thing I want to happen won't happen, and I can't say it was an accident, for then I should get into the ministry on a lie."

Hawkey was deeply interested.

"Be very sure the devil's behind this," he said. "And I'll tell you what would happen if you gave way to it. Once you'd done it and sacrificed your member and ruined your body, then you'd have begun the downward road, and the next thing would be that you'd lie, for you'd be weakened to lying when you looked ahead and saw your sacrifice was all in vain without a lie to buttress it. You'd lie and go into the Church with your soul poisoned for evermore. And your life would be a lie, and the higher you got, the more awful it would be. You shall come out of the dressing-shed next Monday. You can go into the pit or into the engine-house. You'll lose money, but that's nothing against what you'd lose by this."

"You think it's an evil temptation, Mister Tom?"

"The wonder is you could doubt for an hour. Your own sense showed you. In dealing with God we've got to play the game, as we have in dealing with men. You must always have things on a proper business footing with your Maker, and you know that a lie's no sure foundation for any deal. I like you, Pooley, for telling me about this. It's a great compliment to me. Take heart. You can judge of a man by the size of his temptations, and the devil never wastes his strength on anybody. When a heart's small and mean, he comes to it with small and mean whispers. When it's big and strong and aims high, then he puts out his awful power. He wouldn't tempt many men to cut a hand off. He comprehends human nature, and he won't goad on a soul to face an enemy from the front when he knows that it is only strong enough to stab from behind. But you can always withstand evil if you hate a lie. A lie's at the back of most of the devil's inventions—and he knows it, though it takes a good man sometimes to see the lie hid in the trap."

It was five minutes to one, and they rose to return to the quarries.

"Come to me first thing on Monday," said the manager,

and Pooley promised to do so; but before Monday—on Sunday after chapel—Retallack was stopped by his friend, and they spoke together for ten minutes.

“Walk this way out of the people. I won’t keep you,” began Hawkey, and when they were in a side-lane from the street, he spoke.

“We’re all wrong,” he said. “We’re not tackling this business of ours like men, but like cowards.”

It was his fashion to identify himself thus with any individual who came before him. Another would have told Pooley that he was a coward; but this man shared the blame arising from his discovery. Indeed, he felt that he must share it.

Pooley stared.

“How Mister Tom?”

“We’re running away, my son. We’re throwing up the sponge. We’d never forgive ourselves when we looked back and saw what we’d done.”

The younger instantly comprehended.

“Ah! I must stick to the guillotine.”

“That you must, Retallack. We were blind to think of any other way. That’s the right answer to this—and the only answer. The big men are those that frighten the devil, not them he can fright.”

CHAPTER XXIV

MAKING READY

THERE came a morning when, after examination of the cliffs, Tom Hawkey, Retallack, and Nanjulian decided that work beneath them must cease. Preparations had long been in hand for the approaching fall, and it was now judged that within a week or ten days the huge mass would come down. Ample margins of safety were, of course, allowed. The last stroke was struck, the last load of the famous 'Grey Abbey' slate was drawn away. It seemed unlikely that the living generation would ever look upon these galleries again.

One by one the steam-engines were drawn back from their places, and the cranes and great steam-shovel taken beyond reach of danger. The tram-rails were also pulled up and all appliances of value removed. Hawkey and Nanjulian devoted themselves to personal superintendence of this work, and the former calculated that the fall would cover an expanse of not much less than fifty yards, and go far to fill the green lake at the bottom of the workings. Beyond this gulf it could not reach, though it was probable that single blocks and masses of stone precipitated from the great height of the cliffs might fly or ricochet to bombard a more extended area. For this reason all machinery was drawn back to the foot of the great inclined plane that descended into the quarries; the steel ropes, that fell to the foot of the 'Grey Abbey' seams from the pappot-head, were also cast loose and drawn out of harm's way.

The work of making all clear for the avalanche took a week, and Hawkey, knowing that upon its completion two hundred men would be at leisure, had already opened up three separate tracts of stone in the region known as 'Wesley's Hole.' Two promised little; the third awakened his hopes. In the cliffs whereon perched Retallack's home was also high-grade slate, and the manager had a private opinion concerning his future operations here—a plan hidden for the present in his

own mind, because it was possible the place might be affected by the coming fall. He set a large number of idle men to various temporary works round about the quarries, and took the opportunity of their freedom to apply them upon desirable labours. The fact heartened many, for they argued that if Hawkey and those for whom he stood were not sanguine concerning the future, this minor business of removing rubbish and cleansing and cleaning would not have been put upon them. But all application proved difficult at this crisis, and those in authority were the last to expect it. The great rifts on the north face now gaped six feet across, and drew a jagged line between the solid earth and that which was to fall. Shrewd surveys revealed the probable extent of the slip; but its exact dimensions none could predict, for if the rock cleavage bent inward out of sight, the obvious fall might create another great over-burden and so precede another fall, the range of which nothing as yet existed to reveal. Hawkey, judging by the run of the cliff strata, feared no such additional catastrophe. Already he could see the new quarry that would display its features after the fall. A gigantic moraine must be created, extending high up the north face and opening fanwise into the quarry bottom; but above it another north precipice would appear between land level and the newly created heap below. The bulk of the fallen matter must be 'deads,' and, given regular work in the quarries—work sufficient to provide the sinews of war and keep all going at a profit—then an attack, to last for a doubtful number of years, would begin upon this unfruitful mass. Thousands of tons would be distributed upon the bottom of the quarry through depths to be explored no farther; thousands of tons would be drawn out of it to augment those mountains of stone where waste heaps rose above the green valley to the west. The great problem centred in the ability of Delabole to stem the disaster and pay its way without the 'Abbey' slate. Hawkey, upon careful calculation of what was certainly to come, believed that this would be possible. He even allowed a margin against more extended troubles than threatened; but for his subsequent operations he depended no little upon human factors, and these could not be calculated exactly. Future prosperity must at best be delayed, and the way to it led through great changes. Whether the workers would consent

to make such changes, whether the rock-men would abandon immemorial traditions and meet Hawkey's appeal when the time came to put it, remained a doubtful question. But he was not unhopeful, for the argument to the pocket is stronger than most sentimental objections with a working man. Indeed, Delabole had no choice, and would never let custom and old use come between its children and their bread. The manager therefore felt that, assuming the extent of the approaching crash had been approximately judged, ultimate good might emerge from present evil. At any rate, no time more fitting than that to follow the fall could be chosen for his appeal; no better hour in the history of Delabole would ever strike in which to urge those reforms and improvements the manager had long considered and desired. He had hinted the same to Retallack and Nanjulian, and submitted them at a meeting of the directors, but the sense, both of the foremen and the company, had stood against him. Those able to judge admitted the value of Hawkey's theories, but estimating the Cornish slate-men in the lump, were of opinion that they would never willingly desert the footsteps of their fathers, or with good will consent to overthrow of their historic procedure.

"You might as well ask a tinner to work on the earth as to tell a slater to go under it," declared Sidney Nanjulian when, some years earlier in the history of the quarries, Hawkey had hinted of his thoughts; and at that time the argument was strong enough; but now the path of the future receded into doubtful clouds, and if Delabole was called to go underground, or cease to exist, Tom Hawkey felt confident that the rising generation of rock-men at least would not hesitate. Upon them he pinned his faith. They were larger-minded and better educated than their fathers; they were children of change, and found the taste of progress not bitter. Hawkey accepted the need for a gradual advance, and had no intention of erring by haste. Indeed, the physical aspect of his design was such that only by slow steps could it be brought about. Unlike Emancipation, for instance, which was a radical change created in a flash to cause injustice that none foresaw, the evolution of an industry cannot but develop by gradual stages. In order to send the quarrymen underground, tunnels must be driven after the good slate, and that was an operation involving great extent of time.

Tom Hawkey now concerned himself almost entirely with the future, and none longed for the tension to end and the cliff to come down more heartily than did he.

A new tram-line was being laid into the 'Wesley's Hole' workings, and Hawkey watched it. As he did so there came running Ned Retallack with a face that showed strange emotions. For Ned had known neither fear nor grief, but now exhibited both.

His father was suddenly fallen ill. He had stopped at home after dinner under stress of physical discomfort, and his daughter Edith had run for Ned and Pooley. Before the doctor came the sufferer endured a great spasm, and seemed likely to die of it. The medical man was now beside him, and declared his condition grave. But the news, Ned said, had come as no surprise to his father, because Wilberforce Retallack knew his family history very well. He had grown calm, and sent messages to Wesley Bake, to Sidney Nanjulian, and to Hawkey.

Ned now begged the manager to visit his father without delay, and Hawkey accompanied him at once.

He found Retallack conscious and clear-minded, but very depressed. The foreman had suffered a stroke; his right leg was powerless, his right arm involved, and his speech thickened.

Wilberforce spoke of himself.

"This is the end," he said. "I'm just the age to a month when my grandfather died. My father lived to be five years older than me; then he went the same way. Trouble has hastened what was bound to happen. It's no great odds to the man dying whether he gets a year or two more^{or} less, for years are much like each other at my age; but in my case, for the sake of my family, I should have liked to struggle on a bit. And, of course, for the quarries. I'm terrible vexed to go just now. But I shall be away before the fall."

"Don't look on the dark side. You've been crying out for rest this many months. Maybe this is a blessing, though it don't seem so. A proper rest and proper nursing will do wonders."

"Not against a stroke—I know."

"It's only the first, and a little one at that. You're like the

quarry, Wil, one stroke isn't going to shake you. I'll wager you'll be on your pins in a month—or less."

Tom strove to cheer the other, but found it difficult. He stopped till Wesley Bake came, then left the sick man, promising to look in again before night.

Wesley had mounted a pony and galloped from the mill. He came straight out of his work, and was dusty with flour of corn. His face had perspired, and the fine powder on it run down his cheeks. Retallack bade the rest leave him, and was closeted with the miller for an hour. Then Anna brought Bake some tea, and ministered to her husband. She found him very tired, while Wesley strove to be cheerful, but failed. He was uneasy, and glad to go when Wilberforce declared that he desired to sleep.

Presently Edith and her betrothed went out together. She cried for exercise, and bade him come and walk with her.

Though fear had often filled her heart when she looked at her father, the sudden illness of that day came as a shock, and left her in deep distress. She needed comfort and consolation now, and Wesley knew it. But he was not inspired; his own mood fell into depression. It seemed to Edith that he even failed of tact. Instead of striving to cheer her, instead of dwelling on Mr. Retallack's virtues and the extent of the loss with which all who loved him were threatened, the miller appeared to be concerned most inopportunately with another aspect of Wilberforce's character.

A silence had come between him and his betrothed as they walked on the cliffs nigh the little village of Treligga seaward of Delabole. Then suddenly the man broke it.

"He's very set in his own opinions, and, of course, I don't blame him; but there are some things, Edith, I can't see with his eyes."

"So much the worse for yours, then, if you mean father. Never was such another. The soul of generosity and gentleness—Christianity made alive. That's what grandfather called him this very day, and that's what ought to be set on his grave. He's a lesson to every other man I ever met."

"I know that well enough."

"Then try to be like him, if you love me. And don't you let me hear you say an unkind word of him, or I'll never forgive you."

“ God forbid ! ”

“ You ought to be feeling for me to-day—for me and all of us in sight of this awful loss. When Tom Hawkey came in, the first thing he saw was what this meant to mother. You can't rise to a big issue in a flash like he can.”

“ I know—I give him best always.”

“ More shame to you, then. I hate that spirit of yours, always to be giving other people best. But if you want to—then give father best. I wouldn't blame that, for there was never such another man as he is. To say you can't see with his eyes ! And if you were arguing with him to-day, you ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

“ I didn't argue, Edith. I only put a few points. He was quite clear in his mind, and wanted to go over some things. Don't think I don't know his greatness.”

“ He's trusted you to stand for us. And the least you can do, I should think, would be to follow his directions to the letter, whatever they may be, and not argue about them.”

“ I didn't argue,” he repeated. “ I only—as my duty——”

“ Do his wish and you'll do your duty,” she answered. “ It's wicked to doubt that, and father perhaps dying.”

“ I could wish that he would——”

But she interrupted him again.

“ Leave it—leave it and comfort me, for God's sake. Don't you know what this means to me ? Don't you know what I'm going to lose ? Can't you use your imagination a bit and try to look into my heart ? ”

“ My darling girl—of course. Somehow I never say the right thing at the right moment. You'll have to work at me and make my mind move quicker. 'Tis just because I always want to be at my best and cleverest with you that I fail. I get nervous, and yet, bless you, you're not always hard to please.”

But she was inexorable to-night.

“ Now you want me to comfort you,” she said ; “ you men are all selfish ; you're always wanting us to back you up, or applaud you, or forgive you, or something. There's an instinct in every man to take the upper hand with women.”

“ And there's an instinct in every woman to think better of them if they do.”

“ Then why don't you ? Fine women like me don't really

like the gentle sort. They prefer the men who can tame wild animals and face danger."

"There are worse troubles than wild animals and harder things to face than danger. But I must try and growl a bit—eh? And yet a minute ago you wanted me to purr."

"I didn't," she answered. "I wanted you to use your wits and make me purr. Haven't you seen a cat come in cold and worried and looking for sympathy, and marching up to its friends to get it? And haven't you heard the creature express its pleasure at a stroke of the hand and a kind word? You're all right, but you haven't got the knack of understanding what I want without my telling you; and when a woman has to tell a man what she wants, the act of doing so makes her not want. A woman feels it's an outrage to have to tell anything to a man that loves her. If he's worth his salt and loves in earnest, then love ought to quicken his wits and make him know what she wants before she does herself. But it's only other men understand these things—never your own man apparently."

For once Wesley was seized with a happy inspiration. He put out his arm, drew Edith to himself, and kissed her.

They stood where, grey, into a pale, still sea, the ragged cliff line fell—point upon point to precipice and headland and detached rocks dotted darkly on the waters. The sun had set, but the last gold still made a background of light for lumbering cumuli that came laden with rain from the south. They were silver-grey, like the sea, while strata of vapour in loftier regions of the air struck bright horizontal lines above their billowy masses and wrought a pattern of light as high as the zenith. This radiance only died where night's deepening blue spread clear and unstained. Landward the earth fell hugely from south to north and drew a dark descending line across the sea. Here spread great meadows and gloomy fallow and waste land, where the dead fern still spread masses of tawny light upon the dusk. Many a coomb broke the earth and dropped downward to its hidden mouth in the cliffs; and here widely scattered cots thrust the sharp line of their roofs above the falling foreground, and here corn-ricks made a spot of colour. A ploughman traced his last furrow, then unlimbered his horses, mounted one of them, and

jogged homeward. Two milch cows lowed at a gate and waited for the milker.

Then faded the rocky slopes, and Tintagel's little squat tower was swallowed on its distant hill. A girl's voice lifted in song as she came to the cows, a blackbird chinked among the great furzes on the cliff, and the voice of waves, sunk to a murmur, uttered their ceaseless sigh, against which the little sounds of girl and bird struck thinly.

Darkness fell by stealth till land and sea were merged in another night, and earthborn fires glimmered in valley and on hill.

Edith returned Wesley's kiss, and for a time they were silent and walked, as they loved to walk, hand in hand.

"We'll go up and call on Julitta," said the girl. "Then we'll go home."

They climbed the hills, and in an hour reached the brand-new dwelling of the Nanjulians. Julitta had seen her father since Edith left Delabole, and was able to report that he appeared better. Aunt Mercy Inch sat with Julitta, and they had just finished tea. Aunt Mercy expressed herself as delighted with Mrs. Nanjulian's house, but she did not like the pictures.

"However, you've got to live with them, and if you and your husband admire 'em, it's nobody's business."

Julitta made fresh tea for Edith and Wesley, and begged them to stop a little while.

Sidney Nanjulian had found marriage a delightful surprise, and was, so far, well pleased with the novelty of his sensations.

"I should like for a neighbour of mine to see this house," said Aunt Mercy. "She never changed her state. She's acid, and says unkind things about matrimony. In her opinion every married woman's home is a prison so long as the gaoler lives."

"Grapes are sour, no doubt," suggested the miller.

"Why, wives are very near as free as widows nowadays," declared Julitta. "That's one thing education has done."

"It was bound to be so," answered Aunt Mercy. "For why, my dears? Because the law of Christianity is the greatest good to the greatest number, and women are the greatest number by all accounts. And if God wills 'em to be so free as men, then, of course, it will happen."

As they returned to Quarry Cottage, Wesley grew enthusiastic on the home life of the Nanjulians.

“A happier couple won’t be in the world—till we’re wedded. ’Tis the understanding between them, and the faith and trust. Lovers never look into each other’s eyes like married people,” he said.

“Faith and trust are fine things—so long as they last,” she admitted.

“We’ve built on ’em—they’re at the foundation, and so they must last for ever with us, Edith.”

“Please God, they will, dear Wesley.”

She was happier now, and praised her sister’s home.

“We shall never make Newhall look so pretty,” she said; but he would not hear of this.

“A thousand times better it shall be,” he promised her. “And if you can’t do it single-handed, then Julitta will have to help you. She’s got just the cleverness to put a thing in the right place. But no doubt you’re just as good at it.”

CHAPTER XXV

THE FALL

FOR some days the face of the rocks had begun to shed fragments. Here a load of earth slipped from above; here a ton of stone, its support removed, would descend, dragging lesser boulders with it. But now an abyss opened between solid earth and the tottering precipices. They looked as though the push of a child would fling them headlong, yet they weathered some nights of storm through which the village slumbered but little, for every man and woman expected to hear the thunder of the falling cliff before dawn, and many slept not, but abode in the quarry to witness the tremendous spectacle, as far as a clouded moon would show it.

Yet morning after morning found the cliffs still standing, and now daily the high ground above the quarries clear of the north face was crowded with people who lined each edge and waited, expecting that at any moment the end might come. Work was practically suspended now, and in the village itself all business appeared to be at a standstill save the business of eating and drinking.

Then, on the actual day of the fall a spirit seemed to get into the air and an impulse drove Delabole to the quarries. It was contrary to nature that the precipice should longer stand. Night had seen a minor slip and the folk knew, without being told, that the end had come; they poured into the quarry and gathered along the terraces to the west and south, as though attending some great spectacle timed for a punctual hour. The workers lined the banks, and half the village accompanied them.

From his bedroom window Wilberforce Retallack enjoyed a view of the quarry, and at an early hour, Hawkey, who had not seen him for two days, called at the cottage to know how he fared. No hopeful news rewarded him, for Retallack's days were numbered. Complications and an epileptic stroke

had destroyed him, and it was now a question whether first the cliff would fall or the foreman pass. Anna, who held her husband's life was linked with his life's work, declared that the events must happen simultaneously. Her husband's days were dependent on the north face, and she uttered a conviction that when the cliff fell, and not sooner, Wilberforce would die.

As he proceeded from his office along the landing-place, Hawkey met the crowd drifting in knots and clusters to points of vantage; and among them came Antipas Keat.

"It's coming down, Mister Tom," declared the baker. "Be sure it's coming down before noon."

"Why should it now? Who can tell?"

"Nobody can tell," answered the other; "and nobody can say why; and yet everybody knows that it is so. Look at them—all warping and turning together like a flock of starlings. They couldn't explain what's sent them: I couldn't explain what's sent me; yet here I am. There's a force dragging us from our work, and many who have never been near the place for months are out to-day. Old bed-liers are creeping out of their holes, and ancient creatures you don't see more than if they were in their graves already, have got abroad, like bluebottles that have weathered winter and are creeping forth at the call of the sun."

The village schoolmaster was with Antipas, and he spoke.

"It's true, Hawkey—it's in the air, and we're breathing it in. It isn't as if one man told another and the news ran, as news generally does run: no, every man knows it in his bones. These things are mysteries. The force that's pulling down the cliff has pulled us out to see it fall. I've given the children a holiday to-day that they may view the historic sight. It's good for the imagination, and if I talked to them about the law of gravitation for a month, they wouldn't know what it meant as they will to-night."

Children were indeed on the mounds and ledges above the quarry. They whistled and shouted and were from time to time cuffed and driven back into safety.

Hawkey met Grandfather Nute a moment later.

"'Tis like a wreck at Bude that I mind when I was a little one," said the old man. "Why, the houses were left empty

and the whole church-town poured out on to the downs to see men saved or drowned. At such times, if they were known beforehand, a rogue could fill his pockets from fifty tills, for the very shop-people ran from behind their counters to see the dreadful sight. And so it will be here. The people are swarming out like bees, and the hills will soon be black with them."

Grandfather hurried on and met a party of his own acquaintance, who congregated under the office walls over against the tottering face of the quarries.

Here were Jack Keat and Noah Tonkin, Moses Bunt and his friend Benny Moyse. Betsy Bunt stood by her brother and beside her were Jane Sleep and her uncle, John Sleep, who had left Sarah to mind the shop. Now, however, Sarah too joined the group and explained that she had locked the door before leaving. Sarah presently found herself near Grandfather Nute, who, not without difficulty, made a place for her beside him. Near at hand, Philippa Sleep and Ned surveyed the scene together; but Pooley was not there. He believed in his mother's presentiment, that the fall of the cliff would see his father's death, and remained at home by the sick man's bedside. Edith also stopped with Wilberforce; but Julitta sat on a little hill in an old waggon, and Nanjulian came and went from her. He had desired her to bide at home, because he suspected this experience might ill serve the child she was to bear; but Julitta thought otherwise and, sharing the implicit impression that the cliffs were to fall, had followed the unseen magnet that drew to the quarry.

The crowds increased and the best points of view were besieged. Pressure became exerted, and when a hundred tons of rock and earth suddenly fell from the forehead of the north face, the people, supposing the great spectacle about to begin, made a rush for certain points. On the open ground between the cliff edge and the office a great congestion occurred and the crowd swayed and massed. The awe and fear that had dominated so many minds in the past seem strangely to have lifted, and here, in the shadow of the crisis, a cheerful spirit was apparent. An unconscious feeling that they were assembled at a show got hold upon them. The excitement of the actual demonstration for a time made them forget its significance, and not until afterwards did dread and despair reawaken.

For the hour they were almost merry. Some sang and jested. Salutations passed, and men and women who had not met for months came together in the crowd and talked with animation of common friends and the events of their private lives. Laughter rang out in the crushes and a woman's shrill voice entertained those who heard it.

"For God's sake make a bit of room, Gran'fer Nute!" cried Betsy Bunt. "Us be scroudded up here like pilchards in a barrel."

That the lean ancient should thus be accused of crowding his neighbours appealed to the people.

Elsewhere Tom Hawkey spoke with Mrs. Retallack before seeing her husband.

"How does Wil go on?" he asked.

"He's changing," she answered, "changing and growing weak. His voice have gone so thin as the wind in the the window. He used to boom like a tern and be full of fire and fight when he struggled for his breathing; but now the fight's out of him. No kick and sprawl left in the man. He's sunk away into a gentle sort of state. He'll just tootle, and puts me in mind of Pooley when he was a little boy. 'Tis all 'Edith'—he must have Edith beside him. Such secrets come out when a man's too weak to hide 'em longer. Edith's his favourite child and he puts her before me now—a thing I'd not have expected."

"Don't you fancy that. Does he know the end's come and the fall's at hand?"

"Not he—and don't care neither. That's God's work without a doubt, and for that I'm thankful. He never names the quarry."

"'Never names the quarry'! He was full of it last time I saw him."

"That's a bit ago. He woke up the morning after you was here with his mind empty. He was very wisht thinking of the quarries the night before; but, come morning, 'twas all gone, and when my father mentioned it, he took no heed. Everything was broke away out of his head for fifteen year and he dwelt on our far-away, happy time, when the future looked all right and the present full of promise. It stabs, I can tell 'e, to hear him; but that's my selfishness, for its only the point of view hurts me. When you hear a dying man laughing over

the little happy things that fell to his lot long, long ago, and weaving his peace and content out of the faded past, you be glad for his sake, of course; but there's a bitter side to it for them that have to stand up to life still—for God He knows how many years. I could envy my master to-day."

"Don't you let yourself go," said Hawkey. "I guess it's painful, but it oughtn't to be, for if he's pretty happy again and the load of care he's suffered of late is lightened, that's greatly to the good. A peaceful death is what we wish all men."

"He's peaceful enough. We're funny creatures, Mister Tom—made of contradictions. Don't you think I'm not thankful that he's at peace, and don't you think I haven't thanked God for blotting out his life—all the troubled part of it. I've done all that. But there it is—just human nature—a feeling—a sort of justice in a way—though it's a left-handed hit at me he should only want to remember the childer playing long ago and our little bits of fun, and take no heed for my part in the past and my hope in the future. I'm glad it is so; but it hurts. He can go back—I can't. Good God Almighty! he calls home little, empty things, silly things that life's buried under reality—same as the quarry will be buried in a minute! He digs 'em out and laughs at 'em; and if you pull a long face at 'em, he's sad and puzzled."

She dried her eyes.

"Come and have a look at him," she said; "and don't be serious and down-daunted, else he'll grow fretful."

They ascended to the bedroom, and Hawkey glanced first through the window. It seemed as though the quarry-side already moved; but the sick man and Edith were laughing together.

Retallack shook the manager's hand.

"Tell mother," he said.

"We were remembering when we all went for a picnic to Trebarwith Sand, mother, and Ned fell in a pool and I fished him out, and he stood on the rocks and cried, 'Be I drowned? Be I drowned?'"

"Laugh! How we all laughed," said Wilberforce; "and, by the same token, we'll have another day down there—the family party and grandfather too. I'd like nothing better, and a bottle of beer or two. So soon as the sand has caught a bit

of heat from the sun we'll go. And you shall come, Mister Tom, if you've a mind to it."

"So we will, then," said Hawkey.

"Or else it might be Tintagel," declared the sick man. "A very fine place, and the sea-pinks will soon be peeping out in the ruins. We might fetch home a brave root or two for the garden. My Edith's our gardener—ain't you, Edith?"

The visitor stopped but a short while. His heart was sad at the women's sorrow, but content for Retallack. He knew much of the foreman's later days and how weakness of character and unreasonable generosity had tended to complicate life for him. He was glad, therefore, that his last hours were to be darkened by no more care. The man's affairs rested entirely in the hands of Wesley Bake, and Hawkey doubted not that none could administer them to better purpose. When he returned to the quarry the fall was imminent and instinctively he climbed upon a little place apart from the people to watch it alone. Many eyes were on him but he knew it not. To the crowd it seemed right that he should thus separate himself from them. He was above them, and though they judged that to such a man the future would present no difficulties, many among them perceived, if dimly, what this great moment must be to him.

"He be like Moses on the mount," whispered Tonkin to Jack Keat.

"He may be," answered Bunt, who overheard, "but it ain't much of a Promised Land he's looking at. The quarry's going to be scat abroad for evermore. 'Twill be full of scollucks* to the brim in a minute, and then good-bye us."

Suddenly a jagged rift, shaped like a flash of lightning, was torn across the face of the falling rocks. It appeared half-way up the precipice and began to widen as the stone slipped down. The sound of a low hissing accompanied this phenomenon; but it was not so loud as the murmur of the people. The rock slid down; then a face of harder rock that slightly overhung the 'Grey Abbey' seams withstood the rush of it and cast it to the right and left as the bow of a moving ship parts the water. In a gigantic ripple of earth and stone, with increasing roar the land slipped downward, and it seemed that an invisible finger broke the avalanche and cast it to the right

* *Scollucks*—refuse and rubbish.

and left. The precipices had not fallen and as yet no more than a huge mass of their lower planes was broken away. The sound of the descending stone was not so great as a dynamite explosion.

“ ’Tis no more than if the bottom of the cliff had rose up and sat down again !” cried Noah Tonkin.

A cloud of dust rose thinly as the falling masses spread upon the bottom; but it was not dense enough to conceal the workings. They were unhurt, and débris flowed in great rivers to the right and left, while a flood of stone and dust, thrown clear, as water over the apron of a fall, jumped the ‘ Grey Abbey ’ and dropped into the green eye of the little tarn far beneath.

The watchers could not believe their eyes. Inexperienced men laughed for joy.

“ Good fall !” “ Good fall !” “ All’s right !” “ Praise God !”

Three hundred happy men lifted their voices, and some began to sing a hymn; while among the younger not a few started to descend. But Jack Keat at one point, Nanjulian at another, called them back.

“ You baffle-heads !—ain’t you got eyes ? It’s not down yet !” shouted Keat; and Hawkey from his standpoint also shouted to the men to come back.

As yet no more than the foam of the wave had fallen.

There was disorder; hope dwindled and the hymn ceased. Then fell more rock, and the great, solid canopy of the ‘ Grey Abbey,’ that had cast the first fall aside so easily and protected its precious trust, now seemed itself to move. It bellied, as though some imprisoned monster was bursting through the solid rock; it crumpled and opened; then those stationed below the level of the quarry saw the horizon line of the north face change. At first it seemed to rise rather than fall and the entire surface of cliff lifted. The effect was terrific, and men said afterward that it looked as though the railway and the houses and the church, far behind them, must all inevitably follow. The cliff arched, like an enormous wave, and as spindrift bursts from the crest when a billow arches, so now, along the toppling land in its tremendous descent, much lighter matter leapt and fell. Clouds of stone and earth seemed to lift with a spring into the blue sky and sunshine,

and to gleam along its crown for a second. Then the precipice arched and its own great purple shadow darkened its base. At first it seemed that the enormous bulk of stone would cross the breadth of the quarry to assail the galleries on the other side, and many beholders struggled back in unreasoning panic; but a moment later, as it sank and fell head-first into the gulf below, the mass appeared to recede again and shrink into the depths that yawned to swallow it. For a few tremendous seconds the whole quarry face writhed and opened with rents and fissures all bursting downward. Light streamed upon it and no explosions or detonations marked the fall. It uttered the long-drawn and deepening growl of a stormy sea heard afar off. The quarry was skinned to the bone and grit its teeth in agony. More cliff fell than any man had expected to fall, and the very bases of the world seemed shaken before such irresistible might. The earth lifted its murmur to heaven and the desolation was swiftly concealed by enormous volumes of dust that billowed upward and ascended high above the beholders in a grey volume. The folds of it gleamed as the sun shone upon them, and the quarry was quite hidden, as an active volcano crater is concealed with smoke. The watchers could see no more, but through the murk there still came the murmur and groan of earth falling and settling and readjusting itself.

There was no rush into the quarries now. The men feared the strange noises and invisible movements beneath them. They understood the ways of falling stone and knew that the pant and hiss and whistling from below meant a battle of rock masses beating and crushing and hurtling down upon each other, crashing together, rending and grinding each other's faces, splitting and tearing and tumbling with increased speed where the splintered slopes were smoothed and ground clear by the down-rush from above. The pant and growl of all this movement died slowly, and sometimes moments of profound stillness broke it. Then again it began and lifted and lulled, now dying, now deepening. It was as though in a great theatre, made dark for a moment, one heard the hurrying and trappings of many feet changing the scene before light should again be thrown upon the stage.

None of the thousand people who beheld this scene had witnessed or dreamed of such an event. It affected them

differently and they increased its solemnity and grandeur by their presence. Some wept and here and there a woman clung to a man for comfort and found none. The majority of the men remained quite dumb before the spectacle. None cared to speak first. Then apprehension and understanding returned; they came to themselves gradually as the solemn sounds died away beneath.

They looked into each other's faces, and some laughed foolishly and some bragged that it was a poor show after all and they were going home to dinner. Hundreds prepared to rush into the quarry as soon as they could see their way and the clouds had thinned; then, by a sort of simultaneous instinct, their eyes were turned upon Tom Hawkey, where he stood alone regarding the new face of the quarry now for the first time slowly limning through the sunlit dust. Everybody began to regard him; everybody began to suspend their interest in the fall and awake their interest in him. This excitement increased magnetically; pent feeling was poured into it; his attitude suddenly became a matter of profoundest interest. How he was looking! What was he feeling? In what direction, sanguine or hopeless, might opinion be guided by the spectacle of the manager and his view of the terrific thing that had happened?

Such a wave of emotion could not be directed upon the man without his becoming conscious of it. It struck him home and he knew, without turning his head, that the people were regarding him. He must indicate something to them, inspire them, if possible, with an impulse of self-control, a message that all was not lost. He felt profoundly moved himself at the immensity of the event and could not as yet judge its full significance better than another. But apart from all that the catastrophe might mean, there was the actual, stupendous phenomenon itself. He had often pictured it and wondered what it would be like. And now it had come and transcended imagination and presented a spectacle of quickened natural forces that struck him as dumb as the rest. He contrasted the downfall of the north face with the dismay running through the midgets that beheld it; and for a moment the immensity of moving matter and the awful disaster to the rocks swelled largest in his mind. So doubtless the earth was smitten in still mightier scale at times of earthquake and the

eruption of her inner fires. Then he looked at the people and felt that not the chaos of rent stones, but the chaos of their hearts was the weighty matter; not the new quarry presently to be revealed, but the men he led, who now, by some impulse that ran like a fire through their hearts, stared upon him and strove if possible to glean reflection of their fate from his bearing at this supreme moment. He stood for more than he guessed, yet knew that the eyes of many waited upon him in hope to win a spark of confidence, or in dread to be further cast down. The cloud had risen above all their heads from the quarry, and whereas before the sunshine lighted it, now it dimmed the sunshine.

Hawkey's thoughts flashed quickly. There was no time to delay, and he felt called upon for some simple action or gesture. More than indifference was demanded. His inspiration took a shape so trifling that in narration it is almost ridiculous, though in fact it was not so. He drew a tobacco pipe and pouch from his pocket, loaded the pipe, lighted it, and cheered five hundred hearts.

Edith Retallack had come out to seek him for her father, and arrived in time to witness the fall. Now she witnessed a greater thing: the wave of human feeling that broke over the people. They cheered Tom Hawkey. Not a man knew why he expressed himself in this fashion; there existed no reason for doing so; but the act liberated breath and relaxed tension; so they did it and meant it, and Edith admired him who received their greeting. But he laughed and shook his head.

" 'Tis for me to cheer you chaps !" he shouted.

Then he joined them, and the watching woman, who felt she could not thrust herself upon him at this moment, marked while the men began to pour down into the quarry. Soon only the old and women and children were left above. They gazed upon a new world as the dust-clouds slowly thinned away. The ' Grey Abbey ' seams had vanished under a million tons of earth. Perhaps no living eye would ever look upon them again.

CHAPTER XXVI

CHANGE

THE colossal character of the landslip could not be appreciated in a moment. The workers now entered upon a new quarry wherein familiar landmarks, the centres of attack, the tramways, aerial ways and familiar paths upon the cliffs were all swept away. A new cliff now rose upon the north side of the pit—a stark, unweathered precipice of stone towered aloft nakedly, while about its feet, like raiment shed from the body of a Titan, the huddled masses of the moraines oozed out into great hills. The fall had filled the green tarn at the bottom of the quarry, had extended in a billow half across the bottom of the pit and crushed the trestle bridge, had thinned away in débris of huge blocks that fell not ten yards distant from the quarrymen's dinner-house. Seen closely, the great new mounds glistened with moisture. Masses of rock thrust out of them, and here planes of stone gleamed red where iron had stained them, and here the blocks shone with quartz crystals and flashed with broken runs of silver-lead. For the most part the cliffs had fallen perpendicularly, and the sides of the enlarged cup towered stark and naked from the slopes of the new moraine. They were firm enough, but farther east the ground was doubtful still, and the explorers, perceiving the fact, kept clear of that corner.

A spirit awakened in the younger men—a spirit of adventure. It arose from the fact that in some degree all minds were eased by Hawkey's attitude. Feeling assurance, wordless but actual, that such a man would not have lighted his pipe and looked cheerful without reasons hidden from them, the quarriers, relieved from supreme fear, found their hearts sufficiently sanguine to take interest in the lesser matter of this physical wonder, now that the greater dread of what it might stand for was lessened. They swarmed upon the region piled in fantastic disorder before them; they explored

the novel configuration of the quarry, and while Tonkin and Keat, with the foreman, Nanjulian, and Tom Hawkey himself, moved from place to place, examined the nature of the fallen blocks and estimated what value attached to the stone that was visible, others scaled the moraine and endeavoured to judge of the quality of the slate revealed in the cliff faces above it. Less responsible men hunted over the débris, searched the clefts and cavities and crumpled corners of this mighty garment the earth had cast down, and sought for mementoes and curiosities that should for ever record the day.

It was not difficult to find interesting things. Tons of quartz of good water had been broken out and masses of fair crystals, built through vanished ages in the dark workshops of the Mother, were now sparkling in daylight for the first time. Fair cubes and pyramids of transparent gems, clustering on matrix of rock, now broke the sunshine in their virgin prisms; and some were stained with fairy colours of amethyst and topaz, some were auburn and russet, and some diamond-bright and pure. Varied specimens of many minerals had also been broken out of their secret places, and unusual masses of silver-lead flashed like points of fire where their implicated system of polished planes caught the sun. And other treasures there were, for the tombs of living things from the remote ages of geological time had opened and the impress of their vanished bodies was revealed. No great fossils appeared, but a familiar object from these measures might now be seen. Often, when splitting the slate, men came across the dark silhouettes of creatures they called 'butterflies.' These in reality were not winged things, but fossil shells of *spirifer verneuli* from the Upper Devonian age. Now not a few fine specimens of this venerable treasure appeared on the nude rocks, and many other strange objects also rewarded the searchers.

A thousand tons of rotten cliff slipped suddenly at the east end, where danger still threatened; then the great fall was ended.

Until dusk men still wandered through the quarry, and the boys went skylarking hither and thither. But then fell peace at the last, darkness spread its wing, and night's purple wine filled the great cup under a starry sky. Yet whispers of sound never ceased, and through that night was heard the continual rustle and murmur of the moraine and the sound of earth

settling to the new conditions of its tremendous displacement. Its groans had dwindled to a whisper now—a sigh, as of some gigantic spirit sinking again into rest after such torment as only a world can suffer and survive.

Hawkey left the quarries when he had spent a couple of hours in them, and, as he reached that point beside the ascending tram-lines where the Retallacks' cottage stood, he found Grandfather Nute waiting for him.

“ I marked your coming and waited to catch you, Mister Tom. Will you step in for a minute, or maybe you can't spare time ? ”

“ I'll come, grandfather. But only for a minute. I want to write the day's work for the company while it's all fresh in my mind. How's Wil taken it ? ”

“ He hasn't taken it,” answered Mr. Nute. “ The quarry's a thing of the past to him. He didn't even want to look out of the window. The Lord's blocked his thinking parts. A great act of mercy. He heard the noise and thought it was the sea.”

“ It sounded like the sea more than anything.”

“ Yes, fay—like a storm at sea. And he's more wishful now for the sight of the sea than anything. ‘ Talk about the sea,’ he says. He's all right, so to speak—just fading away easy and nothing on his mind—that's the best of it. Full of plans for a jaunt to Trebarwith, and asked me, half an hour after the fall, if I'd step over to Richard Male and hire his trap for this day week ! ”

Hawkey went in for a little while, and found Edith and Pooley with Mr. Retallack. Wilberforce declared himself much better, but his mind was emptied of all present affairs.

“ The sea's been calling me, Mister Tom, and such calls did ought to be answered. Properly roaring it have been—the noise when i' shouts a question to the land and the land shouts back an answer. The zawns and holes of the cliffs are full of strange voices when the sea runs into them, but we don't know what they are saying, because we can't tell their language. I hope you'll come pleasuring with us presently when I'm on my feet again; for such a clever man as you might even understand the sea.”

“ I'll come with pleasure,” declared Hawkey. “ And it

won't be the first time. I remember a good bit of fun there years and years ago. Edith, a little maid then, got up the cliff after wild flowers and I had to help her down."

Edith smiled a somewhat sickly smile. Her father's failing intellect embarrassed her when others were present and nearly broke her heart when she was alone with him. She felt that he was gone and would never say 'good-bye.' A strange new father had taken his place—a father who remembered her well enough, but only as a little child, before she could remember him.

She went out with Hawkey presently and walked as far as his home with him. She felt that she must praise him and show him that she had sense and wit to appreciate him when the cliffs fell.

"You were fine," she said abruptly after they had spoken of Wilberforce and Anna. "You were fine, Tom—standing there with everybody staring and wanting to know how you felt about it. A splendid thing to do—I knew how splendid if none else did."

He laughed.

"I felt somehow the boys were all looking at me."

"Of course they were."

"Did it look rather weak-minded, lighting my pipe? I couldn't think of just the right thing; but I wanted them to see I wasn't knocked out."

"Splendid, I tell you. You should have heard them. It's wonderful how they trust you—at least not wonderful, but fine."

He was moved by her enthusiasm.

"Thank you, Edith," he said. "Praise from you is worth having."

She asked him his real opinion, and he declared that he felt sanguine.

"Changes must come in the quarries," he said. "And this is a very good time for them. When people are shaken up out of the old ruts by chance or accident, that's the moment to lead them into new paths. Our heads are progressive, but our hearts are reactionary; our heads stand for advance and brave adventure and the march to the unknown; our hearts hang back with the women and children. One can't speak certainly; but, making all fair allowance, we've a right

to be hopeful. Things look as if they were going to adjust themselves without a very great clash of interests. But far-reaching changes are ahead and cannot be escaped."

"Father, before he fell ill, told us that it was likely we should have to go."

Hawkey nodded.

"I never mentioned it to him; but he guessed it himself. Many cottages used to stand alongside yours—a regular little colony under the lip of the quarry; but the others have vanished and the knoll and the trees will come down in the autumn—and then——"

She understood.

"Father knew it as soon as he found out the fall was coming. He told grandfather and me, but not mother. I know what you mean: things have to adjust themselves and change is everywhere."

"Yes; you stand on good slate, and presently that slate has got to be tackled from above and below. Don't mention it to your mother yet, however. She's sad enough for the minute."

"When father dies she'll want to go."

"Yes—it will be easy then, I hope."

The thought none the less overwhelmed Edith, though she had known that, in any case, Quarry Cottage must be her own home but little longer. She left him, returned pensively to the place where she was born and looked down upon it. Dimly, as a child, she recollected the other cottages which had vanished before the need for the good slate on which they stood; and now she saw how the nest on the cliff where she and her brothers and sister were born would soon be swept bare—the garden destroyed, the house pulled down.

Her father had hinted at the probability and many others had contemplated it; but their tact prevented any mention of the matter before members of Retallack's family.

Now he was about to pass, and it seemed natural that the change should follow. She regarded the familiar scene and mourned for her mother. Anna loved her home and was responsible for a thousand little improvements and additions. The garden was Edith's creation, and she had filled it with flowers. She pictured the knoll and the trees that crowned

her home all gone; and perceived how forlornly the little dwelling would then perch on the naked cliff. And at last she imagined the scene when her home had vanished and the whitewashed walls and green things were all stripped away to the slate on which they stood.

Change, that had seemed no more than an abstract idea in Hawkey's mouth, now grew into an intense reality. She saddened at the thought, yet found time to rejoice that her father would never be called upon to endure it.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE PROBLEM

WITHIN a month Wilberforce Retallack perished with his reason still clouded. He died planning little holidays for his children.

In the quarries the workmen were hard at work at 'Wesley's Hole'; but some wrought upon the great new moraines, where certain masses of marketable slate proved to be within reach. Other gangs attacked the knoll and cut down the trees upon it; but Hawkey allowed sentiment to delay this matter until his foreman had departed.

For the benefit of Delabole, pronouncement had been made that the quarries would continue to be worked for twelve months certainly; while after that period circumstances would dictate policy.

Many persons attended the funeral of Wilberforce Retallack, and Anna was rendered at once gratified and uneasy by the number of letters from humble folk recording sympathy and registering obligation in the past. She felt proud that so many loved the dead man's name; she was anxious when she thought upon the number and nature of his secret benefactions.

Etiquette demanded no consideration of her position until after her husband's funeral; then, when the ceremony was ended, when Anna and her children had seen the coffin of Wilberforce lowered into his grave at St. Teath, while the west wind blew fiercely and a storm-thrush shouted from the swaying elms above, the party returned home with Wesley Bake. They drove, as the way was long, but he chose to walk with his own people. Mary and Betty each held a hand of her uncle, and the latter was downcast because her little gift of flowers had not been buried with the dead man.

"The flowers on a grave soon quail and look horrid," she

said; "but if they go in the grave on the coffin, the fairies tend 'em and keep 'em sweet and fresh under the earth."

Nancy Bake and her daughter-in-law, Susan, admired the funeral.

"A hugeous crowd and all properly sad," said Wesley's mother. "And Mister Tom stood for the directors, and Tonkin stood for the men, and the heads of departments was pall-bearers. And black suits Edith something wonderful. But pale as a lily she was and the tears would fall."

"What do they murfles* mean on a girl's face?" asked Susan.

"I can't tell 'e. 'Tis a delicacy of the skin and no blemish but an adornment to some eyes. Mrs. Nanjulian haven't wasted no time seemingly. Did you mark her?"

Wesley left his family at Newall and proceeded to Delabole. He greatly desired the day to end, for painful duties awaited him and he knew that he was called to bring disappointment on many hearts.

They made him drink a glass of sherry when he arrived. And then the parlour blinds were pulled up and a fire lighted. The parlour was the proper place in which to hear the will, and to the parlour, therefore, they went. A lawyer's clerk was present and Wesley brought his papers also.

When the family had settled round the room the clerk read the will, which was trivial but not very brief. Wilberforce had set aside the sum of one hundred pounds for bequests, and since these mementoes of him were individually small, in some cases being no more than ten shillings, the reading of them offered opportunity for patience and self-control. The list appeared interminable, and Anna, whose indignation grew steadily, was not a little relieved when the lawyer informed her of the total amount. For the rest everything was left to her. The young man then withdrew and Wesley made his statement.

Before he did so, however, Anna spoke.

"Don't beat about the bush," she said. "I've stood enough to-day, and I only want to know how much it is and what I can count upon. Thank God there's a bit and to spare, and only me and grandfather to be considered. What does my dear husband owe and what has he left? That's just

* *Murfles*—freckles.

plain question and answer, Wesley. From what I could pick up of a night before he was struck, I made out that there was somewhere about five hundred to the bad and two thousand or more to the good. I hope it's better and can't think it's worse."

"It's a lot worse, mother," answered Wesley, "and it's the saddest hour of my life to have to tell you. Poor Mr. Retallack was the unluckiest man that ever lived—always casting his bread upon the waters and never seeing it return."

"You may cast your own bread where you please; but you've no right to play with your children's bread," she said. "He never would have done that."

"He had his ideas. He felt that he'd given his children their share and more in education."

"What about me, then? Didn't I scrimp for the schooling? If he made the money, 'twas I saved it."

The others sat quite silently listening.

"He was very unfortunate in his investments," repeated Wesley, "as well as in his little loans and so on. He lost a lot like that, being too willing to credit other men with his own honesty. Here are the figures in round numbers. He owes just short of a thousand pounds and he's worth two thousand and fifty. That leaves a thousand and fifty; but, of course, there's Widow Lobb, whose husband lent Mr. Retallack a thousand backalong."

"Gave it to him, not 'lent' it," said Edith. "We're all perfectly clear about that, aren't we, mother?"

"Perfectly clear," said Anna. "That was all cut and dried long before Lobb went under. What do you say, father?"

"I can't speak upon the subject," answered Grandfather Nute. "What Wesley says has took my breath. I gave up all, having no use for money, and making it over to my son-in-law in exchange for a home and food and no earthly cares. Before we go further, perhaps you'll tell me what line he took about me, Wesley? I don't want to be pushing, but there's my future as long as God wills to spare me."

"He never mentioned your name, Grandfather. I didn't know anything about your arrangements with him."

"I only asked. Go on, then, with the argument," said the old man. He had grown pale. Julitta took his hand.

Wesley became nervous. Anxious eyes regarded him on every side.

“ You don't say what you understood about the thousand pounds from Mr. Lobb, father.”

“ I don't know anything about it, Anna,” answered Mr. Nute. “ It didn't concern me, and I can't say I ever gave it a thought.”

“ I told you years ago it was given and the debt relinquished,” declared his daughter.

“ Very like, very like, my dear.”

“ I don't see it so,” answered the Trustee. “ Mr. Retalack was always very vague upon it. I grant you that in his opinion it wasn't a call against the estate, and since there are no papers or anything one way or the other, it may be that he'd got to think it was all right.”

“ If he thought so, it was your place to think so too,” said Ned. “ It looks to me as if you were doubting my father and——”

“ Be quiet, Ned, please, and let Wesley go on.”

Anna spoke, and the youth was silent.

“ Well, God forbid that I should doubt the best man I ever met,” answered Bake. “ But he put his trust in me to do all that was right, and I must do it. Feeling that he was far from himself latterly, I tried to clear the thing up, but he was a weary man and we never got through with it. So long as he was clear in his mind I grant we couldn't see alike, and two days before he died I went to Widow Lobb. It wasn't the first time I went. I'd been before and found her very clear about the matter. Her words were—the first time——”

He broke off and took a paper from his pocket.

“ I put them down so as I couldn't make any mistake at all. She said, ‘ I shan't ever raise the question, being far too proud and too tender for my husband's memory. And if Retalack doesn't let me have the money, then I shall go without it.’ ‘ What's your own honest feeling ?’ I asked Mrs. Lobb; and she said, ‘ My own honest feeling is that it was a loan, and that my husband let it go at that for Mr. Retalack to pay back just when he pleased. My husband was prospering then and thought the world of Wilberforce. And after, when we came down in the world, I often named it; but he said, ‘ Wil knows and he'll do the right thing.’” Then I asked

Mrs. Lobb if she had any papers or documents about it, and she said she had not. That's how it was the first time I went to her."

"And what did my husband say when he heard tell?" inquired Anna.

"It vexed him a great deal and he was for going to Mrs. Lobb. But just then all the trouble in the quarries began, and, though I reminded him, he never went. It was a great grief to me to keep on about it, seeing he was so restive under it. But there it was: he'd made me his trustee, and his life, as well he knew, was growing terrible uncertain. At last I feared to touch the subject at all, for it made him go red and his veins show. 'Do justice and fear nothing, and for Christ's sake never name it to me no more.' That was the very last word he spoke about it."

"Then you went to Mrs. Lobb again?" asked Edith.

"I did. I went to tell her plainly and clearly that Mr. Retallack, though he had nothing in writing, yet could not see with hereyes and was under the impression that the matter had ended in her husband's lifetime. And she said, 'Then let it be so. I didn't expect that from him; but I'll say no more.'"

"She took my husband's word, and never lived man or woman who didn't," declared Anna. "So we needn't say no more about it."

"Your husband was a sick man and sore troubled. And there's a great deal more must be said," replied the other firmly. "I'm terribly concerned for my part in this; but he chose me for straightness and for trust."

"What did he say about your second visit to Widow Lobb?" asked Grandfather.

"He never knew of it. I went to her the second time two days before Mr. Retallack had his stroke, and he couldn't talk sense after that, or understand."

"And when you speak of your part in this, what do you mean?" inquired Ned.

"I mean the memory of the last word your father ever spoke about it, Ned. 'Do justice and fear nothing.' That was what he ordered me."

"And can there be two questions about justice?" asked Edith. "Can you see this with any other eyes than ours?"

Her lover stared.

“Surely not, Edith. I never thought—I never dreamed for a minute we should see different. It’s a cruel disappointment for your mother, and for all of you; but there’s a bigger thing than money. The future is all right, because there’s my home and Nanjulian’s home, and I know what he thinks, and what Julitta thinks. But the present is very sad. I’m only thankful, however, that the main thing is gained and the cost will come to little when it’s spread over those willing to bear it.”

“And what do you call the main thing?” asked Ned. “And you needn’t go hinting at charity neither. We don’t want you or Nanjulian, or anybody else, to come between us and our mother. What do you call the main thing?”

There was hostility on Edith’s face also, and Wesley began to grow unnerved. He was hot, and he mopped his forehead and stammered as he answered Ned.

“The main thing, Ned, is your father’s memory. That’s the sacred thing about which there can’t surely be more views than one. And if I said anything rude about the future, and what I felt and meant to do about it, then I’m sorry. This is a terrible position for me, because I was called to it at your father’s will. But I can’t go back on the trust he put in me. I thought you’d all see that. If you all see different——”

“Tell us exactly your view and what you think ought to be done,” said Edith; “then we’ll tell you our view and what is going to be done.”

She spoke very coolly, but she hurt him much. He was silent and recovered his self-command. While he hesitated Mr. Nute spoke.

“You mustn’t put it like that, Edith. Mr. Bake will decide, not us. He’s the Trustee and all-powerful by your father’s will and command.”

“We must talk till we agree, then,” said Ned. “If he knows our father’s intentions better than we do and has a properer sense of justice than mother and Pooley, then I’ll agree with him.”

“You ask what my view is, Edith,” began Wesley—“and I—I hope Mr. Nute won’t call me ‘Mr. Bake’ as if I was a stranger. I took for granted that my view must be yours too. The sorrow was that, along of his infirmities and troubles, Wilberforce Retallack couldn’t quite see. And that I put

down to illness. But I'm bold to believe all you people must see that the debt should be paid."

"It's not a debt," cried Anna. "How dare you say it's a debt when I proved to my husband time and again it was not? 'Twas only his brain-sickness ever made him name the thing to you at all, and if you was half so clever, or honest, as you think, you'd have seen it was all nonsense and set his mind at ease, instead of fussing and fretting him and shortening his days. It's not a debt and I'll hear no more about it. Forty pounds a year is all he's left me, and that's all I want to know—and God forgive him."

"It's either a debt, or else it's not," said Edith; "and if we, his family, tell you clearly that it is not, I hope you'll get back your peace of mind about it and leave us to face the bitter truth. I'll ask you to go now, Wesley, if you please."

The man regarded them with deep distress. Julitta strove to comfort her mother, who was weeping; Edith and Pooley spoke together and were arguing without any further reference to Wesley Bake. The miller judged the size of their shock, but felt bewildered by their attitude to him. It was indeed the first time that he perceived the possibility of two opinions. Something akin to dismay overtook him. He had lived so long with the problem and exhausted it so completely that he failed to realize how it struck on the ear of Anna Retallack and her children for the first time. He had planned the future and busied himself for them. Lacking imagination, he had not guessed that his plans would fail to commend themselves to the dead man's family. It looked so easy and proper for Mrs. Retallack to come and live at Newhall Mill and for Mr. Nute to join the Nanjulians. But he never got as far as these proposals; he was conscious that he had committed a social outrage in the eyes of Edith and her mother. Ned, too, shared their opinion, and he could not be sure that Pooley and Julitta did not also.

Grandfather came to his rescue.

"You'll do wisely to trot off, Wesley, my dear. You've fired a bit of a bombshell into the camp, you understand. You'd better let us turn it over carefully among ourselves and look at it in all its bearings. It was rather a big thing to be thrown on your shoulders, and I dare say, with more experience, you'd have done it cleverer. But nobody's doubting

your good sense—don't think that. Only, perhaps, your judgment may be found faulty. You get home and think it over, and so will we. You're young and can't, of course, see how this looks from my daughter's point of view and from mine. We're quite as hot for justice, however, as you are. And one thing I may say to open your eyes. We need not trouble ourselves about a dead man's honour. The dead are in the hand of God, and you may be very sure their Creator won't let them be misread and misjudged. Nobody doubts Wilberforce's high sense of honour, though his heart may sometimes have fogged his judgment. I say even that under correction, for God's scales weigh different from man's. Our chaff be often his grain, remember. But my son-in-law's character and credit are quite safe with us—understand that. And be sure we shan't say a word about you to your back we wouldn't say to your face, after you're gone."

Bake rose.

"I can't say what I feel about this," he assured them. "I'm much put about. I'll go through it all again from the beginning. It isn't as if Mrs. Lobb wasn't a woman of good character and——"

"Would she agree not to make a claim if she knew she had the right? Answer that," said Anna.

"She waives the right. She hasn't a shadow of doubt about it—more have I."

"Then best begone till you come to your senses," cried Ned hotly. "Good God, you make me want to smash things! My mother left with only a thousand pounds in the world, and you get hold of some crack-brained rot about debts that don't exist and never did. Why did you wait till father was dead? Why didn't you have it out with him and hear what he wished to be done?"

"I did that, Ned. I've told you. I went into it till he bade me leave it alone."

"Then why don't you leave it alone?" asked Edith. "He honoured you by making you his trustee, and then you insult his memory the minute the grave's closed over him."

"Don't—don't for Christ's sake say such things," implored Wesley. "'Tis cruel and long ways off justice."

"You go," urged Grandfather. "You be off, my son. We've reached a temper where nothing but lasting trouble may

rise if you stop any longer. We're all arguing in a circle, and that's a vain thing. You clear out and take it to the throne of Grace; and so shall we. 'Tis very well and right to pray that the Lord's will be done; but it's our business to help to do it—all of us. And the first thing is for each to find out on his knees, or on her knees, what the Lord's will is. And so enough said."

"I'll go," answered the miller. "I'll certainly go, and I'll turn it all over again; and if I've been wrong, I've been punished for it to-day. Never did I think to live through such a wisht bad hour as this; and I hope you'll all try to see from my side a bit and feel what I've been through."

"You needn't be sorry for yourself," said Edith. "It's for you to look at it with your eyes open and not shut. And the sooner you do, the better for your peace of mind."

Her cold voice struck him dumb. He felt that he was struggling through a nightmare. But Edith's tone stung him into a final word which only angered them when he had gone.

"Open your own eyes and keep a guard on your tongue," he said to her quietly. "It is you, not me, that's blinded. You've said many unjust and improper things to me to-day, Edith, and, but that you're smarting under your mother's great loss, I'd answer you as you ought to be answered. I forgive you for your unkind words and thoughts; but be very sure they won't come between me and my duty."

He gathered up his papers and left them then, and he heard their voices clashing when he had gone. His resolute bearing lasted only until he was on his way home again. Then his head sank and his feet grew irresolute. He began to fear that he had dreadfully erred, and he was also alarmed for himself. He had never seen Edith in such a mood. His wave of anger vanished long before he reached his home and something very like fear knocked at his ribs.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WOMAN PROPOSES

GRANDFATHER Nute on his way to Delabole fell in with Betty Bake. The children were in the schoolyard for the moment, between classes, and Betty, observing her greatest friend, promptly got over the wall and kissed him.

"Well, my dinky maid," he said—"haven't seen you for a month of Sundays, I'm sure. And how have you been keeping—good, I hope?"

"Not so good as you'd like," she confessed. "I'm a bit too busy to be good, dear Grandfather. There's such a lot doing."

"How's that, then?" he asked.

"Why, everything interesting be bad, seemingly. You can't do anything interesting without dirtying yourself. You can't even catch tom-toddies* without dirtying yourself. And why do it matter such a lot to other people, and why for shouldn't I go dirty if I like to be dirty? If you was in a muck all day, nobody would say anything."

"But cleanliness is next to godliness, you know, Betty."

"I don't call myself 'Betty' no more, dear Grandfather Nute. I call myself 'devil-angel' now."

"Why?" he asked.

"Because sometimes they call me one and sometimes t'other—just according as they feel."

"Just according as you do, more like."

"I always do much the same. 'Tis them that change, not me. I be often properly sorry God made me a girl. There's a great many better things than being a girl."

"Being a boy, perhaps?"

"No! Even a girl's better than a boy. She's prettier, and nicer, and she's cleverer most times. Stupid, noisy toads, boys be. If I could be made again and choose for

* *Tom-toddies*—tadpoles.

myself, I'd be one of two things—a larch-tree, or a cris-hawk. If God promised that nobody should cut me down, I'd be a larch-tree, and if He promised that nobody should shoot me, I'd be a cris-hawk, for they're both beautiful things—only they've got such enemies."

"Well, you must make the best of it, my pretty. Perhaps you'll live to see that God was right, as usual."

"He ain't always right," she said, "else Uncle Wesley wouldn't be so properly sorry for himself. He don't know what to be at, seemingly. I believe he's found out Aunt Edith's no good and feels fairly mad that another chap's got Aunt Julitta now 'tis too late."

"You oughtn't to say things like that, Betty. I hope all will come right with your Uncle Wesley soon. 'Tis the point of view, and often very sensible and right-thinking people can't see the same about a thing. Sometimes sorrow blinds our judgment. Its very sad for us all to think that Mr. Wilberforce has gone."

"He used to make a noise in his chest like a kettle boiling," said Betty, "and it was very hard not to laugh, and I'm glad he's dead."

Grandfather Nute reproved her.

"You oughtn't to feel like that," he declared; "we Christians are taught to bear one another's burdens, Betty, and mourn with the afflicted."

"It's a great job to be sorry for people—especially if you're told to be," she answered. "When people are so fearful sorry for themselves, I never can be sorry for them, somehow. Anyway, it's terrible tiring trying to be."

He shook his head as the school-bell rang and she had to leave him.

"I'll be cruel sorry and cry buckets when you're took, dear, dear Grandfather Nute," she promised him, and he thanked her humbly and went on his way.

Chance led him to the scene of an accident and his opinions made it necessary for the ancient to utter further remonstrance—this time to a grown man. But Grandfather's usual tact failed. Indeed of late even his steadfast mind and assured outlook upon affairs had been put to very severe trial. His sleep had been disturbed and he had been reminded that he was getting old. That he might talk to sympathetic and

understanding listeners, he was now about to visit the Sleeps, and he had reason to believe that John Sleep was from home. This would insure private speech with Sarah—the thing he desired. For she, in his opinion, possessed the quickest mind of the village and had the happiest tongue to express her meaning and the readiest wit to understand another's.

Accident, however, delayed Grandfather's arrival at the newspaper-shop. Opposite the house which Antipas Keat was lifting with his own hand a little crowd had assembled. People ran to join it, and loud voices were lifted issuing orders that none obeyed. From time to time a groan punctuated the noise. Mr. Nute approached, and lesser people made way for him. He found Antipas Keat stretched upon the ground, and his wife was kneeling beside him. The baker had turned very white and evidently suffered great pain. Engaged in some complicated task aloft, he had slipped his foothold, or handhold, and fallen from the scaffolding to the ground. So he declared; but subsequent examination showed that it was his own scaffolding that had failed him and given way beneath his weight.

His leg was broken above the ankle and he declined to be moved until the doctor came.

"Give him air," said Mr. Nute, "and go back about your business. And you run and fetch a cushion for his head, Mrs. Keat; and you'd best to bring an umbrella also, because it's going to rain."

They obeyed him and, after Antipas had again refused to be moved, the people thinned away and his wife returned to their home that she might bring cushions, a rug and an umbrella.

"Tell 'em all to go and you bide," said Antipas. "They ain't here for kindness—only because a martyred man is a free show and they like to hear me groan."

Grandfather sat down on an upturned bucket and patted Mr. Keat's shoulder.

"Don't you say things you'll be sorry for when you're on your legs again, my dear. 'Tis a great shock and a great reminder that all flesh is grass, when we break the frame same as you have; but naught's gained by temper. The people meant well—only ignorance always comes out in an accident, and, of course, well-meaning's powerless before a broken leg."

"Not my fault, however, and you needn't think that I'll

stop building my house for fifty broken legs," said Mr. Keat with defiance. "I'll rise above it and I'll finish the damned house if I've only got a finger left to do it with."

"I'm sorry you feel like that," answered Grandfather, "because it's a wrong spirit and won't help you. As I've always said, Antipas, the man who thinks that he can do every job beside his own is giving way to the sin of vainglory. A house is a very complicated invention, and though for a baker to set about to build one may show him a brave thinker and a hero in some eyes, I've always told you there's a limit, and you can't do skilled work properly if you ain't skilled. This is a warning, and the third you've had, if I remember rightly. You're trying to do what it would take ten men to do, and it's contrary to nature to find an architect and a navy and a bricklayer and a bricklayer's labourer, and a carpenter and plumber and glazier and slater, and all the rest of them house-building people, in the skin of one man—and him a baker. And nature will have the last word, and so you've tumbled down and broke your leg. And, instead of breathing out threatenings and slaughters, you ought to thank God you didn't fall into the lime-pit and burn the flesh off your bones."

"Go!" cried Keat. "Damn you, go! Get up off my bucket and clear out. And whatever else you may have lost, you've lost your character and sense and Christian charity along with it. For an old mumphead like you to preach to a man like me! What do I care for my leg? When I took on building a house, d'you think I didn't count the cost? You go and play your silly flute and see if you can keep your bones out of the workhouse with it, for that's where you're bound by all accounts. I scorn you!"

Antipas was much annoyed, and turned to his wife and a neighbour woman who came with comforts for him.

"'Vainglorious'—that's what I am. Not the most remarkable man that ever came out of Delabole, or ever will, but just a vainglorious fool that deserved to break his neck instead of his leg. That's old Nute's opinion, and he chooses this minute to tell me so—and him a man not worthy to black my boots!"

Mrs. Keat turned on Grandfather at these words.

She also was rude and personal. There flew rumour that

Grandfather would soon have to appeal to the nation to support him, and Mrs. Keat assumed this disaster as an accomplished fact.

All he could say was:

“ I forgive you; I forgive you both. You’ll live to be sorry—you’ll live to apologize to me.”

Then he hurried away and was thankful to see the doctor’s trap approach as he departed. He took the news to Sarah Sleep, who sent her niece, Jane, out on an errand upon Grandfather’s arrival and entertained him alone in the little dwelling-room behind the shop.

“ My brother’s to Launceston to-day, so we can have a tell if you mind to,” she said.

“ For that very reason I’m here,” he answered. “ There’s times when the wisest of us feel the need of understanding and helpful words. There’s things that only God can say to the heart, Sarah, and He never fails to say them when needful; and there’s things our fellow-creatures can say to us; and when God knows it’s a case for our own kind and not for Him, then He leads us where we ought to go and turns our feet accordingly. And so it is.”

Somewhat fluttered that Supreme Power had guided her friend to her, Sarah made him take her brother’s easy chair. Then she offered to light the fire.

“ We still have it of an evening, but have left it off by day,” she said.

“ And right to. I’m warm enough, I assure you. I’ve just heard a broken man speak very strong, not to say harsh, words. Keat have come to grief once again, and he’s taking his trouble in the wrong spirit.”

“ So I hear—broke his leg trying to do other people’s work.”

“ It’s Communion Sunday next week, so we shall have our minister here, and he’ll steady the poor creature, I hope,” answered Mr. Nute. “ I threw myself into Keat’s affairs and showed him that he was trying to get a quart out of a pint pot; but I hurt his feelings and I’m sorry I spoke. It wasn’t a time to draw a moral.”

“ You did what was right and said what was right—I’m very sure of that,” she answered. “ I don’t like Antipas Keat—he’s too windy and too vain and won’t take a lesson. Some fine day, instead of falling off his house, his blessed house will

fall on him—then 'twill be too late to be sorry. And if he was rude to you, may God forgive him, for I won't."

"He'll soon regret it. I shall go in presently—this day week, perhaps—and count to hear the man contrite."

"As if you hadn't enough on your mind," continued Sarah. "Of course we hear tell through Philippa, who gets it all from Ned. We're a lot troubled for you and yours, James Nute."

Grandfather reviewed the situation placidly.

"A very sad come-along-of-it," he admitted. "You see, most times, in the clash of opinions, you feel one side's right and one mistaken; and then you take one side accordingly and cleave to it. But this is the terrible rare case where even a man of my great experience can't quite see surely which side is in the right."

"I don't care a button about right or wrong," she answered. "All I want to know is who's looking after your future and your fame and dignity. All Delabole ought to rush to the rescue of such a man as you, in my opinion."

"Very kind of you to say that, and just what I'd expect from you, Sarah," he answered; "but let me flow on. I want to put it before you—and before myself, for that matter, because if you tell a thing out loud, you'll sometimes see a new point of view that you missed when you only thought it. The case stands thus: we're a house divided against itself. My daughter, Anna, and her son, Ned, and her daughter, Edith, take one view."

"Against Wesley Bake, of course?"

"They do, and Wesley being betrothed to marry Edith, naturally makes the situation very painful. They think that he ought to abandon the position that the estate owes Jane Lobb a thousand pounds, and they go further and declare it's a monstrous maggot got in his brain that he should imagine such a thing."

"Ned is properly savage about it, and he says if Mr. Bake persists, he'll have forty shillings or a month out of him. And I'm the same way of thinking. Surely to God a man can't take all her money from his future mother-in-law?"

"Wait a minute, Sarah. You're begging the question, my dear—a common thing in argument, but fatal to a proper understanding. You see, the whole point lies just there.

Anna and Edith and Ned say the money is my daughter's; but Wesley Bake, with just as much show of right, declares that it is not."

"And what do the rest say—you and Pooley and Mrs. Nanjulian?"

"Julitta and myself are of a mind. We quite see the miller's point of view, and so does Sidney Nanjulian. We hold that Jane Lobb and Anna ought to come together and try to find a middle course—peace with honour, in fact; but Bake says that he fears it's a case where honour can't mean peace. He's up for the good name of the dead."

"Like his cheek! Everybody knows that Wilberforce Retallack was all he should be."

"Most certainly—a fore-right man in speech and action. And in thought also, no doubt; for them who think straight don't speak crooked. But there it is—just life. Life's the tempter. Life too often shakes our outlook and draws the straightest of us from our steady purpose. Life plunges us into puzzles beyond our power to solve, and suddenly runs us up against problems of conduct where our right course goes twisting through such a maze that the most honourable man may lose his way—through no lack of goodness, but just from simple lack of wits. Retallack fell upon much bad fortune, and his health bore heavy upon him also; and a man in that case must be frankly and freely pardoned if sometimes his way got lost in a fog. Dying, he left his honour in the hand of Wesley Bake."

"And why should Bake's be the only opinion of any worth? Isn't your daughter quite so jealous for her husband's honour as him?"

"Most certainly; but there, again, she's got to face poverty and charity—a nasty pair—quite outside the experience of the Nute family. And afore the threat of such a fate, any woman's judgment may well waver."

"And what has Pooley to say?"

"Pooley, according to his good rule, prayed over it and asked for light. And now he's got it, and he's gone over to Bake and says there's no question about the matter. Widow Lobb must have the thousand, in his opinion. He even feels a doubt if she ought not to have interest likewise. I argued him out of that; because interest was never put up or

required from the day of the loan. 'Loan,' I call it, but of course Anna and Edith won't hear the word.'

"And what does Jane Lobb say?"

"Nought. Just holds off. I wanted for her to discuss it and went over for that purpose. But she's got her pride and she refused to talk a word about the matter. 'I know what's right, Grandfather,' she said to me, 'and trusting in God as I do, I know right will be done.' More she wouldn't say."

"And what about you?" asked Sarah. "That's all that I think upon. Your daughter have got prosperous children to look after her. But what about you? As a friend I ask, and a good friend—you know that. You gave all your money to the Retallacks for your board and lodging and a home among your own. And where do you come in—thousand pounds or no thousand pounds?"

"I haven't thought about it, Sarah. I've always such a lot to think upon for other people, that in honesty I never get time to bother about myself. If a thing about myself crops up, I always say, 'I'll think about that to-night when I go to bed;' and then of course I go to sleep instead. And if more of us went to bed and to sleep instead of thinking about ourselves, we'd be happier people."

"I know," answered Sarah. "It's very nice to go to sleep; but a time comes when you've got to wake up, and got to get up, and got to wash yourself and do your hair and go on living."

"And the Lord looks after the sparrows, Sarah."

"Just the very birds that can best look after themselves. You ain't a sparrow, and you haven't got the selfish, grasping, number one point of view of a sparrow."

"I'm not too old to take what comes. They who can't scheme must louster, and 'louster' is old Cornish for work."

"You're not too old to shine," she said, "but you are too old to work. For that matter, your life's all work. To shine be to work, and such an example as yours——"

"No, no—I like to hear you praise me, Sarah, for praise from such a praiseworthy creature as you is worth a lot. But 'tis only death that can put my light out—not what lies in store for me. I grant at first I kept awake a bit, and I may have wept an old man's painful tears, but it was just human weakness. Now I'm up for anything, and if my Master be

going to lead me to the Union Workhouse, I'll hold His hand firm and my footsteps shan't flinch. Didn't Christ preach to the spirits in prison? And if, in my small way, I be called to do the like and help a few old 'white-coats' to bear their lot with patience—well, 'tis a useful and beautiful thing to do."

"Drat the 'white-coats,' and you for talking such stuff! You don't go there, James Nute—not if——" She broke off and put her hand on his arm. Then she braced herself to a tremendous statement. "I wish to God you cared for me so much as I care for you!" she said.

"I care for you a lot. You're part of my regular life, and poor Wil used to chaff me sometimes on that score. D'you mind when, in a rash and boyish moment, uplifted by the Day, I played you awake with my flute on Christmas morning? I've often thought of the way you took it. Though full of sleep, your senses worked and you bade me run home and not catch my death of cold. I often thought of it. And don't you fret about me. I'm very well able to take care of myself, and if I ain't God is. This comes from heaven, remember—and once grant that, there's nothing left to vex me; because the things that come from heaven are never so bad as the things that come from earth. The blackest thundercloud you ever saw wasn't so black as the earth or sea spread under it. I am concerned for my daughter, because her pride is going to make the future a bit difficult; but I'm not in the least concerned for myself."

"Well, I've got my pride too," answered Sarah, "and there's some things a woman can't do unless she's the Queen, I believe. But I'm properly glad you care for me, and it's a compliment for any woman; and this I'll say, James, and as you value my sense, so turn it over. Don't put it off till you're dog-tired and going to sleep. Think of it when you're awake. And that is that the workhouse ain't the only house in the world, and God's not got any special wish to lead you there if you don't want to go."

He stared at her.

"'Tis one of the great blessings of age that we can say what we feel without lowering ourselves in sensible eyes," she continued, "and more I needn't say. A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse."

Still he was silent and she ran on.

“ If anybody had ever told me I should put it so clear to a person of the other sex, I should have laughed 'em to scorn; but when you're in easy sight of seventy, such things rise up to a higher level of thinking than that where the young and the middle-aged move.”

“ You're not in sight of seventy,” declared Grandfather, “ and 'tis straining your own humility to pretend it. You're a wonderful woman; and never so wonderful as to-day; and now I'm going. More, if more there is, will come from me. 'Tis a case, seemingly, of a man and a woman and the Lord. And the man is threescore years and ten, though he don't look it nor yet feel it; and the woman's in the little sixties, though we all know figures lie; and the Lord's—just the Lord. I've listened to you with a great deal of attention, Sarah, as I always do, for you handle a subject, great or small, with a nice, womanly touch. But now it's my turn, and I should be untrue to myself if I went on with it until I've turned it over. Because, God's my judge, I never thought of anything so out of the common. But upon one point I must correct you, Sarah. I dare say you'd think we have reached up to an age when such a point don't count. But it always counts, and in my view the ancient man who marries for a nurse is doing a doubtful thing. And how much more doubtful to change your state for a home! I'm old, but I'm a man still, and you're a woman. And if I was a hundred, I wouldn't marry a woman unless I loved her. Love there's got to be; and why not? Love between the likes of us would move on a very majestic height, above the understanding of the younger generations; but it would none the less be there. So we'll look in our hearts and let God throw His light in and see how it is.”

“ What do you think I spoke for?” she asked rather snappily.

“ That's hidden in your own heart,” he answered. “ I'm a modest man, and never set much value on my parts even in my prime. You never know what people speak for. They don't always know themselves. You may have spoke from respect, or just pity, or out of a warm woman's heart. Or you might have dreamed of me in the workhouse and felt that, as my lifelong friend, you'd sacrifice your former opinions to prevent it. For well we all know, Sarah, that you've kept single from

choice and not need. So we'll leave it there. Abraham ain't the only man that have found a ram caught in a thicket at a critical moment. I know that. And don't think I'm the sort to miss any blessing—once I'm sure it is a blessing. But we must satisfy ourselves that these likely looking things that come to our hands sometimes are put there by the Lord and not the—Good-bye, Sarah. You're a rare woman—one of the fine, fearless sort—too good for me, or any man."

"Good-bye—and don't you think no worse of me."

"I shall think of very little else but you, till we meet again," he said; "and I couldn't think better of you and I never shall think worse. But what I've got to do is to think all round you, and all round what you've said to me."

"Go to the Lord, of course," said Sarah; "but I needn't ask you to go to nobody else."

"Most certainly not," he promised. "The way your mind runs—like the wind!"

He left her, brisk, cheerful, alert, and she gazed doubtfully but tenderly after him. Her mind ran like the wind, as he had truly said.

"If it happened," she thought, "he'd be Wisdom in the chair for me and the sun on my darkest day. And I'd clear out of this, and let Jane keep house for John. And that would suit them both, because they don't like my busy ways so well as their easy ones. And then—and then——"

CHAPTER XXIX

TO THE SOUND OF THE MILL WHEEL

“Two rights can make wrong, then, it seems,” said Wesley Bake to Edith. “For you mean nothing but right, as you always do, and I mean nothing but right.”

They stood in the mill-house at Newhall. It was raining, and they had gone in there to escape a shower. Separated from them by a wall, the water-wheel revolved in dripping gloom where fronds of ferns trembled to the spout and flash of the stream; within, the place shook at the throb of the machinery above them. Every rafter and dim window was white with dust of corn.

“I’ll try again, then,” she answered him. “You can’t say I’m not patient about it. I know a thing looks different from different points; but I want to make you see what you’re doing, if I can.”

“You shouldn’t talk like that, Edith, I know what I’m doing—only I can’t show you and you people what I’m doing. It isn’t as if I was alone in my opinion, either. Pooley thinks the same.”

“I don’t want to hear any more about Pooley,” she answered. “Pooley’s a fanatic: once let an idea get into his head and no power of reason or argument will ever get it out again. You can leave him. He’s hopeless; but I don’t want to feel you’re hopeless, Wesley. You see that would be awfully serious for both of us.”

Her tone made him uneasy; but he lived in an atmosphere of uneasiness just now. The duty before him had turned him into a very miserable man, and he much desired to see with Edith’s eyes; but he could not. Justice, in his judgment, made it impossible for him to ignore the claim of Widow Lobb, and the fact that there was nothing in existence upon which that claim could be based, excepting the situation as reported to him by a

dead man, made him all the more sensitive. At first the view entertained by Anna Retallack and others of her family had astounded him; now he began to see that it was most reasonable. He also perceived the exceeding gravity of the situation from their standpoint; but with every desire and every inducement to meet them, his own instinct rebelled and his own obstinate view of justice to the dead, as well as the living, thrust him into direct opposition with those who were all the world to him now. His mother had striven with him and failed. In her opinion his line was very foolish and dangerous. Why must his view of necessity be the right one, and, in any case, was it worth while endangering his own future by crossing Edith in such a delicate matter? Nancy Bake asked her son that, and added another weight to his load, for until now, however it might end, he had not dreamed of the possibility that Edith could let the sequel come between their love. She was within her right to argue about it and take her mother's side; but that she should make it a personal thing and suffer it to obscure her love of him—the chance of that Wesley had not considered until his mother pointed it out. He protested and told her that she did not know Edith, and that such an idea had not occurred to her. But his mother feared otherwise, for she had noted a growing acrimony of late and a bitterness of tongue gaining upon the Retallacks. The problem reached an acute stage and further delay would soon be impossible.

He felt to-day, in the mill, that some sort of definite understanding must be reached, and he had proposals to make. They were clumsy and he knew it, yet he hoped that Edith would be reasonable and help him. Her own view he was now convinced that he could never share. It appeared to him unjust. Here was a definite claim on her father's estate, and it was idle to evade or ignore it. True, nothing existed upon which the claim could be enforced; but, on the other hand, nothing existed which could dissolve or disprove it. He marvelled that they did not see how Wilberforce Retallack's name was involved; while they on their side, resented his obstinacy and, above all, suffered exasperation from the fact that Wesley should suppose his own sense of rectitude superior to theirs. That her husband's honour was not held safe with her had rendered Anna very angry. Her face was turned from Wesley Bake and her heart had grown hard against him.

This fact Edith now reported to the miller. Then she spoke for herself.

"Mother's done with you," she said presently. "I'm sorry, but I'm not surprised. It's a bit of a shock, of course, to find you taking sides against us."

"Don't put it in that way, Edith."

"I'm here to talk straight and not to waste any more time. I should have thought it was as easy as a child's picture-book, myself. Anyway, you can reduce it to a very simple shape. There are two points of view about a question of fact. And one is Jane Lobb's and one is my mother's and mine. You're always harping about my father's honour. Well, that can take care of itself, and it's quite as safe with us as with you, if not safer. As a matter of fact his honour isn't in question, and, whatever happens, my dear dead father's honour is without spot. If those who talk of his honour were worthy to tend his grave! So you can leave his memory where it is—high in the esteem and admiration of every just and good man."

"But he said to me——"

"I know—I'm tired of hearing that. I don't doubt it. Dying men may in their weakness think to put things on the strong and well. But that matter was past and done, and only an ailing man with a sick mind would have gone back to it. The money was given to him by his uncle once for all, without provisions or obligations of any sort or kind. We know it—all of us—and if he'd left us ten thousand pounds instead of one thousand, we'd still be under no shadow of obligation to Jane Lobb."

"That's what you say; and she says that she never heard her husband speak of the money as a gift, but always as a debt."

"Then it's for you to decide if you believe a stranger, or your future wife and her mother. It makes me feel a bit hard and cruel to you, Wesley, that I should even have to put it so. But so it is, seemingly. So far as I can see, you are deliberately throwing us over and listening to her. It seems almost unthinkable. It makes me feel rather wicked."

"Keep calm and argue it out. Your mind is deeper and clearer than mine. Be patient with me. Granted there's your side and her side; but that's not all. I've got to remem-

ber your father's anxiety and doubt. He wasn't ill when first he named it. He was quite clear. He wanted my opinion. He couldn't be sure about it. He inclined, of course, to your mother's idea, that there was no obligation; but he'd found out that Jane Lobb was very uncertain in her mind, and so he got uncertain too."

"Leave father out," she said. "You're mad to keep on dragging in a dead man. I won't have it. Don't you see what a cowardly thing it is—what a senseless thing? This is a matter of live people, not dead ones. Here's my mother left with a bare fifty pounds a year, owing to dear father's difficulties and troubles. Well I can understand now why he was so sad and haunted with care of late years; well I can see why the old love of fun and jokes all died out of him. It wasn't his health; it was the grief of knowing that his long fight for mother had failed. But he left his little to her, and you are going to take it away."

"No, Edith, I won't hear that. You shan't say it. You've no right to put it so."

"I've every right to put it so, and every sane man, or woman, would put it so."

"I can't take away what you haven't got. If a man owes a thousand pounds, it has to be paid before you can talk about what he's got to leave to his family. You'll grant, I suppose, that I'm not taking this line for fun. Every beat of my heart goes against it. But when your father came to me, he said, 'I know you're straight—straight as a line, Wesley, and I know that, whatever happens, you'll see justice done.' That's why he came to me, and I'm not going to abuse my trust."

"Doesn't it ever occur to you that you may be abusing it? Your judgment is not the only judgment in the world; your idea of honour and justice may not be the same as that of other men quite as honest and much larger-minded and better educated than you are."

"I know it. But I'm not going to run about asking other men what they think. It's a fearful thing to be faced with this, and what's made it more fearful still is that you don't see it as I do. I always thought you would. Now you must listen to me, Edith. I'm going to do it, because I believe that it's my duty to do it. I've got complete power, and that money's going to Jane Lobb."

“Then——”

“Wait till I’ve finished. Now think how I might have got out of this. I might have treated you and your mother like children and done it without telling you, and bade Mrs. Lobb be quiet about it, and pretended that you had your father’s money. I might have paid her and then invested a thousand pounds of my own money for Mrs. Retallack, and none the wiser. But that would have been to insult you.”

“Yes, it would—an insult you’d have had to pay for. It’s insult enough even to think of it.”

“Not to think of it, and not to do it, if I come frankly and beg you to let me do it as a favour. Of course everything I’ve got in the world is yours—you know that—and it won’t be me giving your mother fifty pounds a year: it will be you giving it to her. And so you must feel it that way—that your father’s name is cleared of what I, rightly or wrongly, think would be a shadow on it, and you come forward and make it good to your mother. For God’s sake, don’t refuse that, Edith. I’ve worn out my wits thinking what to do, and that seems the only possible way.”

She stared at him. He put his arm round her, but she moved away from him.

“Do I hear you?” she said. “Is that a sort of thing to say to a proud woman? Is it a sort of thing to say to a decent woman? You talk of treating me and my mother like children; but what have I ever done—what has she ever done—to make you think we could behave like children? ’Tis you are the child. Perhaps even an average child might have sense to see the stupidity of this. You’ve worn out your wits, certainly—as you say. I’m ashamed of myself—not you. You’ve got to be yourself, I suppose, and don’t see that you’re insulting me and mother, and making a shameful show of yourself. But I said I’d marry you. I said I’d marry a man who can make an offer of that sort and doesn’t see what a disgraceful thing it is. Your money! Your charity! My mother to live on her son-in-law’s charity! And you try to pretend it’s my money, and think that silly little juggle of words makes it all right. I blush for you! My mother doesn’t want your money; she wants her own. She doesn’t want gifts, and she doesn’t want thefts.”

“Don’t be angry—that’s no use.”

“Nothing’s any use with you. Good God! As if my mother’s position wasn’t cruel enough for a proud woman, without all this foolery! I wonder how you’ve got it in you to bully a woman like this! And all this cant about justice—I’m sick of it!”

“We’d better leave it, then, Edith—as we have such a lot of times before. It’s got to be, and I can’t do more than offer to make good. I always meant that.”

“Showing what a coarse mind you’ve got. You’re always for yourself, and your own conscience, and its comfort. You never think that what may make your conscience comfortable may make other people’s sick. You go trampling on, like a cart-horse in blinkers, and it’s nothing to you that finer feelings than your own suffer bitterly, and finer creatures than you are bruised.”

“I’m sorry for that, then. I meant well. I thought coming from me—one of the family, and the best-to-do—it might be reasonable.”

“‘Reasonable’! What does it matter that a thing’s reasonable if it’s impossible? You think like—oh, common—common. Let me go. It’s all so mean and vulgar. I want a bath. After hearing what you’ve said, I’m not clean.”

“I’m sorry—if you can think of anything better.”

“I can think of a great many things better—so could anybody. But it’s time wasted. I’ve had enough and I’ve heard enough. You’ve got to have a thing straight, or else you don’t understand it. You’ve made me sorry for you over this—and sorry for myself too. I can’t go on with it—I won’t. If you’re not going to find yourself mistaken about this—if you’re not going to give in and grant that your betrothed wife knows more about her father than you do, then you can go. If you take mother’s money, I won’t marry you, and no girl on earth who had any credit for proper feeling or proper pride would marry you. I’ll forget your nasty ideas and suggestions—I’ll forgive those—though my mother wouldn’t. But she needn’t hear them. But I’m as strong as you, Wesley, and life’s forced me to show it. You like plain speaking, so there it is. If you do this, I won’t marry you, because, as sure as you do it, I shall hate and despise you. And no woman can be called to wed a

man she hates and despises. I'm not threatening, or anything like that. I'm calm again now. So we can leave it there. You've got so little imagination, unfortunately, that you can't see what you're doing more than your water-wheel. But I'll tell you what you're doing, and that may help you to decide."

"Stop," he said. "I've heard enough. I've insulted you; I've shown myself a blockhead and common and vulgar. I've made you feel so properly shocked and unclean with my nastiness that you feel as if you wanted to go and wash yourself. Go and wash yourself, and be clean again, then. I know what it is to be dirty. I'm sorry I've dirtied you, Edith. But the world's full of better men who will be glad to— There, go! You bade me go when I was at the Quarry Cottage—and I went. Now I'll ask you to go and leave me and my water-wheel to blunder on. And if my conscience requires for its peace the pain of other people—so much the worse for them! D'you hear me? I don't care—I don't care no more. I've grieved and stopped awake and fretted myself till I couldn't eat my food over it. But I'll fret no more. Why should a fool fret? 'Tis the privilege of the fool that he never frets. I'll do what I will to do to the dregs, and God knows I don't want to wed a woman that—that has to wash after she's heard my opinions. That's about the limit. No imagination, I dare say, and I haven't looked round the subject and seen all it means, of course—nothing like that. You know me so damned well—that— There!—this is indecent. Why don't you go?"

She had never heard him swear before. She went straight out into the rain, and in a moment he was after her.

"Forgive me—I wasn't master of myself for the moment," he began.

Then she turned on him.

"Never speak to me again," she said. "Never look at me again, and never utter my name again. And that's how I shall treat you. You're dead to me—far more dead than the father you're going to wrong and outrage. You're everything I hate and loathe in a man, and I never want to see so much as your shadow again as long as I live. You can make love to your own conscience in future, for no decent girl will

ever look at you after this. I'd die of shame to marry you now, and I thank God this happened before and not after, for if it had happened after, I'd have gone out of your house, never to come into it again."

He stared, and after she had done speaking she walked away and did not turn again.

The indifferent wheel thundered on as the rushing water from the mill-race leapt upon it.

CHAPTER XXX

A MEETING OF MOTHERS

It was quickly known that Edith had broken her engagement with the miller, and most of her friends agreed that she had done rightly. His attitude as the trustee of Wilberforce Retallack was in everybody's mouth, and while a few agreed with Wesley, the greater number did not. Decisions of this sort largely depend upon the source of information whence they spring, and since Anna did not keep her grievance hidden, the many who heard it from her felt that she had been terribly wronged. Those who approved the action of Wesley Bake generally heard the story from his mother, Nancy Bake; but she mentioned the matter to few. As for the miller himself, he kept silent. He was dazed and bewildered at the turn that things had taken. He could not grasp this terrific disaster; and yet he would not abate his purpose. He suffered some harsh criticism, and lost a customer or two; but he did what seemed good to him, and, with respect to Edith, wrote her a letter. He made no concession in it, but confined himself to apologizing for any harsh word that he might have spoken at their last meeting. He added that he hoped and prayed she did not mean all that she had said, and implored her to reconsider her determination and bid him come to her.

He received his letter again unopened—a frosty fact that revealed to him the nature of his sweetheart's feeling. Thenceforward he spun no more hopes of a reconciliation.

Once in the village a party of quarrymen groaned and uttered expressions of contempt as he passed them, and he received an anonymous postcard with the words, '*Cursed be they who devour widows' houses*' upon it.

When the postcard came Mrs. Bake put on her bonnet and went to call on Mrs. Retallack. Anna herself answered the door, and upon seeing the visitor, hesitated. They had been

acquainted for forty years, and became good friends after the betrothal of their children.

"Don't say I'm not to come in, Anna," pleaded the elder widow.

"Come in, of course—though I can't see it's much good, Nancy."

Mrs. Bake sat down in the kitchen, took off her thread gloves, and for some time regarded the other without speech. Then she began.

"Many painful things have happened to me, but nothing like this. Death and such-like certainties we know how to meet; but a trouble of this sort is outside all experience."

"I'm as sorry for you as I am for myself, I assure you," answered Anna; "because well I know that you're a sensible and high-minded woman, and this must be as great a grief to you as a shock to me."

"Certainly it is."

"You can't move him, I suppose?"

"How d'you mean?"

"Move him to see his own silly brains are a poor guide in such a thing."

"He knows that. You ought to understand him better. D'you think a man faces the ill-will of the countryside on the strength of his own brains? And they ain't silly brains either, Anna. He's got as good wits as anybody else, and a better temper than some of us."

"If you've come to stand up for him, Nancy, you may as well go again. I thought, as a sensible woman, you'd be my side."

"You don't know half there is to Wesley; and more don't Edith. If you'd try to look at this from his point of view——"

Mrs. Retallack reddened and rose.

"Listen to me, Nancy Bake, and save your wind. My husband left me a thousand pounds, and before the flowers were quailed on his grave, your son puts his hand in my pocket and takes it out to give it to somebody else. And well may every honest man hoot him in the street and take their custom from him. I'm more charitable than charity. I've never had a quarrel with any living creature in my life till now; but I know what justice means. It's beyond belief

—it's so much beyond belief that I don't believe it. And I say openly, as a Christian woman, that your son's mad. Out of my great charity I say it. Your other son was a rogue, and nobody's going to whitewash him; and the only way to whitewash Wesley is to say he's mad. And if the law was just, instead of being crooked as a sickle, as we all know it is, and full of pitfalls for plain-dealers—then the law would take this power from your son's hands and give me my money, and lock him up in the asylum. But the law don't know he's mad, and gives him the wicked power to take all my dead husband left me. And if it wasn't for my sons and daughters and my son-in-law also, I should be driven into the union workhouse by a lunatic. And that's all about it; and if you think that's a proper order of creation, then you're just the mother for such a son. But you don't, you don't! You know I'm right and he's wrong. You know it would be a proper scandal if my daughter took such a man."

"Ease up and hear me now. One side's only good till the other is out. And though it may do you good to insult my son to his mother, Anna Retallack, it won't do your eternal hope good, or bring you any nearer peace at the last. You're wronging the dead and wronging the living both, and behaving in a way that makes me gasp to see. Your man was honest and true and so straight as life let him be; but he wasn't lucky, and he wasn't clear-minded latterly, so in a fit of uncommon good sense he put his affairs into Wesley's hands—well knowing my son to be a man after his own heart. And Wesley ain't going to betray him—not for his own wife. You and your childer value the memory of the dead lower than what my son does. 'Your childer,' I say, but your eldest son and Julitta see with our eyes—and so do this man."

Grandfather Nute had entered and stood still—surprised to find this visitor.

"Nothing of the sort," answered Anna, "or if he do, this is the first I've heard of it. I say the highest form of charity, and Christ couldn't go further, is to call your son a lunny. I forgive him because he knows not what he does; but I don't forgive the law for letting him loose to steal my money."

"Don't use that word again!" cried Mrs. Bake. "'Tis very unwomanly and improper, and I might have the law of you for it. 'Tis you would steal, not my son. He can't take

Widow Lobb's money and give it to you—you know that. He's offered you a thousand of his own."

"Well knowing that I'd rather die a thousand deaths than touch it."

"Don't glare at me, anyway," said Mrs. Bake. "I come to offer peace. He'll do anything—anything the wit of man can do to put this right. But he ain't going against his conscience, whatever the answer."

"We must take it in a large and patient spirit," declared Grandfather Nute; "and as for my view, Anna, you know it, and if Mrs. Bake don't, she shall. She's out to say that I agree with Wesley altogether. In my opinion, on the evidence, the money was given, and it should lie with my daughter, not your son, to decide whether it goes back or not. I think if Jane Lobb and Anna had met and gone down on their knees together to be shown aright, that they would have been shown aright. But Wesley isn't mad, nor anything like that. He is a man of good repute and well thought upon, and he's got the right to his own opinions, for this reason, that he's got the courage of 'em. If he shrank from 'em and was in two minds and doubtful and distracted, then I should tell him to go to cleverer and stronger men than himself about it; but he don't change, though he's got everything to gain by changing and everything to lose by going on. This business may cost him more than the money. It may cost him my granddaughter to begin with; and there again, so level and cool do I find myself about it, that I'm not blaming her neither. She and her mother think alike, and so she's got to give him up—unless they can come to terms—cruel sad for both though it is. And such is his strength of character, that he can suffer that fearful loss for the right—as he sees it. One must respect that. In fact, I respect both sides."

"And will get left yourself," said Mrs. Bake.

"Far from it," answered Grandfather. "I've never depended for my comfort on a worldly foundation. I go my own way, or, rather, not my own, but my heavenly Father's." Mrs. Bake rose.

"Then I'll be off," she said. "I came fully hoping to get nearer a settlement, and I may tell you I'm here unbeknownst to Wesley. I shan't tell him what you've said, Anna, because I hope in fulness of time you'll be sorry for it. I'll only

say that to tell the mother of a man like my son that he's mad, shows a great loss of proper feeling in you; and to pretend that it was Christian charity to say it, is taking Christ's name in vain. And you'll no doubt be spared to repent in dust and ashes. And to call my other son a rogue was going too far also, because a dead son have always got a friend while his mother lives. And I hope you'll be called upon to eat them words in the next world if not this one."

"There's a skew of rain coming down off Brown Willy Mrs. Bake, and I wouldn't have you get wet," said Grandfather.

Anna did not speak, and Mr. Nute led Nancy away. Out of earshot, he expressed a pious hope that all might yet be well; but Mrs. Bake held his impartial attitude mean, and took unfriendly farewell of him. Nor was his daughter pleased with the old man.

"I little like you for taking such a line," she said. "You, who lived under the same roof with Wil for countless years."

"You mustn't criticize me, Anna," he answered. "I do honestly believe, and I can't say more, that I'm directed to hold the scales between you and see both sides. I'm going the Lord's way."

"And in your best clothes, seemingly," she said, regarding his Sunday black, which he had donned since dinner. "You're going the Lord's way, no doubt, in your own opinion, and I suppose He knows what you've got to be so chirpy about of late, for I'm sure nobody else does."

"To vex and fret the parties to it was never yet the way to help a trouble. Trust and patience and a cool head and contented heart—that's the state to aim at. And I may say that's how I find myself."

"You always fall on your feet—we all know that. But you may call it a contented heart. I call it a poor spirit. There's proper pride as well as false."

"I know," answered Grandfather. "And I don't lack for proper pride, Anna—believe me, I don't lack for proper pride. No man blessed with Christian light but must have that. But my great strength lies in taking no thought for to-morrow. That may seem short-sighted to the careful and troubled people; but the discovery of my life has been this: that if you're a good man or woman, and do the thing nearest to

your hand, that's enough. So sure as you do to-day's work properly, God will look after to-morrow's. Once grasp that, and you'll be surprised how it simplifies life. You say I always fall on my feet. I do. For why? Because I trust the Lord with the next step. 'Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?'

"You're clothed in your Sundays, however."

"I am, Anna. 'For your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.' And why I'm in my Sundays won't be hidden longer than supper-time. I'm rayed in these clothes for a reason. Faith doesn't sit down with her hands in her lap—nor more does Hope. I may have news this evening. And it will be good news—whatever colour it takes it will be good. And I'm glad you said that I always fall on my feet. It's an uplifting thought, in a way. And I say the same of you, Anna, though you can't see it for the minute. Given the right point of view, which is God's, and not always within our reach, we're all falling on our feet every minute we draw breath. And where there's an ugly tumble—as in the case of Antipas Keat last week—be sure 'tis the creature's own fault. And where our neighbours fall in such a manner that 'tis beyond the power of this life to set them up again, we still know that we shall find them restored to their balance and comfort in the next life. For that's the Everlasting promise."

With these vague but comforting reflections, Mr. Nute went his way, and Anna, who was in absolute ignorance of his affairs, suspected that her father must be seeking for work. It touched her, and she shed some needless tears on his account.

CHAPTER XXXI

SAFE IN THE ARMS OF SARAH

GRANDFATHER had come to a conclusion with himself, and being a man of great common sense, he was now proceeding upon his adventure in a very proper spirit. Convinced, after due prayer and deliberation, that there was no reasonable objection to marrying again, given a woman of such character and wisdom as Sarah Sleep, Mr. Nute decided to proceed, and his own nice judgment directed his future steps. He was prepared to be sincere and serious, but he had no intention of being unseasonably solemn. He was not going to make love like a boy; but he was going to make love. Sarah should understand from the first that a man and not a human fossil offered for her hand. The man might be old, but his manhood was still a reality. He stood in the happy position of knowing the issue. Therefore fears of failure neither chastened his attack nor moderated his ardour of approach. True it was that Sarah might have changed her mind on cool reflection; but in that case he felt quite equal to making her change it again. Besides, she was a woman of very definite principles: she would never have gone so far had she contemplated the possibility of retreat. For a moment he considered the voice of his fellow-men, and suspected that the baser sort might link this action with his own unexpected circumstances. He could hear Moses Bunt on the subject and guess how that cynic would say he only sought marriage as an escape from the workhouse, and had chosen the greater of two evils. But Grandfather never troubled himself much about the opinion of his fellow-men, and did not propose to do so now. His soul was right with God; his heart was high; he came before Sarah in a spirit at once cheerful and ardent.

He had given her notice that he would appear on early closing day, and she had arranged for his coming. The shop was shut and Sarah sat in her parlour alone. She had hesitated

about a touch or two to her toilet and decided against any such weakness. Indeed, she was feeling and looking older than usual, for since her last meeting with Grandfather, Miss Sleep had suffered some tumult of mind.

He shook her hand and struck a light note.

“ My life ! you’re cold as a quilkin,* Sarah !”

“ ’Tis this skeeny wind,” she said. “ It bites to the bone.”

“ So it does—sure enough, now you say so. But so full has my mind been of late, that the weather passed over me like a shadow.”

“ You ought to have your muffler on.”

“ Like you to think of it. But when the heart is warm the system is proof against cold. How is it with you ? You look a thought wisht.”

“ I’m all right. Only—I dunno.”

With excellent tact Mr. Nute entirely ignored the past. He proceeded as though it had never been, and Sarah’s spirits rose. She feared that he would begin at the beginning, and she wanted to forget the beginning. She soon caught his mood.

“ I’m not going to beat about the bush,” he said, “ because at my time of life that would be out of keeping. If you know what you want, you take the shortest way to get it at three-score-and-ten. That’s my age, and on the wrong side too, though why man should talk of the wrong side of a date, when he knows that it’s the right side for meeting God, I can’t say. Anyhow take it as a figure of speech only. But the patriarchs come to my mind and their ways. I’ve got a long road to go yet by all signs, and it’s borne in upon me, Sarah, that travelled in the company of a good woman, that road would be a lot easier and brighter and happier. I may be wrong, but I’ve put it before the Throne and haven’t been turned down. If I was a poor piece; if time had got his wedges into me and was only waiting for a touch of bronchitis, or what not, to hammer ’em home, then the case would be different. Marriage weren’t ordained to let us escape the hospital. What it was ordained for we very well know in the first place, and we needn’t touch that; but the question is whether it may also be entered into for friendship and understanding and the fine, high-minded sort of love that exists between you and me. I use the word ‘love’ in the highest sense naturally. You

* *Quilkin*—a frog.

and me love one another in exactly the same spirit that we love our Maker, though on a lowlier plane. If I'm wrong, say so."

"You couldn't put it nicer, James."

"Well, what do you think? I don't want to say the words unless you consider they are well in keeping with our characters, Sarah. That's not to say I'm not prepared to say them until I know your answer; because that would be holding a pistol to your head, and a very ungentlemanly thing in my judgment. But before I go on, I merely want to know whether you think such a man as I am, sound as old port-wine and religious and cheerful-minded, has a right to offer himself to such a woman as you. Don't look at it in a personal spirit, my dear, but just as an open question put to you for your views as an experienced and thoughtful creature."

"Put like that, I can't see any reason against. It's a dignified thing, and, at your age and mine, people don't run about for advice. They do what's right in their own eyes and answer to themselves."

"Good!" said Grandfather. "That's pretty much what I should have expected from a reader and thinker and a woman famed for her judgments. So far so good, then. That clears the air a lot. But now, before I go through with it, Sarah, I'm bound to touch on another point. Be quite honest with yourself, because it's a point where affection mustn't blind you. There's a complication. We all know the path of true love never runs smooth, and though you might think where you're dealing with a pair whose united ages would run up into three figures there ought not to be any great impediments from outside, yet so it is."

"I'd very much like to see the man or woman who had a right to come between," said Miss Sleep.

"Not a man or woman, my dear. But a fact—a plain fact that can't be got over and can't be ignored. I'm a pauper."

"Well, I ain't, so enough said. We all know you had money and gave it away. You're a pauper by bad chance and through no fault of your own. Between us a thing like that won't breed trouble. You ain't marrying me for my money."

"God forbid!—'tis the last thing I'd marry for. I've always disliked and distrusted the stuff."

“Then you can let that part go. I’ve saved for fifty years—not with any object in view, but simply because I come of the saving sort. When I leave my brother——”

“Stop there,” he said. “We haven’t got so far as that. Now, Sarah, I want you to do me the blessing and honour of giving up your maiden state. I want you to take my hand and join me in holy matrimony, so that we may go down the hill together in happiness and dignity and heart to heart. You mustn’t think I’m doing this and offering myself on the spur of the moment. For fifteen years I’ve put you above any other woman in the world and held my minutes with you better spent than any others, except them spent on my knees. I even went so far as to picture us wedded. But as I saw it then, it was too late for that step, because I’d thrown in my lonely lot with my daughter’s people and couldn’t leave them without making a feeling. But now time and chance break up that home and I’m free. I dearly like the thought of it, and I’d wish to talk about making a home for you and taking you away from the work of the shop, because the time has come for you to give up that and take your dignified rest. But ’twill be you, not me, makes the home.”

“No—you’ll make a home,” she said. “You’ll *be* the home, for that matter. What odds which of us brings the chair, so long as Wisdom sits in it? Any fool can buy the sticks. They don’t make the home. We’ve seen enough of life to know that.”

To his amazement Grandfather found tears in his eyes. He rose and bent over Sarah and put his arms round her and kissed her cheek.

“God bless you!” he said.

“I don’t know what it is to have a home since my parents died. I’ve lived in my brother’s home. But you and me and your flute—’twill be a proper nest, James.”

“This is a very moving minute for me,” he declared; “a second spring, I assure you, Sarah.”

“Call it the Indian summer,” she said. “A rare come-along-of-it, sure enough. ’Tis done, and may the Lord view it well. I know how my brother John will.”

“You’re out there, Sarah. He won’t turn ugly when he hears me. I shall get the bettermost of him without any trouble.”

“As to my leaving, yes; but what about my leavings? There’s where the shoe be going to pinch John.”

“After what I’ve done and won to-day, that’ll be a very small matter,” declared Grandfather. “In fact, I’ll wait and see him before I go.”

“’Tis candle-teening time,” she said. “I’ll light up if my hand’s not too shaky to do it.”

He helped her, and they discussed the future over a cup of tea. They were both elated, but Sarah returned again and again to what the people would think, while Mr. Nute attached little importance to that.

“They’ll say I’m a goose and you’re a grabber,” murmured Sarah; “and I shan’t like it, and I’m not sure if we shouldn’t do better to live away from Delabole.”

“What matters their opinions? You know you ain’t a goose, and I know I ain’t a grabber, so there’s an end of that so far as it concerns us. If they say silly things, that’s their affair, and naught to you and me, who are going to do wise things. And John will be our side, Sarah—make no mistake there. I shall throw a light on his mind in more ways than one.”

He kept his word, and when John Sleep presently appeared, Grandfather directed Sarah to leave them. Then he broke his news, and Mr. Sleep listened and glowered at the recital.

“It ain’t altogether a surprise,” he said. “I’ve had a sort of feeling this was in the air ever since your son-in-law died. But until now I always thought it was just Sarah’s wild idea—her being addicted to you and very proud of your good parts and friendship. And so was I, and even when I found that she had such tender feelings I never worried, because I shared her high opinion of you, and thought you were a self-respecting old man. I gave you too much credit to dream of anything like this. And I will say, James Nute, that I seem you’re old enough to know better. You may have lifted yourself up in her eyes by this silly thing, but you’ve cast yourself down in mine, and in the eyes of all sensible people. It’s too bitter clear what you’re after, of course; and if you can reconcile such a brazen deed with your fame for religion, then you’re foxing yourself, and I say it’s all humbug. Not a month ago you was telling me and half a dozen other men, after service, that you had no fear

of the workhouse; and yet as it came closer, 'tis easy to see you grew so proper terrified that you fairly fled into the arms of the first woman, and no doubt the only woman, who'd take you. And if you think it's a part worthy of an aged man, then I'll be so bold as to tell you you're wrong. It's a very nasty thing to do, and you'll find I ain't the only person who thinks so."

"Very well put, John," answered Grandfather. "I know no man who can say what he means in straighter language than you can—when you take the trouble to do it. And another fine gift you've got. In argument you'll always listen to what the other party has to say. That's very helpful, and quite uncommon in my experience. So there it stands, and now I'll ask you a question. How old are you?"

"What does that signify?"

"You'll see in a minute."

"I'm sixty-five."

"And well preserved at that. Though if you took more exercise you'd be the gainer. And how old's Sarah?"

"Sixty."

"Very well, then. I've got close on twelve years' start of her and seven of you. And that probably means that you'll both outlive me by many years. Money is money, John, and, as such, a thing I've got no use for; but, seeing the circumstances, and finding, after prayer, that I can wed your sister—not on a money basis, but on a proper basis of respect and affection, and seeing that she's of the same mind, it follows that we must think of the worldly side. I bring nothing but myself."

"And your old-age pension?"

Mr. Nute flushed slightly.

"I'm sorry you allowed yourself to say that. I come of old stock, John—very fine old Liberal stock—and my manners and opinions are far removed from the Liberal ideas of the present day. I went very near so far as Gladstone, but not an inch farther, and the modern policy is against all my opinions. The poor we have with us always; but that's no reason why we should always have paupers. Old-age pensions are not for the like of me, and I won't apply for any such thing. I won't lay bare my private affairs to the pitiless eyes of paid officials. I'm proud, and I hate and despise

such doings, same as I hate and despise the Guardians with their coarse ways of looking into sad human hearts."

"You ain't too proud to live on my sister's money, however?"

"I am not, because husband and wife are one, and Sarah and I understand each other. I'm not willing to argue with you about that, or explain what your bent of mind wouldn't easily understand. I only want to lighten that mind and not puzzle it. The money's the thing to you, and in that matter I want you clearly to know that I don't handle a penny. We make a home, and Sarah reigns in it. And we live on the per centum of her savings. *Her* savings, John, not yours. She's been a good saleswoman to you, and what she's put into your pocket, as an honest man you know. And now the time has come for her to rest from her labours. And she wants to rest from her labours along with me. But not a penny of capital am I going to let her spend. And when she goes, everything she owns will come back to your family. She's willed it all to you and Jane and Philippa. Her will is made, and when she marries me, she'll make it over again just the same to a hair. Only with this provision: that if the unexpected happens and she goes to her rest before I do, then for my balance of days I'm to enjoy the per centum. But every farthing of the capital returns to your family, and you shall read the will and keep it, if you like. I shall continue to have a black Sunday suit and a second-best and an every-day. I shall have boots to walk on, a hat on my head, and food in my mouth, but nothing more—nothing more but a good and loving wife and a decent funeral when the tale is told. And what Sarah gets is me—'just as I am, without one plea,' as the hymn says, John; and though in modesty I grant it's a one-sided bargain, in justice you must hear her also; and, at her age, you've got no fair right or reason to argue against her judgment."

"That's rather different from what I expected, I grant," said Mr. Sleep.

"You'll let me remind you of another thing also. Jane Sleep is very clever in the shop now, and it's been fairly clear to Sarah for a good while that Jane's outlook on life falls in pretty well with your own."

"That's so."

“Then, with Sarah away, business won’t suffer, and your peace of mind won’t suffer.”

“Not now—not if I’ve got your word that you are not after the stuff.”

“That you should have thought I was, knowing me so well as you do, is a painful surprise to me, John. In fact, I’m glad this has happened, if only to open your eyes to me. We shan’t delay. We know our own minds. Sarah’s for going away from Delabole, but I’m going to show her she’s mistaken there. We shall stop.”

“The Kellows are leaving my house by the chapel. You might find that suit you.”

“Very likely. Sarah will decide everything.”

“We’ll leave it at that, then,” summed up Mr. Sleep. “I see you are reasonable in the details, James, and I won’t say no more against it.”

“You can’t—as an intelligent and religious man, you can’t, John. I was pretty sure you’d find out that, when I made all clear. It’s a great source of strength to have you for a brother-in-law. I quite value you, John. And now I’m going home to tell my family. I wish I could straighten out other people’s affairs so easily as I can always straighten out my own. It’s very sad about Edith and Wesley Bake.”

“It’s very proper—he’s behaved shameful.”

“There again, no doubt, you’d be the first to listen to reason if you heard it, John. Another time we’ll talk about that. You voice the general opinion, but general opinion’s a very unreasonable creature. Why for? Because them with least mind are always the first to make it up. Good-night. I shall see you again in twenty-four hours. Such is the simple way in which I live, John, that I can do a thing at an hour’s notice—whether it be to marry or to die. I’ve arranged my life for fifteen years now, so that any call will find me ready to answer at once. I’ve made it a rule, ever since I went to live with my daughter Anna, that I would never own any more than would go into my box. And that box is no more than four feet long and two feet six high, John. From such a box you can go to a new earthly home or your eternal one as easy as eat your breakfast.”

“It sounds all right—though you might just as well be a cat or dog, for all I can see.”

“There’ll be no possessions in heaven, John.”

“You can’t say that; but I ain’t going to argue. You’re one too many for me. Have a drink? And if Sarah can marry and nothing said, why shouldn’t I wed again, James?”

“No reason at all, John, provided you feel the call and go to the right female in the right spirit.”

Full of this sudden inspiration, Mr. Sleep became almost cordial. He saw Grandfather to the street after some refreshment.

“And you can rely on this,” he said: “I’ll uphold you with the people. There’s no just cause why the young uns should have all the adventures. After all, a man’s a fool to let a chronic rheumatism stand between him and what the world can still offer. There’s more to life than physic, even if you’re an invalid.”

CHAPTER XXXII

AN INNOVATION

SIDNEY NANJULIAN refused to believe that because a thing had never been done it must never be done. A custom obtained to decorate the churches of the Nonconformists at Delabole for harvest festivals, but at Christmas and Easter the like was not attempted, and Nanjulian's æsthetic instincts protested against this loss of opportunity. He had raised the question more than once, only to find the trustees of the United Methodists unprepared to consider it; but at last he won the majority to his way of thinking, and when the feast of Easter came round again, he was permitted to adorn their chapel for that great Christian anniversary.

All who grew them knew that flowers would be welcome, and, as a result, on the Saturday before Easter Sunday a great many worshippers brought blossoms from their gardens to brighten the house of prayer. Other sects viewed this innovation with some doubt, and Sidney was the more moved to make it a success. He loved flowers and the culture of them. He had built a little glass-house against his new dwelling, and Julitta began to grow as fond of plants as her husband had always been. The romance of blooming things, the dawning of a flower-bud, its growth and ultimate triumphant expression, added much to Sidney's joy in life.

Now the congregation brought gifts, and Sidney, who superintended the decorations, was pleased at the extent of them.

"We can do even more than I thought," he said, "for the flowers come without stint, and I won't refuse any."

Even Aunt Mercy Inch brought a contribution from Trebarwith Sand.

"'Tis only a bunch of they pink thrifts, my dear," she said;

“but they'll fill a corner, for every little helps. There's no reason why the church-folk should have it all their own way at Easter and Christmas.”

Aunt Mercy delivered her bouquet and stopped to gossip. Betsy Bunt had come with a bunch of late daffodils from the manager's garden, and now she spoke with the traveller from Trebarwith.

“Dabbety fay ! the things that happen,” said Betsy. “To think such a woman as Anna Retallack should have no place to lay her head !”

“But surely her sons ?”

“I mean that her home is took from her; her pride have had a fall; and a fall at her age is never cured. Yes, it have got to such a pass that her nessel-bird, her very youngest, have to make the poor woman a home.”

“The others will help, however ?”

“I don't know no details as to that. Ned's going to marry Philippa Sleep, and his mother's going to live along with them. And Pooley, the preacher, is to have a room with Noah Tonkin and his wife, whose lodger has left them.”

“And Grandfather Nute weds again—that's the chief wonder.”

“He does; for worldly cleverness, combined with the truths of religion, you won't beat that old man. Sarah Sleep's a lucky woman, and I don't care who hears me say so.”

“Without a doubt you're right—if it ain't too much like serving God and Mammon.”

“You can't do that,” declared Betsy. “There was a talk of grandfather and grandson wedding at one time, seeing they was both marrying into the same family; but the old man was far too nice to fall in with it. He's got high feelings, and he said that nothing would be more unseemly than to have two such different ceremonies run in together.”

“The decorum of the man !” said Aunt Mercy.

“Pooley will help the home with money, because he's got a rise,” continued Betsy Bunt. “In fact, you may say that they're all fixed up now but Edith. I understand she keeps herself very much to herself of late days. She'll most likely look for work, and with such an education as she've had, she will easily find it.”

“Surely there’s a hope that she and young Bake can come together again?” asked the other.

“Not a chance—too proud for that. And who shall blame her? He’s come out something shameful and abused a dead man’s trust.”

“What does Mister Tom say?”

“That I can’t tell you. I’ve opened the subject more than once to him in my cunning way, but he won’t talk upon it. Last time I touched it he bade me stop my mouth rather sharp. Of course, we’re not blind, and we know how it was in the past between him and Edith Retallack. Don’t you breathe a word as yet, Aunt Mercy; but remember, when you hear an old tale revived, who ’twas that first whispered it.”

“Her and Mister Tom! I always thought that.”

“Perhaps, and, again, perhaps not. But I think that’s how it will be like to happen. Edith Retallack was a lot drawn to him, you must remember. It was just whip-and-go which she took, and, in my opinion, if she gives him the ghost of a chance now, Mister Tom will be after her like a tiger.”

“And being the man’s housekeeper, of course you have great advantages in studying the situation,” said Aunt Mercy.

“I have, and I use ’em, and why shouldn’t I? I’m terrible fond of Mister Tom, and know more about him than most people. If you mend a man’s clothes and cook his food and make his bed, you get at him in a way no outsider can. Such is my sight that I can tell by the very fling of the counterpane if he’s slept well or ill. And he’s slept ill of late. And I know at this minute his mind is cruel busy. He eats without appetite, and grows terrible late of a night, and don’t smoke half what he generally does. He got wet through not long since and never noticed it, and he was so stiff as Barker’s knee next morning. But he set naught upon it—never thought on it till the pain scourged up his backbone. His heart’s full of Edith Retallack, and though he won’t hear the matter mentioned, he knows what the people think. No doubt he’d not hide his own opinion of Wesley Bake if it weren’t too delicate a subject—him being after the miller’s old sweet-heart.”

"I'm sorry that ever the man was called by that holy name," said Aunt Mercy. "To call a young boy by the name of 'Wesley' ought to be a tower of strength to him, and yet by all accounts he's disgraced it."

"He has, and, knowing what a stickler for justice Edith is, of course Tom Hawkey feels that she's not done such a big thing lightly. He knows, as we all do, that she was right. How could she have lived with that man and borne his childer after he'd robbed her mother?"

"Echo answers 'How?' I'm sure," answered Aunt Mercy. "'Twould be quite beyond human nature, I should think. A fearful thing for Nancy Bake. A proper anti-Christ she've got for a son."

"I wouldn't go so far as that. And you needn't pity Nancy Bake, because she's took the miller's part, and says he's in the right. She won't hear a word against him. In fact, if you look over there, you'll see a strange sight to your eyes, I dare say."

She pointed among the company that was busy in the chapel, and Aunt Mercy saw Susan Bake talking amicably to a young man.

"Susan have brought up a brave bunch of Lent rosen from Newhall and a bit of pink riby along with it, and there's Pooley Retallack talking to her, you see, as if there was nothing between the families."

"Surely he ain't against his sister?"

"Yes, he is. He's on Wesley's side, and that shows how justice and religion are two very different things. Fairly hoodwinked is Pooley over this trouble, and his mother, who thought he was a saint, poor soul! don't think so any more. In fact, when Pooley said he reckoned Bake was right, Anna had a sort of convulsion, and, in her wrath, told him she had but one son now. No doubt that's why she ordains to go and live with Ned."

Benny Moyse, the accordion-player, joined them.

"Where's Moses to, Betsy?" he asked. "I ain't seen him this longful time."

"You're his one and only friend, Mr. Moyse—so I've heard him say—and he's home with a tissick in the chest and a good bit put about that you haven't been to call."

"I thought he was taking his holiday."

"He never takes no holiday."

"To-night I'll visit the man, then," promised Benny. "He was wanting a load of good meat earth for his garden, and I can let him have it, and, since he's sick, I'll dig it in for him myself."

"You'll be welcome."

Nanjulian annoyed some of those who had brought flowers, for upon the holy table he set the wildings, while geraniums and a pot of scarlet cactus he rated lower and arranged under the windows and elsewhere. Jack Keat came in with a bunch of tulips. He bore new honours now, and could not act as though wholly indifferent to them. On Wilberforce Retallack's death, Mr. Keat was raised to be joint foreman with Sidney Nanjulian. Jack wanted his tulips on the holy table, and Nanjulian explained that only the flowers of the field were to be set there.

"The idea is that God Himself grew them, Jack, and so they ought to go in the best place; while the things that men have grown are put in humbler spots."

"I catch your meaning, Sidney," answered Jack Keat, "and the idea's good, no doubt; but the effect will be bad. You want the showy things on the table, where they'll be best seen, and if you're going to draw God in—and I've no objection to that—then you must see that His hand made these tulips so well as they wild pinks. You mustn't think that God only works in the hedge and ditch. He helps the garden likewise and the kitchen garden also; and the peony couldn't open and the cauliflower couldn't draw a breath if He turned His back on them."

Nanjulian, however, had arguments to support his purpose, and would not be convinced.

Elsewhere, as they decorated a window together, Pooley and Susan Bake talked of Edith. Mary helped her mother, but Betty had not been allowed to come owing to her recent record, which was much tarnished.

"We can only wait and hope and put it in our prayers," said Pooley. "The future may make us happier, and I trust they will be brought together again."

"It rests with your sister," she answered; "and she'll

forgive Wesley on St. Tibb's Eve, I reckon, and that's never."

"Our house is divided against itself," he declared, "and that's very sad, and can't last. If anybody had ever told me I should fall out with my mother, I should have laughed at them; but so it is. All her pride in me has fallen to the ground. She thinks I'm wilfully blind to justice and right."

"If you can't make her see, nobody can."

"She'll see," he assured Susan. "She'll see—it may be to-morrow, or it may not be till her death-bed; but such things are never allowed to go unseen. Her eyes will certainly be opened; but whether I shall be allowed to open them I can't say. If it wasn't for Ned, I dare say I might weigh with her; but he's properly mad about it, and says it's treason against mother even to think that Wesley's right."

Richard Male, from the 'One and All,' brought a massive bunch of wallflowers, and stopped to judge of the growing effect.

"Of course, it's all quite on a different line from harvest; and I won't say but what it may be more beautiful to the eye, though not so interesting to the mind," he observed.

"Harvest is the first-fruits of the autumn, and flowers are the first-fruits of the spring," said Nanjulian.

"Flowers go before fruits, certainly; but they are a little bit thin and poor-like against all the solid wealth of harvest," added Jack Keat.

"In my opinion we've been overdoing the harvest a trifle of late years," declared Benny Moyse. "You must draw the line somewhere. You see, the old Cornish toast is 'Fish—copper—tin,' and we of Delabole add 'slate,' which is our great harvest, of course; but reason is reason, and if the fisher people put their harvest in the chapels for harvest-home, so might the tanners, and we might just so well fill up with a hundred dozen 'queens' and 'princesses'* on the Lord's table."

"There's no just reason against," declared Nanjulian.

"Except that everybody would laugh," answered Richard Male. "For my part I often feel uneasy at what the fishermen are allowed to do."

* *Queens and princesses*—the largest sizes of slates.

"They go pretty far," admitted Benny Moyse, "and yet you can't deny them. A fish-jouster from Port Isaac told me that last year they had fish and nets and lobster-pots in the windows, and lobsters in 'em—live ones! Now, that's a disgrace, surely. How ever could you ask a man to praise his Maker while he was afraid of his life all the time he'd have a lobster's claw in his whiskers?"

"They ought to boil 'em first," declared Jack Keat. "There's no doubt about that. It would be kinder to the creatures, and much more showy. So red as a soldier's coat they'd be, and add a great brilliance to the scene."

"'Tis very improper, and once go so far as living things, or dead ones, and I don't see where you are going to stop," argued Richard Male. "For if lobsters, why not legs of mutton, or a row of little choogy pigs?"

"Well, why not?"

"You don't want the Lord's house to be turned into a meat-stall or a fish-market?"

"You're all for corn and roots, we know, Richard; but you must look at it with the eyes of other men. Why should a lobster be more shameful than a brave vegetable marrow, or a string of pollack not so fine as a barley-mow? Port Isaac have as much right to offer the first-fruits of a haul of herring as Delabole to offer wheat and apples and plums."

"'Tis use," summed up Benny Moyse; "without a doubt 'tis use that reconciles the mind to one thing, while the lack of it makes another thing sound queer. A farmer could pray before the sight of the fruits of the earth, but he'd very likely be distracted off his Maker if the fruits of the sea was under his nose and he saw a goggle-eyed hake or what not staring down at him from the wiunder-sill; but to the seafaring man 'twould be just the other way round."

"And the God of the corn is the God of the pilchard, and the God of the tin and slate also, and all manner of workers and toilers can unite in praising Him," said Mr. Keat.

The people came and went, and many brought gifts, until the chapel of the United Methodists had lost its austere lines and was transformed into a bower of vernal blossoms. The simplicity and humility of the flowers chimed

with the place. The frank light from the white glass windows shone down upon the banks of bloom, and when Sunday came, not only the sunshine but the sweetness of spring reigned in the meeting-house.

Nanjulian's success none questioned, and even those who had doubted were ready to admit that the bravery of the flowers had added something to the day.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE SCHOOL TREAT

EDITH, forgetting her treatment of his last letter, now waited in daily expectation of some message from Wesley Bake. But weeks passed and none came. She hardly considered what form the approach must take—whether he would write to her or ask to see her; and presently, from desiring a communication, she grew to dread one. She longed for time to pass and deaden her very poignant suffering; and she felt that any attempt on Wesley's part to win her back to him would only open deep wounds she desired that time should heal. She had loved the man, and a nature cold and ambitious had been warmed by his good-hearted and genial outlook on life, if at the same time chilled by certain features of his character. For he was not ambitious except to do right and live an honourable life, and though his humility had made her smart not seldom, before her father's death she had begun to see that his own way was best suited to her betrothed's genius. She had been content, therefore, to show no further impatience, and trouble him no more, but wait until she came to Newhall Mill. Now all was changed, and for her mother's sake she could not go back, yet still hoped that Wesley might abate his purpose. It was part of his character to yield, not so hers. She consoled herself by considering that she did not stand alone in this; that, indeed, the majority of her friends and acquaintance agreed with her. One opinion, and that a very vital one in her regard, she had yet to learn; but Tom Hawkey was known to avoid the subject and refuse to discuss it with anybody. This he did on principle. None was more deeply and personally interested in the problem, and for that reason he chose to evade it and thrust it from him. A woman here and there guessed why, but those most involved did not, and Edith's family had wondered as much as she herself had wondered, to learn that Hawkey would utter no opinion upon

the outrage. For her part Edith Retallack resented this attitude in him. He had cared much for her and she had admired him greatly, and he knew it. She had exhibited a flash of warmth to him after the great quarry fall, and she was surprised that he could not even declare the sympathy he doubtless felt for her in her sorrow. That he might not feel it possible to speak to her, she understood; but she could imagine no reason why he should decline to trouble himself even to form an opinion or hear the facts of the case. He had silenced both Ned and Pooley when they brought the subject to him; for each had done so in respect for his judgment and desire to find Hawkey on his side.

In truth the vital possibilities of this estrangement had prompted the manager to avoid even thought upon it. He knew neither the rights nor the wrongs of the matter, and did not wish to know them. Only the tremendous result concerned him. Edith had freed herself, and if, after reasonable lapse of time, she continued to be free, there was nothing to prevent him from coming to her again. He worshipped her afar off, and the fact that she had loved and promised to marry elsewhere could not destroy his overmastering regard. From the day that she had told him she meant to wed the miller, Tom Hawkey abandoned hope, and being a man of self-control and steadfast spirit, had not suffered his loss to ruin his usefulness or kill his interest in life; but what he felt for Edith could not perish, and no shape of woman had ever obliterated hers. Now, therefore, his mind was in tremendous ferment, and if Edith prayed for time to pass, Hawkey did so with no less fervour. The temptation to approach her at this juncture must have proved too much for most men, for there is an instinct in love to choose the right moment and offer itself at such pregnant junctures. He believed that he might well win her sad heart, and the effort necessary to deny himself an attempt was a mighty one. The fact that he did not do so was wrongly read by her. He admired her still and valued her friendship; that she knew; but she judged by his abstinence at this crisis that he loved her no longer, and his refusal to discuss the conduct of Wesley Bake, instead of being judged correctly, only led her to feel the more confident that Hawkey's passion for her was a thing of the past. An incident went far to confirm this opinion, for she walked often alone of late and the sea drew her. Its unrest chimed with her own, and she

would tramp for miles beside the cliffs or upon the sands, and win some consolation from the exercise.

An interesting thing resulted from this practice on her part, for Hawkey knew of it. From her own lips he heard it, because, meeting her one day, she had told him her mind was very restless and troubled, and that she found the restless and troubled sea understood her better than anybody. From that hour he knew where she might easily be found alone, and there came a day when, yearning terribly to see her and speak to her, he sought her on the cliffs. A sense of guilt accompanied him. There was a battle before he went, and he lost it. After all, she might not be there; and if she were, was not he schooled to control himself? She wanted a friend at this pass in her life, and was the love he cherished for her of such selfish staple that he could not meet her without showing it? But his conscience smote him, and when, presently, he saw her, half a mile away, standing upon a headland alone, he hesitated. He was swinging along fast towards her when she came in sight. Then he stood still; and then he turned and went slowly in the opposite direction. He thought that she had not seen him, but he was mistaken. Her eyes were on him when he discovered her; and she had marked him stop, hesitate, and then retreat.

The act first puzzled her, then it awoke a sense of injustice. What had she done to make Hawkey, of all men, avoid her? It was apiece with his refusal to judge between her and Wesley Bake. His extraordinary indifference awoke an interest in Edith, and at this stagnant time, when every interest seemed dead, her agitation did the woman a sort of good. She resented the manager's attitude and determined to change it. She had possessed power—paramount power—over him in the past and, in a spirit she herself could hardly explain, determined now to corner Hawkey on this matter and extract an expression of opinion from him. That he was apparently so callous, and could awaken to no lively emotion on her account in this great grief, puzzled Edith. Then it piqued her. She determined that, at any rate, he should hear her side and, if he declined to do so, she would make a personal matter of it. He was a just man and a strong man, and she became suddenly inspired with an active wish to win his support against her old lover. She believed that her motive was single and that

she felt no personal reawakening interest in Hawkey himself; but anon, when she sat beside him, she found that she could not examine that question longer.

An opportunity promised to occur at an early day, and Edith, who had declined to attend the approaching school treat of the United Methodists, now changed her mind and determined to do so. For she knew that Tom Hawkey would certainly be there to help with the boys' games, and it was probable enough that Wesley Bake, with his nieces and their mother, would also join the festivity. For pleasure she would not have gone so soon after her father's death; indeed, a children's school treat offered little hope of entertainment for Edith at any time; but now she determined to go, and, when the day came, she and her brothers joined the holiday-making crowd of happy children.

In four big brakes the United Methodists set forth for Trebarwith Sand, and Aunt Mercy, aware of what was required of her, had made full preparations and engaged half a dozen energetic maidens to assist her through the arduous duties of the occasion.

Benny Moyses sat with his concertina beside the driver of one brake, while a rock-man from the quarries, called Nicholas Stanlake, who played the cornet, made melody on another. A hundred children came to the treat, and some carried little flags and all were dressed in their finery.

As Edith expected, Wesley Bake, with Susan and her children, was of the party, while among others to attend appeared Jack Keat and Noah Tonkin from the quarry. Pooley Retallack accompanied his own Bible class of boys, and in the same brake with him, rode Tom Hawkey and the schoolmaster. Edith sat with her brother Ned and Philippa Sleep. The latter watched with interest to see Wesley Bake and his party in the next brake. She had, of course, taken Ned's view of the situation. He and she were to be married during the coming autumn, and his mother was going to live with them—a plan little liked by Philippa. Indeed, she hoped very heartily that, before the event, circumstances might conspire to change it.

“Look at schoolmistress!” whispered Philippa to Ned. “She's fraped herself in like a wasp. Poor little Betty Bake! —I'm sorry for her.”

“ By gollies ! so am I,” said Ned.

For by unhappy chance Betty’s special aversion was in the same brake with her and her family. Indeed, Miss Male sat exactly opposite Susan Bake’s younger daughter, and being in holiday mood, complimented Betty on her frock and engaged Wesley in light conversation.

The concertina gurgled, the cornet blared, and the brakes rattled down the green coomb to Trebarwith. Then came the business of pleasure, and the children scattered to play until tea was ready for them. Like bright birds they flew about the rocks and sands. By good chance the sea was still, and a boat or two put out full of little passengers. Others hunted the cliffs for wild-flowers and made bouquets of blossoms and seagulls’ feathers. Some of the boys went bathing, with a man or two to watch them; some played cricket on the hard sand; the infants sat and grubbed in little galaxies.

Edith took her part and watched Wesley and Hawkey with the boys. She noted that they were quite friendly. Ned played cricket too, and Philippa looked on. Miss Male conducted a class on the cliffs and explained the mysteries of calyx and corolla to certain sycophantic young people who accompanied her. Of this company was Mary Bake, but unwilling Betty lagged behind and presently made a botanical experiment on her own account.

A bitter wail brought her sister running back to her, and she found that Betty had fallen into a cluster of rampant nettles. Mary hastened to find dock-leaves and soon did so.

“ There, rub it—rub it—rub your face and your hands and say, ‘ In dock, out nettle ! ’ ” cried Mary; but her sister refused the palliative. She danced with anger and pain.

“ Beasts ! Beasts ! ” she cried. “ They shall pay for it—I’ll kill ’em—every one of ’em ! ”

With tears streaming Betty hunted for a stick, found one, and then fell upon the nettles hip and thigh.

“ Are you sorry for me ? Are you sorry for me ? ” she asked Mary.

“ Yes—cruel sorry for ’e,” declared Mary. “ But give over and take these here leaves. Your face is a sight.”

“ I’ll go on till I’ve killed every one of them,” cried Betty. “ And ’tis all that Miss Male’s fault. Why for did she want to come in our brake ? And I’ll beat the nettles till tea-

time; and if there's no scald-cream I won't have no tea either."

"Of course there'll be scald-cream. You can't have a school treat without it."

Then Edith Retallack walked that way and came upon the children.

They gazed at her doubtfully, like young rabbits surprised; but she had no quarrel with them, and her face told them that she was friendly.

"If you please, Aunt Edith, Betty has stung herself all over with nettles, and she's in a fearful tantara," said Mary.

"Poor Betty! Get a dock-leaf, quick!"

"I've got a score, but she won't touch 'em."

"Come here and I'll do you good," said Edith.

"I'm beating the beastly nettles to death," sobbed Betty. Then she stopped and came over to Edith.

"Be you sorry for me?" she asked.

"Of course I am. Sit down here and get cool, and I'll rub your face with docks."

Betty gave a great sigh and obeyed.

"'Tis all along of seeing one maggoty pie* this morning," she declared. "You never have no more luck that day if you see one. I knew it was all over when schoolmistress got in our brake."

"Come down to the beach and find mermaids' purses," suggested Mary when her sister had calmed down; but Betty declined.

"I know they mermaids' purses," she said. "They've never got any money in 'em. And everything's horrid; and now you ain't going to marry Uncle Wesley he never looks at us, nor tells us a tale, nor takes us in the mill or anything. And Aunt Julitta's going to have a baby, and then she'll never be friends with me no more."

"Oh yes, she will," promised Edith. "She's very fond of you, Betty."

"You can't be fond of two people," answered Betty; "and she'll go daft over her baby, and I hope it will die."

"Oh, Betty, how can you?" cried Mary. Then she turned to Edith, whose gentle attitude made her feel brave.

"Be it out of all bounds you can forgive Uncle Wesley?"

* *Maggoty pie*—maggie.

she asked. "He's terrible put about, Aunt Edith. I'm sure he'd do anything to pleasure you if he could."

"He seemed to be very happy playing cricket, Mary."

"'Tis all put on, Aunt Edith, so as the people shouldn't know what a state he's in. Me and Betty have watched him sometimes in secret, and he ain't happy when nobody's looking at him. I promise you."

"It's not a thing for little girls to understand," answered Edith. "Now it's getting on to tea-time. Let's walk slowly back."

She rather wanted Susan Bake and Wesley to see her with the children, that they might understand no small feelings moved her against her old sweetheart's race.

"I don't want no tea," declared Betty. "I want to be all alone by myself in some horny-winky, lonesome place."

"Nonsense! The thing is to forget the stings, and then they'll forget you."

"You've given it to 'em proper, I'm sure," added Mary, regarding the desolated nettle-bed.

They returned, and presently the feast began, and the long tables, set out of doors about the cottage of Aunt Mercy, were soon occupied.

The children sang a grace and then fell to. For three parts of an hour they ate and drank; then returned to their games. It was after the meal that Edith found herself beside Tom Hawkey, and asked him if he would walk with her. He was surprised, and agreed to do so.

"Let me get the cricket going again, and then I'll come," he said. "They'll have to stop soon for the tide."

She pointed the way and left him, and in twenty minutes he followed her. They sat presently on a stone perched up upon the side of the coomb. The spot was conspicuous, and many marked them together and drew conclusions. None suffered more than Wesley Bake, who stuck to the boys and played like a Spartan with his heart hid.

"We're old friends, Tom," began Edith when he reached her, "and you mustn't let any fancied reason make you forget your friendship now, when most I want it."

"That's little likely."

"You know what's happened?"

He nodded.

"But all the ins and outs you don't know, and you won't hear. You refuse to discuss the subject."

"It's wisest, Edith. A thing like that—so private and intimate and—sacred, you may say. The less outsiders think or talk, the better."

"Perhaps. You're the last to think or say anything to hurt anybody. But your good opinion means something to me—more than you know. I want you to understand what has happened and why it has happened."

"Must I?"

"Not if it bores you, of course. You have plenty to think upon, no doubt. But—but—oh, Tom, you can't help hearing about this, and you can't help thinking a little about it for old time's sake. You were so good, and it hurts me among all the other hurts—it hurts me to know you don't know, and don't care."

"It's because I care I didn't want to know," he answered. "Of course I care. Your good means a great deal to me, and——"

"Then listen," she said. "If you can still feel you want me to be a happy woman, listen. Because till you know and till you can say I'm right and fully justified in doing what I have done, I shan't be a happy woman. I put your opinion as high as ever I did, and I don't care a button about any other, and that's the truth. You mustn't think that's strange: it's natural. Anybody in Delabole would feel the same. It's just your unconscious power. At any rate, I ask you to hear me, as a friend. I don't want advice, or anything. I only want you to say that I am fully exonerated in your mind."

"You're little likely to have made a mistake," he admitted. "You were always the soul of justice, Edith."

"But justice in the abstract is nothing. It's when we're called to do justice that difficulties begin. We never know what will happen when we are called to do justice, especially if we're involved—vitaly involved ourselves. I thought Wesley Bake was the soul of justice—so did you—so did everybody. Yet—— May I tell you about it? Don't refuse to hear, Tom, for I'm a very unhappy woman, and it will be the last straw if you won't try to help me."

He did not answer at once. She appeared to be speaking from motives of mere egotism and for her soul's peace. He imagined that nothing beyond the support of his opinion was in her mind, and Edith would have told herself the same if she had for an instant considered the thing she was about to do. But whether in honesty she could now have believed herself is doubtful. She did not stop to consider of what subtle strands her purpose was woven. But hidden from her own heart were new ideas inspired by his near presence—ideas she would not care to have faced. She was back again where she had stood a year ago: between two men.

For his part Hawkey would willingly have persisted in his former attitude, and declined to hear more of the matter from Edith, as he had declined to hear it from all others; but in face of her direct appeal it was difficult longer to refuse. Moreover, he began to see there was no reason why he should do so. He felt that to hesitate meant weakness in himself and unkindness to her. The dissension had mystified him utterly, because he was aware of the standards of both parties, and could not imagine any such cleavage on a question of right and wrong between two just persons. At length he answered.

“It's enough if you want to know what I think, Edith. There's no reason why you shouldn't. If it was any man alive but Bake I'd—— However, go ahead. That'll come after.”

Then, on the impulse of his own hungry heart, he added:

“It would be strange if you and I didn't think alike.”

She flushed a little with pleasure, but he was sorry he had given her cause to do so. He found himself agitated by her. There was an aura about her that made him almost forget to breathe. He turned a little aside and looked at the sea.

“Go ahead, then.”

She began slowly and carefully. She weighed her words, and was scrupulously exact. With meticulous precision she unfolded the story, and her narration was premeditated, for she had rehearsed it many times. But, as the tale advanced, Edith herself crept in, and her heart beat high and her colour rose to the old anger. Passion tintured her words. She

stopped once to wipe away some tears. But Hawkey made no comment when she broke off. He merely waited for her to go on. After her crescendo of emotion Edith grew cool again. She summed up upon the circumstances, declared how she found it utterly impossible to see that her lover could be right from any point of view, and felt that, for her mother's honour, and, indeed, for her father's also, she found it impossible to keep her engagement.

Her story rang true to the listener. Even her anger struck a righteous note. Every instinct of his own desires urged him to believe and acclaim and sympathize, to applaud her conduct as seemly and worthy of her. And just because this was so, and the man felt that the accident of justice might presently bring the woman into his arms, he fought himself desperately and fell back upon the reserves of his own nature. When, therefore, she made an end and lifted her beautiful eyes to his face, he restrained himself, and while he longed to praise the splendour of her decision, declare that she had done well and fill her sad heart with a ray of content, instead he disappointed her harshly, exhibited a balance and impartiality that he was far from feeling, and chilled his own heart as well as hers. Her face asked for bread and he gave her a stone. He felt at that moment his own fate might hang upon his answer. He knew that a gesture would have sufficed her without a word, but he uttered a platitude. For her long narrative and for the dumb question in her eyes that finished it, he answered that he felt deeply interested, and that one story was only good till another was told. He hastened to modify the statement; but the ointment of explanation could not allay the pain of the blow. She changed and rose. She appeared almost frightened. There came a wistful look into her face that he had never seen before. It hurt him terribly, for he felt as though he had deliberately injured some creature not strong enough to defend itself.

She did not answer his remark, but showed her astonishment and pain.

"It's a figure of speech, Edith. Naturally, you feel it a poor compliment after all you've said to me, and, God knows, I'm little likely to hear any story that will make yours look less than it does at this moment."

"There was a time when you'd never have wanted to hear any side but mine, or feel with any other heart but mine, or see with any other eyes but mine," she said.

"That's as true to-day as yesterday, or a year ago. There's many things I want. Not so many, neither; but one. Forgive me. Trust me. You came to me for trust. And I'll not abuse that trust. You seek to know what I think, Edith."

"I seek to know what you feel, Tom."

"You know what I feel well enough. And you shall hear what I think, too, before very long. I'm proud that you cared for what I thought. Nothing could have made me feel so proud as that. And I'll do you the honour to think of it as I never yet thought of anything—with my heart and my brain and my living soul, Edith."

"It's not worth all that. I don't want to waste your time over my affairs."

"My time should be yours and my eternity," he said, "if— There, leave it. Trust me."

"You're not ashamed of me coming with my cares to you?"

"I'm proud, I tell you—mortal proud—too proud almost for a man to be—that you could ask me."

She felt comforted now.

"Don't keep me long in doubt, then."

"Be sure I shan't."

"It's natural, in a way, that I should like to know you are on my side."

"It's certain as my life that I want to be—hunger to be."

"And yet my word's only good till—no, I won't go back to that. It hurt, and it was unreasonable for a woman like me to let it hurt. It oughtn't to have hurt."

"It was the blunt way I put it."

"Come down now," she said. "Whatever will they say?"

They returned to the shore and separated.

Then, when twilight came and the sun burned over the west and sank splendidly into the sea, the holiday party started homeward.

But two men with full hearts, their duty to the children done, chose rather to walk back alone by the cliffs.

Only chance prevented Wesley Bake and Tom Hawkey from meeting at once, for they pursued the same path; but the miller started first, and was half a mile ahead before Hawkey set out. Had Tom recognized the figure visible in the gathering dusk ahead, he might have joined him.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE OLD ORDER CHANGES

UNDER a precipice beneath a beetling crag, upon whose flat summit stood the garden of the Retallacks' dwelling, there began to yawn the mouth of a tunnel. Above it the rocks were curiously streaked with perpendicular scratches, which showed where vanished generations of rock-men had driven their blasting-holes. Beneath this excavation a new tramway extended. The tunnel already ran fifteen feet into the cliff. A ceiling of hard slate supported the opening—a shelf smooth and flawless; solid pillars stood to right and left, while the floor of the tunnel was another stratum of slate.

Hawkey, in the cave-mouth, spoke with Jack Keat and other men. Some of them viewed the hole with uneasiness.

"You want no astills* here," explained the manager. "The slate's a better ceiling than timber."

"'Tis an unkid sort of place to find in a quarry, and there'll be no daylight come they go fifty feet," said a man.

"There'll be electric light by that time."

The chamber was square rather than round, for the slate now being blasted therefrom came out in solid cubes, and left the tunnel of regular form. The trend of the slate ran in a steady slope from east to west, and the purpose of the great experiment was to drive a tunnel and then branch it, and follow the slate if it should prove worthy of following. None as yet could tell that, but the promise appeared reasonable; the bed now being broken out was very hard, and quartz veins spoiled it; but good live stone might lie behind, and a chance of increased prosperity lurked within. For those who are raised above absolute daily care, chance of sudden success and betterment is the salt to the dish of life; while the element

* *Astills*—a ceiling of boards in a mine.

of chance is not salt, but poison, to many who live upon chance, and would thankfully exchange doubt for certainty. Yet even among such as are suddenly lifted to security, you shall meet not a few who miss the battle and find the fight with the storm was better than the peace of the haven. And that order of spirit must suffer when Socialism spreads its procrustean bed for all to toss upon.

High up in the square hole, their perches reached by a steel rope, two men were working, and now Hawkey made the ascent and joined them. A pipe wound like a serpent into the opening and brought compressed air, which set a steel drill hissing in the slate. Ned Retallack and his mate bored holes, now ahead of them, now to the right, and now to the left. They were using gunpowder. For some days they had fought with a curtain of quartz, hard as flint, but they were through it; a rent was made and the quartz had been cut out so that only the ragged white fringe of it hung over their heads across the slate ceiling. Beyond was slate again, broken by glittering veins of useless ore.

Hawkey shook his head when the workers showed him samples of the silver-lead; nor did he smile at blocks of slate the last blast had loosened. It was disappointing, and the desired improvement could not be reported. But they had only just begun, and he expected nothing yet. Nature so greatly assisted them in her rock formations that the work was not costly. But the stone had to be removed. It was the eternal business of driving rubbish that ate up money and increased the enormous burrow-mounds with their foothills in the meadows half a mile away. Trolleys ran along the tram-lines, and a lofty trident straddled its legs over them. With chains the masses of useless stone were lifted by it, and then lowered into the trucks, and dragged away by the quarry horse. He had his own travelling-box, and came and went from the pit like the men.

From the new hole the works gleamed like a picture set in a black frame. Activity marked all sections; there was movement everywhere, and the steel gossamers from the pappot-head now ran elsewhere than to the hidden "Grey Abbey" seam. Already the enormous moraine had been attacked, and was being reduced at the rate of a hundred tons a day. A month's work represented a mere scratch at its base. At one

point, however, good stone had been found high on the mass of the avalanche, and preparations were being made to approach it. It peeped out like a hopeful blue eye in the midst of the mountain of fallen over-burden.

Men also swarmed on the ' Wesley Hole ' seam, and in the heart of the quarry another gang laboured where paying slate was known to lie. To a point on the dizzy wires above them descended the trolleys. Then they loosened a catch, and fell perpendicularly, as spiders from their webs, into the quarry bottom. Anon they climbed aloft once more, regained their aerial tramway, and floated upward like brown birds to the heights above.

Ned and his fellow-worker had bored their holes, and now they poured coarse black gunpowder into them. They charged them and set the time fuses, then climbed down the steel rope and ran clear. A steam whistle from a crane cried that the blasting-time had come, and a dozen charges in different parts of the quarry were simultaneously ignited. The workers went to cover, and in two minutes a succession of explosions rang round the quarries, and puffs of heavy white smoke ascended from cavities and ledges. Here and there no visible effect followed, but elsewhere in some steep place a charge broke away tons of stone, and sent them leaping with increasing speed to the floors beneath. Then, after the great cup had flung the riot back and forth a while, and every echo had sunk to a whisper and so ceased, the men reappeared, returned to their work, and began the business of " breaking out " the dislocated slate. Often, in order to shake clear some huge fragment, half a dozen rock-men would heave on their irons together, and apply simultaneous force, as sailors upon a rope. Then rose the quarryman's immemorial cry, lifted by the leader of the gang: " Hip ! Hip ! Hoy ! Hip ! Hip ! Hoy ! "—three musical notes, of which the first and second were short and sharp, the third long-drawn-out and loud.

From the tunnel a dense volume of smoke bellowed, for three charges had exploded there; and soon Ned and his mate climbed back, to find useful havoc wrought.

They and the majority of the younger men favoured innovation, and argued great hope that tunnelling would increase the output of the works; their elders doubted, and

professed no sanguine anticipation. They declared that with any other manager they would rather have sought new open-air quarries, than assist at an experiment their judgment disapproved. As for the old men, they cried out openly, and held the attempt not only vain, but impious. It was not for them to dictate to their Maker, and seek other paths than those along which He had successfully led their forefathers. They adopted an attitude common a hundred years ago, when the new roads created by the genius of Macadam horrified England, and the clergy preached from their pulpits against the iniquity of such a change. Some of the ancient quarrymen frankly desired poor speed for the tunnelling, and Moses Bunt, who never lacked the courage of his reactionary opinions, openly wished for failure. He, too, had steadfastly opposed the installation of the electric light that was to brighten the next winter darkness of Delabole.

“Who the mischief wants to see by night if he ain’t an owl?” asked Moses. “The night be the time for darkness and resting the eyes, and the God that made it will strike the next generation with blindness, so like as not, for trying to turn night to day. I would if I was Him.”

Tom Hawkey lived as much for himself as for the quarries at this season. While he exerted all energy and powers of persuasion to win enthusiasm for the changes and excite all to work for them in a sanguine spirit, his own affairs served to banish sleep from his couch and hunger from his board. A thousand times he weighed the significance of the scene with Edith; a thousand times he assured himself that such a woman could hardly err in so grave a matter. She was impetuous, but she was very just. So, at least, he had always found her. He longed to take his stand by her side once for all, and proclaim himself as her supporter. The temptation to do so was very great, for, modest though he might be, he had keen powers of observation, and he guessed by her bearing on the occasion of the school treat that he might win her after he had exonerated her action and approved it. He knew that his judgment carried weight in Delabole, and he guessed that as soon as it was found he stood for the Retal-lacks many would go over to their side, content that he—a man who always weighed his opinions—pronounced them in the right. But self-interest, though it had never striven with

him as now it did, was long atrophied by his manner of life and his own nature. He was a generous man with a bent of mind too impartial to be deceived in this great crisis, for his sight remained clear, and his personal desires could not blind it. To say that Edith was right meant much more than the assertion. It implied that Wesley Bake was wrong, that Pooley Retallack was wrong, that not a few other responsible people were wrong. To proclaim them wrong without satisfying himself was impossible for Hawkey. That Edith should be mistaken seemed also impossible; but the very fact that his conclusion might be vital to himself made him morbid about it. He wasted nightly hours in examining the problem from a thousand points of view. Sometimes he satisfied himself that Edith could not be mistaken, since her decision was built on facts; sometimes, allowing all force to the conclusions of the other side, he told himself that, in the sequel, he might come to her and assure her it was impossible for a man with his order of mind to decide between her and Wesley Bake. He regarded this as the worst that could happen. He considered Bake, and, without belittling him, reminded himself that the miller was one of average ability and might possess a certain, common obstinacy to cling to his opinions, once formed, in face of reasonable arguments. This was an everyday human failing. He did not doubt Bake's motives, but tried to believe that the question had shifted, and become, for Wesley, tinged with personal feeling before Edith's resolute stand. He dwelt on this, and comforted himself with the idea that Bake had suffered passion to rouse a foolish obstinacy in him; that now, rather than admit himself mistaken, he had wrecked his own hopes of happiness. It was certain that Bake would never have proved an ideal husband for Edith Retallack if he could act so.

Thus far he went, weakened by a calenture of love. He was not at his best to withstand the shock. Events had sapped his resources and overtaxed him. His life's work, into which for many months were poured every ounce of his physical strength and wits, had left him now weary and weaker than he knew. Upon this condition suddenly opened the prospect of a precious, personal triumph that he had believed was lost for ever, and all ways of thought that led towards that triumph were welcome.

But his disciplined mind (grounded in those grey principles of renunciation proper to his religious creed, stablished on inherent mental characteristics for which, indeed, his beliefs were not responsible, but which chimed with them) could not thus be satisfied. He had not only to reckon with others, but himself, and he knew, when each morning broke, that many of the ideas woven in darkness would not endure. But that supreme selfishness and resolute battle for one's own self-expression and welfare may be justified, he was able to see, and he told himself that, under certain conditions, he would have thrown in his vote for Edith without troubling to examine the opposition's claims. Had Bake been a worthless man—had his record been light or doubtful—— But when he began to think seriously of Bake, his first theories concerning the miller vanished. He now judged him by himself, and began to measure the size of the obstacle that must have made Wesley stick to his own determination at any cost rather than agree with Edith. Hawkey asked himself whether he could have resigned Edith on such a cause of quarrel, supposing that he had won her. Then he began to feel respect for Wesley Bake. Wrong though the miller might be, it was very certain that nothing but mighty convictions and a sure sense that he was not wrong would have made him pay this price. Such a man could not be put aside without sufficient reason; and while from a personal standpoint more than sufficient reason existed to ignore Bake, no reason could justify such a course for Hawkey. To decide against the man without hearing him was impossible, and, looking back from this conclusion to his previous deliberations, Tom felt ashamed that he had ever entertained the possibility of so doing. His life, for good or ill, must stand on sure foundations, and the justice of his conclusions be open to public examination.

He sought Wesley, therefore; and not only him he sought. He went to the lawyers first, and gathered their opinion. They knew the manager, and were glad to oblige him. Their view was absolutely impartial. They held that the Trustee stood free to take either course. None could quarrel with his decision or control it. He was at liberty to deny the claim of Jane Lobb or to satisfy it. Personally, the solicitors of Retallack's will gave it as their opinion that they should

not have acted as Bake had now acted. Had they been empowered to administer, they would have divided the money and given each claimant half of it. But, while stating their view, they desired to make it clear they did not for an instant reflect on Wesley's action, or suggest that he had taken a course imperfectly justified. That it was impossible to impugn Bake's motives Hawkey of course perceived for himself. He determined, therefore, to see Bake and risk a snub.

The miller might tell him to mind his own business, but Hawkey hoped that he would rather meet him in a friendly spirit. For he designed to be frank with Wesley, and explain that he had heard Edith's side, as a friend of long standing, that Edith much desired to know his personal view, and that, though he had not willingly entered into the discussion, now that he was in it, he could proceed no further towards a conclusion without hearing the other side. Some men might have felt the need to warn Wesley before such an interview that they were, if anything, influenced against him for private reasons, and that their own affairs intruding were likely to prejudice them, if only subconsciously, against his arguments; but Hawkey felt no need to do this. Had he suspected such a danger, he might have declared it. But for him the danger did not exist. Far more likely was he to err in an opposite direction, and, knowing what lived in his heart, discount too severely his own emotion and desire. For there is a nobility of mind that handicaps a man out of life's race altogether—a grandeur that denies even the splendours of saintship or martyrdom; and if the Omnipotent Justice of our dreams should ever open for us the heaven of our hopes, therein many a nameless and forgotten man and woman would be found unwillingly enthroned above the salt of the earth.

There came a day when Hawkey asked Edith to make holiday with him.

"You love to be in sight of the sea," he said. "I'll bring food and drink for you, and we'll go to King Arthur's Castle and have a proper talk."

"You've seen Wesley?"

"I have."

"And your mind's made up?"

“ Will you come and hear ?”

She hesitated, looked into his eyes, and thought she read them.

“ A place where great people lived and suffered long ago, so why shouldn't little people take themselves and their affairs to it ?” he asked.

“ I like the castle,” she answered. “ I go there oftener than anybody guesses.”

“ On Saturday, then. We'll meet at the stile above Treholme Farm. You know. If fine, of course.”

She promised, and hid her interest, seeing that he concealed his.

A slight sense of jubilation stole upon Edith after that brief interview; but it subsided swiftly, and she found that it left her sadder than she had ever been before. It was not of Hawkey that she thought now—there would be plenty of time for that—but her mind was occupied with the miller, and she mourned him as one already dead.

CHAPTER XXXV

FELLOW-TRAVELLERS PASS BY

GRANDFATHER Nute found that a lifetime of self-restraint and simple living now stood him in good stead, and he faced his change of environment with a nerve that many men of fifty might have envied.

Indeed his approaching marriage heightened his energies, increased an unfailing sense of humour, which even his religious convictions had never diminished, and mellowed his philosophy.

He walked now with Ned Retallack to drink a glass at the 'One and All.' They had been packing through the day, for Ned's new home was prepared to welcome his mother. She would come to keep house for him until he wedded in six months' time, and Grandfather had already left Quarry Cottage. His nuptials were to be celebrated in a month and, for the moment, he occupied a room at the 'One and All' and took his meals with Richard Male, the landlord. Pooley had gone to Noah Tonkin's. His wages had been raised; he had won the friendship of Tom Hawkey and believed the goal of his hope and ambition would, in the good time of Providence, be reached. He was content therefore, did the work to his hand and prayed daily for one blessing: that he might be reconciled with his mother. As for Anna, she found the emotions of leaving her home and losing her family more poignant day by day. Hourly she declared the situation to be harder than she could bear; but she bore it, and the people consoled her with the reflection that never had a woman been called to endure so much, or answered so bravely to the call. Edith was going to Julitta, whose child would soon be born.

"The first and greatest thing for us human creatures is to keep our self-respect," said Grandfather Nute to Ned. "And I make it a proud boast that all of us—everyone with my

blood in their veins—has done so through this great upheaval. Many might have lost their self-command and run about and been very undignified. You'll find that only human beings can lose their self-respect, Ned. Natural creatures, without the inner light, never lose it. And how much the more ought we with souls to keep it?"

"The creatures don't know they're born," answered Ned. "So they can't lose what they haven't got. Look at them bullocks in the field. Not one of 'em knows he's a bullock."

"True, and well put," admitted Grandfather. "I dare say if they did know, they'd die of shame. Take the starlings hopping round 'em. 'Tis the same there; not one of 'em knows he's a starling, and so they go on their way and ain't cast down."

"What do they think they are?" asked Ned.

"We can't tell that. They may not even know they're birds—such is their ignorance. We can't get into their minds—though no doubt they've got minds. For bullock knows bullock and starling knows starling; so they must have some idea of what they are and all agree about it."

"They might very like have wrong opinions—such poor creatures as them," said Ned.

"That's only to say they're mortal," answered Mr. Nute. "If they never made a mistake, then they're better than us, which they are not."

"I dare say they think themselves a lot more important than they really are, grandfather."

"And not the only ones if they do, Ned. But they can teach if they can't learn, and we may pick up wisdom from them, and get a jar to our self-conceit also sometimes. We say, in our pitying way, that there's no security in nature, and the creatures live from hand to mouth and can't count on no support when they get up too old to work for their living; but do we help to give 'em security? Far from it."

Moses Bunt met them and proceeded with them

"Good-evening, Moses," said Grandfather. "I was just saying that 'tis a reflection on man in the lump that his fellow-creatures—birds, beasts, and so on—don't trust him. The moment they know a bit about his ways, they trust him no more. And now it has got to be a regular instinct in 'em, and a young rabbit is just as timid and doubtful of us as an old one."

“Why should they trust men?” asked Mr. Bunt. “Why should they want to breathe the same air with men? They’re right, for his good is their evil most times, and even them we treat well we nourish for food, not love. I trusted men once; but that’s a damned long time ago. Not for fifty years have I trusted the creature—know too much about him.”

“You trust Benny Moyse,” said Ned.

“No more. I did, but not now. He’s like the rest—kept away from me when I was ill and then came along with his concertina and pretended he’d only just heard of it. ‘You’re a liar, Benny,’ I said. ‘You knew it well enough and you kept away because you’re so base as the rest, and thought I was going to die and so not worth bothering about. And now you may go to the devil,’ I said to the man, ‘for I’ll not neighbour with you no more—not another drink will you get out of me!’ His jaw dropped and he tucked his instrument under his arm and he went. That’s my last so-called friend gone—good riddance too.”

“’Tis very unseemly to be a friendless man—especially when the fault’s all your own,” declared Grandfather. “I’m sorry to say so, Moses, but you’re no credit to human nature.”

“Don’t want to be,” retorted Mr. Bunt. “I see through human nature and despise it, James. ’Tis built on humbug and lies—all lies. We be all stuck together with lies to make a village, like bricks be stuck together with mortar to make a house. And him who tells naked, fearless truth and shames the devil same as I do—he’s out in the cold; and even a fairly sensible old man like you can say he’s no credit to human nature!”

“You ought to get up to chapel and have a go at ’em, like my brother, Pooley,” said young Retallack. “Come in the keel-alley and have a game, Moses.”

They had reached the inn.

At the bar stood Noah Tonkin, Antipas Keat, who was on his legs again, and John Sleep from the newspaper-shop.

They were talking of food.

“Us was just saying what we best liked to eat,” said Tonkin, “and it shows how true it is that one man’s meat is another man’s poison. A greedy subject, but taste was put in us for a purpose.”

“We can’t live without victuals,” said Grandfather, “and

'twould be false to pretend that they are all one to us. We have our likes and dislikes."

Mr. Male spoke from behind the bar.

"Give me a breast of veal and green sauce—so much as I can gather in—and a pint of black-wine-toddy to wash it down. I don't want to sleep on nothing better than that," he said.

"A meal for heroes, no doubt," declared Tonkin.

"Yes, but not for us middle-aged ones," argued Antipas Keat. "I like a marinated pilchard to my supper and a glass of eggy hot along with it. If I was to take in a lot of butcher's meat of a night, I should get no ideas, but a nightmare instead."

"You gather your ideas of a night, I dare say," said Grandfather Nute civilly. Mr. Keat had expressed regret at a scene in the past and the old man had blamed himself and forgiven the inventor.

"They flash to me by night," admitted Antipas. "They come as unexpected as a thunderbolt. Sometimes they'll rise above a train of deep and solid thought, like the gold weathercock on a church steeple, and put the finishing touch; but oftener, they just flash like lightning."

"And what do you do then?" asked Tonkin.

"I light the candle and reach for my notebook and pencil, and scratch it down, so as it shan't be lost."

"And what do your wife do about it?" inquired Moses Bunt.

"She's used to it."

"And what do your great ideas look like by daylight, Antipas?" asked Grandfather.

"Unequal," admitted the baker. "I grant that. Sometimes the waking mind shows they're no use, or call for too many other inventions to back 'em; or they may be too large and expensive to work out."

"And when do you get at your house again?"

"So soon as I can stand to it. I've promised my missis that we eat our Christmas dinner there."

"Be you going to tackle the slates single-handed, if it's not a rude question, Antipas?" asked Grandfather Nute mildly.

"I may and I may not," answered Mr. Keat evasively.

"Nobody doubts you could; a mechanical thing like that

is child's play to you," continued Grandfather. "But the question for your mind should be, knowing your great powers and usefulness, whether the gift of your time oughtn't to be put to higher things."

Antipas declared the same idea had occurred to him.

"What do you say, Moses?" asked Tonkin; and the cynic took his nose out of his mug.

"Some fool have got to put on the slates," he said, "and if Keat wants to be the fool, let him. A proper slater would get through the job without falling on his head and breaking his neck, and very like Antipas won't—that's all the difference."

The talk wandered and broke up. Ned and another lad went out together; Grandfather talked to John Sleep about family affairs. They spoke of the Nanjulians, and in a lull the rest heard them.

"She's cheeldin'," said Mr. Nute, "and the trouble's begun. 'Tis to be a seven months' child. I'm rather sorry for that, because, though sometimes a seventh month's child turns out a fair wonder, and leaves the world better than he found it, more often they are poor, chitter-faced, useless antics, and squinny-eyed as like as not."

"She must hope for the best," answered Noah Tonkin. Then Bunt spoke. He had become animated, and his little eyes flashed.

"Don't you worry, James. There's nothing to fret about on that score. Your granddaughter's babe will be a nine months' child all right. I didn't see 'em mooning about in Lanteglos churchyard last fall for nothing. And Billy Jose, the sexton, will bear me out."

They protested very heartily, and Male spoke. He seldom permitted himself to be angry with a customer, but now he scorned prudence.

"You hateful old canker!" he said. "I don't even like to think my mugs have been between your lips. For back-biting, lying, and slandering, your equal don't live. And I wish you'd take yourself and your evil thoughts out of my bar, and never come back no more."

"There!" cried Moses. "What did I tell you a minute ago, Grandfather? Truth makes the people hiss like a frightened goose."

“It isn’t truth, you bitter-weed,” answered Mr. Nute. “You’re always grovelling and grubbing in the cesspits of your own heart, and crying out that what you find there is truth. You can’t reach the truth if your mind is poisoned and you come to your fellow-creatures with hate instead of love. You’re a bad old man, Bunt, and you ought to look to yourself before it’s too late, and ask the Almighty to send His angels with a besom to scour your soul, for it wants it.”

“Baa! Baa!” answered Mr. Bunt. “A lot of silly sheep, that’s what you be; and the soul of a man that’s going to marry at seventy-three to ’scape the workhouse be just as much in need of a besom as mine. And as for you, Richard Male, I’ll come in your drinking-shop and use your mugs and let down your beer just when I choose and so often as I choose, and woe betide you if you refuse to serve me!”

He then permitted himself a very vulgar gesture, designed to pour insult on the whole company, spat at Grandfather’s feet, and withdrew.

Tonkin alone could speak. The others were dumb with indignation.

“Crossed in love, I reckon,” he said dryly.

The idea restored them, and Mr. Nute was the first to laugh.

“There’s nobody like you for a good joke, when the subject flushes it,” he said. “If you can knock a laugh out of a trouble, so often as not you’ll draw its sting at the same time. Life without a sense for the funny side be a salad without oil. The only way with such a man as Bunt is to laugh at him, or pray for him. In fact there’s no reason why you shouldn’t do both.”

“I’ve thought sometimes,” answered Tonkin, “that to pray for a man—in public, I mean—might often be the saving of him. If he does wrong, we hale him up before justice, and so why shouldn’t we hale him up before his Maker? It would often be a fair eye-opener for a sinner if he found his fellow-creatures knew all about it, and he suddenly heard his name called out in church, with the hope that God would soften his heart, or mend his wits, as the case might be.”

“A very kicklish experiment,” said Grandfather, “and it would all depend on the character of the erring man. ‘Man,’

I say; but it might be a woman, for what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, Noah Tonkin; and when you say 'woman,' you're up against a difficulty in a moment."

"Why?" asked the innkeeper. "They're wrong so often as men."

"You ask 'why,' Richard. And the answer is custom and tradition, and feeling and respect for the weaker vessel. 'Tis only females themselves can kill that feeling; and not even them, I should hope, for it runs through nature down to the fishes. And to hear a woman named in a church congregation, and herself among 'em! Think of the hysterics, if no worse. No, we couldn't do it. There's no minister yet born who would do it. In fact, there's something cowardly to it. 'Twould turn the doubters and backsliders away from church, and them that feared a reprimand would take very good care to escape it, and them that didn't would bring libel actions against the ministry."

"'Tis always a very pretty question between helping your fellow-men and minding your own business," declared John Sleep. "As one who reads a good deal and have made a study of police news for many years, I can't help seeing that friendship is a terrible tricky affair. The best of us do mighty few things out of pure goodwill. We may start like that, but it often ends in self-seeking and getting something for our trouble. The number of simple friendships between well-meaning men and women that end in the divorce court is a fair caution. Again and again you read how the male was introduced to the female in mixed company; and then they meet again; and then he tells her that she's the only woman in the world that ever understood him, and she tells him that the wonderful beauty of his character is the joy of her lonely life; and then, before you can blow your nose, it's a visit to a hotel together under an alias."

"All along of the higher education," declared Mr. Male.

Now Grandfather prepared to retire, and wished the company good-night.

They spoke of him when he had gone, and praised him.

"A wonderful old man," said Tonkin, "and brisk as an airey-mouse. You don't often see an ancient with such kick and sprawl in him at his age."

"He's earned his reward," declared John Sleep, "and in

my sister he has got a treasure, though perhaps I oughtn't to praise her."

"I've heard you do the other thing, however, John," murmured Antipas Keat.

"I own it," admitted Sarah's brother. "Being as I am, rather an easy man, and—God forgive me—not particular clean, I often vex her with my untidy ways; and she will come down upon me, where another woman I could name here and there wouldn't worrit. But though I set no great store on cleanliness and order myself, and find I can get on with less steady buzzing than be natural to Sarah, that's not in fairness to say anything against her. We may admire much that we don't practise, Antipas; and James Nute, being by nature as spry as a lizard and most orderly in mind and body, won't feel hurt when he finds that Sarah and soap and water are two names for the same thing. If I spoke against my sister, no doubt 'twas on some day when she properly drowned me out of house and home."

"'Tis the bettermost of 'em that do so," said Mr. Male. "We can't have it both ways."

A long dusk died, and the customers departed, for Delabole goes early to bed. Soon the last light twinkled out, and peace brooded over the little streets and under the stars. Far away in the woods, nigh Newhall Mill, a goatsucker whirred, until his ceaseless stridulation made the night throb. Then a grey fog, that fringed night's delicate mantle, stole to his tryst, and he was silent.

CHAPTER XXXVI

WITHOUT FEAR OR REPROACH

RAGGED curtains of castellated stone climbed up the northern side of a promontory, and stretched their fretted grey across the sea and sky. They were pierced with a Norman door, and far beyond it danced blue waters to the horizon; above it shone a summer sky, against whose silver and blue the ruin sparkled brightly. Beneath, a little bay opened, and the dark precipices that fell to it were fringed with a trembling lace of foam; while beyond, 'by Bude and Boss,' the coastline flung out hugely, cliff on cliff and ness on ness, until Hartland lay like a cloud upon the sea, and little Lundy peeped above the waters. The milky summer air lapped all, melted the ragged crags together, breathed on the white foam light, and touched many flowers. Direct sunshine penetrated this opal haze from point to point, now bringing a headland out from among its neighbours, now accentuating the rocky islands that stood scattered seaward, now flushing a grey gull's wing.

Shadow played its own sleight; the cliff that was sun-kissed faded and gloomed, the sombre scarps smiled out suddenly with foreheads of gold to spread splendour along the land. Light and darkness ran over the waves also, and now far-off foam-fringes, streaking the distant bases of earth, sparkled in sunshine; now cloud shadows dimmed their whiteness and spread purple on the blue.

A ewe and a lamb came through the gateway in the castle wall. They climbed surefooted over the green slopes and browsed along together. Overhead the gulls glided, and a robber gull chased a jackdaw who carried a piece of food in his beak. The gull pressed hard upon the smaller bird until jack, after many an aerial turn and twist, was driven to drop his treasure. Whereupon the gull swooped downward and caught the morsel in mid-air before it had fallen a dozen yards.

King Arthur's Castle is perched on a noble crag whose

strata of marble and slate and silvery quartz slope from east to west downward until they round into sea-worn steps and buttresses that dip into the water. The story of gigantic upheavals is written here, and the weathered rocks are cleft, serrated, torn into wonderful convolutions for dawn and sunset to play upon and reveal. Wild-flowers find foothold on their faces, and in their wrinkles the wild birds and the samphire home. Aloft, where the skull of the crag broke through the green turf, were ridges and knobs of stone lit by the lemon anthyllis and the starry shine of white campions. Pennyworts and blue jasiones throve here also, with eye-bright and cushion-pink; but the unsleeping west wind had affected all of them, as altitude dwarfs Alpine plants. The flowers were reduced to exquisite miniatures, where they nestled in the clefts and crannies of the rocks, and flashed their clean, bright jewels against the grey and olive and orange and ebony of lichens, that washed the boulders with rich colour.

On a ledge that stood seaward and low, so that it was hidden from the summit of the head, sat Edith Retallack, and beside her on the grass Tom Hawkey lay. Far below, in the caverns of the cliffs, the sea purred gently, where oftentimes it growled and roared. Even on this peaceful day the rollers touched earth with force, and from time to time ascended a gentle thud of impact, or spouted a feather of foam aloft from some ocean-facing rock.

They had made an end of the little meal that Hawkey had brought with them in a rush basket, and at last the great matter that occasioned the picnic, the mighty business postponed by implicit consent till now, was upon his lips. Edith sat and toyed with a little bunch of sea-pinks, picked with memories of her father, who had talked of the flower when he was dying; Tom assumed an attitude of lazy comfort, designed to suggest that his spirit was also at ease. And to increase the force of the illusion, he lighted his pipe. The action reminded her of another great occasion on which he had done the like.

They talked awhile and stole gradually to the question.

"You're looking ill," she said, but he shook his head.

"Not I—never better. I'm off for a holiday soon—to Wales."

“ Only to look at slate, and talk slate, and think slate.”

“ No, not only for that—a rest, too. Now Nanjulian’s mind’s at peace, he can take over the works very well for a fortnight.”

“ Why don’t you go for a month ?”

“ A fortnight’s long enough. How’s your sister ?”

“ Splendid; and a good thing happened yesterday. Mother was there when Pooley came in, and he spoke to her, and they nearly made it up—at least, it promised so. Things will soon come all right now, I believe. A baby makes people gentle and forgiving, apparently. Why should it ?”

“ I don’t know.”

“ It does. Mother couldn’t say hard things to Pooley with her first grandchild in her arms. It’s rather beautiful, you know—for the mother: a baby, I mean. Julitta’s in heaven. She’s grown quite commonplace and like every other mother. She forgets to say clever things. She just hugs it and stares at it as the rest do. It’s a good thing that mother and Pooley are going to be reconciled, isn’t it ?”

“ A very good thing. Your brother was distressed about that. A good example—to others. Eh, Edith ?”

She started and looked at him almost with fear. The colour surged up to her face.

“ Go on,” she said. “ I want you to say just what you feel. You needn’t spare—anybody. I invited you into it. Now you can throw the blame where it lies. When I say Pooley and my mother are going to make it up, you must understand that’s only for decency and scemliness. Neither has changed.”

“ As to Pooley, Edith, I’ve had a long talk with him, too; but that’s nothing now. Wesley Bake is the matter. I’m glad this has happened—glad, for it’s opened my eyes to him.”

“ Ah !”

“ I always thought he was a very fine, straight man.”

“ So did I.”

“ I knew he’d had a lot of bother when his brother died and had come well out of it. I regarded him as above-board, and just—what every Christian man should be, in fact—no more or less.”

“ And now ?”

He did not answer immediately. Then his eyes met hers.

“ Now,” he said, “ I find I was mistaken. He’s much finer

than that. He's a great man in my judgment. He's a grand man, with a strength that any lesser man might well envy. He's done a bigger thing than ever I heard tell about—a properly splendid thing, Edith."

"You're on his side!"

"It's little matter whether I'm on his side or not; and since you ask the question, I tell you that I'm no more on his side than on yours. It's impossible to say that he's wrong in his opinion, and it's impossible to say that you're wrong in yours. As far as that goes—it's quite a minor thing really—as far as that goes you must think, not that you are absolutely right, but that you may be wrong; and not that he's absolutely wrong, but that he may be right. Where you're mistaken is to miss the perfect purity of his motives. You knew him, and yet could harbour a doubt there. That puzzles me. Even if you hadn't known him before, wouldn't what he's done convince you—just as it convinced me?"

"How has he convinced you, if you say you doubt whether he's right?"

"He's convinced me of his aim and motive. What he has done convinces me of them. Perhaps nobody on earth can appreciate the size of what he's done better than I can. He's a moral giant. It's magnificent!"

She stared at such enthusiasm. To hear Wesley Bake exalted by this man was good to her, but she did not perceive or guess what it meant for him who uttered the praise.

Hawkey went on:

"Ask yourself if you've ever heard of a braver action for conscience' sake. Think what it meant to him to stick to his honest convictions, when you challenged him and promised to leave him if he did so. You take yourself so lightly that perhaps you cannot measure the immensity of it. But for him to do this, or not to do it, meant death or life. Yes, you're his life. You have imagination and can see, if you think, that it meant nothing less. He looked ahead and saw all his days turned to dust and ashes, and yet, rather than baulk his conscience, he yielded up everything—everything for right. Your father's honour was in his hands—so he saw it—and he went on, at the most awful cost to himself it is possible to imagine. He had all to gain by falling in with your view of it, and all to lose by doing what he did. But he made the tremendous

sacrifice. I am proud to know such a man, Edith. It makes you hope for men at large to know there are such real big chaps among us still. For didn't he do the biggest thing of all and lay down his life for his friend? Yes, he did that—not in hot blood, not because the cry came to him from one in danger—anybody could do that; but in cold blood he acted—for a memory, for a promise to do what was right after your father died."

She did not answer, and he spoke again.

"Never forget how to forgive, Edith. Indeed, there's nothing to forgive, for there's no right or wrong in the actual point of difference. The wit of man cannot prove that he's wrong any more than it can prove you're wrong. I allow amply for your natural dismay at what he did. It was bound to be an awful shock to you and yours. But you must see what an awful shock it was for him, too. To have to do that single-handed, with hardly a voice raised on his side, and the whole weight of general opinion against him—to do it when he might have given way so naturally, you'd think. It was fine, I tell you! I could envy him the opportunity to do anything half so big. Think of it like that, and soon you'll see——"

She interrupted him.

"Soon I'll see that I ought to beg his pardon, not he mine. You mean that?"

His silence was answer sufficient. But he would not allow the possibility of doubt to hang over the point. So after a moment's reflection he spoke again.

"Yes, I mean that. You'll guess that I wouldn't go so far if I wasn't moved pretty deep about it. But, after hearing Wesley, I do most honestly believe that the line you have taken was unworthy of you and an injustice to him."

"And yet you don't think he is right and I am wrong?"

"No; I think you have both a perfect right to your own opinion. And since it was for him to act, I do not blame him—I greatly praise him—for acting. But it's not what gave rise to your conduct that I think wrong; it's the conduct itself. From such a cause no such event ought to have sprung. You loved the man, and can love die over a difference of opinion? The effect is far too big for the cause. Do you break with even an acquaintance because he or she makes what, in your judgment, is a mistake? You were too near to this to see it:

you couldn't get it into focus. It belonged too much to those sacred and precious to you. Perhaps it was impossible really to see it impartially—even to you. Yet you, of all your family, are the best endowed to be impartial. Pooley is not impartial either. He can no more see any other way out than Bake could."

She followed him carefully. She disliked him a little at the bottom of her heart for his extraordinary self-restraint. She believed now that his love had indeed perished and that, even if he had decided against Bake, he would not have approached her again himself. And she told herself that she was glad of it. If he could be cold at such a moment, then she could be cold. In one respect she was just to him. She gave him the credit of uttering his honest opinion after bringing all his powers of thought to bear on the problem. Yet, perversely, she twisted Hawkey's dictum and now presented it to him in a light she half hoped might puzzle him.

"It comes to this, then: that though, if anything, you think I'm in the right, I must none the less say I'm sorry for what I've done?"

But he would not condescend to explain.

"You know better," he said. "We've just been over that. You were right to have your own opinions about the money; but you were dead wrong not to respect his. I grant the cost to those you love was cruel; but you're far too big to have done what you did. It was clean outside your character to do it. And that's interesting, because you'll say nobody can go outside their character."

"So you praise me too much. I wasn't as fine as you thought, you see."

She struggled with herself for a while; then looked up to mark his eyes upon her. He smiled.

"You did me the honour to ask me to tell you how I viewed it. And I do you the honour to think you're too wise and brave to run away from a mistake. You must be a pretty glorious woman, you know, Edith, for a man as big as Wesley Bake to love you. He wouldn't find many women to share his life with him—perhaps he'll never find another. You'll judge how high I rate him when I say I think you are worthy to wed him. That's to praise you both as much as I can."

"And if I refuse to go back?"

“D’you really want to know what I should think then?”

“Yes, Tom, please.”

“If you didn’t go back, then I should say you weren’t half big enough or—or good enough for that man.”

She blushed again. Her mouth grew hard. She heartily disliked Hawkey for a moment. She did not answer and marshalled her thoughts about her. He rose and walked away for twenty paces and looked down at the sea. A rare bird flew past. He came back to her after observing the bird.

“Did you see it—that Cornish cough—black with a long red bill and red legs? A beautiful creature. You seldom see them now. The old story says that King Arthur was turned into a Cornish crow when he died, and still haunts his birthplace in that shape.”

“Men have shrunk a lot since then,” she said. “They don’t do big things nowadays.”

“Your man has,” he answered.

“You take it for granted then?”

“Knowing you, I do.”

“And you’ll go about and claim you brought us together again?”

“That’s not Edith said that.”

“You make me ashamed and I almost hate you,” she said.

“No, no, you don’t. I’m a blunderer, but not such a blunderer as that. Shame only comes from inside us, not from out.”

“I shall always be in your debt now.”

“Never—it’s the other way. I’m in yours. We can’t be less than friends, you know, and to be your friend is to be in your debt.”

She was surprised at his coolness and really ashamed of herself—not at her treatment of Bake, but because she had dreamed Hawkey was still to be won. He had deceived her apparently, and she felt a gulf was fixed between them and resented it. She dropped the main matter of their conversation and was about to probe this subject. A feeling of listlessness overtook her. She was conscious of a great reaction. But she found her attitude to Wesley changed. Her hardness was breaking up. She felt suspicious that both these men were bigger than she. Instead of asking him, therefore, why he had lost his old interest in her, she merely uttered her last conviction.

"I'm not worth a thought from him or you either," she said. "I've got hateful ideas. Fancy saying a moment ago that men were poor things nowadays compared to the old heroes—just after what you've told me of Wesley!"

"It was a joke—you know better. There are plenty of good men that never get songs sung about them."

"The lives of such men are songs—and poetry too."

"That's just what you would think. And you could read the poetry and help to make it."

"To make poetry of your own life is beautiful. I shall never do that. I'm too commonplace; but Julitta can."

"And your miller has."

She thought upon Wesley and her heart began to soften. She cried.

The other made no effort to stay her tears. He spoke as though he did not notice them.

"Bake is the sort of man who goes far, because he sees clear. To be tried like this falls to the lot of few and, I dare say, to come out of the furnace as he has falls to the lot of very few. It was a very teaching thing for me to hear him about it. Because he was quite unconscious of the size of the deed that he had done. He felt it keenly enough; but the thing that weighed with him was, not his own suffering and loss, but the right. He would have been glad, I believe, if I could have seen it as he did; but if I hadn't felt absolutely impartial and not drawn to one side or the other—if I'd told him straight out that I thought he was wrong, it would have only been another regret to him: I couldn't have changed him, any more than I could change you."

"You have changed me," she said.

"Not I—only the point of view and hearing a little about him. That was my privilege—to tell you a little about Wesley. And it was your good sense—it was the real Edith—to listen and let me tell it. Just my good luck to be the one to tell it."

"Why shouldn't you have the credit, then?"

"There's no credit due. It's my luck. Plenty of others could have done it as well or better, only you came to me. I told him you had come, and he was glad."

It ended quietly, soberly, tamely between them, and she thought she was being generous when she thanked him.

"I owe you a great deal more than I can ever pay, Tom.

It was kind of you to do this. And you've got the pleasure of knowing you did a good thing. Yes—a good thing you have done. You shan't lose your credit either. I'll never forget it, and he'll never forget it. Wesley is a man—a man any woman ought to feel proud of—and hopeful. He will do big things—won't he ?”

“ He has done big things. I don't see how he can do a bigger thing than this.”

Her thoughts began to be entirely occupied with Wesley Bake. She was concerned with his character and its promise. Everything had been made smooth. She could return to him without even the necessity for an apology. But she was prepared to make one. She confessed to herself that a difference of opinion, even on such a serious question, should not have made her break with him. She had held a pistol to his head and he had not flinched.

A longing to see Wesley Bake mastered her. She thought of the nearest way and made a calculation. It was possible to be at Newhall Mill in two hours from that moment; and the walk would enable her to collect her ideas.

Tom Hawkey seemed to know what was passing in her mind. He had seen her eyes roam over the land southward and guessed her new desire.

“ Why not go to him ?” he asked. “ If you follow the cliffs and then turn down into St. Teath, you'd be there by tea. A fine thing to do—eh ?”

“ But our picnic ?”

“ That's over. And I should be rather glad if you could manage it; because I'm well on the road to Boscastle here, and if I go to-day, I needn't go next week.”

“ I believe you're right. You're always right, Tom.”

He laughed and looked at his watch.

“ I'm afraid the buidler at Boscastle won't think so. D'you know your way ?”

“ Yes, I know it.”

She rose with her eyes cast in the direction that she desired to follow. She was anxious to be gone.

“ Thank you ever so much. I envy you sometimes. I envy anyone who can give more than he gets as he goes through life. Only the big people do that.”

“ Not I. I'm much in the world's debt.”

“ You’re like Wesley—I—I can’t praise you more than that, can I ?”

“ Indeed you cannot. Good-bye, Edith.”

“ Never ‘ good-bye ’ between us,” she said: “ and thank you for the lunch. It was lovely.”

She nodded and smiled and set off, while he sat and watched her. At a turn of the cliff path she looked back and waved her hand. He raised his in answer. When she was out of sight, he picked up the frail that had held their meal. He put back the two plates and the knives and forks and two little glasses. Then he went on his way.

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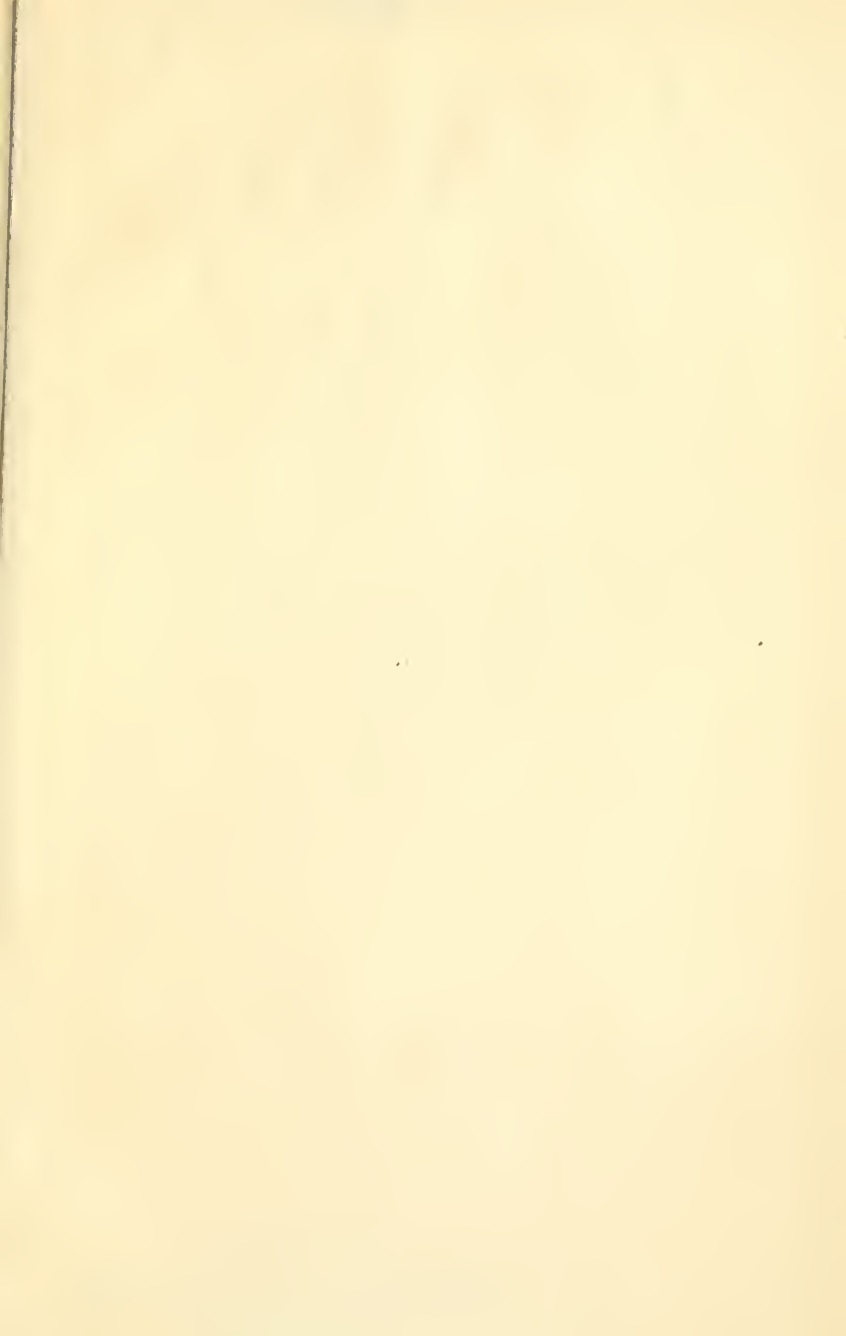
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