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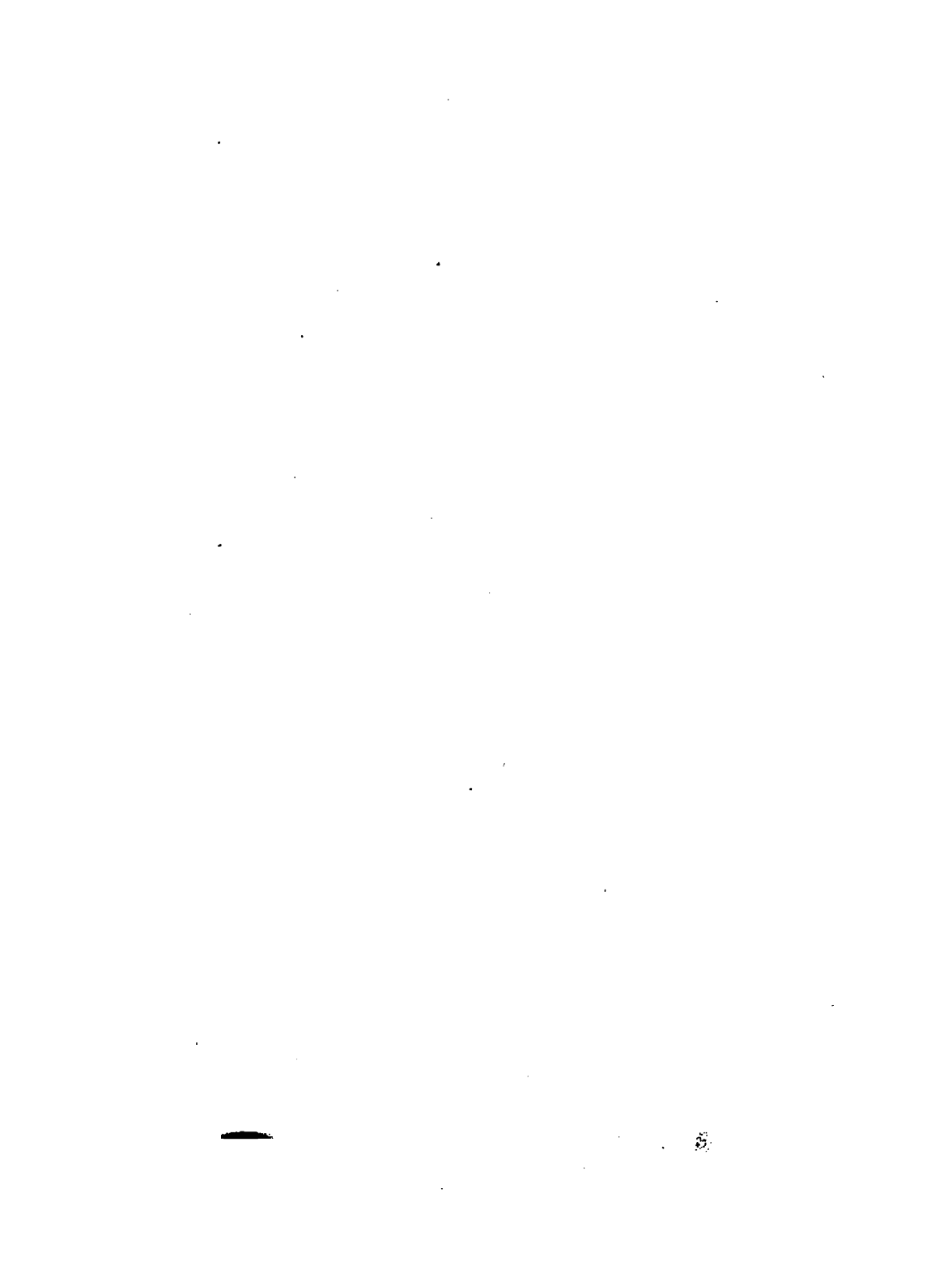
The Wonderful Wapentake  
by  
"A Son of the Soil"



no 1165

C. J. Welch

17 Feb.



**THE  
WONDERFUL  
WAPENTAKE**









WENTBRIDGE





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THE  
WONDERFUL  
WAPENTAKE

BY

J. S. FLETCHER

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ILLUSTRATED BY

J. AYTON SYMINGTON

LONDON: JOHN LANE

CHICAGO: A. C. McCLURG & Co.

1895

PR 6011

L5W6

**BALLANTYNE PRESS**  
**LONDON & EDINBURGH**

*TO*  
*MY DEAR FRIENDS*  
*GEORGE PERCIVAL*  
*AND*  
*CHARLES ERNEST RHODES*  
*IN REMEMBRANCE*  
*OF*  
*MANY HAPPY DAYS*  
*AT*  
*THE HOME FARM STAPLETON*



## ADVERTISEMENT

*It is now some years since I began contributing to the LEEDS MERCURY, and subsequently to the London STAR, the sketches of rural life and manners which have appeared in the columns of those newspapers under my pseudonym "A Son of the Soil." Since that time these articles have become well known, and—judging from my correspondence—there are many readers who desire to possess some of them in a permanent form. Out of something like three hundred articles I have selected and arranged those which follow, and for these my friend Mr. SYMINGTON has made certain drawings which will give readers some notion as to the scenery of the—to me—wonderful and beloved Wapentake of Osgoldcross.*

J. S. FLETCHER.

October 1894.





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***MEN AND WOMEN***



### *THE LITTLE PINK TOES*

OLD GEORGE ROBey, ambling slowly along the lanes in the freshness of a very frosty morning, felt that the brightness around him had no corresponding feeling in his own heart. Material things were certainly all right with old George. There had been a truly magnificent harvest in August, and the grain was still lying stacked in rick and barn ; for old George had no need, as so many farmers have had in recent times, to realise on his crops as soon as the ingathering was over. Potatoes had turned out well, too ; and the sheep had no cause to turn up their noses at the turnips. Again, corn was steadily rising ; and old George Robey was not the man to neglect his own interests. He thought it would rise a little higher, and then he would have a four days' thrashing, and turn the golden grain into golden sovereigns.

Considering all these things, and adding to them the fact that old George possessed a nice balance



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at the bank in the market-town close by, it seems strange that he should have had such a downcast look on his face that fine December morning. There it was, however, and nothing in Nature dispelled it. The old pony, which had carried him many a thousand miles in its time, seemed conscious of its master's melancholy, and ambled along in very sober fashion. It was unable to say anything, but it felt a good deal.

Half-way along the high-road old George caught sight of young George. The latter was emerging from a fallow field, very much bemired as to boots and gaiters, but wearing a fine healthy colour. He came along, kicking the rich mould from his toes. Old George reined in his pony.

"Them sheep in t'far middow," said old George, "ha' you seen 'em this mornin'?"

"Aye," said young George, laconically, "they're all right. I'm goin' to look at them in t'West Close now."

He was going on his way forthwith. Old George restrained his pony again and coughed, as if he had something to say and was loth to say it.

"Stand still a minute," said old George, "I've a word to say."

### *The Little Pink Toes*

Young George turned back and stood still, laying his hand caressingly on the pony's neck. Now that they stood close together, old George and young George made a good picture. They were both big men, large of bone and sinew, with formidable legs and arms, and round, rosy faces, enclosed in each case by a slight fringe of whisker—grey in old George, straw-colour in young George. They were curiously alike, and each face wore an expression of stolid determination, expressive of a will as hard to break as some of the rocks which were now and then ploughed up in the low-lying land.

Young George waited patiently for his father's word. Old George seemed reluctant to say it. Out it had to come, however, and presently out it came.

"I ha' heard," said old George, regarding the pony's ears steadily, "that you've a-promised marriage to yon lass o' Fowler's."

"Well?" said young George.

"Is it th' truth?"

"Yes," said young George. "And I should ha' telled you on it to-night. It were only last night that it—that it were settled atween us."

"Then I winnot hev' it," said old George, dog-

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

matically, and shifting his gaze from the pony's ears to his son's eyes. "I winnot hev' it, I tell 'ee. I'm surprised 'at you should make up to lass o' Fowler's, and 'im what he is—a brokken corn miller! And I winnot hev' it."

"I'm not going to marry Fowler," said young George, squaring his shoulders and his mind at the same time. "And he couldn't help his being brokken. Trade was bad then. And I shall wed wi' Lucy."

He looked straight into old George's eyes and nodded his head. Old George glared at him.

"I winnot hev my s<sup>o</sup>n wed wi' a brokken man's dowter," said old George. "There's money 'll go wi' ye, and she'll ha' nowt. Nowt, nobbut her smock."

"I want naught wi' her."

"More gawmless fool you," growled old George. "Gi' her up, lad; gi' her up."

Young George shook his head. A vision of Lucy Fowler, twenty, tall, lissome, rosy checked as a prize apple, always cheerful, possessed his mind and made riches seem very poor by comparison.

"I shalln't," said young George.

Old George began to tremble. A deeper colour came over his face, and he drew in his breath.

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"Tha'rt all t'bairn I hev'," said old George, "and I aim 'at tha shall marry weel. Art goin' to marry as I say or not?"

"I shall marry Lucy," said young George. "I love her true, and there's no lass hereabouts as 'ud make a better wife."

"Listen to me. I've made a will leavin' thee all I hev'—it's a tidyish lump, as tha knows—but if tha will not gi' up this lass I'll ride straight to lawyer's and teer it up and leave my money elsewhere."

"I'll do owt i' reason," replied young George, "but I ha' gien my word and I'll stick to it like a man. I shall marry Lucy."

"Then I'll say good-day to you," said old George, his face all aflame. "You can go elsewhere."

"Good-day, father," said young George, troubled, but rock-like as ever. He went on his way, but turned round at the next bend of the road and saw old George spurring his pony in the direction of Market Welby, where resided Mr. Kitchen, the lawyer. Young George looked, sighed, stuck his hands into his pockets and began to whistle.

Old George, fuming and fretting, carried his trouble to Mr. Kitchen. "You hev' my will i' yon

*The Wonderful Wapentake*

box?" said old George, nodding his grey head in the direction of a small green-painted case.

"Why, certainly," answered the lawyer.

"Fetch him out," commanded old George.

Mr. Kitchen fetched "him" out. Old George stretched forth his hand, turned a page or two over with trembling fingers, and then deliberately tore the sheets into four pieces and threw them on the fire. Mr. Kitchen exclaimed with horror.

"My dear sir! What a—dear me, what a very extraordinary proceeding. You quite——"

"I want," said old George, "to hev a new will drawn up. Drawed up immediate, and signed."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Kitchen, "but, dear me, this is so informal! Why destroy the old will?"

"I've altered my views," said old George. "Do 'ee hark to what I tell 'ee—make a new 'un, and leave all the money to my cousin Benjamin, as keeps a grocer's shop i' Manchester; forty-two, Black Street, is the address. Every penny, every stick and stone to Benjamin Robey."

"But—your son?" said the astounded man of law.

"Me and my son George has had words," said

### *The Little Pink Toes*

old George, "and I'm consarned if he sees a penny o' my money! Od rabbit him; I'll teach him to go agen me!"

"Come, come," said Mr. Kitchen, "come! You musn't treat your son in that way. Tell me all about it."

Old George told him all about it. The lawyer, who had known his client for half a century, shook his head.

"Why, now," said he, "I think you're a bit hard on the lad, Robey. Dear, dear—the girl's a nice, good girl. And Fowler's a good fellow. Unfortunate he has been."

"He's brokken," said old George. "He brok, and owed me for twenty-five load o' wheat. I winnot hev my son wed wi' his dowter, as 'll hev nowt but what shoo stands in."

"Sleep on it," said the lawyer.

"I winnot sleep on it. Do 'ee get the will drawed up while I smokes a pipe at the Red Lion. I'll come back and sign it later."

"Call at five o'clock then," said Mr Kitchen.

Old George went away, and smoked several pipes at the Red Lion, and even contrived to eat a bit of dinner. But he talked to nobody, and the landlord opined that he must be ailing.

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

At five o'clock he went back to the lawyer's. A youthful limb of the law met him.

"Very sorry, sir; but Mr. Kitchen was obliged to go away at three o'clock, and the matter won't be ready until to-morrow morning. Can you drop in to-morrow, sir?"

"Od rabbit 'im!" said old George. "He said five o'clock. Mind it's done to-morrow."

He fetched his pony from the Red Lion, and rode homewards in the darkness. He was full of sadness; he wondered how the old farm-house would look with young George gone "elsewhere."

Suddenly old George reined in his pony. There was a child crying in the road. It was not a nice bit of road either, at any rate on a dark night. The trees were black and ghostlike against the dun sky. Old George peered under their dark recesses, and seeing nothing, but hearing the cry repeated, got down and hunted about. Presently he found a small child sitting on the path, screwing a tiny fist into its eye, and whining heartily.

"Hillo!" said old George. "Where do 'ee come from, bairn?"

The bairn knew nothing as to that. He was very small and very cold and very frightened, and he clung to old George's finger and whimpered. Old

### *The Little Pink Toes*

George put him on the saddle before him and cantered homewards.

"This here bairn," he said, handing over the child to Sally, the maid, "I found on t'roadside. Do 'ee wash him and give him summut warm. Somebody 'll turn up to find him." Then he went into the little parlour, where he and young George had always sat o' nights. Young George's dog sat on the hearthrug and whined at the fire, feeling sure that something was wrong. But young George was not there. Old George's food choked him that night. He pushed the things away in disgust, and fell to smoking. Presently he remembered the child, and called for it. Sally brought it in. It was warm and rosy, and began to chatter as it sat on old George's knees. It didn't know where it lived, but somewhere in a town, and its sole name was Tommy. Asked what it had been to find, it answered "chestnuts." Old George talked to it and felt better, and then remembered its parents, and sent a man on horseback to the town to advertise it through the bell-man. Then they sat in old George's easy chair, four on the knee of seventy-four, and presently four fell asleep and seventy-four held its head against his breast, and thought, and thought, and thought. Old George's



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

fingers caressing the child's chubby knee discovered that the little socks were damp. He took off shoes and stockings and drew his chair nearer the fire, and held the child's feet towards it. The little pink toes curled and uncurled in the ruddy warmth. Old George got thinking more deeply. He remembered that young George had toes like those, five-and-twenty years before. Young George's little feet had toddled after him in that parlour and through the big kitchen. Later on, young George's red and sturdy little legs had trotted after his father into the farmyard. Oh, young George, young George! Old George grew still more thoughtful, and presently a great tear rolled out of his eye and down his nose and fell on the little pink toes curling on his knee.

There was a step outside ; the door opened ; young George entered. He was a bit agitated.

"Father," said young George, "I can't go back o' my word, and I mun wed wi' Lucy. But I don't like goin' agen you, and——"

Then old George looked down and began blubbering.

"I were wrong," said old George ; "marry her thou shalt, lad. Only let's be as we were."

Then they grasped hands across the sleeping

### *The Little Pink Toes*

baby and were happy. After a while, the father of the strayed child appeared in haste and consternation, and carried his offspring away, after old George had nearly choked the boy with sweet wine and the man with hot rum and water. The man went home to declare far and wide that old George Robey was a good sort.

Next morning old George cantered into town. He went to the toy-shop and bought enough toys to demoralise a large family, and sent them to Tommy. Then he pulled himself together and went to Lawyer Kitchen's.

"You played me a shabby trick last night," said old George, "and I've a good mind to tak' my business elsewhere. Howsomever, I'll forgive 'ee this time. I want a will drawed up immediate."

"All ready but the names filling in," said Lawyer Kitchen. "Who is it you're leaving everything to?"

"My son George," said old George, with a straight glance at the lawyer.

The will signed, old George shuffled about. Lawyer Kitchen waited patiently.

"That there Fowler, now," said old George; "I do' know but what he's reyt at bottom. I'm minded to do summut for 'un. How would it

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be to gi' him a thousand or two, wi' easy terms, and let 'un try agen ?”

So young George married Lucy, and Lucy's father accepted old George's help in surprise and thankfulness, and did well, and paid the loan back before old George died, and with it the price of the twenty-five load of wheat aforementioned.







ON THE RIVER WENT, NEAR WENTBRIDGE



### GOING INTO THE HOUSE

THE little cottage standing back from the road was neat and trim in appearance, and the brown weather-stains on its rude walls were almost covered by the trailing jessamine and long-armed honeysuckle that had sprung up and converted what had otherwise been plaster into a bower of green and white and golden blossom. Here and there a patch of the original wall stood clear, and showed traces of extreme antiquity. A bare space above the porch held a small stone tablet, on which some ambitious hand had carved a dog-Latin inscription to the effect that John Hargreave built that house Anno Domini 1681. How many generations had passed, then, through that little porch ; how many children's feet had pattered down the neat gravelled path to the gate to "look for father ;" how many weather-wise eyes had peered forth from the diamond-paned windows to look for signs of a bright morning ! The windows were not always sur-



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rounded by jessamine and honeysuckle, but those creeping trees had fairly won possession now, and enveloped diamond-panes, white sash, and carefully scoured window ledge. You might have leaned through the little casement on a spring morning and gathered in a handful of white and golden-yellow blossoms more perfect in form and colour than anything that all the resources of Art could produce. The tiny garden sloping to the road was full of colour also. Nothing was planted there in stiff and formal rows ; it rather seemed as if a bird had now and then let fall a chance seed amongst the little beds and gone on its way careless that the seed should spring up a stranger amongst strangers. For here violets and snowdrops clustered at the feet of great blue monk's-hood, and a blush-rose lifted its shy face from amongst a crowd of gilli-flowers, and carnations of the good old-fashioned pink and white peeped out, with attendant crowds of London pride and butterfly-winged pansies. A great lilac tree, full of rich, voluptuous blossom, purple in hue and sensuous in scent, stood in one corner ; a golden vista of laburnum trees flanked it on the other side, and lines of glossy-leaved holly and round-headed box made a border for the whole, and served also as a

### *Going into the House*

hiding-place for the blackbirds and thrushes, who at that hour of eventide had come home to sing and serenade their mates.

All nature lay asleep, save for the birds and for the cattle, browsing lazily in the meadows across the road. The sun had set an hour, and the last crimson streak was dying slowly away in the western skies. I leaned against the gate of the tiny garden, and smoked my pipe with a sense of perfect rest. What mattered it that within a few miles lay the great town, instinct with the life and energy of three hundred thousand men, its air vitiated, its atmosphere dark with the smoke that poured all day long from its thousand furnaces and fires? Here was nothing of this; the roar, the bustle was gone, and the shrill call of the blackbirds, the gentle song of the thrushes and the bleating of lambs grown tired of play made all the sound that came to mar the almost tangible silence. The Nirvana of the ascetic could not be more full of abstract soul-seething delight than this bit of the world.

A dark bank of cloud came up from the eastward, and spread slowly across the clear dome above. It was almost too early for the night-shades. Ah! a splash of rain, and then another,

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

and the sheep lift their heads and begin to gather together in the nearest corner. A storm is at hand, and will be here presently, bathing everything in much-needed moisture, and giving new life to the grass and trees. It comes faster and in larger drops, and keeps up an incessant rattle as of light artillery on the broad leaves of the holly bushes. A man standing under such a shower would be wet through in five minutes.

The door of the cottage was opened to me by an old man, bowed and worn, who glanced up at the sky, and bade me enter.

"It has turned out very wet," I said, as I took a seat near the fire.

"Aye, it'll be a sharpish shower. It were bound to come afore long. T'land wanted it bad enow."

I glanced round the little house. It was like thousands of other English cottages. A square apartment, with low roof and long whitewashed beams and rafters running across; with bare flagged floor, round which ran an ornamental device in white scouring stone; with wide old-fashioned fireplace, on each side of which were wide hobs. I had seen its type hundreds of times. The furniture was poor and simple. A

### *Going into the House*

deal table, worn and scrubbed to veritable thinness ; a deal chair or two, and a longsettle of the same wood constituted the whole. In the window stood a few pots of flowers ; and on the walls hung a few of those picture-almanacks presented by enterprising tradesmen to their customers. Above the mantelpiece stood a pair of old-fashioned brass candlesticks, and between them two china dogs flanked an ancient tea-caddy ; these five objects forming the only ornaments of the place.

While the rain rattled down on the leaves in the garden, I looked at the old man and woman seated opposite each other at the fire-side. He was old and bent, and much worn by long labour on the land ; she was even older in appearance, and her face was full of wrinkles and furrows that nothing but time and sorrow could have put there. The old man was dressed in one of the old-fashioned smocks which are still worn by the peasantry in the south of England, but which one rarely sees in the north. It was much patched and darned, and, like the rusty old hat worn far back on his white head, had evidently seen long service. The old woman's garments were equally old and poor ; but the brown petticoat was scrupu-

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

lously darned, and the white cap surrounding her wrinkled face was white as linen can be.

I was very much struck with the peculiarly sad looks of the two old people, who sat staring into the little wood fire as though they saw pictures there which woke up anything but pleasant thoughts. Neither spoke except when I volunteered some remark about the weather, and then I was only answered in monosyllables. Now and then the old dame shook her head and sighed mournfully, whereupon the old man would look at her wistfully, and shake his head in turn, with something of impatience in the gesture. I concluded that these two old people had trouble of some description on hand.

"You don't seem over cheerful to-night, grandfather," I said to the old man, after I had persuaded him to try a pipe of tobacco. He shook his head sadly, and made no answer; but the old woman presently replied, "Theer's them 'at hes more than their share o' trouble i' this world."

"Aye," said the old man; "she's right, is Liddy. Theer is them 'at hes a deal o' care. We've hed us share o' trouble, hes Liddy and me."

"Why," I said, "I'm sorry to hear that. At your time o' life you ought to be settling down to

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a quiet old age. You couldn't have a nicer place than this to spend your days in."

"Ah!" said the old lady; "it's a bonny place, it is. I'd hoped to die here, I had indeed."

The old man looked across at his wife with a troubled countenance.

"Don't take on so, Liddy," he said; "don't ye, now. Mebbe things is all for the best."

Liddy moved her head impatiently, evidently unable to take that view of the case; and I inquired of the old man as to the cause of their depression.

"Why, ye see," he said, shyly—country people are invariably shy about discovering their difficulties to strangers—"I've been past work for a year or more, and we've been thrown on t' parish. It's the rheumaticks I've had, and I haven't been able to go about much. Then Liddy there's nobbut badly, and she's past doing owt now; and so you see they think we'd best go into t' house! and we'm bahn to 't house to-morrow."

Going into the house! I knew what that meant; and I no longer wondered what made the two old people look so sad and troubled. Going into the house! It meant, in plain English, that they were going to exchange this sylvan spot for

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

the cold formality of a workhouse. The green trees of the garden would give place to brick and mortar; the flowers and dwarf box-shrubs would be exchanged for asphalt pavements and flagged corridors; the splendid stretch of country lying before the cottage would give way to a peep across the grimy roofs of the town. Individuality, too, would disappear. The two simple old peasants, who had never done more than their little duty every day, would exchange their garments for a uniform, and be swallowed up amongst a crowd of others like them.

In the face of trouble like this I had no word of comfort. The old man, growing talkative now that his confession was over, began to tell me his history.

"It comes hard on us," he said, nodding sideway at Liddy, "to hev to go into t' house at our time o' life. I'd allus meant to be buried i' t' church-yard across yonder, wheer we were married and all t'childer wer christened. But they say 'at beggars can't be choosers."

"But," I said, "can't you manage to get parish relief, and stay here?"

"Why, we've hed five shilling a week for two years; but ye see, Liddy's past doing owt, and

### *Going into the House*

can hardlins move about at times. So they think we'd better go into t' house. They say we shall hev a comfortable home there ; but I dunno. They do say as how it's nobbut roughish for old folk."

"Oh," I hastened to say, "I daresay, in fact I'm sure, you'll be treated very kindly."

"Aye," he said slowly, "so parson says. But," and here he looked across at the old woman again, "I dunno' how it'll be about separating of me and Liddy."

"Oh, dear ; oh, dear !" sighed the old woman.

"Ye see," continued the old man, "it's fifty year come Martlemas since we were wed, and we been together iver sin' then. I don't remember as how we was ever parted for a day."

"Niver for one day," said Liddy, emphatically.

"And I shall sorter miss Liddy yonder," he said, with vague pathos, "and I expect she'll miss me, seein' as we've done for each other this last year or two. They do say as how we shall be attended to ; but when you're getting on in life you sorter want your own flesh and blood to be wi' you. But I expect t' Guardians knows best about that there."

"Have you no children who could help you ?" I inquired.



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

The old man shook his head, and the old woman, who had been weeping since the separation was mentioned, sighed heavily.

"Nay," he said, "nay, I can't say as 'ow we hev. We've hed three on 'em. There was Mary; she died young, did Mary. And George went for a soldier, and gat shot i' the Crimea. He were a good lad, were George; a fine, big lad as ever stepped. He used to send his mother money now and then."

"And the third?"

"Aye, why, t' youngest were Tom. He were rather a wild un' were Tom, and ye see, he went off at last, and we niver seen or heard on him sin' then. Twenty year ago, that is. Aye, he'd be a man o' forty now, would our Tom. But he were wild."

"He were good at t' bottom," said the old woman. "He were good at t' bottom. A kinder-hearted lad niver breathed."

"And where did Tom go to?" I inquired.

"Nay, we niver knew. Some said 'at he'd gone for a soldier, like George, and some said he'd gone for a sailor. But I expect he's dead long since."

"Aye, he's dead, sure enow," said Liddy,

### *Going into the House*

“And thee an’ me owt to ha’ been dead an’ all, afore we come to going to t’ Workus. I ha’ allus been used to hevin’ my own house, and I can’t thole t’ idea of being ordered about by nobody.”

“Why, lass, why, mebbe it’ll not be so bad as thou seems to think,” said the old man. “Ony way, we shall hev to try it.”

“Were you never able to save anything for your old age?” I asked.

“Eh, mester, it’s out o’ t’ question to save out o’ wages such as I’ve hed! When t’ bairns were little, wages were twelve and thirteen shilling a week, and it tuk all that to feed ’em and clothe ’em. Then when they were a bit bigger I did save a few pound, but we’d a bit o’ trouble wi’ Tom, and it hed to go to release him. Nay, mester, we’ve not much chance o’ savin’, we hev’n’t.”

“Did you never pay into a club?”

“Why, yes, I did pay a penny a week for a long time, and I wor badly once, and hed pay from t’ club. But we’ve nowt, nobbut t’ tables and chairs, and so on.”

“Ah, what will be done with them?”

“T’ overseers ’ll sell ’em to help pay for us keep.”

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

“But not all, they weern’t,” said the old woman, almost fiercely. “I’ve set i’ this here chair for seventy year, and I’ll hold to it if they hev to tear it throo’ me. It wor my grandmother chair, and then it belonged to my mother. I’ve rocked t’ bairns to sleep in it, and I’ve set in it at nights when thou’s smoaked thy pipe o’ t’ other side o’t fire. I shall hev this chair wi’ me, William, and so thou knows.”

“Why, owd lass, why,” said William, “I darsay they’ll not be hard on tha about that.”

“It’s a sore trouble to me, mester,” said the old woman, turning towards me. “I cannot say how I’ve felt it. Me and William’s lived i’ this little house iver sin’ we were married. Eh, and theer’s noa bonnier spot i’ all t’ land. I used to sit outside theer i’ t’ garden, and listen to t’ yowes and lambs i’ t’ fields, and it wor fair like what they say heaven is. And I don’t like to leave it nah ’at I’m owd and feeble. I’d rayther ha’ died here.”

“Ne’er mind, lass, ne’er mind,” said the old man, “we’m not long for this world, and we shall mak’ out somehow i’ t’ House yonder.”

Just then I heard a heavy footstep coming along the path to the cottage—the footstep of a man of

### *Going into the House*

heavy build judging by the way the sound overcame the rattling of the still heavily-falling rain. The old man heard it too, and began to move his rheumatic-y joints out of his chair.

“I’ll open the door for you,” I said. “Sit still.”

“I lay it’s somebody else at’s getting wet through,” he said. “Ax him in, ax him in, mester.”

Outside the door, in the darkness, stood a broad, burly figure, which kept itself out of the scanty gleam from the wood fire. I peered at it across the step.

“Does William Thwaite live here?” said a deep voice that seemed to have a certain anxiety in it.

The old woman’s sharp ears caught the sound. She uttered a sharp cry. “Eh!” she cried, “it’s my bairn, my Tom. Bill, Bill, here’s Tom come home ageean!”

I stood aside to let Tom pass in—a big, black-bearded sailor. I saw the old man struggling out of his chair, and the old woman stretching out her hands to the long-lost son. And then I took my hat and went away, out into the storm, feeling, like good Mr. Jarvis, that I was “not on in that scerte.”

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

At the gate I turned, and went back and peeped through the window. The sailor was kneeling at his mother's side, her withered hands tremblingly roving about his head and face and neck, while the old man hovered restlessly in the rear, and the old grey cat, that had sat all night on the white hearth, sniffed and purred at the sailor's boots. And then I went away, and the wet drops on my face were not rain-drops, though the rain was coming down faster than ever.

A week later I went along the road again, and paused at the little cottage. It was a bright, sunshiny day, and the sailor was planting potatoes in the garden, whistling "Wapping Old Stairs" over his task. William, smoking a most gorgeous pipe, and looking quite gay in a scarlet fez, was tottering along the little path; and Liddy, in a new shawl that had never been purchased in an English market, was seated at the door enjoying the sunshine. They had not gone into the House, and were evidently in no danger of doing so.

### *DICK AND THE BOOKS*

THERE are few things in this world more interesting than the development of either man, beast, or flower—even if the man be a mere clodhopper, the beast a pig, and the flower a wayside weed. That perhaps is why I took such intense interest in the development of young Dick Trippett. He was by no means a mere clodhopper, though his boots were of a fearful weight and thickness, and his ideas entirely bucolic. He had been bred and reared amongst the sheep and cattle, the horses and the pigs, until they had impressed him with something of their own personality. Thus he reminded me of an untamed colt in many things, and of the sheep in many others. He had the bovine impassiveness of a respectable milch cow in one corner of him, but he was as persistent and persevering in another as the pigs are when feeding time comes, and the rattle of the tin bucket is long in sounding against the stone troughs. In short

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

Dick, after fourteen years of life on a solitary farmstead, was rustic to the finger tips. A Cockney artist, traveller, or sportsman passing him on the road-side would have put him down for a mere chawbacon, and gone by smiling. However, there was something in the lad's big eyes, in his curious, comical freckled face, and especially in his wide head, on which no hard hat ever sat comfortably, that would have proved to any observant person that he had powers of some sort somewhere.

It was Dick's great desire to have knowledge of certain things which, in the opinion of two high authorities, did not concern him in the very least. These two authorities were his mother, Mrs. Trippett, and his paternal uncle, Mr. George Trippett. In their opinion Dick needed no knowledge that did not conduce to the getting of produce from the two hundred acres of land which his mother now farmed in place of Dick's father, deceased. In order that Dick might secure knowledge of this sort they had set him to work at twelve years of age, and admonished him daily to toil from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same. Nevertheless Dick wanted to know more.

### *Dick and the Books*

"There's only one way of knowing more, Dick,' I said, when he informed me of this fact. "You must read books. Out of books you will get as much information as will serve you for a lifetime."

"I didn't know there was as much to be got out of books as all that," said Dick. "My Uncle George, now, says 'at reading's all waste of good time."

I did not reply to this. Uncle George Trippett was Uncle George Trippett. I proceeded to examine Dick as to his knowledge of book-lore. I found that apart from a glib knowledge of certain fulminatory passages of Holy Writ, detached verses of Wesley's Hymns, and choice extracts from the week-end newspapers, he knew next to nothing.

"Haven't you any books in the house, Dick?"

"Books? Aye," said Dick. "There's the Bible, and the hymn-book, and the 'Complete Farrier,' and a book about fowls 'at my mother bought of a pedlar, and another about Polite Manners 'at she bought at Cornchester Fair. Shall I read them?"

"You can read the first as much as you like, Dick," I answered. "But the Farrier, and the Fowls, and the Polite Manners—I think not."

A day or two later Dick approached me with wide-open eyes.



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

“I've found a whole heap o' books. You know our apple-chamber? Well, I was cleanin' it up yesterday to put the pears in. There's an old oak chest in there 'at I've seen many a time, but I never looked into it before. Eh, it's just full o' owd books! There's all sorts—some on 'em's mouldy. I read a line or two. There's 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and 'Robinson Crusoe,' and 'Peter Wilkins,' and I don't know what. How will them do?”

I made answer that they would do exceeding well. But now arose difficulty and sadness. Dick was certain that his mother would never allow him to waste time in reading. She never let him have an idle moment at any time. When could he find time to read except on Sunday?—and then he had to go to chapel twice, and to help milk the cows between whiles. But would I talk to his mother?

I did talk to Dick's mother. It was neither a pleasant nor an easy task. One might as easily have moved the adjournment of the House of Commons on a matter of real importance as have stirred Mrs. Trippett out of her adamantine indifference to non-material things. Learning, in her opinion, was only for parsons, lawyers, and

### *Dick and the Books*

rogues ; it benefited nobody else. Nevertheless, by dint of much argument and more flattery, I won from her a conditional promise that the boy should read his books. But first the Methodist parson under whom Mrs. Trippett "sat" was to be consulted.

This was step number two. Step number three was my visit to the Methodist parson. Naturally, he was easier to deal with than his sister Trippett. And the next time he came to preach in Mrs. Trippett's kitchen he took the opportunity of announcing to Dick that, by his good mother's permission, he was to read the books in the oak chest, always providing that he did his work, wasted no time, and left the books alone on the Sabbath Day, which is a day whereon no one must take pleasure of any sort, unless it be holy pleasure at being miserable. But that particular ecclesiastic was tainted with Calvinism, according to his own brethren, and Dick had got six days to read in, and that was more than we had hoped for. So all was well, and Dick was joyful.

After that Dick lived in a new world. His eyes were wider and rounder every time he came to me. Every week he had some wonderful tale to tell. Now it was of one Robinson Crusoe, a marvellous

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

gentleman who was shipwrecked on a desert island, and did such things there as were simply astonishing. Then it was of a person called Peter Wilkins, who told such tales as he, Dick, could hardly credit, only, of course, it must be true, because it was all printed in the book. Then there was the Pilgrim. A truly wonderful character, that Pilgrim, with a knack of falling into bogs and swamps, and of getting locked up by giants, and of fighting with lions and wizards that was truly grand. Over the Pilgrim Dick laughed and wept. There was gloom in his soul when Master Faithful died at the stake, but his heart wept for joy when Christian finally crossed the river and climbed the hill to the Shining City.

So Dick read on all through the autumn evenings and the winter nights, and he became a new man. But after that there was a tragedy. Or was it a comedy?

Dick, coming to me one winter night, brought with him an old book, and laid it on my desk.

"That was in the oak chest," said Dick. "But I can't read it, 'cause it's printed different to the other books."

I picked up the book and opened it. And then I gasped, for lo! the book was a black-letter of

### *Dick and the Books*

great value, and in my desk at that moment lay the catalogue of a great London dealer, in which another copy (thought to be unique) was offered for a price equal to the value of a whole herd of cattle.

"You can have that if you want it," said Dick. "I can't read it."

Here was temptation indeed. But I resisted, for I saw a chance of doing great things for Dick. Out of the proceeds of that book, Mrs. Trippett might be persuaded to pay for Dick's schooling for two or three years. So I bade Dick carry the book home again, saying nothing to him about its value. I made a fatal mistake there; I ought to have kept that musty old volume under lock and key. But I did not like to have so much temptation under my very nose.

The day but one after that I went over to Mrs. Trippett's. She was knitting. Dick was lost to everything in Gulliver's Travels, and Uncle George Trippett smoked by the fireside. After due preliminaries, I inquired of Dick for the old book. Dick knew nothing about it. He had laid it down on the drawers on his return home, and had never seen it since. He began to look for it.

"Be this it?" said Uncle George Trippett, very suddenly holding up a volume which he had taken

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

from the hob by his side. "'Tis an old, queerish book, this, an' nobody can't read 'un, so I have bin a-tearing leaves out of 'un for to light my pipe."

He handed me the black-letter—irretrievably ruined. I said nothing; it was useless to tell these people that this insignificant little object was lately worth a heap of shining gold.

"Lor-a-massy!" said Uncle George Trippett, stretching himself across the hearth. "Lor-a-massy! When I wor a young 'un we had a whole box full o' them there queer old books. All sizes they was, and all printed i' them big black letters. So, as nobody couldn't read 'em, the lasses tore 'em up and lighted the fires wi' 'em."

This is a true story.

### *THE VILLAGE NE'ER-DO-WHEEL*

It is now many years since I saw him for the last time, and soon after that the grave closed over his graceless yet not wholly unpicturesque career for ever ; but I can still call to mind his somewhat rakish appearance, the knowing twinkle of his eye, the quaint humour of his mouth, the self-asserting pose of his entire figure. Under other conditions he had been a clever man ; nay, he might have been a great one, and led his peers in solemn Parliamentary conclave assembled, instead of being Dictator of the village inn. He withstood no little tyrant of the fields, neither was he a mute, inglorious Milton ; but patriotism (of the fine old crusted Tory order) lived in his bosom ; and the Muses, who rarely shine on smug respectability, did not disdain to visit him, as certain merry catches of the Moll and Meg and Susan order bear witness, no less than many a breezy strain of the fine mornings whereon Reynard ran for his life before horse and hound.

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

Like many another ne'er-do-weel, then, he had talents, great natural talents, which, properly developed, might have led him to the woolsack or to a bishopric ; but which, uncared for and undeveloped only helped him along a downward path. Brilliancy of wit and invariable readiness in conversation do not serve a dweller in the villages so well as a quiet tongue and twelve hours' monotonous labour ; and this man possessed the one and disliked the other. For him to preserve silence was terrible ; good company he must have, and plenty of it ; and if the brown flagon or pewter pint circulated freely, the occasion was a more joyful one in his mind. What brilliant things he said, what roars of bucolic laughter he raised in the great kitchen of the inn, drawing merriment from hearts that are not easily made to laugh, and amusing where the art to amuse might be practised in vain by some who consider themselves qualified to teach it ! Who so gladly hailed as he at sheep-shearing or harvest supper ? Who so eagerly waited for in the tap-room when the daily task was done and the newspaper spread out on the table—he being the one man in the place who could read fluently, and expound what he read ? Alas ! poor Yorick ! he is dead, and his quips and quiddities are silent as himself. He

### *The Village Ne'er-do-Weel*

sleeps in a quiet corner of the churchyard near the old farm-house where he first saw the light, and whence he went forth to see the great world outside, to which he came back time and again, never doing any good, despite his great natural ability, but underneath the thatched roof of which he did not die. His end came in a miserable outhouse, where his bed was straw, not feathers. The brilliant wit, the jovial companion, the man who was "Hail, fellow, well met!" with everybody, had to die at last alone—untended, uncared for. What thought he then of the world and its ways?

Dick—or, to give him his proper name, Richard, though he was Dick, to every man, woman, and child in the place—Dick Hallam was the youngest son of a farmer who, by virtue of renting two hundred acres of land, may be considered as standing midway between the class who till their own acres and that which commits its farming to the tender mercies of a hind. Old Hallam, in fact, though not unwilling to take a hand at the plough-shaft or spend a day in hard labour during the ingathering of crops, was able to keep a horse and trap, and smoke a cigar as he drove round his fields in the early mornings, or late afternoons. He dressed in homespun and cords six days out of



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

the seven, and in broad-cloth and a hat of the style of the Regency on the seventh. On market day his second-best grey coat accompanied him to town, and when he came home at night he carried from twelve to sixteen glasses of gin under his belt, but was certainly not intoxicated, nor disdainful of the supper of cold bacon and strong beer which awaited him on the white kitchen table. He belonged, in fact, to a race which is now nearly dead—a race of men who wore tremendously long neck-cloths, black, white, or spotted, who could eat enormous quantities of beef, bacon, and bread, and drink great jugs of home-brewed without any possible danger of headache or kindred evils. This race believed in God and the King, and in testimony thereof they swore by the one and would have fought for the other until they or the Frenchmen were dead and done for. This ancient gentleman married late in life for the second time, and Dick was the fruit of his union with Polly Crinkle, a buxom country lass, who thought it a grand thing to become Mrs. Oliver Hallam, of the Rectory Farm. Old men always betray considerable fondness for the offspring of a May and December marriage, and old Hallam was therefore uncommonly proud of young Dick, who cut his

### *The Village N'er-do-Weel*

teeth at an abnormally early age. Such a child, according to Oliver, had never smiled on the earth previously, and to that statement he clung with tenacity, despite the chaff of bar-parlour and market-place. As time progressed it seemed as if the proud father's assertions were to be sustained by hard facts. At five years of age Dick could read the Morning Service from his mother's big Prayer Book ; at six he could do the six primary rules of arithmetic ; at eight years of age he asked his father to take him away from the village school, because he already knew more than the school-master. He was, in short, a perfect prodigy of intellect, and people began to wonder what miracle had provided old Oliver with such a clever son. Nor did Dick's talents confine their scope to learning. He could and would fight every lad of his own size and age ; he knew more about games than any of his companions, and he would climb the highest elm or penetrate the stiffest thicket if there seemed good reason to believe that anything in the shape of birds' nests lay at the end of his toils. Dick Hallam, in short, was the most brilliant thing that the village had seen for many a day. To be sure, the parson, good worthy man, shook his head over him, though he was fain to

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

admit that the lad had great parts, and ought to do well. The Squire, too, having heard of Dick's cleverness, shook his head, and said that the lad had better have been born as thick-headed as any Flemish boor, for in those days the trading and labouring classes were deemed impertinent if they bred boys and girls who had more than an average amount of brains.

Dick, however, having seen the necessity of education, persuaded his father to send him to the establishment of the Rev. Septimus Smallwood, who, in the nearest town, instructed young gentlemen in Latin, Greek, and the higher mathematics. Here he made rapid progress, and caused the worthy old farmer to gape and scratch his grey head in wonder, by rattling off the Latin verbs like any rustic ballad. Dick's new pedagogue, although a University man, was fain to share the fate of his old master at the village school. The lad soon learnt all that the Reverend Septimus could teach, so quick was he at picking things up, so tenacious of whatever facts got into his active young brain. At seventeen he told old Oliver that he had decided to leave school, and go in for the law. The old man, who had long feared his brilliant son, acquiesced, and prepared to article Dick to his own

### *The Village Ne'er-do-Well*

solicitor. But Dick had no intention of pettifogging in a country town. London, said he, was the only city in the world where a man of genius could get on, and to London he would go. Whereupon Oliver Hallam was obliged to find room for Dick in a Bedford-Row office. And so Dick said farewell to the village, and was swallowed up in the great metropolis.

I suppose that Dick Hallam was not the first man to be ruined by the life of a great city. Full of spirit and life, he doubtless plunged into the excitements and pleasures of the London of that day—the London of Vauxhall and Cremorne, a worse London than we know at this present time. As time went by, and Dick remained away from him, old Hallam's face grew thinner and more careworn. The lad, he said, seemed to have no thought of the old home nor the people in it, and did not even care to spend his holidays there. Once the old man travelled up to town, and looked grave and troubled when he returned. He spoke little to his neighbours on the subject; but it was understood that Dick was quite a man of fashion, and had a select and brilliant circle of acquaintance. With his usual readiness, he was getting on in the law just as rapidly as at school, and old Hallam would sometimes predict his son's rise to the Woolsack.

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

Men do not live for ever, however hale and hearty they may be at eighty, and presently Oliver Hallam died, and blessed Dick with his last breath. Dick came down to the funeral, and the village saw him for the first time for four years. He was now twenty-one, and his handsome face already bore signs of dissipation and fast living. He was dressed in the newest style, and inspired considerable interest amongst the younger population of the village, the maidens admiring his face, and the lads his clothes. But Dick betrayed no interest in anything, and after ascertaining that his father had left him five thousand pounds he returned to town, and the village knew him no more for many a long year. Rumours came now and then concerning him ; but direct news of him there was none.

It might be fifteen years, perhaps twenty, after this that Dick Hallam returned to his native place. He was shabbily, poorly clothed ; his once handsome face was bloated and wrinkled ; his curly, black hair was grey and thin. Dick had gone down in the world. No one knew whether he had ever been admitted as a solicitor or not ; but no lawyer round that part of the county could settle a nice point as Dick could. In spite of his failure, he was as sharp and cunning as ever, and if some one had

### *The Village Ne'er-do-Weel*

stretched out a firm hand to steady him, Dick Hallam might yet have risen to fame and fortune.

But steadying hand there was none, and Dick was doomed. His half-sister, a plain, honest woman, married to one of Dick's old school mates, a thick-headed farmer who had done well, found him a home for a while. But Dick loved the sanded parlour of the village inn, and stayed out o' nights too much for the taste of his relations. He had to go, and the only refuge left him was the house of an old woman who took in lodgers, and got drunk every night. Here, then, Dick pitched his precarious tent for many a year, earning a living as best he could. Sometimes he acted as auctioneer's clerk. He took out the voting-papers for the Guardians and overseers. He collected the census. He wrote letters for people who could not write themselves ; he read letters for people who could not read. Every evening he went to the Green Man, and read the Tory paper to a wondering and open-mouthed company, expounding and explaining and exhorting in all the pride of his superior wisdom. He, in fact, did most of the talking in the village tap-room. He could tell so much ; he had seen things and peoples that his cronies had scarcely heard of. He had seen the Queen many a time, and the Royal

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

Palaces she lived in ; he had even been to Paris, where the French people live, and heard them talk in their own language. Why, neither parson nor squire had done that !

And so time went on, and Dick Hallam went steadily down-hill, never once making an effort to recover his footing. His brother-in-law gave him a job as shepherd, and the man who had been familiar with Piccadilly and Regent-street sat under a hedge in the raw autumn mornings and watched the sheep moving listlessly about the dank fields. But that was soon over, for Dick could not keep money in his pockets, and as soon as he got a week's wages he was bound to spend them at the Green Man.

Then came the old precarious time again, and Dick had to live by such odd jobs as he could pick up. He grew shabbier and shabbier, and the smug farmers who had once envied him his city-cut clothes now looked the other way when they met him. The old woman who had kept a corner for him, money or no money, died, and Dick found himself without a roof over his head. During a severe winter he slept out for a week, and got his death-blow. They found him one morning lying in his brother-in-law's barn, dead and stiff. In the pocket of his old coat







### *The Village Ne'er-do-Weel*

they found a little Testament which his mother had given him long years before. And now that he was dead people began to remember that he was always kind-hearted, and would share his last sixpence with a tramp or a beggar. There were some gathered round his still figure who felt that they would give a good deal to have him back for an hour, if only to hold his hand while he passed away from the life that he had wasted.

*IN PLACES WHERE THEY SING*

THERE is hardly a village church in England now-a-days which does not possess its organ or harmonium, to say nothing of a choir of adult and juvenile rustics, gloriously arrayed in white surplices. It is possible, if one happens to be walking abroad on a Sunday morning and drops into an out-of-the-way church, to hear music that our grandfathers would have wondered at, but which is nevertheless classical and famous. Nay, in some village churches the musical service is quite as fine as anything you can hear in an ordinary town, and the stray visitor is treated to Gregorian tones and Anglican chants with prodigal profuseness. At harvest festivals, school feasts, and ecclesiastical anniversaries it is not uncommon to find the choir attacking Handel or Mendelssohn. Here and there, sometimes in wildly lonely spots the traveller comes across a union of three or four country choirs, who have banded themselves together to hold a little musical festival.

### *In Places where they Sing*

Nowhere does one find the old-fashioned church where the musical service is got through with the aid of one psalm tune and three hymn tunes ; nowhere does one come across the ancient precentor, whose voice always cracked on the top notes as he gave out the tune. Those times are dead and gone, and the number of " quires and places where they sing," as the rubric puts it, is great and many.

Not that the old-world village church was by any means the church of an unmusical people. Our grandfathers were not without music, even if their stock of tunes was limited, and their knowledge of Bach and Palestrina absolutely nil. They seldom possessed an organ, and, I believe, that hybrid abomination, the harmonium, was not then invented. They did not learn the Tonic-sol-fa system, or any other system, but they sang even as King David advised, somewhat heartily. Possibly Gaffer Jones sang a note higher than Gammer Brown, and Hodge in the corner under the belfry had a habit of getting a line behind everybody else, which was awkward when it came to the end of the hymn. No doubt the blacksmith sang too loud and the miller too low, and perhaps Jenny Wren piped too shrilly, but did that matter if they all enjoyed

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

themselves? As for harmony, there is an angel somewhere 'twixt heaven and earth who blends all discords into one harmonious whole, and therefore the somewhat rude singing of our grandfathers and grandmothers no doubt sounded sweet enough when it reached the eternal courts. At any rate it made up in heartiness what it lacked in quality.

But even in those old days the village churches were not exactly without instruments. In the front row of the gallery under the tower sat a row of highly important people—"the musicianers" as the country folk called them. They were a party of essentially sober-minded men, middle-aged or ancient, with a high notion of their own importance and of their excellent discourse on various instruments. There were two or three violins, or fiddles as they were commonly called thereabouts; there was a bass, and a double-bass; there was a flute and a serpent; in some places there was also a harp. Beautifully, too, did they go together; yea, and made music, even if the fiddler did scrape a bit and the flute got a trifle shrill. At any rate, everybody liked to hear them, and there were certain naughty folk that minded the music more than the sermon. What saith one Master William Dale,

*In Places where they Sing*

*circa* 1632—"As for myself in my younger days I was chiefly occupied during the time of divine service in thinking about other matters. For there were things which did more easily claim a lad's attention than the reading and discoursing of Parson Drumbleforth, such as the performance of the village musicians, who sat in the chancel . . . and whose performance was considered very fine. There was amongst them a violin, and a double-bass, a couple of flutes, and a serpent, and when they were minded to exert themselves they made a brave show, and the hymns went trippingly."

Trippingly, too, went the musicians' tongues in the gallery what time the bell was ringing overhead and master parson was robing himself in the vestry. For then were strings tuned and brought into accord and criticisms exchanged on the previous Sunday's performance.

"I could have thought that your instrument scraped somewhat in "O praise the Lord all ye people," last Sunday, neighbour. Not that I have aught to complain of, but a' seemed to squeak in my left ear.'

"True, true, neighbour—'tis maybe my second string that waxeth old. Your own third string do be looking parlous thin, too.'

*The Wonderful Wapentake*

“‘Yes, yes ; we be none of us so young-like as we was, surely. Nathless, “O be joyful” went very well last Sunday, neighbour.’

“‘It did—oh, it did. And “O come let us sing”—’twas a main fine effort.’

“‘Aye, very crediting, very crediting. But my top note in “My soul doth magnify”—ah, ’twas powerful fine. “A note of exceeding sweetness,” saith passon ; “of quite heavenly sweetness,” a saith.’

“‘A good judge is passon. A’ always admired my rendering of “Lord, now letteth”—a sweetly pretty tune is that, neighbour. Hum—hum—hum—hu-u-u-um, a goeth—yew’ll remember they sang him down at Cornchester church.’

“‘Yew ain’t never heard John Truepenny discourse on the flute—Ah, ’tis blessed music, and seemeth to make a man think powerful mighty of a’s last end. A sort o’ dyin’ appeal, neighbour.’

“‘Ah, powerful fine it must be. No, I ain’t never heard John, but Timothy Truepenny was a soulful fluter. Ah, the way he could play “O all ye works” was ’nation fine. But here be passon, and my first string aint tuned as’t should be.’

### *In Places where they Sing*

“Give him a scrape when the folks gets to “miserable sinners,” neighbour. They do all cry so loud then that t’wont be heard. There goes passon with “Rend your hearts.””

So much for the “musicianers.” They did their part of the service well, but there was another official who came not behind them in musical zeal. This was the precentor, who also acted as clerk, and sat in a little jack-in-the-box arrangement at the base of the great three-decker pulpit. It was his duty to start the psalms and hymns and to utter the final Amens, and this task he performed with scrupulous care and exactitude. Without possessing the voice of a Lloyd or a Sims Reeves, he had no difficulty in making himself heard all over the church. He was usually somewhat ingenious in the exercise of his duties. One peculiarity of which nothing could cure him was to insist on keeping a word or two in front of the congregation. A second was to beat time with his prayer-book. A third was to adapt the pronunciation of his “Amens” to the needs of the case. Thus in the morning service it was a short, sharp, clear “Ah-men”; in the evening it was a long drawn out “A-a-a-men”; at the communion and during funerals it was slow, solemn, and sonorous—“Aw-men.”



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

But alas, the singers refused to follow their leader in this case, and whatever particular pronunciation he favoured, they invariably chorused it with a loud "Yeh-men!"

As for the singers they were pretty much what singers are now-a-days—they thought themselves above all criticism. If you had accused them of bawling "Nunc Dimittis" at the top of their voices, and of chanting "Te Deum Laudamus" in a subdued whisper, they would have admitted the impeachment, and replied that "there be different notions in different places." Perhaps there was too much bass and tenor and too little childish treble amongst them, but the deep voices of the men sounded well about one o'clock on Christmas-day morning, when the choir gathered under the squire's windows and sang "Christians, awake" and "While shepherds watched." "Ah," said old Tummas, the sexton, "they dew say as how King David were a great musicianer, a-playing on the sawl-tree, and the harp o' seven strings, and the sax-bat, and them foreigneerin' instruments, but I dunno 'at he could mak' such real music as our choir. Why, they ommost rase t' roof off my cottage wi' 'Hark, the herald angels!' And 'O come all ye faithful' i' church on Christmas morning—'od's sake, it were

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like to bring t' bells down." So the singing was evidently loud and hearty rather than finished and delicate. People evidently sang in those days with both lungs and all their vigour. They were not afraid of opening their mouths or of singing out of tune, and in that they proved themselves greatly the superiors of thousands of their descendants, who sit dumb and decorous in the "quires and places where they sing."

### *A WAIF OF THE HIGHWAY*

THE great yard of the "King George" Inn at Cornchester was almost emptied of men, horses, and vehicles when Jeremiah Mott, the Willowmere carrier, entered it. It was then eight o'clock of a winter evening, and nearly everybody had gone home from market. The stables of the "King George" were almost empty. In its accustomed corner stood old Farmer Scrooby's grey mare; but that was not unusual, seeing that Scrooby never went home until he had finished his "market-day 'lowance." He was sitting in the bar-parlour just then, leisurely soaking his capacious body with gin-and-water; and the ostler knew that the grey mare would have to stand in its stall for a good hour yet. But it was something very unusual to see Jerry Mott's stout pony in the stables at that time; and the ostler was curious to know the reason of the carrier's delay. As a usual thing, Jeremiah was off and away before six.

*A Waif of the Highway*

"Yew be late to-night, Master Mott," said the ostler, as Jerry approached the stable-door. "You'm away home afore this, in general."

"Ah!" Jeremiah heaved a long sigh. "Ah! You be right, Willum; yes, you be right. Outwards at twelve, and inwards at six—they is my rule, as a hewsual thing—yes, oh dear, yes."

"Well, yew be two hours late in going hinwards to-night, then, Master Mott; for 'tis eight now by parish church clock."

"Ah, dear, yes!" said Jerry, helping the ostler to yoke the stout pony into the shafts of the carrier's cart. "But I was two hours late in startin' from Willowmere, ye see, Willum. Oh, ah—yes, of course. Trouble, Willum, trouble it was that did it. 'All flesh is grass,' aint it, now, Willum?"

"Ah, yew be right, Master Mott. Yes, 'man as is born of woman'—very powerful affectin' words them be. Somebody dead, Master Mott?"

"Yes," said Jerry, heaving another prodigious sigh. "Oh, yes, Willum. My little grandowter."

"Nay. What, Bob's little g'el? I be sorry to hear on 't, Master Mott. And the only one they had, too! Dear, dear!"

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

“Ah!” sighed Jerry. “Ten month old this very day, and as fine a child as ever yew did see. The way it took nourishment! Oh, but ’tis a world o’ trouble is this now, aint it, Willum?”

“Yew be right there,” said Willum. “There do be a deal o’ deaths. Old Simon Brown died last week—matter o’ ninety-fower he were. Ah, very sad is this world—so it is.”

“Ay,” said Jerry, climbing into his cart, and swinging his lantern over its contents to see that they were all safe; “ay, Willum, we be all born to trouble, accordin’ to the Scripcher. Take it very bad, dew some on us, too, when we be called to kiss the rod.”

“Human natur’, Master Mott, human natur’. Yes, I reckon Bob and his pore wife ’ll take it very hard. Dear, dear, a deal they did think o’ that child, surely! The way it were dressed—like a quality infant. Ah, a sore trouble indeed.”

“Ay, Willum, and, ye see, all the more so ’cause Bob and his wife has no more. Oh, a very desolate house indeed, I assewer you, Willum, when I come away. ‘Bob, my lad,’ I says, ‘yew bear up. Listen to parson, Bob,’ I says. ‘Let him speak comfortable words,’ says I.”

“To be sure,” agreed the ostler. “’Tis very

### *A Waif of the Highway*

seasonable is a bit o' religion when a man's in trouble."

"Ay," said Jerry, gathering up the reins. "Ay! Buried it to-day, they did, Willum. Alongside my old woman it is—God rest 'em both. Well, good night, Willum—a very sad world is this here."

Jerry went rumbling out of the yard and through the archway into the glaring lights of the market-place. Usually he had stopped his pony at the sweet-stuff shop and purchased a "marketing" for Bob's baby; to-night he drove sadly past, for the baby was dead, and beyond the reach of lollipops. He could see the little green grave in Willowmere Churchyard in his mind's eye as he drove slowly out of Cornchester and turned into the dark country lane that led homeward. Such a tiny little mound it was—how strange that it covered so much of human love and sorrow!

It is six miles from Cornchester to Willowmere, and between the market town and the sleepy village lie two other places—one a rather large colliery village called Pitmouth, the other a tiny hamlet called Little Ashby. It was old Jerry's duty to call at both these places. There were parcels to deliver and commissions to give an account of.

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

Presently, therefore, he pulled up at the "Blue Pig" in Pitmouth, and after collecting half a dozen miscellaneous parcels from his cart, disappeared into the inn. His pony remained quietly outside; it was accustomed to stay in the same spot every Saturday evening for at least half an hour.

Everything was very quiet outside the inn. The village lay a hundred yards farther along the road, and the "Blue Pig" was therefore comparatively lonely. Thus it happened that no one was about when a woman, carrying a square basket-hamper, came cautiously from the direction of the village and approached Jeremiah Mott's cart. She looked round to see that no one watched her, and then laid the basket very gently amongst the straw in the body of the vehicle. For a moment she lingered, then she drew the shawl closely about her face, and hurried away.

At the end of half an hour Jerry emerged from the inn, climbed to his seat, bade the pony proceed, and rolled away again. He left the colliery village behind him, and was soon in the open country. Left to himself once more, the little green grave in Willowmere Churchyard began to haunt him again. He sighed as he pictured the lonely cottage at home. Bob and his wife would be there waiting

*A Waif of the Highway*

his return, and, no doubt, still sorely troubled by their bereavement.

“Eh,” sighed Jerry to himself, “what a deal o’ difference a little un dew make, surely! I’d gi’ a hundred goold guineas to have it back.”

The road grew rather rough. They had been laying down a course of dross upon it, and the pony staggered a bit as he picked his way in the darkness over the sharp points. The cart had no springs, and it began to jolt and shake somewhat. Presently it got over the stones and on to smooth surfaces again. Then Jerry was suddenly aware of a child’s faint cry somewhere close at hand. He started and pricked his ears like a watch-dog.

“Seems to me like a child a-crying,” said he. “Yea—’tis a child surely. Whoa, Robin, lad—let’s see what this may be. Whoa, then.”

The pony stopped, and Jeremiah got down, and having lighted his lantern, went over towards the hedge-side. The cry had stopped then. He looked about him curiously, but saw nothing. “Must be on t’ other side,” said he, and went stumping across the lane. Then the faint cry came again, and the carrier straightened himself up in amazement.

“Blessed if ’t aint in my cart!” said he.



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

“Well, well, this do be very partikler strange!  
A child cryin’ in my cart.”

He held the lantern over the cart-tail, and looked at the miscellaneous collection of baskets, bags, and parcels arranged there. And then his face grew troubled, for he saw a hamper and did not recognise it.

“Dear, dear!” said Jeremiah. “Here be strange work, I misdoubt. I didn’t never put that i’ my cart.”

The hamper-lid was loose, and Jerry turned it back and gazed with astonished eyes on the sight that presented itself. For there, warmly wrapped in various ancient garments, lay a baby girl, fair-haired and blue-eyed, which stared at Jerry’s wrinkled and weather-beaten face, and smiled contentedly.

“Dear-a-me!” said the carrier. “Dear-a-me!”

He stood staring at the baby until it began to whimper again. There was a feeding-bottle in the basket with it, and Jerry hastened to thrust the tube into the little rosy mouth, at the same time giving voice to certain soothing chuckles which he had used when hushing his little dead granddaughter to sleep. Then he covered the baby up

### *A Waif of the Highway*

again and went forward to Little Ashby, and pulled up at the door of the "Brown Cow." He stayed inside little more than two minutes, and when he came forth again, the stout, comfortable-looking landlady followed him to the cart.

"Look 'ee there, missis," said Jerry, holding his lantern over the sleeping baby's face. "Look 'ee there!"

The landlady nodded and sighed.

"Ah, poor dear!" said she. "'Tis just a dispensation o' Providence, Master Mott—it is indeed. Take it home to Bob's poor wife—maybe it 'll comfort her for loss of the other."

So Jeremiah set forward over the last mile of road to Willowmere. The baby slept quietly all the way, for the road was smooth, and the motion of the cart was soothing.

Poor Bob, his eyes red with weeping for the dead baby, was at the gate to welcome his father. Jeremiah got down from his perch very softly, and approached him.

"Now, my lad," said Jerry, "how do 'ee feel now, like, and how's poor Mary?"

"Bad—very bad, feyther, is Mary," said Bob. "Her sits by the hearthstone and don't say a word to nobody. Mistress White—she says 'at if on'y

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

Mary 'ud cry a bit, 't would do her good, but hei don't cry—not a tear."

"Bob," said the old man, "look thee here !"

He held the lantern over the sleeping baby. Bob, opening his eyes and mouth, stared and gazed in amazement. The old man set down the light, and, lifting the child from its nest, turned with it towards the house. Mary sat by the hearth as he entered, her eyes dry and burning, her face full of despair.

"Mary," said old Jeremiah, very softly, "Mary—look thee here, my dear."

He laid the sleeping baby on her knee. It suddenly woke, and shed the full light of its blue eyes upon her. For a second she gazed at it wonderingly; then she clasped it in her arms, and the hot tears began to rain down upon its round little face. Old Jeremiah watched the little group wonderingly, then he turned, sighed, and went back to his cart.

1



### *GIVING UP THE FARM*

THE house stood by the wayside, its white walls unshrouded from the gaze of travellers, save where a bushy lilac or glossy box-tree sprang out of the trim bit of garden, and made vivid patches of colour against the prevailing tint. It was a very old house, and the vandals, who in bygone times had covered up the rough stones with thick coats of plaster had been considerate enough to leave evidence of its age in the shape of a square slab above the front porch, on which appeared the inscription, "J.D., ANN. DOM. 1645." Such an antique memorial carries the mind a long way back, and presents the old house in many different aspects. When it was first reared there were troublous times in Merry England—times when men were rising with strong feelings of righteous indignation to sweep away the last vestige of an old, bad system. Beneath the gabled roof, then in all its pride of newness, many a company of Ironsides

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may have slept on their way towards the Castle of Pontefract, eight miles away to the north and west. Here, perchance, had fled for refuge many a gay Cavalier, weary of fighting and full of wonder that the trading classes could hit so mighty hard and show themselves so cunning of fence. In these rooms many an intercepted despatch may have been opened and deciphered by eager warriors, the unfortunate bearer meanwhile sitting by in high dudgeon. And in this porch, where now roses and honeysuckle climb about the lattice-work, many a gallant soldier may have said good-bye to wife or sweetheart, and ridden away never to come back.

But these times are long since dead and gone, and the house is old, and full of those signs of age and decrepitude which seem to steal over all things that are going down the hill of life—whether it be an oak in the forest or a man of threescore years. The little diamond-paned windows, set so deeply in the thick walls, are not of this age. The great oaken door, studded heavily with square-headed nails and swinging over a step into a low, dark entrance-hall, resembles in nothing the doors of present-day houses. Looking at the roof, you notice that it is covered with broad stone flags,

### *Giving up the Farm*

some of which are chipped away from long exposure to the weather. The chimneys are squat and square and built outside the house, with many a curious twist and turn from base to summit. Upon one of them is fixed a weathercock of pattern so strange, so rude in manufacture, that it must certainly have swung in the wind for a century.

If the old house, with its quaint doors and windows, its old-world chimneys and roof, looks picturesque, what must be said of the garden that surrounds it on three sides? It is a veritable rural Paradise. It is mapped out into divisions with such studied indifference that everything looks as if art had been lost in nature. The trim flower-beds are bordered with dwarf box, there is a rustic seat under the lilac and laburnum bushes, and the white rose tree by the porch has scattered a shower of ivory-tinted leaves across the gravelled path. The long rows of potatoes are beautifully straight, the peas and beans are set to a mathematical nicety, and more than one pair of hands have done their best to keep away weeds and rubbish. At the back of the garden a long, thick line of hawthorn stands, and in one corner a great ash tree rears its feathery head proudly to the sky, and casts a



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

shadow across the garden under which a hundred people might find shelter from sun or shower.

There is something going on at the old house to-day which is not of a common nature. The high road in both directions is busy with traffic. Men drive up in spring-carts or in the more stylish dog-cart, and the old house is evidently their goal. Young rustics in their best apparel are in great request taking care of horses and traps, or leading the former away to be put up in the stables at the rear. Men whose calling you can tell by simply glancing at their exterior come riding or driving up and dismount at the little gate. Here comes the horse dealer with a straw in his mouth. Behind him comes the pig-jobber, and close at his heels is the round-faced butcher, who is talking to the cattle dealer. Both these gentlemen are accompanied by satellites in the shape of drovers and dogs. Amongst the rapidly increasing crowd stand two or three individuals whose looks betray them as purchasers of old iron and such like goods. All these people, as fast as they arrive at the house, pass through the garden and enter a paddock at the rear. A horsey individual, with very tight nether garments, and a whip in his hands, is standing by the roadside occupied in chewing a

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straw and staring down the road as if in expectancy. I look upon him as a likely informant and edge up to him, nodding my head towards the old homestead.

“ A sale, eh ? ”

“ Ah ! ” The exclamation expresses a good deal of meaning.

“ What’s the reason ? ”

“ Nay, t’owd man’s giving up farming.”

“ Is he very old ? ”

“ What, owd Reuben Rivers ? Eighty, if he be a day.”

“ Humph ! Been here all his life ? ”

“ Aye, and’s father and grandfather afore him. T’owd man’s taking it very hard, they say.”

“ Has he no sons to keep the farm on ? ”

“ Nivver hed but one—young Dick.”

“ And where’s he ? ”

“ Dead. There’s nowt but t’lasses ; and women’s poor managers in general. Well, it’s eleven o’clock, and time to start.”

He turned into the garden, and made his way across to the paddock, and I followed close behind him. As I passed the open door of the house, I saw that the great kitchen was made ready for that liberal consumption of beef, beer, and bread, with-

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

out which nothing can be done in the country. Nobody stands on ceremony on these occasions, and I therefore stepped into the porch and looked round me. They had set up three long tables in the wide kitchen, and draped them with snowy cloths. Great rounds of cold beef, flanked by foaming jugs of ale and loaves of bread, stood on every table, with big piles of plates in front of them. Here stood a large piece of ham, there an enormous cheese. A box of cigars stood open on a side table. The women-folk of the house were bustling hither and thither, pressing people to eat and drink and make themselves at home. I noticed that all of them looked anything but happy, and that one in particular appeared to be miserable.

“Miss Sophia don't like t' idea o' leaving t' owd place,” said a big man in cord breeches on my right.

“It's human natur,” said his companion. “It do come hard when you've been borned and christened and all but married i' one place to hev' to leave it at t' last.”

I passed on into the paddock, and found the auctioneer just in the act of mounting an inverted tub. He wore a light dust coat and a white hat, and had a scarlet rose in his button-hole, and

### *Giving up the Farm*

looked a very gay and humorous gentleman indeed. He was starting the sale with a neat reference to his old friend Mr. Reuben Rivers, who was obliged to decline farming under the pressure of advancing years. He reminded his audience that Mr. Rivers's father and grandfather had farmed the same land, and that it was now more than a century since the famous Rivers breed of cattle and sheep came into existence. Then, with a jocular remark or two and a eulogy of the fine weather, the sale began with the odds and ends which are always found about a farm, followed by the harness, with the advent of which things began to be lively.

Watching a sale by auction is not a very exciting matter, and I presently strolled away towards the stables, where the horse-dealing gentry had already collected in numbers and were inspecting the stock with critical eyes. There were some five animals in the stalls, all groomed to a nicety for the occasion, and the ploughboys, under whose care their toilets had been made, stood by listening to the criticisms with proud faces. One lad, in charge of two beautiful roan cart horses, looked anything but satisfied at the prospect of parting with his pets.

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“Tha’ll not hev’ t’ chance o’ grooming Major and Prince no more, Bill,” said a ploughboy who stood near. “Ahr maister’s bahn to buy ’em, and I shall hev’ ’em for my ploo.”

“Tak’ care tha’ looks weel efter ’em, then,” said Bill sullenly. “Else I’ll come across t’ Moor and pelt thi lughoil for tha.”

Coming out of the stables we saw the old farmer himself advancing to us on his daughter’s arm. He was coming to take a last look at his horses before they went under the auctioneer’s hammer. A fine, thick-set, thoroughly English old man he was, with a rosy face and blue eyes, which showed some signs of perturbation or excitement at the noise and bustle around him. He was dressed in knee-breeches and gaiters of the old-fashioned brown hue; his waistcoat was buff in colour, and he wore a blue coat, with steel buttons, and a wide-brimmed white hat. He moved slowly along, leaning on his daughter’s arm and his stout stick, and looked wonderingly in the bystanders’ faces. It was evident that he was already approaching the period when the second childhood comes.

“Good day, gentlemen; good day—a fine day to all of you. I’m very much obliged to you, I’m sure, for coming. There’s a little something to

### *Giving up the Farm*

eat and drink in the house, gentlemen, if you'll step that way. Mary, my dear, why don't you ask these gentlemen what they'll take? Well, well, now make yourselves at home, gentlemen; the ale's very good, we brewed it last October, and the beef's fed by myself. Aye, well, now, let me see these horses. Tom, thou's seen they're all properly groomed? Aye, aye; well now, let's see. What's this! Captain? Aye, Captain, by Duke, out of Diamond. Aye, a good bred horse that, gentlemen. It's all down in my book, but I don't remember it so well now. Aye, and here's Diamond. How many foals has Diamond had, Tom? Well, well, now, it's a great many—a good mare, a good mare is Diamond. Where's Polly? Polly's not to be sold, Tom. Dost't hear? We can't spare Polly, gentlemen. We shall keep a little trap when we get moved, and Polly's not to be sold, Tom."

So he chattered on going the round of the stalls, which he had no doubt visited every day of his life since he was a lad, having something to say about this horse's father, and that mare's mother, and always pressing everybody he met to go into the house and eat and drink to their heart's content. From the stables he went forward to the

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

cows, punching the cattle's fat sides with his knowing fingers, and pointing out the various points with pride. So he went the whole round of the homestead, till finally his daughter led him into the paddock, where the sale was going briskly forward. There he stood, putting in a word now and then when some article was put up, till his querulous cry, "I can recommend it, gentlemen; I can recommend it," was constantly heard.

I lingered about the place till the afternoon shadows began falling across the meadows, and watched the whole stock, live and dead, disposed of. The horses came into the ring, each the subject of lavish encomiums by the auctioneer, and were knocked down and led away by their new owners. Once they led in an old brown mare, blind of one eye and evidently "aged." The farmer's daughter started as she saw the old creature. "Oh, father," she whispered, "not Daisy, surely! You'll not sell Daisy?"

"There's some mistake, gentlemen," cried the old man. "We'll not sell Daisy. We can find Daisy a bit o' grass somewhere till she's dead. Take Daisy away, Bill."

And Daisy was led away to share the old man's fortunes till the end came to both of them.

### *Giving up the Farm*

Then came night and the sunset, and the farmstead was busy with buyers fetching away their purchases. Here a lad was leading away a horse ; there a drover was taking off half a dozen cattle ; yonder a man and a dog were busy with a crowd of frightened sheep. Inside the kitchen, the auctioneer and his clerk were counting great piles of dirty bank-notes and yellow gold, while the old man hovered restlessly about, still pressing his hospitality on every one coming across his path. How would he feel next morning when he woke to consciousness that his herds and flocks were gone, and that he was no longer a tiller of the brown soil which he and his had worked for so long a time ?



### *THE 'TATEY BOILER*

**WHEN** I was a lad there was no delight dearer, no pleasure more vivid, than that of spending an hour or two with old John, the 'tatey boiler. At this distance of time I can hardly tell what it was that proved so fascinating in the old man and his little hutch. Was it his quaint individuality, his old-world attire, his stories and anecdotes, or was it the cosy warmth of the fire underneath the boiler and the mealy potato which he could always pick out from the steaming mass of slowly-boiling tubers? It may have been all these things put together: certain it is that after twenty years' interval I can remember every detail of the 'tatey boiler's daily task, and every corner of the little place where his operations were carried on.

And first, as to the old man himself. When I first remember him he was close upon seventy years of age, and he had worked for my grandfather for more than fifty years. His name was John Salkeld,

### *The 'Tatey Boiler*

and everybody called him Sorkill, which sounds Norse or Scandinavian. He was a tall, thick-set man, who habitually wore a smock-frock, which even in the early seventies was getting a scarce garment in Yorkshire. Winter and summer his grey head was crowned with an ancient hat of greeny-brown felt, and this was kept down by a red woollen muffler which came over his ears and was tied in a bow beneath his chin. His face was broad and full of humour, and his little grey eyes, peering out from a heavy mass of wrinkled eyebrows, always seemed to be smiling or looking for something to smile at. When he walked abroad he made use of a long staff of stout ash, not unlike an alpenstock, and he was celebrated throughout the parish for his feet, which were enormous in size and set themselves down with weight and decision.

In the village itself old Sorkill had never lived. During the half-century in which he had worked for my grandfather he had had his home at the market-town, three miles away, and had walked to and from his work every day in the week, Sundays excepted. I question whether in that half century he had ever missed a day. Folks did not think so much about holidays in those days, and the pigs wanted feeding on Good Friday, which was perhaps

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the only occasion whereon Hodge and Giles made merry. Nor was old Sorkill ever late to his work, though he did live so far from it. He was busy amongst his pigs by half-past six every morning, and earlier in summer, and it was not until the shadows began to fall in June and the stars to shine in December that he set out on his homeward journey. I can see him now as he trudges along, the smock-frock outlining his sturdy limbs, the old hat tied tightly down over his grey hair, the big stick in his hand, and the bundle slung over his shoulder.

The domain over which old Sork exercised the rule of an absolute autocrat was a yard in the rear of the farmhouse. You gained access to it by the dairy. It was paved with cobble-stones. In one corner stood a plum-tree, and it was always a matter of intense interest as to whether the plum-tree would yield two plums or none. All along one side, facing the plum-tree and the dairy was the establishment of pigs. First came a square covered cote, having holes in the wall, through which wash and other food might be poured. Then came the boiling-house, a square, raftered apartment, having a set-pot in one corner and a swinging boiler above it. This was Sorkill's sanctum sanctorum, into which no man might enter without permission.

### *The 'Tatey Boiler*

Beyond that lay the great sty, having a covered cote and an open yard with troughs. At its outer corner stood the great pig-barrel into which all manner of superfluous food was thrown, and beyond that was the pump, and beyond that the gable end of the granary, whereon flourished an apricot tree. This was Sork's kingdom. His subjects were the pigs and any human beings who chanced to stray there.

To seek and receive permission to enter the boiling house was more delightful than an invitation to dine with the king. There were two three-legged low stools in the boiling-house, and on one of these sat old Sork, while the visitor sat on the other. There was a genial warmth always diffused throughout the place, and the boiling potatoes smelt very attractive. From a niche in the wall Sorkill produced pepper and salt, and then, diving his hand into the big boiler, he would fish out a potato just beginning to burst and showing its mealy contents through the brown skin. You sprinkled salt and pepper on it, and ate it with a feeling that no epicure ever enjoyed. It was, in fact, a feast, and the philosophy was not absent from it, for old Sork had his notions of life, and could talk about them. On pigs he was especially learned. He

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

had studied the pig from the cradle to the butcher's bench, and he gravely remarked that pigs had a good deal of human nature in them. And that he was not far wrong was shown in the fact that his own particular pigs knew him, and treated him with lavish displays of affection.

I remember very well the deep regret which came over all of us when old Sorkill began to fail. For a time he held bravely on, trudging his three miles to and fro, but at last the severe winter stopped him, and he had to remain indoors. When the spring came, nothing would pacify him but to be driven over to the old familiar haunt. He would go into the boiling-house and sit for hours, scolding the lad who had taken his place and listening to the hissing of the potatoes in the big boiler. At last he was too weak even for that, and then the end came. He died hoping that things would go on all right, and that the master would alter the pig-cote. But the pig-cote never was altered. With old Sork's death the cultivation of pigs seemed to die also. The boiling-house was turned into a coal shed, one of the styes was given over to the hens and ducks, and a great house-leek grew and flourished over the chimney of the fire by which the old man used to sit and tell his wondrous tales.

*THE MIGHTY MOTHER*



### *A CONGRESS IN ARCADIA*

It was amongst the elm-trees which stand in the corner of the Duke's garth that the congress was held. The time was three o'clock of a hot July afternoon, and that explains my presence on this particular occasion. I had gone there in search of shade and quiet. Everywhere else it was hot—really hot, not warm. Under the elms, however, it was comparatively cool. It was possible to lie down there on the thick grass and feel that one was not being slowly roasted to death. There was just a suspicion of air passing slowly through the feathery branches overhead, and the ripple of the tiny stream close by sounded refreshing.

In the elms and in the hawthorn bushes there were a number of birds assembled, evidently with the notion of discussing some serious matter. So far as I could judge with my eyes half-shut, there were representatives of almost every bird family. Blackbirds, thrushes, linnets, red-starts, fly-catchers,



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

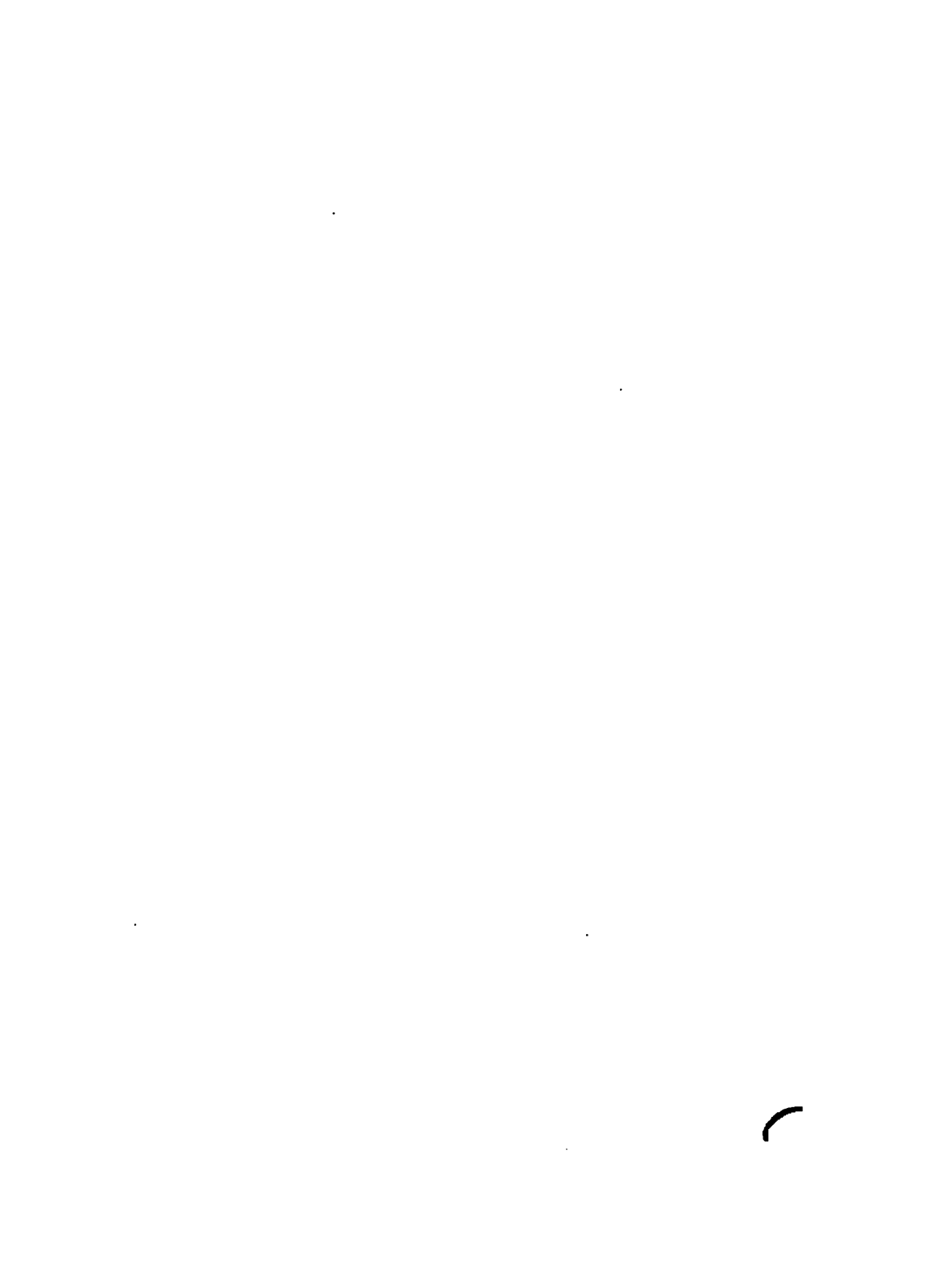
honey-buzzards, rooks, ring-doves, robins, and so on, almost through the whole list, were there. As for the sparrows, they were innumerable. They seemed to have come *en masse* from the wheat-fields, and they were full of impudence, as usual.

Presently the birds began to talk, or I began to hear them. Probably they were talking when I arrived and laid down under the elms. It takes a few minutes before one gets fairly accustomed to the speech in which birds carry on their discussions. But when one is once familiar with it there is nothing so easily understood.

The blackbird was talking. He sat on one of the lower boughs of the elm, and spoke freely, and even warmly.

"Of all the disgraces to society," said he, "the rook is the very worst. I live near a colony of them, and I have had opportunities of seeing how they behave themselves. They are always fighting and howling. And then, they're destructive. Why, this spring, they tore each other's nests to pieces—absolutely destroyed them! I ask if that is good conduct. Even human beings don't do that."

"Don't they?" said a sparrow. "They do. I used to build in the eaves of a cottage where they







LETTER-BOX AT THE HOME FARM, STAPLETON



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### *A Congress in Arcadia*

had an eviction. They pulled the cottage to pieces. So there !”

“That’s only a solitary case,” said the blackbird. “I mean—they don’t as a general rule. But the rooks are always at it. You might as well live in a wasp’s nest as live amongst the rooks. They hate each other like poison. And then they make such a noise. I’m a peaceful bird, I am—quite domesticated and genteel—and I don’t like these goings on. The rooks ought to be spoken to severely.”

“Haw !” said a rook, who sat high in the elm. “Haw !” The blackbird shook his head. The rook’s deep voice was full of contempt, but that was simply adding to his many crimes. He was too degraded to feel ashamed of himself.

“If everybody’s going to be pulled to pieces,” said the thrush, “I want to know what’s to be said about the sparrow.”

“Oh, I don’t care,” said a house-sparrow. “Have your say, by all means. Shall I say it for you ? You want to object to us because we’re thieves, and because we’re eating Farmer Jones’ ten-acre wheat-field, eh ? Well, who cares ? We don’t.”

“Not we, indeed !” cried all the other sparrows in loud chorus. “We don’t care for anything.”

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

"You're a disgrace to society," said the robin. "I don't know about the rooks, but you really are a disgrace. You ought to be sent to a reformatory."

"Well, I never!" shrieked a dozen sparrows in unison. "Of all the impudence! Why, who and what are you, pray, you miserable little impostor?"

"I belong to the aristocracy," said the robin, proudly. "I'm not of low birth. Why, men write about me in books."

"They write about us in the newspapers," said a sparrow.

"Yes—and what do they say?" asked the robin. "You should read the *Mark Lane Express* and the *Field*. They do love you, don't they? Just look how they write about me! Why, the poets praise me, and sing of me in their finest poems, and the artists make pictures of me. They think more of me than of any of you."

"More fools they," said the owl, who sat just inside a deep hole in the elm, and seemed rather cross because of the sunlight. It just shows how much they know of you. You're a mean-spirited little thief—that's what you are. Who was it that chased the butterfly, eh?"

"What do you want to rake that up for?" said the robin indignantly. "Wordsworth preached at

## *A Congress in Arcadia*

me about that. 'Love it or leave it alone,' he said. Pooh! love a butterfly, indeed. A good deal better eat it. Don't I want something to eat as well as the rest of you? I don't steal the farmer's corn, as the sparrows do."

"You try to sneak the corn which they throw out to the hens in winter, anyway," said the blackbird. "I saw you at Farmer Brown's kitchen door last December, begging just like a common tramp. And the tom-tit came up and offered to fight you, and you ran away—yah!"

"I won't stop here to be insulted," cried the robin, and sailed off. The sparrows uttered a scream of derision, and rising in a body chivied him across the field and into the wood.

"They are a low lot—the sparrows," said the blackbird. "I don't care where you find them—they're a low lot. I went to see a cousin of mine who lives in a town, and there were a lot of sparrows there—the dirtiest, grimiest things you ever saw. I was ashamed of being a bird when I saw them. They—" but here the sparrows returned from chivying the robin, and he said no more.

"There was a cow talking to me yesterday," said the magpie. "She often does talk when I meet her the low garth. She's all by herself, there, and



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it's a bit lonely ; and though I'm not a talkative person——”

“ Certainly not,” said the owl, derisively.

“ I like to talk to her,” continued the magpie, unheeding the interruption. “ And she complained to me about the wagtails. Says they're a source of annoyance to her. Always flying about her nose, and settling on her back, and pecking at her. Now, I don't think that's nice conduct for a respectable bird to adopt towards such a lady-like animal as the cow, and I think the wagtails ought to be spoken to.”

“ Well, I'm sure ! ” said the only wagtail present. “ How unreasonable some folks are. Why, I was only hunting for flies and things like that. There are always a lot of flies round the cows. I thought I was obliging her. She seemed annoyed by the flies.”

“ You should let her kill the flies in her own way,” said the magpie. “ What's her tail for ? ”

“ I never thought of that,” answered the wagtail, much abashed. “ One can't think of everything, you know.”

“ You're right there,” said the chaffinch. “ I wish one could. It would save a lot of trouble. I had a good deal of trouble last winter because I couldn't think of everything. There wasn't very

### *A Congress in Arcadia*

much on the hedges, and less in the fields, and some of us had to hang round the stack-yards, you know. And that boy of Farmer White's contrived a trap for us—a riddle, propped up by a spelk it was, with corn under it. Of course, one can't think of everything, and so I allowed my wife, and the children and several relatives to go under the riddle, and——”

“They were caught,” said the owl.

“Some of them were,” sighed the chaffinch. “My wife escaped, but we lost two sons, three daughters, four cousins, my wife's uncle, and my mother-in-law.”

“You ought to be thankful for that,” said the bullfinch. “Your mother-in-law was the meanest old hen that ever hatched an egg.”

“She was trying, certainly,” said the chaffinch. “But she had very managing ways, and my wife doesn't enjoy good health. Of course, if I'd only thought of it, I wouldn't have let them go under that riddle; but, then, as the wagtail says, you can't think of everything.”

“And boys are so ingenious,” said the fieldfare. “Give them three bricks, a bit of forked twig, and a handful of corn, and it's wonderful what a temptation they can put in your way.”

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

"When you're hungry," said a sparrow.

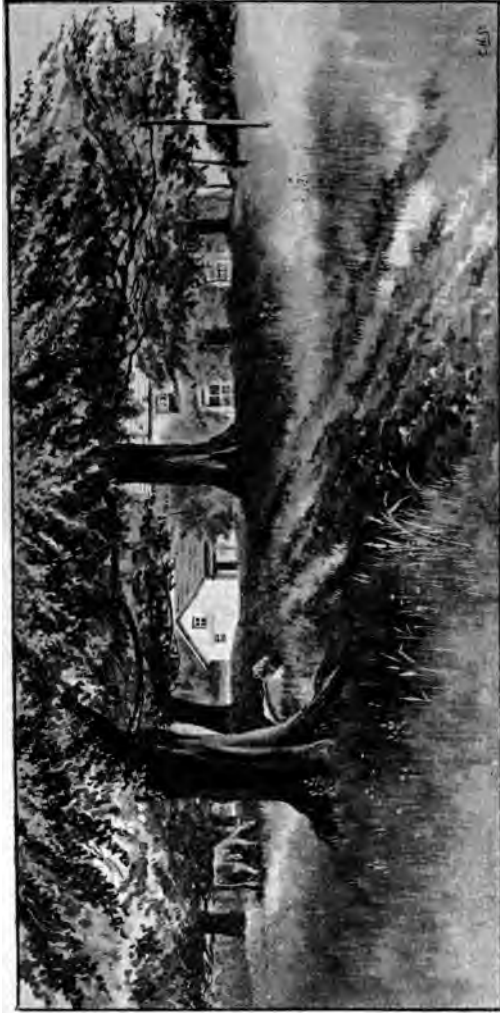
"You always are hungry," snapped the black-bird. "I never saw you when you weren't eating, or looking for something to eat."

"It's because you're hungry that you walk into the trap," continued the fieldfare. "I lost my tenth wife in that way." He sighed deeply at this sad memory. "My present wife's rather too wary to be caught in a brick-trap," he added. And again he sighed.

"I'll tell you what I think about everything," said the owl. "You know I think a good deal. I don't talk much, but I do think. It's wonderful what a lot of thinking you can do when you sit in a hole like this waiting for the sun to go away. Now I think——"

But I never heard what he thought. The other birds departed silently, and with remarkable swiftness. I invited the owl to continue his remarks to myself and to Jones' cow, which had approached leisurely, and now stood under the elms swishing her tail. The owl, however, was offended. He said "Pooh!" and went into his hole again. Perhaps that was wise.





THE HOME FARM, STAPLETON

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### *PHILOSOPHY IN THE KENNEL*

It is one of my favourite diversions whenever I am staying at a certain Osgoldcross homestead to spend some little time in conversation with the sheep-dog who dwells there, in a stone kennel near the kitchen door. He is a dog of more than usual intelligence, and during his lengthy and respectable life he has amassed considerable mental wealth in the way of reminiscences and experiences. His conversation, in short, is usually much more welcome to me than that of animals who have more brains and fewer legs. Because he rarely meets a man who understands his speech, my friend the sheep-dog does not often engage in conversation. Thus his language is simple and straightforward, and entirely free from those tricks and turns of speech which too often appear in the speech of men who want either to make evident their own superiority or to beat down an opponent in some argument. It is uncommonly refreshing to me to enjoy conversation of this kind,



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

and therefore I never miss an opportunity of seeking the sheep-dog's society when the summer evening is fading from twilight into darkness.

One evening last summer I went out with a book in my hand, and sat down on the top of the old-fashioned stone kennel in which my canine friend lives. He came forth, and wagged his tail at me.

"I wouldn't sit there, if I were you," said he. "There are fleas about, and fleas are unpleasant. It's a pity, but dogs have their parasites as well as men. Go over and sit under the beech-trees, and I'll come and sit by you."

It was beautifully cool, and calm, and pleasant under the beeches. I sat on the ground with my back against the smooth bole of the tree, and the dog came and sat near me. His face was statue-like in its gravity; to him at that moment the hush of the summer was profoundly solemn.

"You were reading," said he, glancing at my book, "Wordsworth's poetry, I see. I have read a good deal of Wordsworth myself. My grandfather came from his country. The sheep there are half-wild, and they have horns. In winter there are often scores of them buried in the snow. A sheep-dog's life there is one of variety. Here,

### *Philosophy in the Kennel*

of course, it is monotonous, but still not without compensations."

I made no answer to that. One should never disturb a train of philosophic thought. "When I read Wordsworth," cried the sheep-dog, presently, "I naturally first examined such of his work as refers to my own species. That's a very fine poem of his about the young gentleman who fell over the precipice, and was killed. His dog, you remember, watched by the dead body for three months, and so Wordsworth called the poem 'Fidelity.' It is very fine as a poem, but I think, if I had been Wordsworth that I should not have inquired too closely into the matter, or, rather, should not have supplied a fanciful notion at the close of the last lines."

"I don't understand," I said.

"Well, he says the dog had remained by his dead master's body for three months, and then he goes on to ask how he had been nourished through such a long time in so wild and solitary a place. That was unnecessary."

"What for?"

"Because common sense might have supplied him with an answer. Don't you see, the dog kept himself alive by eating his master. That's not poetical,

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

is it? But it's true. Even poetry must yield now and then to the material forces within us."

I could say nothing to this. But I wished Wordsworth had been there. Presently the sheep-dog mentioned him again.

"There's one thing I liked about Wordsworth," said he. "His dogs are dogs. Some poets, when they write about dogs, describe men in dog-skin. Now, he doesn't. There's his description of the dog who gets drowned while his mate watches him, and tries to save him. That's nature. That's better than Byron, who said that the only real friend he ever had was a dog—which was foolish, because no dog would ever love a man whom other men didn't love."

"Dogs and children," said I, "always detect badness in a man."

"So you say," answered the sheep-dog. "But I don't know whether it is so or not. How are you to tell? Of course, we have instinct. But there's a good deal in first impressions. If I went to a new place I should keep a watchful eye open for first impressions. I have lived in three houses in my time. At the first there was very little to eat, and if a sheep was ailing they used to kill it off, so that they could sell the meat instead of letting me

### *Philosophy in the Kennel*

eat it. At the second there was plenty of porridge, but very little else. Now, here I am, one of the family. There was sirloin of beef for dinner to-day, and I shall have the bone to-morrow. That's the way to treat dogs. Let them feel that some of the sweets of this world are for them. We all have our weaknesses, and ours is for a bone."

"But that's materialism," I objected.

"What is materialism?" he asked. "And what's idealism? Now, look here, when you have been shooting all day, tramping through stubble, or over turnips, and getting your legs and feet miserably wet, which would you prefer to have in readiness when you get home—a good fire, a warm meal, your pipe and glass, comfortable slippers and an easy chair; or a cold room, nothing to eat, and philosophic questionings for your sole company?"

"Why not combine the philosophy and the creature comforts?"

"Most men do," he answered. "And that's why I asked the question. What I mean is that a man's brain is never so workable, his thoughts never so brilliant as when his feet are warm and his stomach judiciously filled. I dabble a good deal in philosophy myself, and I find that my philosophy improves or deteriorates according to the

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

state of my material comfort. One can't speculate as to the origin of things when one feels a decided vacuum within one's self, nor can even a dog enjoy the manufacture of ideal fabrics when his owners have forgotten to provide him with clean straw. So there you are."

"Where am I?"

"Where you set out from. Did you ever see a dog run after its own tail? That is how most men think—always in a circle. There have been few men in this world who ever thought in a straight line, because nearly every man before he begins to think makes up his mind as to what it is he is going to think when he has done thinking. Wherefore he naturally comes to where he set out from."

"You seem to have observed men a good deal," I remarked.

"If you were a sheep-dog you would know what excellent opportunities I have for observation," he replied. "There is old Thomas, the shepherd, for instance. I have watched him until I can tell just where he has got to in his thinking processes. Suppose we are going to put the sheep on a new patch of turnips. A day previous to the operation Thomas makes up his mind as to which part of the field he will set up his nets in first. That done, he

### *Philosophy in the Kennel*

begins to think why he should set them there, instead of somewhere else. Then he proceeds to consider what other folks might say on the matter, and on that point he hardens his heart, the seeking of advice in any case being to men an admission of ignorance and of helplessness. Having thus argued all round himself, he finally arrives at the point from which he set out, and thinks that his logical process is good. But, you see, there was none, because he made up his mind that he would do this particular thing before ever he began to think why he should do it."

"That is very deep reasoning."

"Certainly. Lonely things like myself are invariably deep of thought. Do you know that the things which keep silence are most deep in thought and richest in knowledge? If you could get the mountains to talk, or even the trees! What a world it is—oh, what a world! See, there's the night coming on—only a little while ago and it was twilight. Look at the stars. I often open one eye in the night and look out of my kennel, and there are the bright, the solemn stars, shining steadily, and all the time the old world is rolling along. Where to? Do you know, man? No. Do I? No—how should a dog know? But may

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

be, some time, some where, I shall know. There is something even in a dog whereby he lives, and loves, and understands. Who put it there? And will He who put it there ever destroy it? Will it always be twilight, always uncertainty? But why should it? Once I went out in a mist, and made for a certain tree. The white mists were thick and close; I could not see through them. Yet I knew my path was clear, and I held on, and at last came the sunburst, and the mists rolled away like clouds before the wind, and I saw. Will not the other mists disperse? What may there not be for me in the time to come—even for me, a dog?"

What, indeed? There are strange secrets hid in the rugged breast of mother Nature. But they will all be unravelled some day.

### *THE LAST DAYS OF HARVEST*

**THERE** is nothing more beautiful about the time of harvest than its last days. When the country folk first begin to reap and mow the ripened corn, the rural world is full of bustle and commotion ; when the corn has fallen and been gathered up and stored away, a great hush falls across the land, and peace seems to reign supreme where but a week earlier all was energy and toil. The fields are left to themselves ; the farmsteads regain their old sleepy look ; the Irishmen who came over from Connemara or Tipperary to earn a trifle towards their own rents have departed ; and the horses begin to get back some of the flesh which their month of hard work took from them. Summer says a lingering but definite farewell, and Autumn, brisk and breezy, or languorous and lazy—for she, like Spring, has more than one mood—steps into her place. The trees begin to shed their leaves, and the woods are presently thickly carpeted with



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

these fragile bits of green and red and brown, which once fluttered gaily in the breeze, and now lie to be trampled underfoot by whosoever walks through the undergrowth. The paths along the highway sides are soon hidden from sight by the dead leaves that descend upon them from the chestnuts and elms overhead, and the hedgerows, losing their foliage, become bare and brown as in March. In the orchards and gardens the fruit-trees look as though nature prompted them to mourn their vanished glory. Their boughs no longer hang heavy with ripened fruit, and their topmost branches are no longer bent under the weight of pear or plum which the sun had kissed into maturity. Here and there an apple-tree, otherwise bare and desolate, preserves a few russet-cheeked apples which nothing has ripened; but these shake mournfully in the September wind, and invite nobody to pluck them. Those flowers that love light and heat have vanished from the gardens, and in their place spring up the hardier autumn plants, whose quiet-hued blossoms will be all that we shall see of flower-land until the snow-drop peeps forth from February's snow. There is something everywhere, in field and wood and garden and orchard that heralds the sleep-time of

### *The Last Days of Harvest*

the year, the long interval between the end of summer and the birth of spring.

Once upon a time, if the old men's tales be true, harvest was purely a summer incident, and the last load was brought home before September's shortened days came round. It is long since we had harvests of that sort in Yorkshire, and it seems natural to us of this later generation to see the corn being led long after the St. Leger of the year has been fought and won. In the old days our grandfathers used to look to Doncaster races as a sort of annual treat after the hard work of harvest ; lately it has been possible to attend the September meeting on the Town Moor before an acre has fallen before scythe or reaper. It is this backwardness of the seasons that enables us to go out into the villages on the verge of October, and find farmers and their men still at work. Certainly the corn has all been cut, and possibly the last field is being cleared ; but the harvest evidences are still strong, and a peep into the stack-yards proves that the land has not yet settled down to its autumnal repose. There, in one corner of an already well-filled stack-yard they are building the last stack of wheat. Already it has reached the height of a house-side. Beneath it stands a horse

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

and cart, the horse looking somewhat the worse for the previous month's hard labour, and the cart piled high with golden-brown sheaves. The townsman who sees that load of grain in the straw may think it has been an easy task to load and bring it from the field a mile away. But if he stands by and watches Hodge number one dissect it with a pitch-fork, and lift a sheaf to Hodge number two, stationed on the stack-side, he will come to the conclusion that there is no little art, and a great deal of skill, in so putting a load together that it will not topple to pieces as the cart comes over deep ruts or round difficult corners. Just as full of skill is the art of Hodge number three, who is building the stack. Observe how mathematically he lays sheaf after sheaf, course after course, so that his stack may finally be architecturally perfect. Now and then he descends from his high perch and comes to "terra firma," in order to see how his stack looks from a territorial standpoint. He slips a length of straw between his teeth, puts his head on one side, shuts one eye, and gives himself up to contemplation. At the end of five minutes he mounts the ladder again, satisfied, and the work goes on, course after course, until the stack begins to

### *The Last Days of Harvest*

slant towards the line that will presently crown it.

It is not difficult to find the way to the field from which they are leading the corn. All along the sleepy village street, and down the high road, and up some quiet lane, you will find a well-defined track of loose straws that have fallen from the carts as they have passed along. Street, road, and lane, indeed, look likely to furnish a rich harvest to the gleaners, for the strayed ears of corn lie thick in them. The almost bare hedges of the quiet lane look as if somebody had decorated them with a fringe of wheat and barley, and the trees that overhang both lane and road have caught a liberal handful from the tops of the loads. But it is not necessary to trust to these landmarks to find the field. An empty cart comes lumbering out of the stackyard on its way to be re-filled. Climb over the shelvings, and make yourself comfortable, but take care not to sit in the bottom of the cart, for although you are probably ignorant of the fact, you are in the midst of a new world. Leave the surrounding landscape for a moment, and turn your attention to the planks at your feet. You will see there certain things that you will not find elsewhere. The floor of the cart is thickly

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

carpeted with ears of wheat, barley, and oats that have accumulated ever since the work of loading began, and amongst them, and under and over the loose straws, are crawling a hundred strange insects, which you have very likely never set eyes on before, even supposing you to be an entomologist. What all their names may be it is beyond my power to tell you. But here are ants, running about as nimbly as if they were on one of their own hills, and there are beetles, black, brown, and green, climbing the rough sides of the cart in an effort to escape; and here are lady-birds, looking like dots of red sealing-wax; and there are caterpillars, green and white, and full of life and a desire to travel. And there, too, is an insect which I have never seen elsewhere than in a harvest cart, and which ought more properly to be called a beast, or perhaps a reptile. For he is long and black, and his head is horned, and great shiny scales cover his back, and he has a wicked-looking tail, which he carries constantly turned up like a foxhound. Take one of these long straws and tickle him with it, and notice what a wealth of savagery there is in his nature. He stops and turns towards you and elevates himself on his fore-legs, and presents his tail to you as if it were a

### *The Last Days of Harvest*

cannon, and you must be quite sure that if you put your finger to it you would find that there is a sting somewhere about, and that you had got what the country folks call "smittled."

But turn from this strange little world to the horse and its driver. The animal is big, heavy, and clumsy, and its coat is somewhat shaggy and dusty, because nobody has much time to spare in grooming horses while harvest lasts. It steps along the road in leisurely fashion, conscious, no doubt, that slow and sure work from early morn till dewy eve demands leisure rather than haste. The boy who drives it does not seem in any hurry either. Perched on the front of the cart shelvings, or sitting sideways on the saddle with his feet resting on the shafts, he whistles constantly, only unpursing his lips occasionally to cry, "Come up, Boxer!" In deference to the superstition that nobody can work except in shirt sleeves, he has doffed his corduroy jacket and hung it to the horse's collar, and this in spite of the keen September wind that blows to meet us as we ride along the high road. Like the horse, he has been at work since an early hour this morning, and it is his opinion that slow and steady wins the day. Rouse him to conversation, and you will find, by

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

induction, that his great ambition ever since he first realised the fact that the horse is a domestic animal, has been to drive carts in harvest. Somewhere about July he began to make a whip, and went every day into the fields to see if the corn was ripe. When the village school finally closed for the harvest holiday his cup of joy was full, and he would not have exchanged places with the King himself. He felt himself a man when he drove the horses in the reaper; he feels himself something more than a man now that harvest is nearly over, and he has had a month's experience. He points out with tremendous pride that he has driven all day down the steep and uneven road known as "Mucky-lane," and has never upset a single load of corn. His countenance beams as he further informs you that he has had a shilling a day and his "drinkings" during harvest; but it falls and becomes pensive as he adds that this is the last field of corn to be led, and that "t' schooil" reopens on Monday.

We turn—horse, boy, cart, and the little world of creeping things on the cart floor—into a field where but a month ago a great crop of golden wheat waved beneath the August sunlight, and

### *The Last Days of Harvest*

where now nothing but stubble remains. Yet stay ; far away, at the end of the field, you can see a few rows of stooks of corn still left standing. As we draw near them a laden cart passes us, and its boy-driver salutes us with an admonition to hurry up. We approach the stooks, and find two or three labourers leaning on their forks, and regarding us passively. One mounts into the cart, the others fork the sheaves up to him ; slowly and surely the load is built. It looks very easy to do, but something would go wrong when the cart comes to that awkward corner in " Mucky-lane " if an amateur hand had built the load. See how loosely it seems to be built, and how it rocks and wobbles as horse Boxer, led by his juvenile driver, goes on from one stook to another. You wonder how it manages to get to the stackyard, a mile away, without falling to pieces. Presently it is big enough, and the man who has loaded it slides down from its topmost layer to the horse's back, and from thence to the ground. In that leisurely fashion, which is one of the agricultural labourer's chief characteristics, he proceeds to unroll the rope which has hung coiled at the cart's tail. With a dexterous twist, he flings one end over the load



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

of sheaves, and, catching it at the other side, draws it taut through the iron loop provided for that purpose. Another turn and twist, another run through another iron holdfast, and he flings it once more across the swaying sheaves above, and finally fastens it securely at the other side. Then, with a "Come up, Boxer!" the cart moves away across the stubble in the direction of the gate, the youthful driver holding Boxer by the bridle, and occasionally applying a harmless-looking, home-made whip to his dusty sides as a reminder that not even horses should lag in harvest time.

Leave the labourers to repeat the same performance with another cart, and turn to another part of the same field, where a youth is amusing himself with a horse-rake. Seated on a sort of iron chair, fixed at the end of the shafts, he has nothing to do but occasionally press his foot on a lever, which lifts up the great circular teeth behind, and releases the mass of loose straws they have gathered. Up and down the field he goes, whipping up his horse every few minutes, and occasionally belabouring it with a long bough, which he has cut from the hedge. Monotonous as his occupation is, he makes it more so by taking an absolute pride in keeping

### *The Last Days of Harvest*

the rows of rakings as nearly straight as if they had been planned out with a ruler. His only relief is to sing, and as you go away from him you hear the click of his rake mingled with scraps of tender song concerning "Sweet Mary, the pride and the joy of the vale, Who tripped o'er the dew with her tin milking-pail ; And said to young Colin, as loved her so trew, 'Ow happy, dear Colin, should I be wi' yew!" Song, indeed, seems to be quite the order of the day with lonely harvesters, for farther away you find another young Hodge, who is employed in heaping rakings. As he bustles the stray straws together, and dumps them down in a big lump, he roars forth something which he has heard and improved upon at the last statute-hiring fair, "As I walked forth i' Lunnon Town, One day i' last Jewly ; A laädy fair, wi' golden hair, Came lightly trippin' by. Her eyes were blew, her cheeks were red, Her lips did sweetly pout ; And shoo axed me with a graacious smile ; 'Does your mother know yer hout ?'"

The rapidly gathering darkness shuts us out from young Hodge and his songs. We hear a long note of emphasis on "laädy fair" as we leave the field and go slowly down the lane. Here the dusk of

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

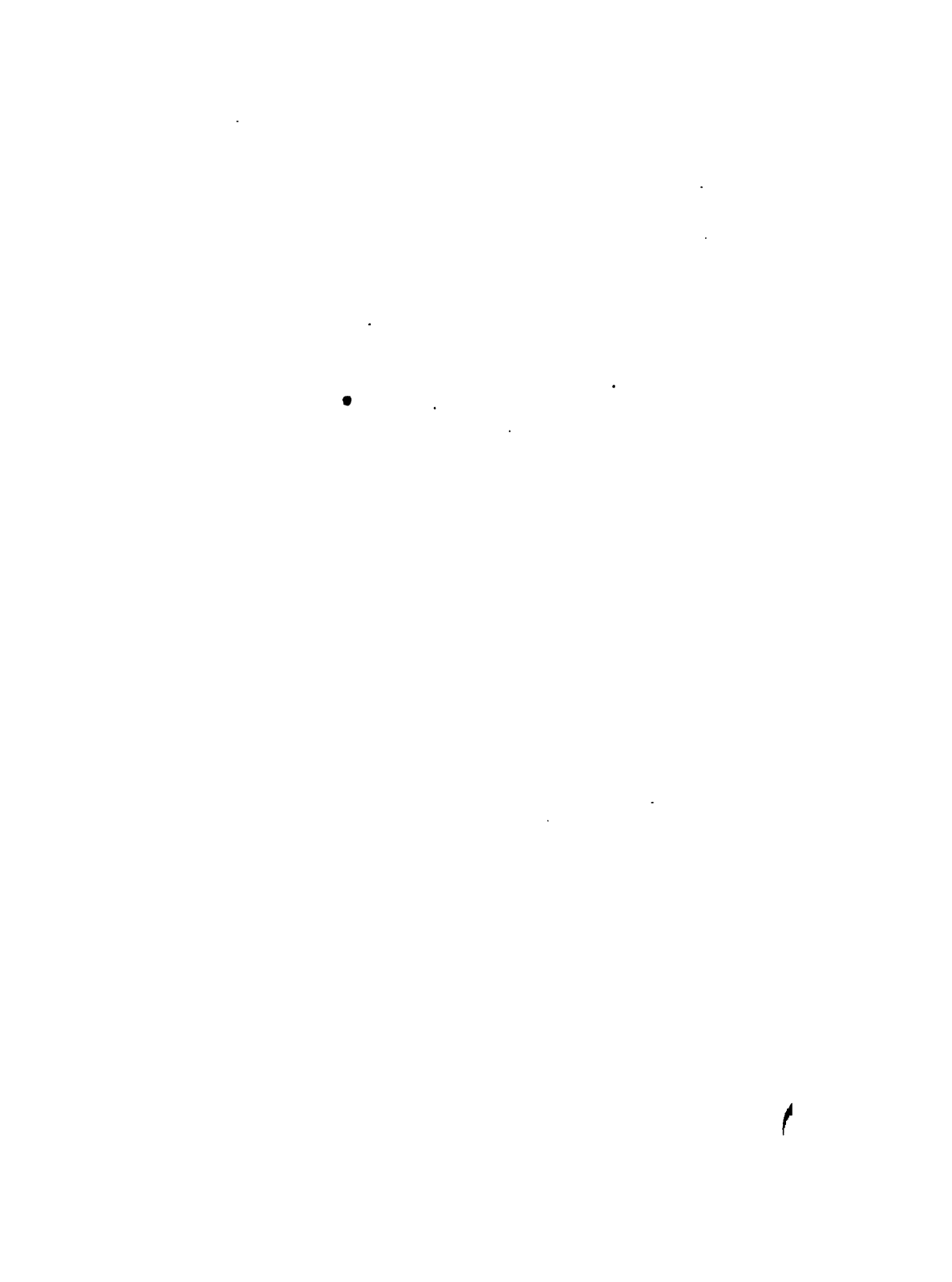
the September evening seems to be settling quickly. Your first acquaintances, Boxer and his driver, are going very carefully along the deep ruts, for the gloom deepens, and the youthful Jehu is anxious not to spoil his great reputation. He keeps a tight hold of Boxer's bridle, and admonishes that faithful steed to "Ho'd thi gurt feet up!" which is perhaps not polite, but certainly forcible, and easily understood language. They come to the awkward corner, and you step behind lest the load should overbalance and smother you. The darkness is thicker there, because of the overshadowing trees, and horse Boxer seems to pick his way more carefully. The cart groans and creaks, the big load lurches and rolls, and young Hodge admonishes Boxer in still more forcible style. Somehow, however, the cart gets safely down the lane and into the high road, and the juvenile Jehu releases Boxer's head, and lets him go his own way. An empty cart approaches and goes rumbling up the lane, Boxer's driver greeting its driver with the remark that there's "nobbut two looads to come." Into the village street we rumble. The housewives who are not in the harvest-fields are lighting their candles and lamps, and the farm-house windows are bright and inviting. In the stackyard they can

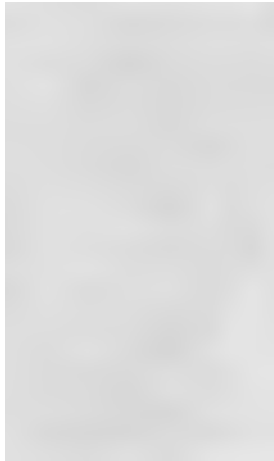
### *The Last Days of Harvest*

just see, and that is all. Half-an-hour more and the still September evening falls finally upon the whole scene. It is welcome, and no one objects to its coming, for the last sheaf has been thrown up from the cart, and the stack is finished, the day's labour done.

### *A RAINY DAY IN ARCADIA*

THERE are some people whose knowledge of nature and of country life is so imperfect that they cannot understand how any one finds it possible to be content or happy on a rainy day in the country. They think that the lonely village or solitary house may be pleasant enough quarters while the spring sunshine is flooding mountain and meadow, and one can wander hither and thither unchecked by storm and rain. To me, however, a rainy day in the country is as full of delight as a day of summer-like weather. To wake in the morning and hear the rain-drops pattering faster and faster on the little window-panes of the old farm-house or wayside cottage, where you have taken up your temporary quarters, to catch their continual drip, drip on the eaves, and drop, drop, on the glossy-leaved holly and laurel bushes in the garden beneath your window, is a source of delight which the lover of nature will readily appreciate. That monotonous





### *A Rainy Day in Arcadia*

musical drip, drip, drip means so much to the thirsty land. Perhaps the sun has burnt fiercely for weeks, and the wayside hedges and meadow grass have grown white and parched with his heat. Perhaps the crops in the brown fields are thirsting for moisture, without which they can no more live than without the warm sunlight. Gladly enough will bough and leaf, seed and root welcome the shower which unthinking man too often characterises as ill-placed and tiresome, forgetting that there are other children of nature than himself who want to drink and live.

It would be a strange April that brought no rain with it, and he would be an unreasonable mortal who wanted an April day to pass away in unbroken sunshine. One might as well expect a child to be all smiles and no tears. April is the baby of the year's family—a dainty little mortal that laughs, sings, and smiles, and now and then sheds pearly tears as sweet as any smile, but never frowns or sulks. No one ever knew a really dark and gloomy day in April even in England, for if the skies were overcast and the sun shone at rare intervals or not at all, there were other compensating signs of gladness, such as the singing of birds and the rippling of some tiny stream refreshed by the late



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

rain. Grey days in April there are plenty, especially in the neighbourhood of hills and mountains, but they have nought in common with their distant relatives, the grey days of February and November. They are clear grey days—days when everything is silvery in hue, tint, and tone, and the distant hillside and mountain top are outlined clearly against the reposeful sky. Such days are grateful to men whose eyes need rest, and who love quiet, subdued colour more than the brilliant tints and gorgeous hues of landscapes seen beneath the cloudless skies and burning suns of Midsummer.

There is something about an April shower which never comes with the rains of summer or winter. It is soft, languid, and yet refreshing. A poet might safely imagine it to be blessed by the good Gods of Olympus, who, taking compassion on the thirsty earth, sent down from their treasure-house a shower of divinely perfumed nectar. The earth welcomes it with quiet effusion; the thrush, who knows what is good, sings to its descending drops his sweetest songs. The flowers in the little cottage gardens, and the shy violet hiding beneath the yet unleaved hedgerows, open their petals to it as readily as to the first beams of the morning sun. Perhaps its effects are best seen, felt, and valued

### *A Rainy Day in Arcadia*

when the shower is over. Then all Nature—birds, beasts, flowers, the grass and the trees—seems to sing a psalm of thanksgiving, and pours up towards heaven such incense as never scented a temple raised by human hands. The air is filled with its rich perfume. You can distinguish a hundred delicate, distinctive aromas in it—the pine, the fir, the moss that grows round the ancient stump of some fallen oak, the violet, and the new grass—all conspiring with their myriad brothers and sisters to make the land a paradise of beauty.

Anybody who loves the rain enough to have lost all fear of it can secure an hour's exquisite pleasure by sitting under a tree, or in the shelter of a mossy wall, and watching it fall around him. The land seems to hush itself into silence for a while before the first rain-drops descend; even the blackbird contents himself with an occasional impatient note. There is a sense of expectation in the air; Nature seems to summon all her powers of anticipation together. You can feel that something good is coming, something that will freshen the earth, gladden the birds and beasts, and wash away the dryness from the flowers and the grass. The first two or three drops pattering on the leaves above your head make a fitting and harmonious prelude

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to the flood of music that follows, slowly and surely increasing in volume as the grey clouds discharge their burden upon the earth. Sitting in the somewhat doubtful shelter of hedge or wall, you may watch the shower increase until it becomes something of a downpour, and all the time you will see new evidences of the welcome which the land and its creatures give to the rain. Now the thrush hops out from his shelter in holly or ivy bush, and drinks at the mimic pool formed in the deep rut of the lane ; now the primrose, which had folded up its pale petals because of the great heat, opens them again, and rejoices in the refreshing shower ; now the ewes and lambs, tired of the two or three days' drought, show new signs of life at the genial downpour which "slackens" them.

And even if the spring shower comes too heavily to be watched from under such protection as a hawthorn-hedge or moor-side rock can give, there is no reason to be daunted or disappointed because of its coming. One rainy day in a week of fine weather is as enjoyable as one fine day in a week of rain. Then is the time to have a wood fire lighted in the little country-house parlour, and to bring out the books brought with you on the chance of outdoor life being unattainable. There

### *A Rainy Day in Arcadia*

are few hours pleasanter than those spent in this fashion. The wood fire, especially if built of fir or pine logs, crackles, sputters, and smells delightfully, reminding you of the hill-side woods from whence came the trim logs that throw such lively sparks up the old-fashioned chimney. There is nothing more fragrant than the scent of pine-logs ; and nothing more soothing than to sit by a fire made of them, and hear the rain rattling on the windows, and occasionally hissing and sputtering down the chimney into the midst of the cheery blaze. Let the weather be what it may outside, it matters little to the man who has bestowed himself in an easy chair before a fire of wood, mind and body alike at rest, while some congenial book further ministers to his comfort.

Perhaps there is a good deal in the choice of the books which one wants for moments like these. Every country-house ought to have a little library of country books ; but, unfortunately, books found in farm-houses and cottages are not always of the sort one would like to find there. It is well, then, in going into Arcadia for a brief season to provide yourself with such literature as will prove valuable for a rainy day, or for the later stages of the evening, when outdoor life must cease until next

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morning's sun rises again. Some people perhaps fancy fiction of an exciting nature for times of this sort; but it seems to me that it were as fitting to read "Don Juan" in the solemn aisles of Westminster Abbey, as a shilling dreadful in the sacred solitude of an English valley or a Scotch dale. The books which the lover of Nature wants to have about him when he is face to face with Nature are few in number but precious in quality. They should be in perfect harmony with the hills and mountains, and whatever they say should further deepen the lessons which the inanimate things of Nature can give. Matthew Arnold's little volume of *Select Poems of Wordsworth*; Thoreau's "Walden" and "Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers;" White's "Selborne," and some of Richard Jefferies' books—that is the sort of literature which one wants for times when rain or storm forbids one to hold more communication with hill or valley than through the window.

To any one who will take a rainy day in the country in this spirit it will not be a profitless or a disappointing time. And when at last the rain is over and gone, then, indeed, its virtues and delights will make themselves more manifest. The sun shines out with renewed brightness, the birds burst

### *A Rainy Day in Arcadia*

into louder and merrier songs, the hedges and flowers seem to have put on more beauty, and the meadows wear a brighter green. All this rejuvenation is due to the recent shower. It is proof of its usefulness that Nature's thanks are uttered so unequivocally and in such prodigal profusion. She, at any rate, knows what is good and fitting, and renders thanks where thanks are due. The man who has nought in common with her, who does not understand her subtle moods and deep spirit, may chafe at the restriction put upon him by a few hours of heavy rain, but neither Nature herself, the men who love her, nor the things, animate and inanimate, which depend upon her, are ever likely to repine at an occasional rainy day in Arcadia.

### *A WINTER PICTURE*

There are days in winter, or, at any rate, parts of days, which no more belong to winter than May Day to the middle of autumn. To rise in early morning and go forth to find the land wrapped in balmy air, to see the sun rising clear and warm in the east, to hear birds singing as they sing in March—these are not the things that one expects to find in January. Nevertheless, such days come, and to meet them is like meeting some rare vision of beauty in the midst of a city slum. It is as though one walked through squalid streets and crowded courts, and suddenly came face to face with something full of loveliness—a cluster of flowers, a girl's eyes, a child's smile. For winter, despite its weird beauty of ice and snow is in these northern climes a dreary season, and one longs for spring as constantly as a lover for his mistress's face. That, perhaps, is why these occasional spring-like days are so welcome. They

### *A Winter Picture*

are a foretaste of the joys that are coming, and they are all the sweeter because they are somewhat irregular. They, in fact, are the stolen kisses of Nature.

Yesterday, the skies, instead of being draped with grey cloud, were bright and blue, and the whole expanse canopied itself above the earth with an air of benign and smiling protection. The hills ten miles away stood out against the blue sky with sharp and well-defined outlines; so clear was the frost-sharpened air that one could almost swear to seeing the sheep and cattle upon their higher slopes. And yet though the air was sharpened by frost, there was nothing in it to remind one that we were moving and breathing in mid-winter. Everything seemed warm, balmy, sleepily luxurious. In the trees, bare and lifeless as they were, the birds were singing with something like gaiety. The blackbird, who has come for food ever since the snowstorm three weeks ago, sat on the top rail of the fence and spoke his mind with much plain eloquence. He had an audience of sparrows—little brown homely bodies who manifest enormous interest in whatever is going on—and to them he preached his gospel like a new St. Francis. This, he said, was not spring; behold, the trees



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

how bare, the fields how thin of grass. Winter was still here, and to-morrow the meadows might be white with new-fallen snow, or the curling mists wrap the uplands from sight. But spring was coming! Ere long the sun would kiss the land with warmer kisses, and the skies would weep as a mother weeps over a bride, and then new life should spring from the marriage of sun and soil, and the green leaves should burst from the brown branches, and all the world should grow exceeding joyful. This was but a foretaste of the coming delights. And at that the sparrows, each with his rakish head set well to one side, chirped and chattered, and the blackbird flew away to examine last year's nest in the hollybush, for already he is courting and has designs matrimonial.

In the grass meadow underneath the long woodside there are already lambs. Such a day as yesterday is to these newborn creatures as a draught of strong wine to a starving man. They drink in the sunlight and the balmy air at every pore. When I went over to look at them yesterday—the day having then worn on to noon, when the sun is warmest—the strongest and boldest amongst them were running races round the boles of the beech trees, just as if March had already

### *A Winter Picture*

brought the early primroses. Two, born only that morning, were already on their legs, somewhat cranky and feeble, but evidently full of life. They blinked weakly at the sun, being no little dazzled by his splendour, but still grateful for the warmth he gave them. So, in old Jacob's opinion, they ought to be. He remarked that the man who came into the world with the sunshine on him was always a happier man than he who came when the earth was wrapped in fogs or half-drowned with rain. The same rule held good for beasts. There was nothing like sunshine, either in life or Nature.

The lambs were not the only creatures that warmed their hearts in yesterday's geniality. As I went along the woodside I heard the first faint whisper of the chorus that goes on gradually increasing in volume until June is with us, and all the land is mad with life and love. The things that sleep, spirits, fairies, invisible voices of undergrowth and shaded copse—these seem to be waking out of their long winter's sleep for a moment's rehearsal of the music with which they will swell the chorus. For a while the woods were no more silent. The birds sang in their deepest recesses, and there seemed to be already an under-current of insect melody running

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

beneath their songs. But the myriad insects are dead. Or are they only asleep, and do occasional glints of warm sunlight wake them to life again? However it is, it is no unpleasant dream to think of them as coming forth from their winter quarters and heralding the spring as they circle and flit through the sunbeams. It makes one think of all the delights that will come with March and April. Then after a day's sunshine one can reasonably expect a second day, and a third, and the first primrose that blossoms under the hedgerows will but announce the coming of a goodly company, whose gay coats and smiling faces will transform the land into paradise.

### AN OLD-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS

WHETHER it is that I grow older and that things which once charmed have no longer any power to attract, or that times have changed and customs, too, during this last quarter of a century, the fact remains that Christmas is not what it used to be. It seems to come now as a matter of course, like quarter-day and the last day for paying taxes. It has a ghost behind it which never used to appear when I was younger, but which now turns up every New Year's Day in the shape of unpaid bills. Once upon a time Christmas seemed a mystic, half unreal time; now it is somewhat prosaic, and not at all mysterious. I used to lie awake five-and-twenty years ago to hear the waits; now I feel more inclined to wish them a mile away when they wake me out of my first slumbers. As a boy, roast beef, turkey, chine, mince-pies, and plum pudding *ad libitum* used to seem the very ideal of a dinner; now I am sure to have dyspepsia, and

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

perhaps worse, if I go conscientiously through that orthodox menu. I could do it all once without a headache ; nay, I was ready for all manner of larks within half an hour of the last helping of brandy sauce. Now my head would ache for a week and indigestion make a martyr of me if I ate one-half of what I could eat in those days of knickerbockers and healthy appetite. I used to take a great interest in Christmas-boxes ; now it appears to me that my front-door step is needlessly crowded by postmen, dustmen, lamplighters, butcher-boy, gas-inspector, and a dozen more, who all seem very anxious to bid me a "Merry Christmas." Clearly things have changed. Christmas is not now what it was—to me at any rate.

But, after all, what a grand old time it was in those old days—days that seem such a long, long way off now!—and how we did use to enjoy ourselves! We used to begin getting ready for Christmas somewhere about the 1st of December. To begin with, it was no inconsiderable part of the fun to pay a daily visit to the pig-cote, there to inspect the condition of the porker who was to die in order that we might revel in pork pies, and chines, and spareribs, to say nothing of fry and fresh pork. There were always a dozen doomed pigs in the cote,

### *An Old-Fashioned Christmas*

but we invariably selected the plumpest for the Christmas pig. That was a great day on which he was killed. We boys used to rise about five o'clock in the morning, and dress hurriedly by the light of a feeble candle. Outside the diamond-paned windows it was dark, save for two or three glittering stars that peeped over the corn-stacks in the neighbouring stack-yard. Downstairs into the outer kitchen we used to creep. Early as it was we found there Sork, the pig-herd, superintending the heating to boiling-point of a huge cauldron of water wherewith the doomed swine was to be scalded immediately after death. Presently appeared the pig-killer, carrying a leather bag full of horrible knives and lethal instruments, which we youngsters regarded with wide open eyes. The pig-killer and pig-herd conversed in subdued tones; a maid-servant appeared on the scene, and introduced a serio-comic element into the tragedy; by-and-by a few farm hands entered. The moment was at hand, and poor piggie was all the time sleeping the sleep of innocence in his cote ten yards away. To me, an imaginative child, whose brain was full of Dumas, Eugene Sue, G. P. R. James, and Harrison Ainsworth, it always seemed like an execution. The pig was the criminal—poor pig,

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

that had never done anything more than eat and sleep and revel in the mire!—the pig-herd was the gaoler, the pig-killer was Monsieur de Paris, and the farm hands were the bloodthirsty crowd. Then we all went forth, and the porcine victim was drawn out of his sty, shrieking and protesting, and bound down to the fatal bench, and—but we will draw a veil there. Only, we used to have pig's fry (a most delicious dish after you have seen the pig killed) about an hour after for breakfast. Think of that! the victim alive at seven, and you have eaten some of him before half-past eight.

And then what grand times used to come in the great farm-house kitchen! There were pork-pies to make, and Christmas puddings to compound, and mince-pies to manufacture, and the Christmas cake to concoct; and at the fire they were rendering the dead pig's fat and turning it into lard, so that everything was like Camacho's wedding. Then there were geese to kill and a turkey to slaughter, and the gamekeeper walked in with squire's compliments and a hare and brace of birds (I wish some squire or plain Mr. would remember me in this fashion nowadays—care of the publisher), and the larder was full to the very windows. Nay, there was more than this to do—there was the task of choosing







### *An Old-Fashioned Christmas*

out the fattest bullock from the thirty or forty feeding in their stalls and sending him to the butcher, who shortly returned to us a monster piece of sirloin, which was all the sweeter because it had been fed in our own yard.

December 21st, sacred to St. Thomas, used to be a great day with us. Then, as soon as breakfast was over, came the old women of the parish "a-Thomasing." "Thomasing" was an euphemistic term for extracting largesse in the shape of coin of the realm. The old ladies went about in gangs of four or five and called down celestial blessings in a most reckless and extravagant fashion on the heads of all who paid this ancient tax.

When Christmas Eve arrived everything and everybody was ready for due celebration of the great feast. Early on the morning of the 24th we set to work decorating the old house. Boughs of holly and ivy were displayed on the walls; every window-sill had its sprig of scarlet berries; and in the hall or kitchen hung a gigantic mistletoe bough. The family portraits of grandfather and great-grandfather with their respective spouses peered out at us through frameworks of ivy and myrtle. Green stuff was everywhere, and decoration was the order of the day. Nor was it confined to home. During

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

the afternoon as many as could spare time must go to the church to help decorate that ancient building. There we found friends and neighbours, high and low, the squire driving in tacks, the blacksmith carrying ladders. There was one great joy about those old times—everybody was neighbourly, and brotherly love seemed the order of the day, and that just because it was Christmas time.

And then came Christmas Eve itself. In the great kitchen fire-place the Yule-log burnt and sputtered and flamed for hours. Round the white table sat all the farm hands, from the old man of eighty to the boy of twelve. Before them were set great foaming jugs of ale, a mighty cheese, and big loaves of spiced-bread. Into this Christmas cheer they were admonished to make inroads—an order which they were not slow to obey. What quantities of home brewed, what mighty chunks of cheese, what tremendous slices of spiced-bread they could put out of sight! It almost gives me an appetite to think of it.

Very often there were members of the family circle arriving on Christmas Eve. Perhaps they were coming from afar, and had not seen the old place for many a long month. For them the parlour fire blazed bright and keen in the frosty

### *An Old-Fashioned Christmas*

air, for them the supper-table groaned with all manner of good things, for them was despatched the best horse to the railway station three miles away. Then what talking and laughing and comparing of experiences there was when they finally arrived and had shaken off the snow and got into warm things and gathered round the supper-table. And how the jollity did go on, with accompaniments of pipes and tobacco and a drop of something hot, until, all of a sudden, the old clock in the kitchen boomed out twelve strokes, and somebody said, "Why, it's Christmas Day!"

I don't think we used to sleep much, we youngsters, during those few hours in which we were in bed. We had not been there long before we heard the tramp of many feet coming through the snow, and a murmur of voices in the paddock outside, and we knew that the waits had arrived. Then stole forth the strains of "Christians, awake!" and "While shepherds watched their flocks by night;" and if the treble did sometimes get before the bass, and the tenor attempt impossible shakes and crescendos, it was, all the same, very fine, and the correct thing. We used to get out of bed and peep through the windows at the lantern-lighted faces beneath, until the parish clerk (leader of the

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

waits) called out, "A merry Christmas, Mr. Hodge, and a fine morning," and away they all tramped to the next farm-house.

We used to be up before it was light on Christmas morning, and we had never been long downstairs before there came a patter of feet to the kitchen door, and a babel of juvenile voices demanding Christmas boxes was heard. Then the door was opened, and the first lad who crossed the threshold was escorted into the hall to bring Christmas in. This he did by chanting forth these lines in a loud voice :

I wish you a merry Christmas,  
A happy New Year,  
A pocket full of money,  
And a barrel full of beer,  
And a good fat pig to kill every year ;  
Please will you 'stow us a Christmas-box ?

We always looked forward to breakfast on Christmas Day, because it was a time-honoured custom in our part of the land never to cut into the pork-pies until that meal was taken. How grand they used to taste, taken in conjunction with hot toast well buttered ! They formed quite a pleasant memory all the way to church through the snow-covered fields. It was, of course, part of the day's proceedings to go to church, but I am afraid

### *An Old-Fashioned Christmas*

we used to devote sermon-time to thinking about the turkey, and the beef, and the sparerib, which we knew were roasting at home in front of an enormous fire. We used to wonder, too, if they were putting plenty of brandy in the sauce for the plum-pudding, and if the mince-pies would be as good as usual. And then we used to sing "Hark! the herald angels," and tramp out of church into the keen air, which was enough to give anybody an appetite.

Then about one o'clock came dinner. Solemn occasion! What a lot of us there were round the great dinner-table; aunts, uncles, cousins, and so on! How majestic the turkey looked; how truly English the roast beef! And when everybody had got fairly to work, and the good sound ale was going round—we hadn't got to cheap and nasty clarets in those days—how tongues used to wag and jokes circle round the table! What a signal for juvenile rejoicing was the appearance of the pudding, with a sprig of holly in the top and surrounded by flame circling upward from the sauce! And that was fine old port, too, of which everybody had a glass with the walnuts before the ladies went to discuss servants and fashions, the children to play, and the men to smoke cigars or long church-

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

wardens. All day long the jollity used to go on. There were games of a more or less—generally more—uproarious nature ; there was kissing under the mistletoe public, and kissing under the mistletoe private. A neighbour would drop in, and smoke a pipe, and drink everybody's health. There was a high tea at six o'clock, and everybody had a good appetite again. Then there were more games, and more kissing under the mistletoe, and the mummers came and acted in the kitchen, and sang us the famous ballad of "The Derby Ram," and everything was joy and jollity until midnight came, and Christmas Day was over. Ay, over! I wish such a Christmas Day as that could come back to me. In those days I never had dyspepsia. I was not even aware that I possessed a liver. And instead of my giving Christmas boxes to other people, other people used to give them to me.

### *VILLAGE FESTIVALS*

**WHILE** Christmas is chiefly valuable on account of roast beef and plum-pudding, and Good Friday principally remembered for its annual dinner of salt fish, the village feast is looked forward to as the one great day of the year—the high-water mark of all that is worth living for. It matters little at what period of the year it comes round. It may be in the middle of broiling July, or at the end of dark December ; but it is always welcome to every man, woman, and child in the village. To each of these three the feast suggests a certain definite value. The man thinks of it as a day whereon he may cease labour at noon without losing a half-day's pay, and spend his leisure in talking and drinking with his friends. The woman looks forward to it as a high festival of gossip—for will not Mary come from the west, and Susan from the south, and Hannah from the north, all to exchange news and views ? The children long for it as a



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

time when coppers, and even sixpences, fly about with prodigal profusion in the shape of "feastings," and unwonted delights present themselves in the sweet-stuff stalls, merry-go-rounds, and peep-shows. It is a time when everybody is in good-humour, full of hospitality and mild excitement. Even the weather, which is such an important factor in English merry-makings, can hardly spoil a village feast; for the rural mind having once screwed itself up to enjoyment-pitch, lets nothing short of an earthquake prevent or hinder it.

Probably very few village people know why their feast is held on a certain day or days, or what the meaning of the feast is. The more learned amongst them—such as the schoolmaster and parish clerk—could perhaps inform the curious stranger that the feast always fell on the Monday following St. John's Day or St. Thomas's Day or St. Matthew's Day, and that it had always been so from time immemorial. Ecclesiologists would probably deduce from this the fact that the modern festival is simply a keeping up of the old pre-Reformation saints' days observance. Of late days, since the High Church movement gained a footing in the rural districts, the feasts have been ushered in by special services in the parish churches; but the unlettered villager regards

### *Village Festivals*

this as an accident, and is still in blissful oblivion on the main point. It is sufficient for him that the feast comes ; and he cares very little, most likely nothing at all, whether it be in honour of St. Luke or St. John.

Feasts generally make a fair start on Monday, but the previous Saturday evening always sees unwonted signs of liveliness in the village. The observant notice that the houses have been scrupulously cleaned on Saturday morning, and that every window is as bright as much polishing can make it. The flower-pots in the window-sills have each had a new coat of paint, and come forth in gorgeous red or shining white. The weeds have been jealously extracted from the little flower-gardens, and the steps into the road have received an extra amount of ornamentation from the goodwife's sandstone or whitening. Inside the houses everything has undergone a change. The stoves are polished, the hearth is unusually tidy, and the furniture has been rubbed until it shines again. The whole place looks *en fête*, which, of course, is just what it is. Not the least ornamental thing about it is the goodwife's honest face, red and warm from prolonged exertion, and with a proud smile over the effect produced by her long day's labour.

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

Sunday, again, is a sort of foretaste of the good times coming. By nine or ten o'clock most of the children are arrayed in their very best, sometimes in new garments, and on their way to Sunday-school and church, where they will certainly think more of the morrow's coming attractions than of the admonitions of parson and teacher. The regular church-goers on this particular Sunday morning present an unwontedly gay appearance, the female blossoming proud and triumphant under a new bonnet, the male surly condescending to ornamentation of the floral type, and wearing a button-hole large enough for a ball-room bouquet. Very often the houses are ornamented with flowers, and the church too, so that everything looks as if the goddess Flora had suddenly descended on this particular spot of earth. Inside the church it is not difficult to tell that high festival is going on, for the country clergy have nowadays taken to hallowing the feast as much as they can by showing the people what its real significance is. Wherefore there will be a sermon about the particular saint whose festival this is, ending up with an earnest admonition to the weaker vessels not to take too much strong drink, a very salutary piece of advice, and much needed at these times.

### *Village Festivals*

Meanwhile, guests from far and near have been arriving at farmhouse and cottage, in traps and on foot. Here is Farmer Brown from ten miles away, with his wife and children, come over to his brother Thomas for the feast. There is young Hodge, the ploughman's son, who went out to place last Martinmas, and has tramped many a mile to let his father and mother have a look at him once more. He has got half a crown in his pocket, and his master has given him all Monday for a holiday, and he's as happy as a King, or as a King should be. Here is Mary, who is out in service at the market-town, and she has come over for the day, and brought her sweetheart with her—a circumstance which gives rise to many harmless jokes and sly looks. All through the morning the stream pours in of people who are "come to t'feast," until the houses are full of cousins and uncles and aunts and brothers and grandfathers and cousins sixteen times removed, and anybody who can claim the least relationship. It is wonderful, indeed, how many relations a man has at feast-time. Men and women whom he never saw before walk in and introduce themselves as "your cousin Thomas, from Leeds," or "your half-cousin Sarah, from Huddersfield," and proceed to make them-

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

selves thoroughly at home with the cold beef and home-brewed ale. At feast-time everybody must keep open house who can afford to do it, and not be particular about drawing too fine distinctions between relations and acquaintances.

It is now, when the Sunday draws near to dinner-time, that the serious fun of the feast begins, *i.e.*, when each one begins really to enjoy himself. Then, while the groups are flocking homewards from church, and new-comers are strolling about gardens and orchards, what greetings are exchanged ; what questions asked ! Very often one brother never sees another except at feast-time ; sisters, married and living far away from each other, never exchange words except on these occasions. Old friends only get this one chance of talking over the old times. What news there is of marriages and christenings and funerals ; what gossip to exchange ; what tidings of good or bad fortune to communicate ! What comparison of children there is, one married pair showing off their baby against all other babies ; what confidence to exchange between the women ; what fatherly pride amongst the men ! In order to understand this, it must be remembered that the rural populations are not letter-writing people, and never put pen to

## *Village Festivals*

paper unless they are obliged. It is more in their province to keep all their news in their hearts, and open the latter to each other on occasions such as these.

Whatever the townsman may do, the villager still respects Sunday as being a sacred day, and even at feast-time he does not permit himself to violate it. Consequently Sunday passes quietly, the older folks filling up their time with talk and gossip, the younger ones in anticipating the delights of the morrow. But on Monday morning everybody wakes up to take his fill of pleasure. The children invariably rise with the lark, and hasten to the field or open space where the feast is held to see what has arrived in the way of amusements. During the night a swing-boat or two has come, and a shooting-gallery, and a peep-show, to say nothing of half a dozen "Aunt Sallies" and as many sweet-stuff stalls. All these are now being rigged up by their attendants, and a crowd of wide-eyed, open-mouthed children stand round to watch the operations. The old sweet-stuff woman, who has attended every feast for fifty years, is seated at the door of her caravan eating her breakfast. That she and her daughter have slept all night within the little house on wheels,

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

along with the sweets, matters nothing to the youthful customers. The brandy-snap will taste just as good, the toffy just as sticky, the nuts will be just as hard to crack. Behold the graceful young lady-attendant on the shooting-gallery. She is already attired in her most ravishing costume, and is engaged in polishing the guns wherewith the festive marksmen will endeavour to hit the bell at the end of the long tunnel. The peep-show man is polishing his windows ; the gentleman in charge of the swing-boats is setting those delightful machines in such a position as not to knock down the walls of the nearest cottage. All is bustle and preparation for the day's business.

Long before noon the feast is mounting to its height. The swing-boats are filled with children and older people whose heads are strong enough to stand anything ; the crack, crack of the rifles tells of good trade at the shooting-galleries ; while the old sweet-stuff woman's strident voice is heard above everything in praise of her goods. At the "Aunt Sallies" a rare business is going on, and now and again the sticks rattle heavily on that much-enduring female's wooden countenance. The peep-show man is showing all the wonders of the

### *Village Festivals*

world to a crowd of awe-struck youngsters, and an itinerant photographer has arrived on the scene, and is inducing bashful youths and blushing maidens to "step up and have their portraits took."

But it is during the afternoon and evening that the feast reaches high-water mark. At dinner time the labourers, who have worked all the morning, get permission to take a half-holiday, and presently they appear on the scene in their best clothes, and very highly polished faces and a general expression of helplessness, occasioned by their perfect ignorance of what should be done with a holiday. Bit by bit they settle down to enjoy themselves—the older ones in the public-house kitchen, the younger amongst the children. If the feast occurs in summer, there is a cricket match, to which all the lovers of our national game go ; if in winter, a game of football serves to keep the cold out. Meanwhile every farmer in the place has kept open house, and his stables and sheds are filled with the horses and vehicles of his friends, who have driven in to help him make merry. Cold roast beef and brown October there are for everybody, to say nothing of a huge tobacco-jar filled with good bird's-eye, or the great







THE VILLAGE FEAST

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

spirit-case, from whose bottles the old stagers can select a drop of something short. The older folks, though they take their pleasure more quietly, can enjoy the feast with the best of all around them. Not the least of their pleasures is the searching of deep breeches' pockets for stray six-pences, to be given away as "feastings."

Then comes night, and the stalls and shooting-galleries and swing-boats are lighted up by naphtha lamps, and the fun waxes fast and furious, and the quiet village becomes a pandemonium of unfamiliar sound. Inside the inn Boniface does a roaring trade, and it will be well if Dick and Tom and Harry do not carry away more of his home-brewed than they can manage. In the big spare room over the inn stables a lively dance is going on, the music being supplied by the village fiddler, who probably knows but one tune, the which he plays over and over again, to his own and his audience's content. And so the fun goes on till night has fairly fallen over the garish lamps and the wondering elms. In the morning the shows and stalls will have flitted away, the labourers will go back to work and the children to school, and there will be no more feasting in that place for another twelve months.



THE VILLAGE FEAST



## *AN OLD WORLD IDYLL*

OUTSIDE the village it was a clear spring afternoon. The whole world seemed to lie at peace ; the blue sky, flecked here and there by mountainous banks of white cloud, smiled down upon the brown fields and newly budding hedges as if in benediction ; the soft western air breathed almost imperceptibly upon the bright green of the feathery pines just starting into life within the wood that shut in the whole east and north as with a wall of half-clothed branches. There was not a sound throughout the entire length and breadth of the landscape. In a slight dip of the rolling country lay the village, its presence betrayed by no gleam of thatched roof or tiled cottage or quaint gabled end of farm or manor-house, but rather by the spiral columns of blue smoke curling from the cottage fires into the clear atmosphere above. Far away on the southward, its white walls shiding silver-bright against the dark overhanging forest

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

behind, lay the great house of the district, its many turrets and gables rising in artistic confusion above the mullioned windows, and beyond it the spire of a lonely church shot up in sharply defined lines to a height where its shining cross caught and reflected the beams of the rapidly westering sun.

At this particular spot stretched a great heath, spreading out for a square mile, and decking itself in honour of spring-time with new wealth of golden gorse and purple heath-flower. Across it, intersecting each other at the northern corner, ran five roads, now running straight and true, now dipping into a sudden valley, now winding away to right or left, as though their makers had been possessed at the making by some spirit of whimsical vagary. One of them, however, as though in stern opposition to the tactics of its fellows, turns neither to right nor left. Up and down, according to the nature of the ground, it goes ; but standing far away to the southward and glancing hitherward, you would notice that it runs straight on, never deviating for a yard from its arrow-like course. Beyond the wall of woods that close in the north prospect it travels in the same spirit. A great hill comes, round the base of which another road would wind, but over which this road cuts its

### *An Old World Idyll*

straight path, to continue its equally undeviating course into the valley and through the level meadows, until the eyes lose its silver streak in the meeting of earth and heaven. In this straight unswerving fashion, going straight to the goal like the modern bullet, ran the athletes at the Olympian games ; in this fashion fought the men who made this road and themselves masters of the then world—the Roman legionaries of two thousand years ago.

At the exact point of intersection stands a guide-post, white and spectral of aspect, and at present rejoicing in a new coat of paint. You can see the letters of solid black a hundred yards away ; you can read them at twenty yards' distance. The finger pointing silently to the southward bears the name London in great capitals, the one tending northwards bears the equally famous name of York. In this way the metropolis of a long-dead age and the metropolis of to-day are linked together. Ten miles across country the iron road links them in sterner and more rapid fashion.

If you look closely amongst the heather which clothes the foot of the guide-post, you will see that an ancient milestone has there fallen from its once proud position, and is now gradually crumbling



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

into decay. Traces of lettering are now nearly all gone from its moss-encrusted sides, but you can still make out, more by the sense of touch than of sight, some peculiar spelling and some curiously formed figures. Here, crumbling into dust, has this old milestone lain for nearly half a century. Thrice during that time it has watched the gaudy sign-post above it rot and become worthless and give place to others, and it will no doubt see many more taken before its own final scene comes. Peripatetic philosophers have no time for moralising, but the thought strikes you as you tramp by that from the stone mile-post and the gay white guide-post above even the most elementary thinker might draw an exceeding wise inference, to be subsequently applied to questions of human interest.

A hundred yards beyond the guide-post, going in the direction of the village, you come suddenly on an old-world figure seated in a sunny bit of overhanging bank by the wayside. It is the figure of an old man, whose appearance immediately gives you the impression of extremely great old age. He sits on a fallen tree, a staff supports his hands, and his venerable head is resting on them. A beautifully clean and tidy old man he is, with silver-white hair falling in straggling locks from

### *An Old World Idyll*

under his old hat, and a bit of white collar turned down over his neatly darned coat. Glancing at his nether extremities, you perceive that he wears the coarse grey stockings and knee-breeches of long ago ; and you discover subsequently that his coat is of the swallow-tail pattern, and is buttoned tightly over a scarlet waistcoat, certainly fashioned by no modern tailor. From his fob dangles a bit of steel chain, to which are attached two or three copper coins or tokens. Not often do you see so ancient a figure in this part of England.

The old man looks up as you come along the highway. You nod to him ; he returns the salutation courteously, and with a dignified air which seems the exclusive possession of rustic old age. The fallen tree looks comfortable and fitting, and you have not smoked a pipe for five long miles. You climb up the bank and seat yourself by the old man, opening conversation with him by a truly English interchange of commonplaces about the fine weather. He addresses you as "young master," and seems not displeased to have half an hour's chat. Does he smoke ? Yes ; and he pulls forth a little age-blackened clay pipe, so darkly coloured that your smoker's eyes gaze at it with envying admiration. He fills it out of your

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

pouch, and deftly lights it by striking a match on the stem. Looking more narrowly at him, you see that in his day he must have been a man of more than ordinary thew and sinew. His teeth have all gone, and his chin has accordingly elongated and betrays a disposition to meet his nose. He sucks away contentedly at his black clay, and you prepare to open conversation.

"You must have seen a great many changes hereabouts, grandfather, in your time," you say, looking round at the intersecting points of the five high roads.

"Changes!"

The old man looks round with a wondering gaze in his somewhat dim blue eyes, as if suddenly impressed with a sense of change which had never visited him so convincingly before.

"Changes? Why, yes, young master, I do see changes pretty considerable hereabouts. Ay, there's changes; so there is."

"This road, for instance; you'll have seen a few coaches pass up and down here, I expect?"

"Coaches? Eh, eh, eh! Ay, master, I have so. I can remember," he says, with renewed emphasis, "a matter o' sixty coaches, up and down, down and up, along this road. The down uns went to





THE OLD COACHING DAYS







1. The first part of the text is a list of names and titles, including "The First Book of the Year" and "The Second Book of the Year".

2. The second part of the text is a list of names and titles, including "The Third Book of the Year" and "The Fourth Book of the Year".

3. The third part of the text is a list of names and titles, including "The Fifth Book of the Year" and "The Sixth Book of the Year".

4. The fourth part of the text is a list of names and titles, including "The Seventh Book of the Year" and "The Eighth Book of the Year".

5. The fifth part of the text is a list of names and titles, including "The Ninth Book of the Year" and "The Tenth Book of the Year".

6. The sixth part of the text is a list of names and titles, including "The Eleventh Book of the Year" and "The Twelfth Book of the Year".

7. The seventh part of the text is a list of names and titles, including "The Thirteenth Book of the Year" and "The Fourteenth Book of the Year".

8. The eighth part of the text is a list of names and titles, including "The Fifteenth Book of the Year" and "The Sixteenth Book of the Year".

9. The ninth part of the text is a list of names and titles, including "The Seventeenth Book of the Year" and "The Eighteenth Book of the Year".

10. The tenth part of the text is a list of names and titles, including "The Nineteenth Book of the Year" and "The Twentieth Book of the Year".

### *An Old World Idyll*

York and the up uns went to London town, a main long distance by all accounts."

"Ah!"

"Yes, and there was post-chaises. Eh, the number o' post-chaises there was i' them days! They used to come galloping away down yon hill, and sometimes they'd stop for a glass at the George and sometimes they'd go on to the next station without stopping. Eh, and the folks in them! Lords and ladies they'd be, and young gentlemen a-running away with young ladies, and putting their heads out of window every hundred yards or two to see if the old gentleman was after 'em. Ay, I remember a good many of them sort."

"Ah! Did you ever see any of them stopped?"

"Ay, many a one, young master. Lord bless 'ee, the quality seemed to do nought else in them days but run away wi' young ladies. I do remember one spright young lord playing off a fine trick hereabouts. I was working in yon wood one fine morning—a woodman I was in my day, young master—and all of a sudden up the road comes galloping a grand travelling carriage, with a young man looking out of window, and the beautifullest young lady a-crying inside. They comes round the corner there and pulls up, and I sees then that



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

the horses were nearly dead-beat. My young gentleman gets out, and ramps and stamps up and down the road. 'What the devil's to be done?' says he. 'They can't be more than three miles behind.' 'Oh,' says the young lady, 'I can hear them now. What shall we do?' Then the young lord catches sight o' me as was peeping over the hedge at 'em. 'Woodman,' says he, 'ten guineas if you'll hide the carriage in that wood for half an hour.' So I takes 'em up that lane a bit, and got 'em through a clearing into a thick clump of trees, and then I goes back to yon corner and waits. Presently up comes a post-chaise, with the horses steaming and blowing, and a red-faced old gentleman swearing at the post-boys through the window. He sees me a-standing at the roadside. 'Whoa!' he shouts. 'Eh, fellow, have you seen a bright yellow chariot pass here?' 'Ay,' I says. 'How far will it be on?' he shouts. 'Oh,' I says, 'they ought to be five miles on the York road by this.' And so they had, if they'd only gone on; but they were safe in the wood. Eh, them were merry times!"

"And how long ago is that?"

"How long? Maybe sixty year ago, maybe more. I was a hale, strong man then; and parson he do say as I was christened in 1801."

*An Old World Idyll*

"Dear me! Then you must be about ninety years old."

"I dare say, master. Ay, about ninety I shall be."

"You must have seen a good deal in your time."

"Nay, we didn't see much in my day. I remember Farmer Folliot going to London town—dead and gone he is these fifty years. 'Twas thought a great thing i' them days was that. Yes, I do remember he'd have his will made by lawyer Cheeseborough over at Tadcaster yonder, and he went all round the village and said good-bye to 's friends. Ah, a great matter it were, indeed, to travel i' them times."

"Yes, I should imagine so. It's much easier now."

"Ay, marry, is it! Why, my grandson comes in t'other day wi' his 'Good-bye, grandfather, I'm off to London for a day or two,' as easy as if he'd been going to market. Ay, we thought a good deal about travelling in them days. I did once go to York, but never no farther. And there was old Mally Dickinson that died last Christmas—she were eighty-nine, and never set foot out o' the parish in all her life, and never saw an engine or a railway carriage, or aught o' that sort."

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

“And you have never been farther away than York?”

“Never seed no bigger place than York in all my life, young master. Ah, a powerful fine place it were, wi’ grand shops and houses, and a church that you might ha’ put a thousand of yond into. Eh, that’ll be well nigh on to sixty year ago, it will. It were election time in York then, and the old Squire—rest his soul!—were wanting to buy young trees, so he killed two birds wi’ one stone.”

“And what do you remember about the election?”

“Why, master, i’ them far back times us poor folks didn’t know much about elections. They didn’t do things then as they do now. I remember they used to go to York to give their votes, and the voting went on for many a day. Eh, and what a sight o’ money used to change hands in them days over the elections! All them that had votes used to be bid at by the election men, and the man that held out longest got most money. I’ve heard old Farmer Rigby tell many a time that his vote-money always paid half a year’s rent.”

“Then the man with the longest purse won in those days.”

“Seemin’ly, master, seemin’ly. Eh, things is

### *An Old World Idyll*

very different now. My son's a vote, and his lads has votes, and I should have a vote myself if I didn't live wi' my married daughter. Seems a great change to me, young master, as can remember when working men were nowt no more than horses and cows. Lord bless 'ee, in old Squire's days such a thing would never ha' been dreamed of. I often think the old gentleman must ha' turned in his grave to see all these here new-fan-glements. Lor', there's such a lot on 'em as I can't keep count wi'. Steam-engines and electric telegraphs and votes and halfpenny newspapers. Ay, it's very changeful is this world."

"Which would you prefer—the old times or the new?"

"Why, master, there was some good points about the old times, and there's some bad ones about these times. Life isn't as quiet and easy nowadays as it were then. We hardly ever saw strangers except them that passed through on the coaches, and we never went nowhere. Letters didn't come very oft as they do now, and I don't remember much about newspapers. Nowadays it appears to me as if you know everything that's going on everywhere. There don't seem to be a quiet corner anywhere. Then you see, master,

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

hardly a one could read, and all the news we had came from hearing folks talk at the public-house. I don't know whether it weren't easier to live in them days, too, for young folks didn't want all the fine things they want nowadays. Lord bless 'ee, why the farmer's daughters were not so fine in them times as the lasses is now, and there's farmer's daughters i' this place to-day that's finer by a deal than ever Squire Bantam's girls were. Ah, 'tis a powerful world for changes."

"Do you think it's changed for the better?"

"Ay, surely, master, in some ways. I remember my poor brother George dying—a coachman he were, the other side of Hull—and we didn't get the letter saying he were dead till the day after his funeral. Things were very slow in them times, but it's better now. But there's one thing that I miss sadly, young master. There's no stirrings nowadays. Lord bless 'ee, in the old days we used to hev such doings now and again. Roast beef, and big puddings, and cheese, and ale as much as ever you could drink—all at t'old Squire's expense. Eh, deary me, why, there were Waterloo. I remember what a stirring we had in the park yonder at t'old Squire's expense. Every man and woman in the place were in at that, and the old

### *An Old World Idyll*

folks weren't forgotten neither. Then there was the time when the Queen came to the throne. We'd a grand stirring then—tables wi' white cloths down the middle o' the street yonder, and roast beef and a brass band—eh, deary me, it were grand doings. Ay, they were livelier in them times, master. There were cock-fighting and rat-baiting—ay, and bull-baiting and all. Folks seemed to 'joy theirsens a bit now and then. But appeerently it's all work nowadays."

You saunter by the old man's side towards the village, leaving him at last at the door of an ivy-walled cottage, where he is taken in charge by a group of romping, rosy-cheeked schoolchildren, who hail him as "Grandfather," and drag him by his ancient coat-tails towards the house. He is the type of a race that is fast dropping into the past—a race of men who were content with what they were born to ; who had neither aspiration nor ambition, who knew little, and wished not to know more ; whose sole worlds were the quiet hamlets and villages of the rural districts,

Each with its little patch of sky  
And little lot of stars.

## *THE LAND BY MOONLIGHT*

It strikes ten o'clock from the village church as you leave the door of the little inn, and the landlord comes bustling along the sanded passage to put up the chain and shoot the bolts, lest any officious policeman should come round next morning and accuse him of keeping open in unlicensed hours. His cheery "Good night" is the last sound you hear as you stride along the high-road. The whole village, save himself and his buxom wife, is already fast asleep, drowned in dreamless slumber, or if dreaming, then of to-morrow's labours in the fields. A dog barks here and there as you pass the farm-houses, being uneasy at the sound of your footfall echoing steadily along the lonely road. But there is neither sound nor sight of human life in the place. Two hundred miles away the London streets will be full of gas glare and life; humanity swarming in the crowded thoroughfares; tens of thousands preparing to

### *The Land by Moonlight*

begin the evening which to these simple souls is long since over. The contrast is a great one, but in your present state of mind you feel more disposed to enjoy the peace that reigns all round you, because of your knowledge that within a brief journey the world's Babylon is waking up to a night of unholy mirth.

Up, up, still up the long, narrow cutting that leads away from the village. Turn at the summit and look round you. Saw ever man a sight more fair than this that lies rolled out in panoramic splendour at your very feet? You are on the summit of a hill three hundred feet high, a pigmy in comparison with Skiddaw or Snowdon, but a monarch in this gently undulating land. It is crowned by a long, low wood of fir and pine, whose new-leaved branches wave gently in the soft west wind. Standing beneath them, you look downwards. Almost at your feet, jutting out abruptly from the hill-side, lie confused masses of white stone, about the feet of which the rabbits have burrowed for ages. Right at the foot of the hill runs a winding road, beyond which the valley stretches away, mapped out by irregular hedge-rows into fields and meadows, and lost at last in a great bank of woods that rises mistily in the



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

south and west, and terminates your field of vision. The village, lying to the right at the foot of the hill, looks the very embodiment of peace as it lies sleeping in the brilliant moonlight. What is that long, silver streak that winds tortuously through its trees, whose topmost branches stand out like silhouettes against the sky? What, too, is the faint gleam of ruddy light that sparkles now and again through the elms against the bridge? The silver streak is the tiny river—see, there you catch it again, far away across the meadows—the gleam of light is the candle in the landlord's bed-chamber. He has raked the last ashes of the kitchen fire and smoked his last pipe, and is now going to bed.

Ha! what's that? A sudden, lightning-like dart across the thick grass twenty yards beneath you; a sudden flash of something white at the foot of the grey rocks. A rabbit, of course, his white tail catching the moonbeams as he darts into his burrow. See, he is out again, and with him one, two, three, six, ten more of his fellows—leaping, frisking, darting hither and thither in the moonlight. While man is asleep, the coney tribe are awake and enjoying themselves. Lambs new born to spring-time gladness could not frisk more madly than these little denizens of the rocks. Sit down

### *The Land by Moonlight*

on yonder smooth boulder and watch them. You will notice after five minutes' observation that there is method in their gambols, and that one of them, who jumps not so readily or lightly as the rest, has taken upon himself the office of master of ceremonies. Ah! they are gone—all of a sudden, their sinuous bodies twisting into the burrows, their little heels kicking up a tiny cloud of sand as they hurry for their lives. Why this haste? Look yonder—they saw what your eyes did not see. A fox, stealthy, every sense on the alert, ears pricked, muzzle stretched forward, has stolen out of the wood behind you, and is making down the hill. He gathers speed, he gallops over the rabbit-holes, snuffing his way, and then tucks his legs under him and sweeps off towards the village with long, subtle strides. Alack! for the goodwife who has left her hen-roost door open to-night!

And now there is not a sign of life on the hillside. But what's that yonder on the road? A sudden gleam of light that dies away again at once. A man walking along between the cart-ruts—some belated villager who has been to the market-town four miles away? No; he turns into the field in which you are standing, and commences to climb towards you. As he comes nearer you

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

perceive that he carries something under his arm on which the moonlight gleams fitfully. It is a gun, and the man who carries it is the village gamekeeper. You stand up, and walk a few paces towards him; and his sharp ears catch the sound at once. He stands at attention, and peers about him. He catches sight of you—not an easy matter, because the dark wood is at your back, and frames you in a dusky background.

“Hullo, there!”

“Hullo, gamekeeper!”

He comes nearer, the gun ready to his hand, lest the voice out of the semi-darkness should be that of a foe. At ten yards' distance he sees you, and laughs.

“Hullo, sir, so it be you? A fine night it be, sure-ly. I hear you was in the village agin. You be gettin' very fond o' this part of the country, sir.”

“Ah, it's a grand country, gamekeeper! Are you out for the night?”

“Right you are, sir—till morning, anyway.”

“So am I. I think we've the best of it, too. What a night it is!”

“Ah!”

He compresses a tremendous amount of admira-

*The Land by Moonlight*

tion into that simple "Ah!" Neither does he say it loudly. Men out at night never talk in much more than a whisper, because they feel that in Nature's unveiled presence there cannot be too much reverence or awe.

"Seen anything stirring, sir?"

"About a dozen rabbits and a fox. The fox has gone over towards Mrs. Simpson's hen-roost."

"Ah, that be the varmint, then, as killed her Cochinchina cock the other week. He'll get nought there to-night. Rabbits, I reckon, was about them stones. Ah, there's scores of 'em hereabouts. We shall have to thin 'em, else the farmers 'll complain terrible later on. Got a bit of baccy about 'ee, sir?"

He sits down on the stone beside you, and lights his pipe deliberately and carefully, laying the old-fashioned muzzle-loader on the grass beside him. The two pipes keep company over a silent five minutes. Then the gamekeeper whispers "Hist!" and nods towards the rocks. A brown head peeps out of the rabbit holes and reconnoitres, then another, and a third, and so on till a whole colony of conies is disporting itself on the hill-side with never a thought of man or fox.

The gamekeeper knocks the ashes from his

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

black clay, and rubs the steel barrels with his velveteen sleeve.

“Did 'ee ever see a badger, sir?”

“Not for five or six years.”

“I know where they be three on 'em. Yonder away through the wood—in the Middle Spinney. It's eleven o'clock. They'll be out in an hour. Like to see 'em, sir?”

You rise in company, the rabbits at last distinguishing you from the grey rocks, and scattering, hurry-scurry to their runs. You turn away from the hill-side, and plunge into the wood. The track lies beneath the trees, whose branches are already so well clothed by the fresh, green, sappy foliage as to shut out the clear moonlight above. The dead leaves of last autumn are not yet reduced to pulp, and they creak and rattle beneath your feet. Now and then a dead branch snaps as you step on it; occasionally the spectral fingers of a decaying bough snatches the soft cap from your head, and flings it into the darkness behind you. A delicious smell of resinous pine greets your senses—perfume more exquisite than all the gums of Arabia blended together.

Hark, what's that? The gamekeeper stops in his stolid tramp, and nods his head. From some



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### *The Land by Moonlight*

far recess in the wood comes a mournful, ghostly sound that would almost make your flesh creep if you were at all superstitious. It suggests goblins, banshees, pixies, and what not of legendary fairydom. A yard or two farther on, and you distinguish it more clearly. Now stand and listen. "Tu-whit, tu-whoo! Tu-whit, tu-whoo!" It is an owl saluting midnight.

"I knows where that there old joker be hiding of his-self," says gamekeeper. "Many a time do I hear he about this hour o' night. He be in the old ruin. In my country, now" (he is not a Yorkshireman), "we do hear a plenty of them there, but this old friend be the only one on the estate. Shall us give he a visit, like, sir?"

A visit to a solitary owl at midnight? By all that's poetical, yes! Lead on, velvetens, but warily, lest the owl change his quarters. Through a darker path, the branches lower, the footing rougher, you travel for a good half-mile. The foliage grows thicker, and shuts out the moonlight; it is all you can do to see your companion as he glides in front. At last he turns, and utters a sound of caution.

"Sh! We be about on the old joker's perch now, sir."



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

Ah! what's this—a scene from a romantic opera? You emerge from the trees stealthily, and find yourself on the edge of a small clearing, with the moon looking straight down through the tall pines. In the centre of the clearing stands a grey ruin, just two broken walls and no more, every stone covered by green, clinging ivy. It is a weird scene. The moonbeams falling through a broken window or loophole in the ruin make a chequered pattern on the long, rank grass; a blasted oak, overshadowing the ruins, creaks mournfully in the gentle wind. Everything is silent. Has the owl heard us coming, and flown? No. "Tu-whit, tu-who!" Tu-whit, tu-who!" There's his cry, but where is he? Gamekeeper winks upwards in the moonlight, and following his eye, you see a dusky mass embowered in a framework of ivy. Aye, there he sits, and you think of the lines from Gray's famous "Elegy":

"Save where from yonder ivy mantled tower  
The moping owl doth to the moon complain."

Zhoosh! His Mopishness has caught sight of us, and he flits heavily across our heads into the recesses of the wood.

"It be a ghostly spot this, sir," says gamekeeper. "Lord bless 'ee, do 'ee hear them chains a-rattling

*The Land by Moonlight*

in the old oak ? Ugh ! I'd as lief not come this way o' nights without company."

True enough, there is a rattling of chains in the stricken tree. "What do they there ?"

"Why, sir, they do say hereabouts that a highwayman was hung here in chains long time ago, and them there be the identical chains. Lord ! they be enough to gi' one the hurdy-gurdles in the stum-mick o' windy nights ! I don't look over my shoulder at that there old tree, I tell 'ee, when I pass this way."

Now for the badgers. Under the pines and along the yielding carpet of the dead leaves again, the moonlight coming in flickering patches across our path and glinting on the shining barrels which gamekeeper conscientiously keeps pointed to mother earth, in whose bosom they would find more appropriate shelter than in your shoulders. Now a low wall looms up in the darkness, with a bank of yellow sand supporting it. You turn sharp off the path and skirt it, keeping close to the sloping bank. The wall goes up and down with the undulations of the ground. Even in the faint moonlight you can see that it was not built yesterday, for the stones are crumbling into dust, and here and there the clinging ivy has pulled them down altogether, and

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

left them lying in rude confusion on the sandbank beneath.

Another clearing, with the moon shining strongly over the trees. The gamekeeper draws you into the shade, and points out a great hole in the bank immediately opposite you. A fallen tree lies near, and after the muzzle-loader has been carefully bestowed against a holly-bush, you sit down and light pipes again to await the advent of the badgers.

"It do be wonderful," whispers gamekeeper, "what an amount o' baccy a man can smook in the open air. Lord bless 'ee, sir, why the two ounces you give me last Saturday week was done in no time! Don't seem to have no effect on a man as is allus knocking about in the woods and fields."

"Had a brush with the poachers lately?" you ask, as he fills his pipe again.

"No, sir; they be precious few of 'em round this way, now. Now and agin I do come on a snare in the hedge-bottoms. Took a hare out o' one the other night. Don't seem to me that we're near enough to they collier-fellows just hereabouts, as is boys for netting a bit o' game now and then in a likely spot. Ah! Did 'ee know that I was once a poacher myself, sir?"

*The Land by Moonlight*

"Can't say that I did."

"Eh, but I was ; and merry times I've had, too, in them days. There's points about killing game on the sly, like, that you don't get on the square, sir. It's a grand feeling, a-stealing out on a shiny night like this, knowing that you'll get nabbed if you don't keep eyes and ears sharp and lively. Ah, dear-a-me, what a game I used to lead poor old Squire !"

He laughs silently, and with full enjoyment, at the memory of his younger days, and shakes his head at some particular reminiscence.

"Do 'ee know, sir, there was gipsy blood in my veins ? and it was only nature to me to snare whatever I could. Lord bless 'ee, the whippings I've had from old Squire and his keepers ! Then at last I gets into a reg'lar mess over a fight with the watchers, and they drags me up to the justice-room for old Squire to commit me to gaol. 'What be I to do with 'ee, you young scoundrel ?' says old Squire, looking fierce as a lion, but speaking kind-like. "Be you never a-going to leave me a hare to my own dish ?" So I ups and speaks straight out, 'Why, please your Worship,' says I, 'if so be as your Worship would make me one of your keepers, I could manage.' 'Confound the boy !' says old

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

Squire, 'a keeper he shall be!' And so I put on the livery, and served him faithful."

"And began watching your old mates, eh?"

"Ah, sir, set a thief to catch a thief! A good poacher always makes a good gamekeeper. But, Lord bless 'ee! old Squire, he weren't hard on anybody 'cept them that wouldn't work. 'Keeper,' says he to me one day, 'if so be as you sees a poor chap out o' work, or whose wife's down, a-snaring a hare, just look the other way,' says he, with a wink. 'Confound it!' says he, 'I'd rather they'd come and ax for 'em,' he says; 'but if they won't, why let 'em take it as they like. But,' he says, 'if you catches any o' them idle blaggards a-poaching my game,' says he, 'wollop 'em sound!' he says, so he did. And there be a badger, sir."

A grey snout pushes its way into the moonlight, followed by a grey body. Then comes another, and presently a third, and you hold your breath and watch these creatures of the night as they pursue their games on the sloping bank of sand, leaving it covered with peculiar foot-prints. Alas! the gamekeeper swallows a mouthful of tobacco smoke, and in spite of terrible efforts, is forced to give way to a violent fit of coughing, and at the first sound the

1875





BADGERS

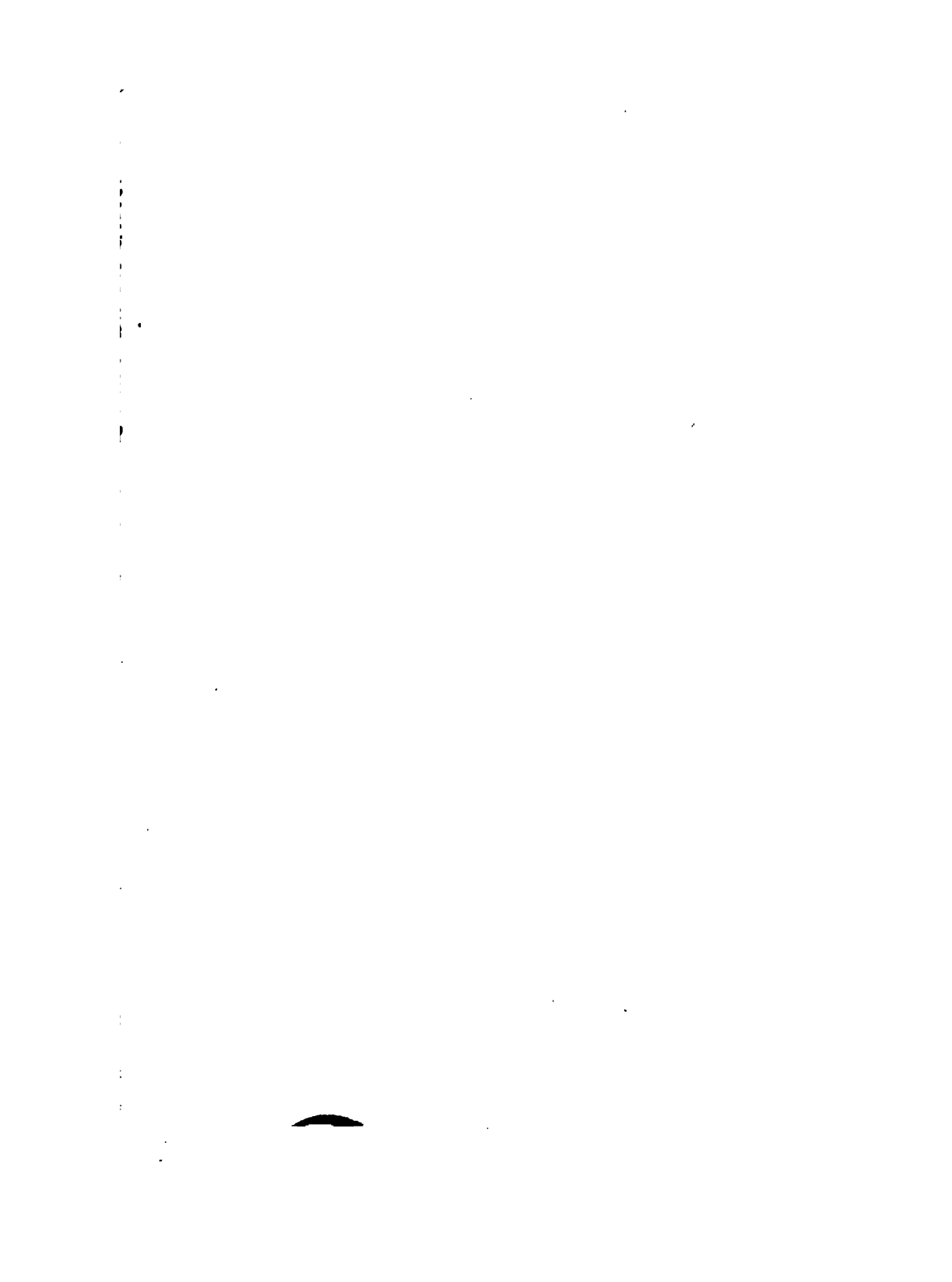




*The Land by Moonlight*

badgers hurry to their hole, and you have seen the last of them for that night.

You rise and climb the wall and plunge into a deeper wood, through which you tramp for mile after mile, now emerging into axe-cleared spaces or turning down grassy bridle-paths, your companion enlivening the way by stories of bygone days, of wild things done in the woods and fields, of midnight maraudings on the game that not always ended without strife between human beings. Then out of the woods into the dew-bathed meadows, in which sheep lie shivering in the keen wind that has sprung up between three and four o'clock, and so back to the summit of the hill from whence you set forth. A ray of crimson light steals slowly across the heavens; a spiral column of grey smoke goes up from an early cottage fire; the clouds of mist begin to roll slowly away along the valley. It is morning; the long moon-lit night is a thing of the past.



*HIGHWAY AND BYWAY*

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

knight. Walk six miles between one market town and another and you will meet him more than once. He is in evidence as soon as you get out of the town, and you will hardly get through a sleepy village without finding him sitting on the fence of the last house. The various rôles which he fills with satisfaction to himself are legion in number. Now he is an Irishman come over for the hay and corn harvest, it being at the time of your conversation with him somewhere about the middle of April, and the hay and corn scarcely risen from the brown soil. Or he is a hardworking but unfortunate mechanic from the crowded towns of Lancashire who is looking for a job. Again he is a sailor, shipwrecked, alas! in the North Sea, and now on his way from Hull to Liverpool. Or he is a shoemaker from Northampton, driven by unforeseen circumstances to travel around his native land in search of work. Not seldom he is an old soldier, who exhibits, if you permit him to do so, two horrible-looking bullet-marks on his shirtless ribs, one of which he got at Inkermann and the other on the heights of Alma. Sometimes he is a native of sunny Italy, whom some wretched romancer has deluded into believing that England is carpeted with broad gold pieces which any man may pick up

*MY FRIENDS THE HIGHWAYMEN*

Do not imagine, O, gentle and well-to-do reader, leaning back in your comfortably-padded first-class or third-class carriage, while the train carries you between Leeds and London, that the high-road over which you now and then rush and rattle is any less free from knights of the highway than in the old days of Turpin and King, of Nevison and Sheppard! You need not now, it is true, go in fear of a peremptory demand to deliver your money or have your commercial brains strewed among the daisies and buttercups of the wayside, nor will you ever be put to mortal terror by the apparition of a black mask and dreadfully complicated horse-pistol, warranted to miss fire eight times in every ten. These things went out with the yellow-bodied stage-coaches and hurrying postillions, and like the other characteristics of the good old times, have become but memories.

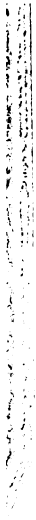
Nevertheless, the highway is not without its



BY MEAD AND STREAM







### *My Friends the Highwaymen*

if he will but bend his back. Again he is a coal-miner, thrown out of work by a strike, and on his way to a distant colliery in the hope of obtaining more. Very seldom he is an agricultural labourer, tramping from the north to the south in search of better wages. And now and then he is just what he professes to be—a knight of the highway, whose only care is to find enough food to keep him alive, a little coarse tobacco to smoke in his black pipe, and an occasional pair of boots to put on when the road becomes unduly rough.

In nearly every case you must not expect too much in the way of appearance. He is not mounted on Black Bess, but his feet too often look as though a dabble in the next pond would do them good. His garments are not fringed with lace, nor his sleeves with ruffles, though they usually terminate in fringes caused by the irresistible hand of time. He carries no silver-mounted pistols two feet in length, but he very often arms himself with a grievous cudgel of blackthorn, abstracted in the shades of evening from a wayside coppice. He is not so armed and fortified by grace of manner as the good old ruffians of a hundred years ago, whose charms so captivated their female victims that the "stand and deliver" part of the ceremony

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

was often but the prelude to a dance by the wayside. If you hold converse with our modern knight of the road, you will ere long develop a strong conviction that his main article of food is the strong but savoury onion—a good vegetable, but apt to pall on a susceptible person's olfactory nerves when taken in conjunction with the delicate odour of bad beer and stale tobacco. Also, the decrees of fate have obliged the modern highwayman to eschew the shop of the tailor and the shirt-maker—even of the ready-made ones—and there is a certain fluffiness about his apparel which suggests to you the advisability of keeping to the windward (or is it to the leeward?) of him. He invariably carries a small bundle with him, and your curiosity is constantly aroused with regard to it. It is impossible to conjecture that it contains a clean shirt, because you have the best evidence to prove that the knight of the road is at present doing without that civilised garment, and no sane man could believe that a fellow-creature would walk the road shirtless while carrying a shirt in his bundle. Does it contain shoes, or a traveller's kit, or his sainted mother's Bible, or the odds and ends of food which the people by the wayside have given him? It is useless to ask these things

### *My Friends the Highwaymen*

—the modern highwayman's bundle is a thing of mystery.

The last time I met the knight of to-day was on the highroad leading towards Doncaster from York. I saw him afar off, and I knew that he saw me, and that he metaphorically fell upon my neck and embraced me as a brother. I knew this because as soon as he caught sight of my advancing figure he immediately relinquished whatever business he had on hand and betook himself to a neighbouring bank by the wayside, where he seated himself upon the daisies until such time as I should draw near. Not that he betrayed consciousness of my presence. He was earnestly regarding the wonderful works of Nature during the ten minutes which elapsed between his first seeing me and my reaching the exact spot whereon he designed to attack me. I knew as soon as I got within easy distance that I was in the hands and at the mercy of a consummate artist in highwaymanship. He was tall, and red, and Hibernian from the top of his old rakish-looking billycock to the tip of the toe peeping picturesquely through his ancient foot-gear. He was of the military caste. I could see that by the cock of his eye and the sweep of his moustache, and the remembrance of old days of discipline had induced

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

him to have a shave at the last village. Innocent of shirt or undergarment I judged him to be, his coat being tightly buttoned across his chest and a red comforter or neck-cloth tied cravat-fashion about his throat. His eye was fixed on the landscape when I drew near, but he had started to attention, and was saluting respectfully the instant my shadow fell across his line of sight.

“The top of the mornin’ to ye, Captin, and many av thim. Sure, Oi seen ye comin’ along the road beyant there, and knew by ye’r step that Oi was seein’ a military man. It’s meself that’s seen service, and that could show ye the most illigant wounds if it wusn’t for fear of shocking a gintleman’s eyes at sight of me bare skin, me not havin’ a shirt to me back at this present toime, though Oi’ll be better off prisintly, Oi will, plaze God! Were ye at the Alma, Captin? Sure, Oi seen a gintleman very like yourself out there, as made the entire rigitment wonder for bravery, and whin Oi seen ye comin’ along the road Oi sez to myself, ‘It’s the brave man himself that Oi’m priviligid to mate this foine mornin’,’ Oi sez. Ah, there wus hundreds of us fell that day, Captin, as you’ll be knowin’ well, bein’ a military man yerself, and familiar wid war and bloodshed.”

### *My Friends the Highwaymen*

The audacity of this modern highwayman is simply enormous. I am thirty years of age, five-foot seven, and I do not look like a military man. I am not acquainted with war and bloodshed, and the Alma affair was considerably before my time. But the magnificent Irish assurance is irresistible, and I am well content to stand out in the centre of the road and admire my modern highwayman in his new rôle.

“ You seem rather youthful to have been at the Alma ? ” I ventured to remark.

“ Ah, Captin, sure it’s the open air and the plain eating that’s preservin’ the constitution wonderfully. Betwixt fifty and sixty years of age Oi am, and not a grey hair about me. Ah, sure it was fifty-three Oi was last October. An’ ye wouldn’t think it now, would ye ? ”

I certainly should not. I am not sure that I should think it in presence of affidavits and baptismal registers. I should strongly opine that thirty-three would come nearer the mark.

“ Ah, thin, Captin, sure it’s yerself wid your experience that knows the evils as a poor soldier is subjected to. Sure, didn’t Oi know dozens of the boys as gone down terrible fast wid the dhrink and bad company and such like ? Haven’t Oi seen

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

'em turn into old men fast, while mesilf was still preservin' me youth and illigance? Ah, it's not many men ye'll find that's been as stiddy as mesilf, Captin, dear."

I venture to remark that his "stiddiness" does not seem to have brought prosperity to him.

"Ah, but now, wait awhile, Captain, and ye'll see. Sure I'm on my way to worruk that I've got convaynient to York, and I'll get my clothes out of pawn when Oi've been at worruk a week or two. Ah, faith, there is no better hand at worruk thin mesilf, and if Oi had but a little capital, sure Oi'd become a master mesilf. And so Oi'l be stepping along the road, Captain, and if ye've a bit o' baccy or a trifle to give a poor soldier as has seen service and got two bullet-holes—ah, well, God be good to yer honour, and may ye niver——"

He shambled away on his journey to the mythical "worruk," but the heat of the morning must have been too much for his carefully preserved constitution, for, looking back, I saw that he had assumed a recumbent position by the way-side, and was sending blue rings of smoke from my tobacco out of his little cutty-pipe. Somehow, I felt no resentment. The "worruk" was twenty miles farther on the road, and the way-side daisies were inviting.

### *My Friends the Highwaymen*

I do not object to this species of the modern highwayman. His boundless resource, his unparalleled audacity, the twinkle of his humorous eye, the invariable request for tobacco or a trifle of loose cash, interest me, and afford food for subsequent reflection. As I go along the road I wonder whether such a one has yet reached the haven, not of rest, but of "worruck," or whether he is repairing his shattered energies beneath the shelter of a friendly hayrick. The high road, in fact, would lose some of its charm if it lost sight of the sunburnt, lazy, garrulous tramp.

But there is another species of modern highwayman to whom I do object most strongly, and he is the man whom it would be more Christian-like to pity. I mean the tattered and forlorn individual who comes whining to you from the hedge-side, where sit a miserable-looking female and three utterly squalid children, the youngest a mere baby. I would cheerfully face a score of Turpins rather than one of this species of knights of the road. He forces you to listen to a mournful tale, which is probably invented, but which may be true, and which you therefore feel bound to listen to. He has been thrown out of work by a combination of circumstances the most wonderful, and is perforce



### *The Wonderful Wapentake.*

obliged to tramp the country with his wife and children. Well for the latter if it be summer time ! The nights are warm then, and the lee-side of a haystack is comfortable enough, but it is not always May, and in the biting nights and bitter days of autumn and winter the children of the shiftless and wholly helpless highwayman come off badly unless the cold shelter of the workhouse be afforded to them.

Then there is another knight of the road whom I dread far more than I should dread a vision of Jack Sheppard. He is a terrible individual, who having been condemned by Nature or by accident to bear about with him the external ravages of some horrible disease, is always eager to exhibit the sorry sight to some one in hope of exciting compassion in the shape of silver money. This type of highwayman is not modern. He was known in the Middle Ages. The loss of a limb, the searing of a hot iron, the accidental over-turning of a vessel of molten lead, set him up for life, and sent him out, as it does now-a-days, to arouse pity in the hearts of those who do not like to see physical deformity in the midst of natural perfection.

Going along the roads at all times and in all

### *My Friends the Highwaymen*

places I have met a great many various species of modern highwaymen. I have met Short and Codlin, the one smoking his short pipe, the other carrying the show on his bent shoulders. I have met Mr. Alfred Jingle, who was temporarily down on his luck, and not above borrowing half-a-crown. I have met Nicholas Nickleby and Smike, the one's eyes full of resolute endeavour to fight the world, the other's full of a great wonder at the new things he saw about him. I have met Peggotty looking for little Em'ly, and wondered how that honest soul would fare in the heart of the great city to which he was bound. And now and then I have come across little Nell and her grandfather, and felt that perchance the green fields and quiet woods were fitter surroundings for the grave-eyed child and broken-down old man than the Babylon from which they had strayed far afield, and from whence come most of these modern stragglers of the great highways.

### *THE PIG AND WHISTLE*

At the eastern extremity of a long and picturesque valley, now bare and bleak, but in early summer a very paradise of green and gold, stands a tiny village or hamlet of quaint farmsteads and cottages, some of them tiled with red, some covered with the now unfamiliar thatch. It nestles half-way up the south bank of the valley, and far below it, in the valley itself, there is a narrow river, which is placid enough in June, but somewhat turbulent when February rains fill every dike. Men who wish to cross this river may do so by either of two ways. Those who ride on horseback or in a cart may cross it by the ford ; others may go dryshod by means of a narrow bridge. From the bridge and the ford, which are close together, two paths converge into one, and wind irregularly up the hill-side to the village overhead. There is no main street in that village, but there are quaint turnings and twistings ; and sometimes the





A YORKSHIRE VILLAGE





### *The Pig and Whistle*

traveller, thinking to go away, finds himself confronted by a blank wall, and is forced to go back and try another cast. As for the houses and cottages, they are all either white or yellow. Come Whitsuntide, they will all be newly white-washed, or splashed with yellow drabble. At present the snows and rains of winter have spoiled their brave appearance. Neither rain nor snow, however, can spoil the old church, which stands amongst farmsteads and cottages like a sentinel. It gets greyer every year, and the moss which grows on the roof seems to get thicker. Nor can snow or rain do aught to steal away the cheery gleam of the bit of stick-fire which comes through the windows of the "Pig and Whistle." No matter how fiercely the rain beats down the valley, or how darkly the snow falls across the outlying fields, there is always a shelter behind the old church tower, or in the little old-world inn which lies half-hidden at the church-yard gate.

It was raining a little when I stood before the "Pig and Whistle" yesterday afternoon. Right across the valley I saw the great woods—once a part of Sherwood Forest—half-draped in the thin driving clouds, half-rain, half-mist, which stole across the land from the east and north. A haw-



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

thorn hedge close at hand, bare and barren enough of leaf and twig, glittered in the grey light with the drops which had settled upon its brown branches during the day. The thatch on the roof of a barn close by was soaked; the red tiles on the farm-house across the road shone and glistened with wet. A wagtail hopping and strutting across the wet and muddy road seemed to enjoy the damp and the rain; but two horses hanging their heads over the gate of the fold looked somewhat depressed and cynical. Beyond them a labourer was carrying great heaps of straw out of the wide-open doors of the barn, and round the black cavity thus revealed stood a semicircle of expectant cattle, who licked a mouthful of fodder from his shoulders as he passed them on his way up the fold. From where I stood I could hear the swish, swish, swish, of the straw as he forced his way through the narrow door of the mistal. I could hear, too, the cows tugging and pulling at their chains as the man put the straw in the racks in front of them. With these sounds came others, all suggestive of quiet rural life. Somewhere in the fold somebody was feeding the pigs—I was sure of it, though I could neither see pigs or sty. I could hear the rattling of a tin pail against a stone trough, coupled

### *The Pig and Whistle*

with the grunt, grunt, grunt of a satisfied porker, and the shrill wail of one kept out by stronger snouts. From some distant turnip-field came the faint murmur of patient sheep, standing knee-deep in the wet soil, no doubt, and waiting for their troughs ; and above their baa-ing rang the short, sharp, distinct bark of the shepherd's dog.

Inside the "Pig and Whistle" everything was very warm, clean, and comfortable. The floor of the one room (they have no parlour there—nothing but one great stone-floored kitchen) was so spotlessly bright that it was evident the rosy-cheeked lass who brought me my pint of ale had recently scrubbed it, and subsequently polished it with buttermilk. Next to the surrounding walls she had drawn an elaborate design with pottery-mould—a design of circles and curves worthy of high æsthetic art. Also she had burnished up the brass candlesticks, the meat-jack, and the big salver which ornamented the mantel-piece ; and some hands—hers or other's—had filled the spill-jar with carefully rolled spills torn from the previous week's local newspaper. To bring one's wet clothes and dirty boots into so clean a place seemed a profanation. Nevertheless it was possible to make an attempt to be dry and clean,

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

for there was a newly twisted straw mat at the door whereon to wipe one's feet, and a clothes-horse near the fire on which to hang one's coat.

There was but one man in the "Fig and Whistle," and he, sitting close up to the fire, was sucking steadily away at a short clay pipe, and now and then dipping his nose into a mug of ale which rested between times on the oven top at his side. He informed me, after we had exchanged various conventional remarks upon the weather, that he had brought a horse from a village seven miles away, and that he was going homewards again as soon as he had finished his "lowance." It would be a long and dirty walk, but he did not mind it. There were dirtier jobs. Shepherding, for instance—that would be very pleasant in the present state of the weather. He had been shepherding the previous day, and had finally gone home "up to t' ees i' muck." The bringing of the horse he evidently regarded as something of a holiday—as witness his wearing of his best waist-coat and neckerchief. So he drank off his mug of ale, relighted his pipe with a coal from the fire, and went out into the February twilight.

It is said that on St. Valentine's Day you can see a grey horse a mile off at six o'clock in the

### *The Pig and Whistle*

evening. As I looked out of the tiny window of the "Pig and Whistle," however, I could see nothing but the rolling mists across the valley. The fog was coming thick and strong, and the rain was driving with it. The damsel with the rosy cheeks, mending the fire, observed that the night looked like being wet, and added that her mother was walking home from the market-town five miles away, and that she had on her best shawl and bonnet. This may appear to be trifling conversation, but it is not so—to country people. Consequently I consoled with the rosy-cheeked girl, and hinted that probably her mother would borrow an umbrella. She answered that her mother had taken an umbrella with her, but that the fog had a bad effect on the feathers—it took all the curl out of them. Her own best hat, she added, had been spoiled that way coming from Pogley Feast last Martinmas. She seemed inclined to enlarge upon the subject; but the striking of the old clock suddenly reminded her that her mother would want some tea as soon as she arrived; and she accordingly hastened to set the kettle on the hob and to cut a thick rasher of ham out of a somewhat fine specimen hanging in one corner of the kitchen. She had just placed

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

the ham on the fire when I went away, and I caught the first divine odour of it as I crossed the road. I wished, somehow, that I had nothing to do but sit down in the "Pig and Whistle" and hear the ham frying in the pan, and smell its odour mingling with the scent of fresh-brewed tea. Alas! we all crave for something that is beyond us. It is possible, though I cannot understand why, that the girl cooking the ham sighed for the empty delights and foolish excitements of the town, just as I sighed for the quiet of the lonely village.







BROCKADALE, KIRK SMEATON IN THE DISTANCE





### *THE WOODMAN ABROAD*

It is never a difficult matter, whether in winter or summer, autumn or spring, to find old Martin in the woods or the plantations. In a land so silent as this, where the whistle of a railway train is heard miles away and the barking of a sheep-dog is carried across a dozen broad meadows, it is an easy enough matter to catch the ringing of an axe, laid vigorously to the root of elm or oak, pine or beech. If you enter the long Valley Wood at the time Martin is engaged in felling a tree, you will be able to locate his exact position by the sounds that come ringing and shivering through the trees. If it is summer, when leaves are thick and the long wood full of glossy foliage, the sound of Martin's axe will come to you, deadened and muffled ; if it is winter, it will sound sharp and clear and metallic, and you will catch an equally defined echo ringing away from the hill behind you. Other sounds in the wood there are usually none. Now and then

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

in winter its deep silence is broken by the baying of foxhounds and the crashing of branches and underwood, pushed aside and trampled upon by impatient horsemen following the hounds. In spring and autumn there steals through it the faint murmur of patient sheep, penned in the fields outside, or the loud voice of ploughboy calling upon his straining horses or carolling some country love-song as he follows his plough on its way through the brown soil. In summer the wood is never silent. A myriad of insects, creatures of a day, perhaps of an hour, hum and buzz in its deepest recesses ; the stock-dove plains and broods in the fir-tree, and the blackbirds and thrushes vie with the linnets in filling the warm air with melody. But all this sound is melted to a soft harmony, and blends with the rippling music of the leaves stirred by the wind, and over and above it rings out the clear stroke of Martin's axe.

There are few things more pleasant than to find the old woodman in the woods on a fine summer afternoon about the beginning of June. He is then usually busied in a wide clearing, deep in the heart of the wood, and you have to penetrate through a deep ambush of undergrowth and tangle before you

### *The Woodman Abroad*

can get at him. If you know the path by which he and Edward the donkey reach the clearing, or if you chance to light on the road by which the great trunks and logs are carried away, you will have no difficulty in finding Martin's whereabouts. But there are more sides to a wood than one, and if you enter it on the three sides which have no path, you will find that there lies before you a primeval forest, thick and mysterious as those you read of in fairy tales. Nevertheless, to some people the adventure has charms. There are so many rare things to see in pushing one's way through a wood. You have hardly entered when your eyes are blessed with the sight of primroses, violets, wood anemones, bursting from the ground in the most extravagant profusion. Through the green curtain that hangs before you, you catch glimpses of a shadowy blue, which gets deeper and deeper until you push aside the branches of some thick bush, and find yourself gazing at a great carpet of hyacinths, whose subtle scent fills all the trembling air. As you gaze and think how delighted many a poor town-child would be at such a sight, you become aware of a fox that breaks cover six yards away and trots slowly across the bit of clearing, his red body half-buried

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

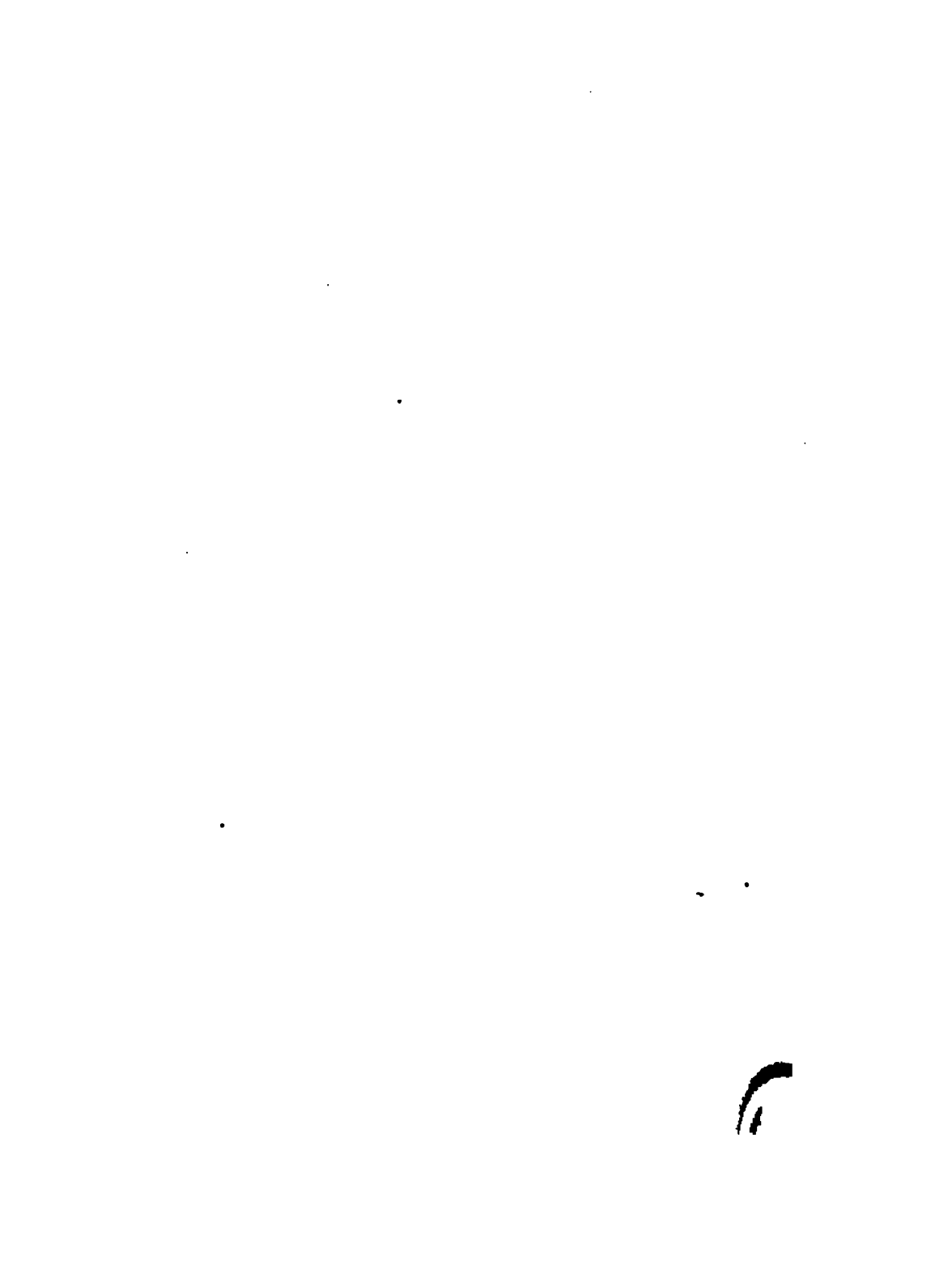
in the blue hyacinths. The cracking of a dead bough under your feet startles him ; he stops, turns, and looks at you with questioning eyes. He knows well enough that winter is far away, and the hounds, his ancient enemies, at rest within their kennels, and therefore he fears nothing. He watches you for a moment, and then goes unconcernedly on his way, and his waving brush disappears. You follow him across the hyacinths and into the deep wood again. The undergrowth grows deeper and more tangled ; the wild rose trees catch you as you strive to push forward, and insist on holding you in their clinging embrace. Little by little you fight your way through the wood, to come presently to another clearing, where the sun looks down on a rabbit-warren round which the rabbits are playing and frisking. The soil there is sandy and soft, and the rabbits have honey-combed it in all directions. Their white tails dart hither and thither as you break upon their sanctuary, and before you have stepped into the clearing they have disappeared into the black holes, from which their bright eyes will peep a few minutes later. You do not stay to watch them, for the sound of Martin's axe rings very near now. You

### *The Woodman Abroad*

have but to push forward a few yards and you find yourself in his presence. The clearing where Martin spends so much time in spring and summer is a wide space in the very heart of the wood, thirty yards long and twenty wide. So thickly do the trees grow round it that it looks like a large chamber hung with green and ceilinged with white clouds drifting across a blue sky. In one corner stands a rude hut fashioned of pine logs, in which Martin keeps certain implements better left there than carried back and forward between the wood and the village, and in which he also takes his meals in winter and on cold days. At this present moment Edward the donkey stands tethered near the hut. His eyes have a demure and far-away expression in them, and his nose is meditatively inclined towards a bundle of hay at his feet. Now and then he gazes at his master, now and then his great ears droop, and his head drops forward—which means that he is taking a forty-seconds nap. His master, however, is wide enough awake, and the scene around him bears testimony to his activity. Here are great piles of tree-trunks, lopped and trimmed, arranged with mathematical exactitude and looking as if Martin expected the Queen to drop in and inspect his

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

arrangements. In the corner of the clearing opposite to the little hut there is a saw-pit, where Martin's two assistants sometimes spend a day in sawing the trunks into lengths and slabs and palings. In the village there is a steam saw-mill, but Martin does not like it. His father, he says, was a woodman before him, and there were no steam saw-mills in his time. He mentions with obvious relish the fact that one of the steam saw-mill men had two fingers cut off last year, and says that such accidents do not happen to his men. Of course, sawing by hand is a slow process, but it is Martin's notion that there is nothing like being slow and sure. Edward, the donkey, takes him home every night, and brings him to his work every morning in the most leisurely fashion, taking an hour to do the two miles from the village; but then, Edward is very sure-footed, and never stumbles, though he is now getting old and his feet are getting long. Moreover, if Martin has learnt anything in his long life it is that there is nothing like taking your time. Rapid work is poor work, slow work is good. That, he thinks, is how Nature contrives, and he believes that Wordsworth—though he has not read him—is right when he says that Nature is the best teacher man can ever have.





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THE FISHPOND, STAPLETON PARK



### *The Woodman Abroad*

He would be a foolish man who refused to accept Martin's opinions as to what Nature can say, for he has studied her ways and moods, fashions and fancies, for fifty years, man and boy. I have often wondered what strange secrets of the wood and trees are locked up in his breast. As he has lingered here in the woods or about the fields, year in and year out, he must have seen things which most men never see, and heard voices which the majority of men never hear. Now and then as he sits by you on a fallen tree, and puffs away at his little pipe, he will tel you that he has seen rare things. He has no language in which to describe them adequately, and his references to them are therefore mysterious and provoking, inasmuch as that he leads you to the veil of the temple but has no power to rend it in twain. He will say over and over again that there are strange things and fine things in the woods, and that people who say there are no fairies or magic people do not quite know what they are talking about. He thinks that he has heard voices in the weird silence which falls over the woods in winter, and he has seen the mystic rings in the clearings when he and Edward have gone to work very early in the morning. Strange and terrible

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

things there are, too, in the woods, he says, and shakes his head. Once in this particular wood they hung a man in chains, and to this day there are strange sobbings and sighings round the fateful tree whenever the wind strikes and rattles the chains. Even more dreadful than that, though, is a thunderstorm. In his simple language the old man can describe how he and Edward were once caught in one and obliged to creep inside the little hut for shelter until its fury was abated. He will tell you how the thunder rattled and boomed through the wood, dark as night and heavy with suspense, how the lightning flashed and danced from tree to tree, how the silence was broken by the crash of some great oak or elm felled by the fierce lightning, and how the poor donkey nestled close to the man, as if certain of protection from the hurricane outside.

But there are more things than these known to the old woodman whose life is spent abroad. He knows better than any naturalist or botanist that ever lived when the primroses will first peep through the undergrowth, and when the violets will begin to fill the air with fragrance. He can prophesy the bursting of the black ash-buds to a day, and knows where the boys should go for

### *The Woodman Abroad*

palms with which to adorn their hats and caps on Palm-Sunday, or for oak to wear on Royal-Oak-Day. There is not a boy in all the parish who knows so much about birds and their nests, nor one who more zealously goes a-bird-nesting when blustering March comes round. Martin can tell you where the first throstle has built, and where you will find the earliest blackbird's nest. In his cottage at home he has a collection of eggs which would turn most collectors green with envy. And yet his collection has been made without robbery or cruelty, for he has never pilfered a poor bird of all her eggs, nor destroyed the nest reared with such infinite labour by the feathered architect. The old man is too great a lover and worshipper of Nature to inflict pain on one of nature's belongings. How great a lover of things beautiful he is you can see for yourself when you meet him going homeward after his day's toil. It is a sight which a man does not forget, and which an artist would love. You stand in some quiet country lane, and between the green, high hedges you see Edward the donkey approaching with Martin on his back, his long legs dangling almost to the ground, over which the humble steed steps deliberately. On Martin's smock there is carefully

*The Wonderful Wapentake*

pinned a great bunch of flowers, primroses, honeysuckles, hyacinths, or violets ; in Edward's head-gear there is a bunch of May-blossom or a branch of fragrant pine, that waves and nods between his long ears like the war-plume of a conqueror. So they go their way, both satisfied and happy. The old woodman has done his day's work, and earned his right to repose by his cottage fire.

*LADS WILL BE LADS*

SHADRACH PARKER and I had been tramping for an hour or more along the highway. We had foregathered at Dead Man's Copse, where old Timothy's body swung in chains for many a long year, and became first bones, and then dust and nothingness. I had been into the copse to look at a stock-dove's nest, and it was the sound of my feet breaking the dry twigs that made Shadrach put down his gun and seat himself on the nearest stone-heap, to await my appearance through the yawning gap in the hedge. When I came out he looked at me out of one eye.

"Oh," said he: "it's you, is it?"

That meant that all was right. If I had been somebody else—Jim Doubleday, the poacher, for example—there would have been conversation, recrimination, possibly a fight, and certainly an appearance before Mr. Justice Shallow on the



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

following Saturday. For Shadrach was a game-keeper, and a zealous one.

When he had filled his pipe out of my pouch, Shadrach looked up at me again with a curious mixture of pathos and disappointment in his eyes.

"'Tis main curious," said he, "that a man should ha' so many disappointments in this life. I'd aimed 'at you was that lad o' Farmer Tomkinson's. It's about his time for passing here on his way home from school, and the young varmint has taken of going into that there coppice and disturbing my young pheasants. Drat his bones! says I. So I sits down on this stone-heap, meaning to talk to him with my ash-plant when he comes out. But it wa'n't him at all—only you."

I said I was sorry to have disappointed him, and mentally resolved to give Tomkinson's boy a hint next time we met. Then we went along the road in the direction of the "Cow and Kitten," and the walk was a pleasant one. We passed Tomkinson's boy on the road. He was round-eyed and innocent, and looked at Shadrach with the guileless eyes of an angel or a baby, but I knew what desperate deeds in the way of fur and feather hunting lay black upon his young soul. Shadrach growled as he passed, and remarked that some day

### *Lads will be Lads*

he would catch him and make an example of him. That was not wise ; no man should boast where it is a question of adult wrath and juvenile cunning, and Tomkinson's boy is a veritable Indian in all the resources of woodcraft.

Shadrach had not forgotten his disappointment when we reached the "Cow and Kitten." There were several ancient gaffers there, sitting in the kitchen, which was warm and comfortable, and not so grand and awe-inspiring as the front parlour, where the fire was not lighted every day. He took up his mug of ale with the remark that life was "very worriting," and proceeded to inform the company that he had meant to introduce his ash-plant to a certain young rapscaillon's back, and had been circumvented, and grieved accordingly.

"Aw," said Barty Sutton, in the chimney corner, "but lads will be lads. 'Tis human natur. I was a lad myself upon a time."

"A long time, too," said somebody.

"Why, faith, neighbour, and you may say that. Come St. Mark's eve, I shall be one-and-ninety years of age—a main long life, to be sure."

"And a merry one," said somebody else.

"Aye, surely ; I never went through life weeping, Master Trippett. There be them that groans

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

and sighs, and makes mournful music, and likewise them that sing and whistle and give forth a blithe ballad. One of the latter sort I always was—couldn't see no manner of good in melancholy."

"It's well when a man can demean himself after so joyful a fashion," said Nicodemus, the sexton. "But a man may sing canticles of praise, and yet find occasion for lamentation now and again; this being a deceiving sort o' world at the best. Now, there was David, for instance. He was very considerably given to cheerfulness, but there is notes of mourning and woe in him at various times."

"'Cause there is a time for everything," remarked the landlord.

"I never had no time for aught but rejoicing then," said old Barty. "There was a deal o' joy-making when I were a lad. Seemeth to me that now-a-days folk don't run as merry a course as we did. Aw, the gay doings we did have, surely! Now there's keeper here a-making woe and lamentation over his troubles. Minds me, so it does, of a little merry matter that I once had wi' a keeper—a predecessor, so to speak, of this same Shadrach."

"Let's be hearing it," said Nicodemus. "A tale o' them old days is like sugar in a bairn's mouth—very sweet and consoling to nature."

*Lads will be Lads*

“’Tisn’t much of a tale this,” said Barty, “but it occasions laughter on my part when I think of it. You see when I was a lad of happen fifteen years or so the Squire gave orders that nobody was never more to take stock-doves’ eggs on pain of terrible punishment—sent to Botany Bay or some foreign part they was to be, if they sinned. But a lad being of a daring nature, I cared nought for the warning, and one day I went to the Black Coppice and climbed a tree and found a nest there, and took two eggs out and came down again. Well, now, Stephen Grimes was the keeper in them days, and I hadn’t been on the road two minutes before I met him. We were goodish friends, me and Stephen. ‘Hallo,’ says he, ‘seen any lads about here?’ ‘No,’ says I. ‘What for?’ ‘’Cause,’ says he, ‘there’s a stock-dove’s nest in yond coppice, and if I don’t keep an eye on ’em the young varmint will be taking of the eggs.’ So I might ha’ told him they was taken already, and safely stowed away in my cap, where he couldn’t see them. But, of course, I didn’t. And then he said he was going to shoot pigeons behind the West Wood, and would I go with him? Of course, I naturally said I would, and off we went, and stayed all the afternoon, and Squire Jones’s keeper

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

joined us, and we had a good time, but I took good care not to take off my cap. Well, as luck would have it, there came on a horrible thunderstorm, and the rain poured down amazing. 'We must run through the woods,' says Squire Jones's keeper; 'my cottage isn't a mile off.' So off we ran, and in due course comes to the man's cottage. The two keepers goes in, and makes themselves comfortable, but I stopped outside in the porch, 'cause if I'd gone in, I'd have had to take off my cap, and then where would the stock-dove's eggs have been? However, Squire Jones's keeper's wife she comes out to me: 'Do come in, Master Sutton,' she says, 'the rain comes in through the top o' the porch.' 'Thank you kindly, ma'am,' says I, 'but I'm warm with running, and I'll just cool down a bit.' So I stops there, but that there rain, why, it fell more amazing than ever. And they kept wanting me to enter, but I resisted. However, at last, the woman comes again. 'Now do come in,' she says, 'I've made a dish o' tea, and a drop'll do you good.' So I had to go in, but I wasn't going to take my cap off for nobody. 'You'll excuse me, ma'am,' says I, 'but I'll keep on my cap, for I've a bad cold in the head, and if I don't keep my hair covered it gets worse.' 'Dear-a-me!' says she, 'you'll ha' made

*Lads will be Lads*

it worse by stopping in the porch.' 'No, ma'am,' says I, 'it's better in a draught.' So I kept my cap on after all, and I got my eggs home in safety. And I told old Stephen all about it many a long year after."

"Ah," said Nicodemus. "A deal o' craft and subtlety there is in human nature. The way in which you dissembled is a striking illustration of depravity, as parson says."

"I uphold one thing," said the landlord, with a decisive gesture. "Human nature or no human nature, there's one thing certain—lads will be lads. And," here he looked round the kitchen with magisterial gravity, "why shouldn't they be?"

Nobody could answer that.

## *AN OCTOBER WALK*

THE train which had rumbled and rattled for half an hour over twenty miles of flat country suddenly came to a standstill, and the sound of a familiar name warned me that the end of my journey was at hand. I left the carriage, and found myself the sole occupant of the little platform save for a sleepy-looking rustic porter, who signalled the engine-driver to move on, and at the same time held out his hand for my ticket. The engine and its attendant carriages rolled away, the swing gates that had barred the country lane shut to across the metals with a sharp metallic clang, and the sleepy porter disappeared within his tiny station-house, leaving me all alone in what seemed to be a land of sleep. I walked out of the station and down the road. It was four o'clock of an early October afternoon, and the level fields and meadows and brown woods and coppices were half veiled by thick sheets of white mist. A fine shower, half

### *An October Walk*

rain, half dew, fell across the highway and made the footpath soft and slippery to walk on. Save for the pantings and puffings of the train speeding farther southward, there was not a sound to break the stillness. No spot in a mid-African desert could well seem more lonely or more thoroughly given up to nature and her influences. Trees, woods, and meadows, all soaking underneath the October mists, shut me in on every side, and above them hung the grey, dull sky, guiltless of sunlight from east to west. The picture was English, and therefore pleasing to the eye, and full of possibilities for the imagination ; but it was lonely and somewhat chilling for all that, and its very solitude and dreariness gave an involuntary quickening to the pedestrian's rate of progression.

A sharp bend of the road suddenly brought me in sight of the village, an irregular colony of brown and grey walled farmsteads and cottages, brightened here and there by the red roofs and the gaily-coloured autumn flowers that bloomed in the otherwise deserted gardens. Here the loneliness was doubly accentuated. From end to end of the winding village street there was not a soul to be seen. It seemed as if men had agreed to leave outside things to the softly falling October mist. In the



### *The Wonderful Waspentake*

folded the cattle stood knee-deep in straw; here and there in the stack-yards pigs and geese foraged amongst the odds and ends of wheat and barley that thickly covered the ground. Cheerier prospects presented themselves with the farmsteads and cottages. Through their windows shone the gleam of firelight, and the scent of burning wood stole out and filled the air. The village smithy looked doubly attractive as its glowing fire lighted up the black shadows and grimy walls. That the village folk had not gone to sleep, worn out with the toils of harvest, the sound of voices in the little school-house and in the inn parlour attested. A vision of two old folks seated by a little tea-table drawn up to a cheery fire suggested warmth and comfort, while the sudden opening of a cottage door and consequent revelation of the cosy interior seemed to indicate that a damp October afternoon was not without certain recommendations. However chilly and dreary it might be in the woods and fields, there were compensating advantages to be had when the day's work was over and the cheery hearth was reached and enjoyed.

The long stretch of country road beyond the village looked bare and bleak as I came out upon it from beneath an avenue of elms and chestnut

### *An October Walk*

trees, the leaves of which had fallen and thickly carpeted the path. The steadily falling mist had thoroughly wetted the grass by the roadside, and the cart-track in the middle was soft and yielding. Its deep ruts suggested the recent passage of heavily laden harvest carts, and further evidence of harvest came from the loosely-scattered ears of wheat and barley that lay by the highway side or hung from the branches of the trees overhead. In the hedge-row the sparrows quarrelled and fought over these precious ears of grain, while others of their kind left the issue in doubt, and feasted contentedly on the scarlet berries that hung in heavy clusters from the hawthorn branches. The sight of these berries recalled the old wives' fable that a hard winter is coming when the hawthorns are heavy laden. This year they look more heavily laden than usual, and here and there some tall hawthorn tree makes a bright blot of scarlet against the brown and black of the woods. Beneath them, in the hedge-rows, are other berries, more appreciated by the school children, who keep their eyes open as they wander along the road at morn and eve. The blackberries, coal-black and delicately shaded as a sun-ripened grape, hide themselves from the searching dew behind their own broad leaves.

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

But they have little chance of escaping observation, for autumn has already thinned the hedges, and the childrens' eyes are quick to discover the bramble shoots that trail across the brown, bare twigs.

Following a footpath which led at right angles from the highway, I presently came to a field where a labourer was engaged in ploughing. For some time I had heard his slow and deliberate "Hauve—hauve—hauve" across the silent land before I approached the scene of his labours. He and his horses were laboriously plodding their way across a field which lay enclosed on three sides by thick woods, and which was damp and heavy in consequence. Nevertheless, the ridges which he had set preparatory to his final labours ran straight as a railway metal, and the plough deviated scarcely to right or left as the horses drew it through the heavy soil. Behind the stilts came the ploughman, keeping an apparently careless eye on his work, and in his rear followed two or three crows, which promptly seized and swallowed the fat worms turned up by the ploughshare. This is work which to a townsman looks easy. It seems so simple a thing to take hold of the plough-stilts, to bid the horses "gee-up," and to steer a straight line from one side of the field to the other. The novice, however,

### *An October Walk*

would cut but a poor figure at ploughing a straight line, even supposing him to be able to keep the ploughshare from sticking its nose ignominiously into the ground. It were easier to bring a Cunarder safely through a rocky passage than to speed the plough in a mathematically correct line across a ten-acre field.

In the thick belt of wood through which the path led me after leaving the ploughman and his horses, I found two youthful rustics engaged in nutting. Their clothes were thickly covered with the soft, searching mist, and their hobnailed boots were doubtless soaked in consequence of their explorations through the wet undergrowth ; but they were supremely contented, and had no fears either of ague or rheumatism. They carried hooked sticks and big baskets, and within the latter they had already piled cluster upon cluster of green hazelnuts. Now and then they paused from their labours to crack two or three fine looking specimens between their strong, young teeth, and to exchange reminiscences of former nutting expeditions. They informed me that this year was a fine one for nuts, and likewise for crab-apples ; and in proof of their assertion conducted me to a crab-apple tree where the fruit was certainly as thick as leaves are in

### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

Vallombrosa. As for the nuts, the hazel bushes were full of them. They hung in thick clusters high and low, and the kernels inside their soft, green shells were already sweet and of a goodly size.

I left the two lads to fill up their baskets, and passed on through the wood into a wide field, which but a short time before had evidently been filled with waving corn. Now it looked bare and deserted, and the long ridges of stubble seemed typical of the suddenness with which the crop had been torn from the soil that produced it. A score of geese, looking somewhat bedrabbled from a whole day's wandering through the wet soil; were busily feeding amongst the loose ears of corn which the rake had failed to catch. They lifted their heads as I passed along the path, and seemed to protest at my presence. I left them and approached a stile, close to which a labourer was engaged in thatching a wheat stack. There were three stacks at that point, all round, and all tapering to a nice point in the middle. Two of them were already thatched, and the man was of opinion that he would finish the third one in about three-quarters of an hour, as he had but one more course to put on. When I came up to him he was

### *An October Walk*

on the ground, but he presently mounted a high ladder, and ascended to the roof of the stack, carrying on his back three bundles of thatch. He remarked as he commenced to lay this scientifically on the stack top that it had been a bad day, the fine, misty rain having soaked him nearly through. Still he had kept his knees dry, thanks to his stout leather knee-caps, and so long as his knees were dry he did not much care. To get your knees wet, he said, was a bad thing for the rheumatism. In proof that his spirits were above all weathers, he began to whistle merrily as I moved away and left him smoothing his thatch and pegging it down with spelks and tar-band. He probably thought of the conclusion of his task, and of the cottage fire waiting to welcome him.

The lights of my own destination shone out before me as I crossed the next field. I could see them shining through the branches of the apple-orchard long before I approached the house. It was with a well-defined sense of comfort that I hailed them, for to my mind there is nothing so pleasant after a long walk along wet roads and through damp fields and dripping woods as the sight of the firelight dancing on the walls of an old-fashioned farm-house kitchen. It is worth all

*The Wonderful Wapentake*

the discomfort—if there is any—of wet boots and damp clothes to see the cheery blaze in the wide fire-place, and to hear the crackling of the logs of wood that are piled on at your approach. And were the discomfort of a long and wet walk in October ten times greater, it would be a poor heart that did not find it amply compensated for by the cheery greeting, the pleasant meal, and the long evening's talk and laughter that one still finds in many an English farm-house.

### *THE PEDLAR AT LARGE*

THE world gets smaller every day, shrinking in size as railway, telegraph, and telephone bring its inhabitants into closer contact one with another. It is easier now-a-days for the rural housewife to order a case of goods, and get it, from the many stores of London, than it was for her grandmother to lay in a winter's supply of tea and coffee from the nearest market town. London, even Paris, with their countless attractions to well-filled purses, have been brought, as it were, to our very doors; and the Squire's daughters, who, had they lived a hundred years ago, would have been more than satisfied with the mode of the previous year, are now no more than contented with the last thing from Elise or Worth. There is now no particular pleasure in paying that bi-annual visit to Miss Poesby, the dressmaker in the county town, which our grandmothers used to make in order to look at two-year-old fashions, and select so many light



### *The Wonderful Wapentake*

gowns and so many heavy ones. That, even amongst the farmers' daughters, is quite out of date. The cheap fashion papers are read everywhere, and while it takes an average man an hour to decide whether his friend's coat is badly cut or not, the ordinary girl can tell in two minutes whether Lucy's new dress is made according to the latest fashion or on a plan now obsolete. Between the church parade in Hyde Park and the walk to service through the corn fields there is small difference now-a-days, and in both cases the observers are also the observed. A desire to be in the fashion has taken hold of everybody. "I beg your pardon, sir," says James Footman to his master, the Squire, "but I 'ave instructed Mr. Snitchem, the tailor, to take particular notice of your new coat as 'as just come 'ome from Poole's, sir, as I desire to 'ave one made like it myself." And James wears his coat with the proud consciousness that Bond Street can turn out nothing newer, and little Polly Turnip's deft fingers fashion her new bonnet into a facsimile of that which the Squire's lady wore at church last Sunday morning, and it seems that a whiff of the Boulevards or of Rotten Row comes to us as we see all this finery in a Yorkshire village.

Of course, now that Regent Street and Bond

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Street have stretched out their tentacles and enveloped the whole country, there is no longer any room for that old world character—the pedlar. Fancy a packman of the old type coming into a modern village! Who would care to look at the contents of his baskets, at the gaudy neck-ties, the gay handkerchiefs, the red, blue, green, and yellow of his wares? Who would fall into raptures over his “real goold” jewellery, his glass “diamonds,” his hundred and one bits of trumpery at which our grandmothers—in their youthful days—used to gaze with envy and admiration? What modern boy and girl would care for his little stock of literature gaily coloured for twopence, or a penny plain? Where would you find a whole household ceasing their ordinary domestic avocations for an entire hour in order to listen while he gave them the news of the countryside? Alas! nowhere. And yet, and not so long ago, the pedlar used to be one of the most important figures of rural life. Nobody knew where he was going or from whence he came, and his visits were like those of the angels, few and far between. It was known that he would come some day or other, just as it was certain that Midsummer or Michaelmas would come, and in anticipation of his coming many a maiden

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used to save her pence and sixpences in the foot of an old stocking, which she kept locked up in her box until the eventful day arrived. The housewife looked forward to the pedlar's annual or bi-annual visit as an occasion whereon she could replenish her stock of pins, needles, buttons, tape, and other such useful things. The farmer secretly resolved to buy himself a new razor or half-a-dozen new neckties whenever Master Pedlar came next that way. Miss Priscilla wondered if he would bring any more of that lace which looked so becoming on under-wear. Miss Sue—nearly eighteen—longed for a string of beads. Bill—twelve—was saving five shillings wherewith to purchase a six-bladed knife; and Tommy, aged seven, had his mind's eye on a red and yellow backed broad sheet wherein was contained the true and terrible history of Phineas Pott, the Pirate.

And then the day whereon Master Pedlar struck the village at last! Tommy, or Bill, or perhaps Miss Priscilla herself, ran in with the welcome news that he had come, and was even now engaged in showing his wares at Farmer Turnbull's, across the meadow. Then what running and shouting and summoning of all hands to the

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pump—or rather, to the big, oak-raftered kitchen. The farmer himself must come from the barn, with straws sticking here and there out of his bushy poll, and his hand still holding on mechanically to his fork. Susan must come from the dairy, and Maria from the brew-house, and John must be summoned from the hayfield or the garden. Then perhaps the farmer would remember that a new barrel of beer wanted tapping, and the good wife would send Susan to cut a salad, Master Pedlar being remarkably fond of both these creature comforts, and it being also quite out of the question that he should depart unrefreshed.

You may picture to yourselves, you who can, the scene in the big kitchen when the pedlar had at last arrived and opened his pack on the great oak table. It was generally too large a pack to be carried on his shoulders, and he therefore took a pony about with him. While Bill took the pony round to the stables, Master Pedlar, with the farmer's help, carried in the pack, and opened it to the admiring and wondering eyes of the women. He had oil-covered baskets, and strange looking bundles, and funny little boxes; and from these he brought out silks, and velvets, and muslins, and prints, and dimities, and fine and

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coarse linen, and neckties, and handkerchiefs, and jewellery, and books, and everything that honest bucolics could possibly desire if they did their duty to Church and King. And all these fine things he spread about the kitchen, on the backs of chairs, and across tables, until the place looked like a bazaar or a dry goods warehouse.

As I have already mentioned, Master Pedlar's goods would not attract more than contemptuous attention from the rural young ladies of to-day. The colours were decidedly elementary; but, then, who in those times thought it against the canons of art to wear a pink necktie with a bottle-green coat? The pedlar knew his patrons, and laid in his stock accordingly. That enormous expanse of bright green handkerchief, with pink figures representative of an exciting chase after Reynard, was the very thing for the burly farmer. Those blue and yellow scarves, with green spots, were sure to be admired by the girls; and as for the scarlet roses, why, weren't they the very thing for the good-wife's blue bonnet, which she had wanted to trim up for two summers past? Look, too, at the stock of jewellery—diamonds with a light like the stars, set in real gold, at half a crown; lockets with true-lovers' knots on them;

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and chains of tremendous length, which could be twined round the neck and hang in graceful festoons across a Sunday waistcoat. Observe the array of literature—"Dick Whittington and his Cat," "Bluebeard," "Jack, the Giant-killer," "Sindbad," "Old Mother Goose," and so on. Look at the broadsides with the latest thing in ballads printed thereon; look at the Last Speech and Confession of the Famous Murderer; look at the rhyme made by Robin Rich against his grasping landlord. Then, too, if any one wanted a little serious reading, there was Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" and "The Holy War,"—to say nothing of the Church Prayers, bound in leather and gilded at the edges. There was something in the pedlar's pack to meet everybody's tastes.

Perhaps the pleasantest time during Master Pedlar's visit was the hour after dinner when the farmer and he lighted their long pipes and drank their toddy over the kitchen fire; while the other members of the family grouped themselves near at hand. Then Master Pedlar brought forth his budget of news, collected for many a month in his travels through the land; then did his hearers learn for the first time that John was dead and Mary married, that Simon had lost his wife and

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Thomas his leg, that David had got notice to leave, and that Reuben was going to marry John's widow. News of the outside world they got, too, and presently detailed all their own news to Master Pedlar, so that he could publish it as he went on his way at farm-houses where his hosts were as eager for a crack as they themselves were.

As beseemed so popular a character, the pedlar was usually one of those individuals who are "hail fellow well met," with everybody. To him the farmer would tell all his troubles—how the rain had spoiled the turnips, how the harvest would be late, and how the landlord was slow in doing necessary repairs. The good wife poured into his sympathetic ear the troubles of last churning day, when Mary was churning from six in the morning till late at night, and couldn't get butter, so that they all thought a witch had worked a charm on the cream. The girls would consult the pedlar on their love affairs, while the lads used to take his council on matters relating to fishing, cricket, and other pursuits in which he himself had had experience. His opinions on religion and politics were looked upon with the utmost respect, because he was a far travelled man, and considered to have

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“lights” on these matters which quiet, stay-at-home people could not possibly get.

When the new order of things came, the pedlar dropped quietly but surely out of sight. With the opening of railways, the little sleepy market-towns were invaded by an army of commercial travellers, who put into the hands of the drapers and mercers goods which took the hearts of the country damsels who saw them by storm. The maidens, who had seen nothing outrageous in the pedlar's gay colours, began to feel that it might not be quite the thing to wear a yellow bonnet to a purple dress. The new *modes* from London came down to the towns, possibly a season late, but still far in advance of the old styles with which the country folk had formerly contented themselves. Things also began to get cheap when the ancient and expensive method of carrying was superseded by steam, and the “bargains” of the pedlar's pack began to seem as nothing when compared to the “bargains” of the shop windows. One by one the pedlar's various lines of business were taken from him by competition. Even the children, who had thought his red and yellow chap-books the most wonderful literature in the world, began to despise them, in view of the flood

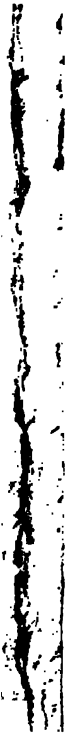


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of cheap juvenile books which came into the market along with steam and electricity. The flash "jewellery," which the pedlar had found so useful in drawing his female customers' attention, and which had made so many damsels' eyes sparkle, was found to be mere Brummagem, and not to be compared with the cheap brooches of the shops, nor with the Paris diamonds, which not even the most experienced eye could detect—according to the advertisements.

Thus the occupation of the old itinerant pedlar was gone. He was but a part of that old system of which we hear now-a-days with the same feelings which made us listen to fairy tales in our younger days. He has dropped out of sight like the mail-coaches and the once a week postal deliveries, and all the rest of the bad old things which are so delightful to read about, and were so very uncomfortable in practice. Now and then you may come across a representative of the old race, with pack on back and stick in hand; but no one knows better than he that the old times are gone, never to return, and that the village folk no longer look for him as they did fifty, or even thirty, years ago.





### *THE GREAT NORTH ROAD*

If you take down your map of Yorkshire from the wall, and with pen or pencil draw a straight line from York to Wetherby, from Wetherby to Pontefract, from Pontefract to Doncaster, from Doncaster to Goole, and from Goole back to York, you will find that you have made an enclosure round some of the best agricultural country in England. Within that irregular line lie some of the prettiest villages in Great Britain, and if you could cover it in a whole day's pilgrimage you would be treated within the four-and-twenty hours to a diversity of scenery which it might be difficult to parallel anywhere. Long, level stretches of meadow land alternate with extensive woods, the remnants of the great forests of a thousand years ago; here and there a pastoral valley runs between two long, low hills; now and then, especially if you go to the eastward, occurs a perfectly level plain, treeless, shrubless, inconceivably dreary. There are villages within



ALONG THE ROAD



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passing through a quiet village, now crossing a wide expanse where no human dwelling is in sight. It brings you into peaceful hamlets where Nature seems to lie asleep, where the only sound is the subdued murmur of voices from the village school, where the women are knitting by the cottage fires or talking to each other across the little hedge of box or privet that separates cottage from cottage, where the men are far afield following their horses through the brown soil. It takes you across little rivers, making their way towards the North Sea fifty miles distant, and spanned by grey-stone bridges, which look too ancient to bear the weight of the heavy carts and waggons which pass over them. At all times of the year, whether in leafy June or bleak December, a ten miles' tramp along the highway repays the pedestrian, so much is there on each side its broad expanse that is interesting. Not the least interesting is it at midnight, when in the darkness you pass belated farmers driving slowly home from some far-off market-town, the lazy rumble of their wheels and the plod, plod, plod of their horses' feet sounding far away down the road and echoing through the dull sound of the village clock striking the hour.

But the road is perhaps at its best in the first

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few days of June, when the trees have clothed themselves in their new finery, and the hawthorn blossoms, white and pink, smile on you from every coppice. A perfect feast of colour awaits you as you tramp along under the friendly smile of the sun. Here a chestnut towers aloft in pride of broad green foliage, its spiral blossoms of ivory whiteness scattering down their loose petals in your pathway with prodigal profusion. Through the vistas of the woods you catch glimpses of cool shades, meet haunting-places for dryad or faun, but only occupied now by white wood anemone or purple hyacinth. Every hedge by the roadside exhales a sweet odour of violets, though an inexperienced eye might not easily detect the little blue flowers amongst the moss and broad leaves that cluster beneath the thorn and holly. Now and then passing the gates of some large park, and glancing down the broad carriage-drive, you catch sight of hares and rabbits sitting under the long, low branches of the copper-beech, or frisking in and out of the small plantations studded like oases in the green expanse of carefully kept turf. Across the road will occasionally steal a cock-pheasant, gorgeous in the green and gold of his breast, and conscious of his



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superiority to his humble neighbour the partridge, who can boast nothing finer than his suit of sober brown. Sometimes you will see a stoat glide across the road, his evil-looking snout raised as if to sniff some trace of anything likely to make a dinner. In summer, where the road winds between grey crags or overhanging woods, you will often come across a snake coiled up in the sunlight, and often too sleepy or torpid to take fright at your approach. In the summer evenings, going along between the hedges, you will often see a hedgehog plodding along, with his mate not far away, and a touch of your stick will resolve the pair of them into two prickly balls, which the dog at your heels had best not touch if he values his nose.

And if there is no lack of lower animal life along the road, there is certainly none of human company. You can rarely glance along the white highway and find yourself alone. The genial tramp is always in evidence along the Great North Road. He is tramping from Doncaster to Pontefract, or from York to Tadcaster, or from Wetherby to York. You will probably meet him more than once in a week's peregrinations, and he will always be going somewhere, always carrying the same bundle, always ready to greet you with

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the same request for a bit of tobacco. The road would sometimes seem lonely were it not for the tramp, but he is a true member of the class who are with us always, and none of the fraternity of the poor are so ready to remind us of the fact. Besides the tramp, there are other faces to be met with along the road. Here comes a round-faced, red-cheeked farmer, seated in a comfortable, if somewhat old-fashioned gig, drawn by a horse that has done duty before the plough, judging by the sturdiness of its legs. The farmer is arrayed in cloth of decidedly large pattern, and the buttons of his covert coat are of Brobdignagian size, as is also the horse-shoe pin which fastens his neck-tie. The feather of a partridge's wing is stuck in his hat-band, and his hat is placed a little on one side. He is off to a fair, or to market ; and he thinks, as he goes along, of the price of wheat, and of the probable rise in barley, and with these speculations, if he be young, is mingled some hope that a certain rosy-cheeked Phyllis from a neighbouring village may go to market that day. If he be old, he thinks nothing about Phyllis or Chloe, but speculates on the chance of meeting good company at the ordinary of the Blue Lion.

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Sometimes, going along the road in winter, you suddenly find yourself, having climbed a slight eminence, in view of that pretty sight, a full chase after Master Reynard. Nothing makes such an effective picture as this on a clear winter's morning, where there has been enough frost to purify the atmosphere, but not enough to stop hunting. Far away in the valley beneath you see a little brown spot moving rapidly across the fields and meadows, and behind it a crowd of hounds, followed by men and women in black, in scarlet, by boys on ponies, by half the countryside on foot. Here they come, over hedge and ditch, grass meadow or ploughed field, poor Pug leading the way, and every now and then glancing over his shoulder with those shy eyes of his to see how far his enemies are from him. A stiff double fence breaks the line, and while Reynard and the dogs slip away through it, more than one of the field pulls up and glances round for a convenient gape or gap. Ah! an adventurous spirit dashes at the fence and clears it, and goes away after the hounds with renewed spirit. Others follow, settling hats on heads and spurring horses with fierce determination. Smash! Crash! A gallant bay has caught a foot in the stiff branches

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and toppled over, shooting his hapless rider overhead like a shot from a catapult, and rolling him into the long grass with undignified haste. Another comes to similar grief farther down ; and while the rest of the field get safely over or through, two luckless wights are seen, hatless and dirty, running with rueful countenances after their steeds, who, rider or no rider, are minded to continue the chase. Still Reynard goes on, taking a straight line for a wood four miles away, where he knows of a certain haunt in whose cool depths he can sit and snigger at the baffled hounds. On sweeps the field, the hounds galloping forward with fierce determination, the horses moving in a little cloud of steam with distended nostrils and blazing eyes, until a long plantation shuts out the gay crowd—black, red, and white—from your eyes. Ah ! there comes a merry blast from the huntsman's horn, and a chorus of yelps and howls from the dogs. They have pulled poor Reynard down and killed him, and there is one fox less to disturb the housewife's chickens.

The road is always busy in harvest, and you cannot walk a mile along it then without meeting brown-faced, brown-armed men clad in the

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scantiest fashion, but hot and dusty with their labours amongst the golden grain. The road is worn deep with the pressure of cart-wheels, and yellow ears of wheat and barley are scattered in rich extravagance over every yard of it. The heavily laden carts and waggons jolt slowly along, the horses groaning as they come to an incline, and the great sheaves above swaying to and fro as the wheels bump over the stones in the ruts. Turn aside for a moment into the fields and see how hard the agricultural labourer works during the time the crops are gathered and garnered. If you can catch him at drinking-time he may, over his bread and cheese and ale, tell you something about his day's labour; at any other time he is too busy even to say "Good morning" to you. He was up at four o'clock, and in the harvest-field by half-past five, and as there threatens to be rain to-morrow or possibly to-night, it will most likely be ten o'clock in the evening when he has finished. You will notice as he goes back to his task, that he works away with a will and shirks nothing. The reaping machine—instrument of modern science which has superseded sickle and scythe—whirrs round the standing corn and lays it low on the ground in

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compact sheaves. See how the labourer twists a band—something that a townsman might try in vain to do for a year—gathers up the loose sheaf, ties it up, and throws it on one side. By the time he has finished the machine has whirred round again to him, and so it goes on all day, the modern tiller of the ground literally earning his bread by the sweat of his brow.

Such are some of the sights and sounds that may be seen by any man with eyes for all that is beautiful and sylvan along our Yorkshire highways—such are the sweets that nature can offer to those who would rather take a week's rest in the depths of the land than in the crowded places of some fashionable resort. Here is no glare or glitter of gas, no retailing of the last fashionable gossip, no ceaseless blare of brass band ; but in their place is what some men deem much more attractive—the pure light of sun and moon, the whispers of nature herself, and the music of her hundred voices in wood and field.

### *THE WAYSIDE INN*

GOING along those great highways which were once the chief channels of communication between our principal towns and cities, or through the narrower by-roads which connect village with village, the observant traveller must often notice an occasional solitary building standing deserted and dark by the wayside. There is perhaps a courtyard in front, the pavement of which is obscured by grass and weeds; and round the courtyard are stables, extensive enough to harbour a score of horses. Probably no other house is near, and the next village is two or three miles away. How came such a building to be reared in so lonely a spot? and how, having been reared, came it to be deserted and left to decay? The answer is not far to seek. These solitary wayside houses were inns sixty or eighty years ago—inns by the highway-side, where a brisk business was done all day, and arrivals and departures were occurring every moment. The







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door was always open; the courtyard constantly re-echoed the tramping of horses' feet. Coaches drove north; coaches drove south. The postchaise dashed up to the door; new horses were put to while the traveller drank a glass of home-brewed ale; and away went the equipage again, up hill, down dale, while the land unrolled itself like a map. Around these wayside inns there was always plenty of bustle and life until Steam, spreading across the land its network of iron rails, drove the old-fashioned methods of locomotion away, and with them the trade of the ancient hostelries. Then the road-side taverns were closed, and their windows became darkened, and grass grew in the stable-yards, and the old houses stood, monuments of the ancient *régime*, looking sadly at the new order of things.

They were picturesque, comfortable places, those old wayside inns, as any one may know who is fortunate enough to come across one that is still tenanted and preserved pretty much as in the old days. One such I know, standing in a solitary district, which is a perfect type of what the old road-side tavern was. Probably it has changed in nothing during the last hundred years, save in the number of its customers. Now, during the summer,

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you may enter its doors at any hour of the day, and find no one in the house save a passing farmer or waggoner, whose team rests outside. In winter it wears a busier aspect, because the land just there is a famous hunting country, and in the capacious stables of this wayside inn many lovers of the chase keep their half-dozen hunters during the season, and live in the house themselves. But in the quiet summer months, when the hounds cease to trouble Master Reynard, this old inn is peaceful as a church, and one may well dream a whole day away in and about its grey walls. Then does something of the past come back, and a glimpse of old English life interposes between the modern individual and his modern world.

This wayside inn is an old house standing in a quaint garden, rich in flowers and shrubs and trees. The walls of the inn are liberally covered with creeping plants, honeysuckle, jasmine, roses. Under the tall elms in one corner of the spacious garden there is a rustic seat, where one may well and profitably spend an hour in admiring the quiet landscape of wood and meadow that stretches away for many a mile before the house. The highway runs at the side of the garden, slightly dipping to a small stream of water, which it crosses by an ancient

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stone bridge. Then it rises again, climbing a steep hill, and goes on by wood and meadow till the eye loses sight of it in the dim distance. In the garden there are always birds singing and flowers blooming in considerable profusion, and from a plantation close by there steals to your ears the humming of myriad insects. To sit in such a garden as this in the mystic twilight, perchance catching the divine notes of a nightingale in one of the neighbouring coppices, is an idyll.

Most people know how it feels to enter a very old house. As soon as you get inside the door there is a sensation of age and antiquity steals over you. So it is with this wayside inn. The great hall which opens into the courtyard is panelled with black oak, over which hang the heads of foxes slain after many a sharp burst over the stiff fences and grass meadows outside. The very chairs and tables present an appearance of other times ; the quaint drinking-cups inside the bar window are sixteenth century in appearance. There is nothing modern about the house ; your new-fangled methods of fitting and furnishing would be out of place here. Old houses, to look well, must have old appointments ; and so the old grandfather's clock still ticks in a corner of the staircase, the chairs in the parlours are after

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the style of Chippendale and Sheraton, and the prints on the walls are grey with age.

The pictures, indeed, are a noticeable feature in the economy of an old-fashioned hostelry. If ever you turn into one of these comfortable houses, you may be certain of finding a series of pictures in black, time-stained frames, hanging round the walls in bar and parlour and dining-room. One set will represent incidents of fox-hunting life ; the meet, the throw-off, breaking cover, gone away, and so on to the bitter end, where poor Pug is pulled down and finished. Another will present to you the salient features of the old coaching days, including the robbing of the York mail by Master Richard Turpin and his famous mare. Here and there, over fireplaces or in alcoves, you will gaze upon the counterfeits of Sir Chuffee Chumpney, late master of the Blankshire Hounds, or of Lord Fireaway, the famous amateur whip. These will beam upon you in characteristic blandness of expression. Sir Chuffee is seated on horseback, his mount being the favourite mare, Diamond, while around him stand his six famous hounds, Gay Lad, Sparkler, Harkaway, Dazzle, Beauty, and Smiler. Lord Fireaway is represented in the act of mounting Fencer, the famous steeple-

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chaser. In both portraits there is a background of village green and trees, and the ancestral hall of the Chumpneys or Fireaways appears in the extreme left, while the spire of the village church peeps forth on the extreme right. In addition, there will be pictures of country life, of fishing, shooting, and badger-hunting. There will probably be a portrait of the neighbouring village cricket club, proudly displayed on the mantelpiece. I like to see these old-fashioned prints. They prove that if country people have one special love, it is for the land and the land's men.

At this wayside inn it is still possible for a man to put himself up for the night with an accurate forecast of coming comfort. For himself there will be a cosy parlour, a good dinner, a dainty sleeping chamber; for his horse, if he have one, a good stall and sweet-smelling hay. He will not find the gilded palaces which people call hotels in these days one-half so comfortable as this old-fashioned room, where the light comes from a pair of old silver candlesticks, and where there are quaint shadows in the gloomy corners of the wainscotting. But the light falls on a cloth as white as good honest laundry work can make it, and it glistens against the scrupulously polished

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glass and plate. Say the right word to the landlord, and from some remote corner of the cellar he will bring you a bottle thickly covered with cobwebs, out of which the red wine will leap like a living thing. Then draw up to the fire, and reposing in your easy-chair, let your fancies turn to the long, long ago, which looks so picturesque from our standpoint. A hundred years ago, for example, this quiet, old wayside inn would not have been so peaceful as it is just now. Instead of sitting quietly here by yourself, with the fire-light dancing on the panelled walls and the west wind sobbing gently in the chimney, you would have been but one of many guests. The York mail perchance would have rattled up and discharged half a dozen passengers anxious to go east or west by post-chaise. Others, having come from the neighbouring districts, would be in waiting to take the vacant places. The horses are taken out; new ones are brought round with much shouting and trampling and halloing from the stable-yard in the rear. The coachman and conductor have got down for a moment, and are taking a little drop of something warm in the bar, just to keep the cold out. A short, fussy gentleman, enveloped in shawls and great-coats and

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travelling-cap, is stamping up and down the hall, insisting that he will be an hour late in York. A jolly-looking gentleman, having smelt something toothsome cooking in the inn kitchen, is lamenting the necessity of proceeding so soon. An elderly female, occupying an inside seat, puts her head through the open window, and asks one of the ostlers if the new horses are really safe, as she is so very nervous. Out come coachman and conductor, passengers who have dismounted to stretch their legs now mount again, crack goes the whip, round go the wheels, and the mail-coach rattles away over the bridge and up the hill.

But what is this that comes tearing along the high-road, making such a tremendous racket? A post-chaise, and the postilions are urging their horses forward as if their own lives depended upon attaining some great rate of speed. Up they dash to the inn door, and off jump the post-boys. A young and considerably excited gentleman pops his head out and demands fresh horses instantly. A sovereign if they are off again in two minutes! The landlord hints at dinner, a beautiful fowl with mushrooms. Dinner! What thinks a runaway pair of lovers of dinner, when an irate parent is following hard upon them? The occupants of



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this post-chaise are making their way as fast as possible towards Gretna Green. The young gentleman bites his lips with impatience as the ostlers bring round the horses; the young lady, trembling in the furthest corner, is almost sure she can hear papa's horses following in the rear. Off they go at last, the people of the inn looking after them curiously. Before long the angry father or guardian will dash up to the door, and shout loudly for fresh horses, and ask how far the runaways will have got, and manifest terrible impatience to lay hands upon them. If the runaways have only known how to play their cards, they will cause the pursuer to lose valuable time at every stage, for a guinea judiciously laid out will cause ostlers to delay, and stable-boys to leave a buckle or a strap loose, or even to surreptitiously remove a pin from the axletree. Then will the pursuer come to grief by the way-side, and the pursued fly on to safety and married bliss.

And now drives up to the inn door a great, square, ancient chariot, in which some jolly old squire and his family are returning from town. There is no hurry about their travelling—they are neither pursuing nor pursued. They will get out and dine, and go leisurely onward after dinner.

### *The Wayside Inn*

The old squire, bluff, hearty, red of face, and loud of voice, leads the way into the inn; his good lady, florid and comfortable, follows. Behind them troop in their four daughters, healthy, good-tempered, rosy-cheeked lasses, who have been to town for the first time, and can talk of nothing but the newest modes, and the theatres, and Ranelagh, and the thousand and one sights they have seen during their month in the capital. The squire calls for a bottle of port, and drinks the King's health like a true-born Englishman. Then he confides to his neighbour that London hath no doubt many attractions, but to his mind the country—meaning his own estate—hath more, and he shall be heartily glad to see them again.

So you might sit in this wayside inn during a whole evening peopling the ancient place with the ghosts of bygone ages. What feet have echoed through these rooms and passages, what faces have passed along, what voices called! All sorts and conditions of men have come here and tarried awhile and gone onward and no man knows whither. If we could but summon back for an hour the people that have come within these walls, now so silent, what a pageant would pass before us! And all are gone, just as everything that now

*The Wonderful Wapentake*

is will go. It suggests certain solemn thoughts, this musing by candle-light in the old inn parlour. The world, perhaps, is a great inn, where man stays his course for awhile, and then hurries forth again into the unknown future. Or, perhaps—but let us not moralise further. The candles have burnt low, the shadows increase on the panelled walls, the last drop is gone from the bottle. Let us go upstairs to bed and sink to sleep between lavender-scented sheets, while the soft winds sob and sigh round the old gables and turrets of the wayside inn.

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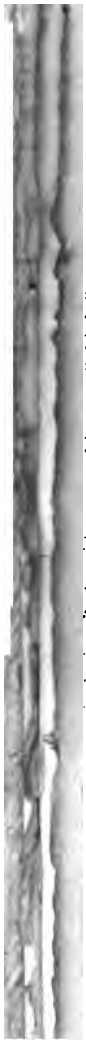
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