Joseph Hocking

Sham

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Sham

By Joseph Hocking

AUTHOR OF "PRODIGAL DAUGHTERS," ETC.

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1.

A YOUNG MAN stood outside the gates of Dartmoor A Prison. Although October had not gone, the district was drear and gloomy. The sky was the color of lead, while a heavy mist hung over the moors.

The young man, who stood at some little distance from the prison gates, looked at the grim walls which surrounded the prison with a strange expression. This was no wonder. He had for nearly five years been incarcerated behind those same walls. From the slightly elevated ground to which he had found his way, the prison build— ings were plainly to be seen; strong, forbidding, sinister.

"Free at last!" he exclaimed aloud, as he gazed about him.

He was not pleasant to look upon at that moment. Dark thoughts evidently filled his mind. Doubtless his long years in those forbidding, fortress-like buildings had made their impression on him. Not that he was a bad looking fellow. His features were well formed, and he was tall and stalwart. He was respectably clothed, too. Before he left the prison that morning the garments he had worn when he had been arrested had been returned to him. Somewhat old fashioned in cut they were, nevertheless a good tailor had evidently fashioned them.

Presently he gave a laugh, a bitter, mocking laugh. He was thinking of what had been said to him an hour before, and of the replies he had given.

"Look here, Treleaven," the Governor had said, "I hope you will turn over a new leaf and become a respectable member of society. You are not without brains, and you have been blessed with a good education. Make good use of your new opportunities, and don't let me have the pain of seeing you here again."

"What opportunities shall I have, sir?" he asked. "What chances are there for me to become a respectable member of society?"

"There will be heaps of chances," replied the Governor. "A strong, well-educated young fellow like you can find work."

“Where?” asked the other. “From what I can gather there are over a million people in the country who can’t get work. Besides, I shall be a marked man wherever I go. It is true, as you say, that I have a certain amount of education. But what use will it be to me? Who would employ me? Before any would-be employer would think of giving me a job he would ask for my references. What references have I? Directly I had told him where I had spent the last five years he would drive me away as though I were a dog.”

“You have a good suit of clothes on your back,” retorted the other, “you have money in your pocket, and you are free to go where you like.”

“Yes, free to go to the devil,” the other replied. “Oh, yes, I know what you would say. There are all sorts of agencies for helping discharged prisoners, but wherever I went I should be looked upon as an ex-convict. No one will trust me. No one will give me a leg up.”

“Anyhow, see to it that you behave well for the future,” replied the Governor. “Don’t let me see you back here again. If you had gone straight you would never have been here. See that you go straight in the future.”

“Straight!” he repeated, “straight! Does it pay one to go straight? Dartmoor isn’t what you would call a Paradise, but I see very little chance of my being better 05 outside than I have been in here.”

“You will be free, anyhow.”

“Yes, free. But what kind of freedom shall I have? Anyhow, thank you, sir, for speaking to me kindly. What the future has in store for me, God knows, I don’t.”

Afterwards he had walked through the prison gates with a jaunty air. He had even gone so far as to crack a joke with the gate-keeper. For a time, at all events, he could hold up his head again. The warders, who had nightly locked him in his cell, no longer had control over him. He need no lunger grovel before those who had been set in authority over him.

“Don’t let me see you back here again,” said the man at the prison gates, echoing the Governor’s words.

Treleaven laughed; “You will stay here, I suppose?” he replied.

“I expect so. Why?”

“I pity you, that’s all. You were here when I came, and you are here now that I am going. What a life for a man!”

Nevertheless it was not without a certain exhilaration that he passed into freedom. The day was cold and dreary2 the misty atmosphere of the moors

enveloped him, but, at any rate, he was free. He had no longer to be obedient to orders, he had no longer to mingle with the scum of the earth, no longer had to slave in the quarries. He looked at his hands: they were coarsened and hardened by labor. His finger-nails were jagged and torn; his finger-tips gave evidence of the rough work he had been doing.

What should he do with his life?

As he had said to the Governor, there seemed nothing that he could do. Hundreds of thousands of men, beating good characters, were, all through the country, out of work. Thus how could he expect people to employ him? Besides, he hated the thought of work. There was a good deal of the vagrant in his nature, and he was stirred by few noble impulses.

Hugh Treleaven was now nearly thirty years of age. His father had been a successful solicitor, and had had great ambitions for his son. He had sent him to a good public school as a boy, from which he had passed on to the University. He had destined him for the Bar, and Hugh, possessing as he did more than the average amount of brains, had, while he was a very young fellow, passed his examinations. Directly he was called to the Bar, however, his father had died, leaving him alone in the world. Moreover, fortunately or unfortunately for him, his father had been unsuccessful in some speculations, and thus at his death Hugh found himself practically penniless. Then followed evil days. Perhaps there are few professions more dificult than that of a young barrister without money, without influence, and without briefs, and Hugh Treleaven possessed neither the grit nor the character necessary to tide him over such a time. As a consequence he drifted.

For a time he obtained a precarious living as best he could, without making any headway in the profession his father had chosen for him. Before long he found himself in dificulty. He had linked himself up with a lot of worthless fellows, whose influence upon him was entirely bad. Later he found himself mixed up in transactions which could only have one end. Then the end came. He was found guilty of forgery and embezzlement, and was sentenced to five years' penal servitude.

And now that he was free again the man in him was not dead. He was glad he had no relations who could feel shame or sorrow because of him. He was glad that his mother was not alive; glad that his father had died before disgrace fell upon him. Moreover, he still had a sneaking fondness for what was termed respectable. He had shrunk from the blatant coarseness

of his prison companions, even shuddering at the bestiality which was often manifested.

Presently a look of resolution came into his eyes, and buttoning up his coat, he started to walk across the moors. Leaving the Princetown Station on his left, he wended his way in the direction of Tavistock. He hardly noticed that the day was dark, and cold, and mist laden. Not a break in the clouds was to be seen.

When the sky is clear and the sun is shining the Dartmoors present a fine and inspiring appearance. There is something majestic in the sweep of hill and dale, something that seems to make life a grand thing. But that day it was cold and depressing. Not a breath of wind blew. Not a solitary traveler was to be seen.

"Straight!" he muttered. "I'm ready to do any devilish thing if it would get me out of England." Again he reflected on the years he had spent behind the stone walls of Dartmoor Jail, years of unrelieved gloom. "And it's October," he went on thinking, "and there will be months of winter before spring commences."

The shriek of a railway engine met his ears, and it seemed to put a new idea into his head.

"After all, why not?" he said aloud. "I have enough money for that, and I might be able to find a place in Plymouth where I can get a shake-down. Perhaps, who knows, something may turn up there."

An hour later he reached a little wayside station.

"How long before there's a train for Plymouth?" he asked a porter.

"One in ten minutes, sir," the porter replied respectfully.

The word "sir" caused him to straighten himself. It brought back old memories, old hopes. He had been almost afraid to enter the station. He had the feeling that the stamp of Dartmoor Jail was upon him. Thus to be spoken to respectfufly and called "sir" gave him a sort of confidence.

Finding his way into a waiting-room, he found himself looking into a mirror. No, he was not such a bad-looking fellow, after all. There were no broad arrows upon his .clothes. He was away from that hell upon earth.

A little later he found himself alone in a third-class carnage.

What should he do? If he could only get out of England, where no one knew his name and no one knew his past, there might be some chance for him. Chance for what? What did he want to do or be? All moral ambition seemed dead within him. He hated the thought of work. What he most

desired was to get away somewhere where he was unknown, with enough money to enable him to go to the devil in his own way.

Arriving at Plymouth, he eventually found his way to a public house frequented by sailors. No one asked him any questions, or seemed to regard him as in any way out of the ordinary. He was glad of this. He might hear of something whereby he could fashion his future. After a time he found himself talking to sailors, men who had strange tales to tell about distant lands, and of chances across the seas. Many of them worked on cargo boats and tramp steamers. He wondered—

A week later Hugh Treleaven had been sufficiently fortunate, or unfortunate, in getting a job on one of the worst boats that ever left Plymouth Harbor. Where it was going he scarcely knew, neither did he are. He heard talk about the Bay of Biscay, Madeira, and various places on the African Coast. A rough set of fellows made up the crew. The Captain was a drunkard and a bully; the other officers were little better. But Hugh heeded not. The Black Swan, which was the name of the boat, gave him his opportunity to get out of England and to travel to a sunny clime.

As it happened the seas were calm, so he did not suffer the agonies of sea sickness which he might otherwise have suffered. Indeed, after the first few days he began to enjoy himself, and but for one thing might have decided to stay on this old boat. That one thing, however, possibly gave direction to the whole future of his life.

He had not been at sea more than a few days before he had the feeling that the mate was constantly looking at him suspiciously. At first it was only a passing fancy; but presently it became a certainty. He had been called upon to perform a duty, and he had done it awkwardly, clumsily. This was no wonder, for Hugh Treleaven knew nothing of seafaring life.

“You—fool!” said the mate with a sanguinary adjective, “do you call yourself a sailor?”

“No more than I should call you a gentleman,” replied Treleaven.

“You wouldn’t deceive me if you did,” and the mate laughed tauntingly. uVl’hat’s more, your name isn’t Bill Barnes. It’s something a—sight more high-falutinl"

Treleaven was silent.

“I’ve touched you, haven’t I?” and again the mate laughed tauntingly. "We’re not a very tony crew on this boat, but we’ve none of your sort here.

An altercation followed, of which the less said the better.

Hugh Treleaven had fancied that his early pride had forsaken him, but he found out his mistake. The mate was an evil-dispositioned fellow, and seemed to take a delight in making his life a hell.

After this Hugh determined to leave the boat at the first opportunity. On arriving at Cape Town the Captain agreed to pay him 011', and to tear up the papers he had signed.

For some time Hugh Treleaven lived a precarious existence. He was a boots in a hotel, a billiard marker in a low tavern, a waiter in a restaurant, and several other things.

Had he wanted, he could have obtained permanent work in South Africa. But the curse of Ishmael was upon him, and he wandered from place to place aimlessly, and without thought of bettering his position. Still, he sometimes longed for better things. His father had been an honorable man, and had occupied an honorable position in his profession. He remembered, too, that his mother was a pure and beautiful woman. He had only been a boy when she died, but he still called to mind the sweet face of the gentle mother of his boyhood. This sometimes made him ashamed of himself, but not for long.

Presently he drifted to a mining district, and there heard of a rich diamond field which had been discovered far away from civilization. Still with the wanderlust upon him he made his way there only to find grim desolation. The mine had proved worthless, and the men who had put their money in it had given up their enterprise.

Looking around he saw among the ruins of the deserted mining camp a hut that looked inhabited. It was only a wooden shack, but it seemed much superior to the others,which had been built by the miners. He went to the door of the house and knocked. It was opened by a young man of about his own age.

"Yes, what can I do for you?"

"You can give me a job," replied Treleaven.

"A job?" retorted the other, looking around at the desolate camp. "What kind of a job?" He laughed as he spoke as though the question were a joke.

"Anything. I am not particular as to what. I'm starving, and I want to earn my supper."

The young man laughed again. "Come in," he said. "I can't give you a job, but I can give you something to eat. You look as though you have had a rough time."

“I have,” replied the other. “I haven’t touched food for the day, and my head is swimming.” He sank into a rough seat as he spoke, and rested his head upon the table.

A minute later he realized that a huge chunk of bread was placed by his side, and that a plate of corned beef lay before him. He fell to eating ravenously, while the other watched.

“Feeling better now?”

“Yes, I’m all right now. Thanks very much.” He looked keenly at the questioner as he spoke, and saw a good-looking, kindly-faced young fellow. For a moment he had the idea that he had seen him before, but he drove it from his mind. Why it was he did not know, but his mind reverted to the day he had left Dartmoor Jail, and to the waiting-room of the station to which he had gone. He remembered, too, that the porter had called him “sir,” and that immediately afterwards he had looked into the glass and seen the reflection of himself. Surely that reflection was not unlike the man who had given him supper. They were the same height and build, and their features were similar. But there was a tremendous difference, nevertheless. He knew that his own face was sinister, and marked by years of evil living, while this man’s face was frank and sunny. He looked a good fellow, too. One

who was in the habit of doing kind deeds, and thinking good things. Indeed, his host seemed to exude kindness, while his sunny-looking eyes and smiling lips made Treleaven feel as he did when he thought of his mother.

“I suppose you came to this out-of-the-way hole to get work?” queried his host.

“Yes, I did. It was reported farther south that fortunes were made here in a day. That’s why I came, and to travesty Caesar’s axiom ‘I came, I saw—I lost,’” and he gave a cynical laugh. “That’s been my usual luck,” he added.

“You are an educated man?” queried the other.

“Educated!” laughed Hugh. “What is it to be educated? So-called education except in certain grooves seems to be about as much use as side pockets to a frog.”

The other laughed again. “Yes, I suppose you are right,” he said. "By the way, it would help us to talk more freely if I knew your name.

Treleaven was on the point of giving the name he had used on board the Black Swan, and to which he had clung since he had been in Africa, but

something checked him.

"What's the good of telling you?" he asked. "Names go for nothing in this country."

"No, I suppose they don't. Have you any reason for not telling me yours?"

"Yes, I have."

Another short silence fell between them, while the owner of the hut looked at him steadily.

"You have no place to go tonightz I suppose? Of course you haven't."

Hugh shook his head.

"I am leaving here very soon," went on the other. "As K you see, this mining camp is deserted and there is nothing here to stay for. But you can spend the night here."

Hugh did not reply, but it was evident from the look in his eye, that he eagerly assented to the stranger's proposal.

"You don't feel like telling me your name, but I will tell you mine."

Hugh fastened his eyes upon the other's face and waited for him to speak. He felt sure he had seen him before.

2.

"I HAVE BEEN CALLED PADRE IN THIS CAMP," he said I with a laugh, "but my name is Bancroft—Frank Barcroft."

Treleaven gave a start, and a look of fear came into his eyes.

"I thought you would remember me. We were at Oxford together. I was at Wadham and you were at Christ's."

"I say!" gasped Treleaven, "don't—" then he lapsed into silence.

"I was sure I remembered your face," went on Barcroft; "sure, too, that you remembered me. We hadn't much to say to each other at Oxford, but your face was familiar. What a funny thing life is, isn't it? We little dreamed in the old Oxford days that we should meet out here."

"I say," and Treleaven spoke anxiously, "you won't give me away, will you? I don't want anyone to know who I am."

The other laughed. "There's no chance of that, my dear fellow. I'm leaving here very soon and going back to England."

"Why?" asked Treleaven.

"I have an offer of a living there. Oh, of course you didn't know. I'm a preacher. I was ordained almost directly after I left Oxford, and soon afterwards offered myself for mission work. I have been in Africa almost ever since, and have never once returned to England. What have you been doing?"

"Don't you know?"

"No, I have never heard. Let me see, I was in my fourth year while you were in your third, and as I came out here I have lost sight of nearly all the fellows I knew at home."

Treleaven gave a sigh of relief. Barcroft didn't know his history; didn't know what had happened to him since the old Oxford days.

"I have had a rough time," went on Barcroft. "I suppose, if the truth were told, I ought never to have offered myself for this kind of work at all. I spent three years down Lorna way doing what you might call pioneer work and I have had to rough it. The district was unhealthy, too, and I have been

down with malaria times without number. However, I hope when I get back to England to become strong again."

"How did you drift here?" asked Treleaven.

"I didn't drift," replied the other. "I came here with a set purpose. I learned that there was a huge mining camp here, and that; no clergymen or church could be found, so I thought it my duty to come. It was worth doing, too, and I really believe that I have done a good bit of solid work. There's practically no one here now," he added; "just a few natives and myself, that's all."

"And so you are going to chuck it?"

"Yes, I am going back to a country parish in Cornwall. As I told you, I am not very strong. I am afraid it will be a very easy job, but I hope to put in a few years of useful work until I am quite well again. St. Michael's will make no great demands on me."

Another silence fell between them. Hugh Treleaven seemed to be thinking deeply., He was wondering if he should tell Barcroft what had happened to him.

"I say, Barcroft," he said presently, "do you really believe in it?"

"Believe in what?"

"In—in—call it what you like,—your profession."

"I am afraid I don't understand."

"You say you are a parson," and Treleaven laughed a little mockingly. "Do you believe there's any truth in it?"

"I believe in nothing so much."

"Come now, be honest. Of course a clergyman's calling is respectable, and if he happens to get a good living he is on velvet, so to speak. But, for anything else, you don't think there is anything in it, do you? You were a reading man at Oxford, and specialized in philosophy and history. You don't really believe that there is anything more in Christianity than the survival of an old legend or fable, whatever you like to call it?"

"It's the greatest fact in the world," declared the clergyman earnestly.

"What? You don't really believe that Christianity saves people from sin and all that kind of rubbish?"

"I not only believe it, I know it," and still the young clergyman spoke earnestly. "Don't you?"

"I believe it to be so much hocus-pocus," replied Treleaven. "Of all the unbelievable fables that was ever foisted upon a credulous humanity, I think

Christianity is the worst."

For a moment Barcroft looked a little shocked and indignant. Then he gave a laugh.

"Look here," he said, "you have told me nothing about yourself, or about what has happened since we last saw each other."

The other looked at him inquiringly.

"Yes, I may as well tell you," and there was anger in Treleaven's voice. "I meant to keep my doings since I left Oxford to myself. That was why I asked you just now not to give me away; but since you are going back to England tomorrow, and will have no interest in talking about such dirty scum as myself, I may as well tell you. Perhaps," he added, "when you have learned what kind of a man I am you won't want me to spend the night here. I went off the lines a bit at Oxford," he continued after a moment's silence; "now I am simply a bit of drift. Why you are dragging all this out of me I don't know, but perhaps it will do me good to tell someone."

Whereupon he repeated to Frank Barcroft what had happened to him since he left Oxford.

"So now you know," Treleaven concluded, "the kind of man you are entertaining, and why I have no faith in your nostrums. If there is anything in your Christianity, why hasn't it saved me? I went to church like the rest of you when I was at Oxford, and heard your so-called famous preachers spout their patter—patter which had as much reality as the rigmarole of a cheap jack at a country fair. As for the stufi I heard while I was at Dartmoor,— save me from any more of that! Of all the twaddle that was ever talked we had the worst. You should have heard what the prisoners said about your sky pilots!"

Frank Barcroft listened to Hugh's recital in silence. Not a single word did he utter during the time he was telling his story, but a look of infinite compassion came into his eyes.

"Poor old Treleaven," he said presently, "I am sorry for you. I really am. I never heard a word about it. You were regarded as a good-hearted fellow at Oxford, and I often looked at the papers expecting to see your name associated with some important case."

"Case!" snarled the other; "the only case with which

I was ever associated was when I was condemned to hell for five years. But don't let's talk about that any more. It's too—too ghastly. As I told you, Barcroft, I have no faith in your pijaw, but you are a good fellow, a real

white man, and I am infinitely obliged to you. You say you are going to Cornwall, to St. Michael's. There are three St. Michael's. Which is it?"

Barcroft told him.

"Why, I have heard of it many times," said Treleaven eagerly. "I bear a Cornish name. 'By Pol, Tre, and Pen know the Cornishmen.' Treleaven is a well-known name in the county." He sighed as he spoke.

"Do you know any details about the parish?" asked Barcroft.

"No. Stay, though. Now I come to think of it, I have heard that it is one of those rural parishes far away from the mining centers. How on earth did anyone think of asking you to go there?"

"It was this way," Barcroft informed him. "My father was a preacher before me. He was Rector of a parish not very far from Dulverton in Devonshire, and was very friendly with a Bishop who had been with him in Oxford. He has been dead for many years now, but the Bishop, for my father's sake, I suppose, has always taken a friendly interest in me. He has written to me several times telling me I ought to return to England. I expect it was through him that I got the living."

"And you say you are leaving here very soon?"

"Yes. Arrangements have been made for my successor. Of course the mining camp is practically deserted, but there are several native villages near by, and my successor when he comes will carry on my work. What are you going to do? If I can help you in any way, Treleaven, I shall be only too glad to do so."

"What am I going to do?" repeated the other. "God only knows. Drift, I suppose. For that matter I see no use in living. Perhaps I shall find a nice deep pool and drown myself."

"Don't be a fool, Treleaven. God didn't give you a life to throw away."

"Don't talk about God to me! I'm sick of everything. What interest could God Almighty, if there were a God Almighty, have in such scum as I? I am glad of one thing, though."

"What's that?"

"That my father is dead. He would go mad if he knew. I was the pride of his life, and to see the thing I am now would drive him out of his mind."

"You will be a man yet, Treleaven, and will take an honorable place in life."

"Don't talk such—rubbish."

"But you will. I feel you will. You are not married, I suppose?"

“I! married! Man alive, what Woman would have me?”

“A woman may save you yet.”

They talked far into the night, and presently, when Hugh Treleaven fell asleep, it was to dream of a quaint little village in the heart of the country, in the center of which was a grey old church tower.

When he awoke next morning he found Barcroft in the grip of a bad attack of fever.

“I don’t think I have ever felt so bad, Treleaven,” he said. “I shan’t start for England today.”

Before the day was over Hugh Treleaven had become frightened. His friend’s fever had become a delirium, and he became fearful lest he should never recover. He was perfectly helpless, too. As we have said, the mining camp

was practically deserted; there was no doctor within call and they were far away from any center of civilization.

As day followed day his case became more and more desperate. What had at first been a ghastly fear now became a terrible certainty. Frank Barcroft’s days were numbered. He would never become the Vicar of the quiet little village of St. Michael’s. He would never go back to England again.

On the fourth day of his illness he rallied somewhat. His fever had left him, and he became conscious of his surroundings.

“Treleaven, old man,” he said, “my number is up. It’s all over with me.”

“Hold tight,” said Treleaven, saying what he did not believe. “You will pull through yet.”

“No, I shan’t. I shall be gone soon. In a way I am sorry, for I looked forward to going back to England; but evidently God doesn’t intend that I should.”

“God!” Hugh could not help saying a little scornfully.

“Yes, I mean it, old man. It’s all right. God evidently doesn’t intend for me to go back to England, but He has not finished with me yet. He has got work for me to do elsewhere.”

“You really believe that?”

“I am sure of it, old friend. I have no doubt whatever about that side of my life.” His voice was weak,and Treleaven felt sure that his strength was fast ebbing away.

"You see that bottle on the shelf?" went on Barcroft. "Give me ten drops out of it, with a little water. That will give me strength to do what I must do."

A few minutes later he seemed much stronger.

"Treleaven," he said, and his voice was more natural, "my successor will be here soon. I want you to stay until he comes and tell him everything. All my papers are in that drawers I want you to give them to him. I meant to tell him everything myself, but you will do what I want, won't you?"

Hugh nodded his head.

"And there's something else. I'm awful obliged to you. You couldn't have nursed me more tenderly if you were my own brother. I want to write something. Give me writing materials will you? They are on the table in the corner there."

Hugh watched him while he wrote with what seemed to him unnatural strength.

"There," he said, as he signed his name, "that's for you. It may be of service to you some time. I've said how good you've been to me."

That night Frank Barcroft died.

When Hugh Treleaven realized that Frank Barcroft was dead he was bewildered, almost bereft of his senses. As may be imagined, he had no great affection for the man whom he had for several days been nursing; nevertheless, the thought of being alone, far away in the heart of Africa, with a dead man frightened him. There was something eerie in the thought. Around him was the debris of the deserted mining camp. In the distance were the native villages, but that was all.

He remembered Barcroft's instructions. He had told him that he had left all his papers in a certain drawer, and that he must give them to his successor when he came. Who was this successor? He was in complete ignorance. When would he come? It might be any hour, but on the other hand his advent might be postponed for weeks.

Meanwhile he was there alone with a dead man.

Hugh Treleaven was visibly disturbed. Under ordinary circumstances the thought of death would not have troubled him; but to be alone with what but a few hours before had been a breathing, sentient creature, was gruesome.

He took the letter which Barcroft had written a few hours before, and read it. Yes, there was something touching about it. The man had in his

dying hours and with almost the last ounce of strength that he possessed written him a sort of testimonial. It stated that an old friend of his college days, Hugh Treleaven, had nursed him tenderly and had been with him at the last.

Where was Barcroft now? he wondered. Had the man's faith any reality, or was it so much hocus-pocus?

He stood for a long time thinking.

Presently he remembered Barcroft's words:

"My successor will be here soon. I want you to stay here until he comes and tell him everything. All my papers are in that drawer. I want you to give them to him. I meant to have told him myself, but you will tell him what I want, won't you?"

Hugh Treleaven went to the door of the hut and looked out into the night. How silent it was!

Coming back into the room, he cast a quick glance where Barcroft's body lay. Then he turned to the drawer of the desk he had indicated.

At first he found little to interest him. There was a diary of the work he had done. Also a statement of his financial position. Evidently Barcroft had not been badly of. Looking at his bank-book he saw that there was a fairly large balance on the credit side. '

His interest increased as he proceeded to read. A little bundle of letters especially interested him. They were from the Bishop of whom he had spoken.

"I scarcely know you at all Frank," he read. "I imagine that if I met you in the street I should not recognize you, but I am greatly interested in you for your father's sake. He was my dearest friend, and I promised him that I would look after you. That is why I want you to return to England. Evidently your health is in a bad state, and you have been overworking yourself. If you were here, I should feel that I should be better able to fulfill my promise to your father."

Hugh Treleaven unfastened and examined one bundle of papers after another. In a way he could not understand, it fascinated him to read about the friend whose body lay dead and rigid only a few yards away.

Presently he opened an envelope which evidently contained an important document. On reading it Hugh Treleaven was reminded of the diploma he had received on leaving Oxford.

"It's a Letter of Priest's Orders," he said aloud. "Edward, by Divine Permission Lord Bishop of—to our well beloved in Christ, Frank Barcroft."

At first a cynical smile played around Hugh Treleaven's lips. What a piece of mockery it was! Priest's Orders indeed! Just because some snuffy old man had signed his name, the possessor of this paper was a priest. Some people believed that he had the power of working a kind of miracle. Anyhow— Yes, because Frank Barcroft possessed this, he could go to any parish in England and—

He read the letter again from beginning to end.

"No wander he guarded this carefully," thought Hugh Treleaven. "If he had lived and gone to Cornwall, he would have been obliged to show this to the Bishop before he could enter into his living."

For more than a. minute he stood looking out of the window into the darkness of the night. Then suddenly an indescribable look came into his eyes. It might be that some thought of which he was ashamed, and yet which fascinated him, held him fast.

"Why not?—but it's impossible!" His voice was hoarse as he uttered the words. He continued to look out of the window as though he saw something in the darkness of the night.

A little later he turned to the drawer again, and eagerly examined the papers he had not yet read. Yes, there was the letter offering Frank Barcroft the living, and there in his diary was a copy of the cable he had dispatched.

"Well, what have I to lose?" he said at length. "Of course the whole thing is hocus-pocus;—but why not try it? Besides, I should be doing no harm to anyone. I shouldn't harm him. He, poor devil, is beyond being hurt."

A minute later he was trembling like a leaf, while in his eyes was wild terror.

"I daren't do it!" he gasped. "And yet why not?—I could carry it off all right. I know the ropes. I have been through the same University, and I know enough about the evil of sin to preach about it with conviction! Besides, there's the offer of the living, and here are the Bishop's Letters. All I have got to do is to go to St. Michael's, present these Letters, and I defy anyone to find me out!"

Again he looked around the room. The thought which possessed him made him fearful, even though it fascinated him. He went to the door again, opened it and looked out into the night.

“No, I’m alone—all alone!” he muttered.

As if to make assurance doubly sure, he walked around the shack, watching and listening intently. No, there was no one in sight. The mining camp was deserted. The native villages were asleep.

He saw a glow in the sky.

“It can’t be morning yet,” be reflected. “It can’t even be midnight. How that glow, then?” He watched it like a man fascinated.

A few minutes later he laughed. The bright crescent of a waning moon crept up the horizon, dispelling darkness and making everything almost as light as day.

“Whatever is done must be done quickly,” be reflected. “Barcroft’s successor may be here any time, and— and—”

He made his way towards the mining camp and marked the heaps of debris all around. Looking intently he saw a deep hole.

Yes, it could be done, and no one would know.

And yet he shuddered at the thought of the thing which seethed in his mind.

“If I didn’t do this,” he reflected, shortly after, as he lowered the body of his former companion into the hole he had discovered, “what would there be ahead of me? Nothing but a life of drunkenness, chicanery, and fraud—I’ll make one huge fraud of it and do the thing properly. Besides, who knows, if I were dressed in his clothes I might become a decent fellow. I may”—and he laughed aloud—“do what he called a bit of good work.”

On the evening of the next day a newcomer arrived at the deserted mining camp. He was dressed in strictly clerical attire.

“My name is George Underwood,” he said, presenting his card. “I meant to have come here before, but it took me longer than I thought to settle up my affairs. Still, I have come. My servant is outside with my trap. But, my word, Barcroft, you are lucky!”

“Why?”

“I hear you are going to a jolly good living in the West of England. It will be a change after this.”

“Yes,” assented Hugh Treleaven a little grimly, “it will be a change.”

“I hear you want to leave immediately, Barcroft,” remarked Underwood presently.

“Yes, I want to get away as soon as I can.”

“I shall want a long chat with you. You see, your work has been a little out of the ordinary, and as this mining camp is deserted—”

“Of course I will tell you everything,” interrupted Treleaven. And they talked together for a long time.

Within a month Hugh Treleaven stood on the deck of a vessel bound for England. He was watching the disappearing shores of Africa. In his eyes was wonder, cynicism, fear. There was something else, too, which I cannot find words to describe.

3.

THE VESSEL on which Hugh Treleaven sailed was drawing near to Plymouth Harbor. It had left Ushant far on the right, and in a few hours would land at the great port of the West of England. It was now nighttime, and by eight o'clock in the morning it was expected to land.

Hugh Treleaven was excited. It was no wonder. He was about to embark upon a new career, to sail, as far as he was concerned, upon unnavigated waters. He reflected that a hundred or so miles on his left was the Cornish coast, and that the people of St. Michael's, the little parish where he was to live, would be expecting him.

He tried to accustom himself to the idea. He, Hugh Treleaven, who was practically an atheist at heart, a ne'er do-well, a man convicted of forgery and embezzlement, and who had spent five years in Dartmoor Jail, had planned to become a Vicar of a parish.

"It's a great lark, after all," he reflected, as he paced the deck of the vessel. "I suppose such an experience as mine is rare. A few months ago I left Plymouth a casual hand on a tramp steamer; I had just left Dartmoor after five years' incarceration; now I am returning to it with a new appearance, a new name, and am supposed to be a respectable man. I have clerical clothes in my bag and I am referred to as 'the Padre.'"

He laughed aloud at the thought. Yes, the idea was funny. The whole thing was funny.

"That's what I have got to bear in mind," he reflected as he tramped from one end of the vessel to the other.

"Hugh Treleaven is dead. He is buried in a pit in the mining camp. He doesn't exist save as a ghastly memory. I am not Hugh Treleaven. My name is Frank Barcroft. I wear Barcroft's clothes. People think of me as Barcroft. The passengers on board this ship have spoken to me as Barcroft. No one has the slightest doubt about me. Yes, my metamorphosis is complete."

He had thought of this a hundred times during the voyage home; he had calculated upon the chances of detection; he had wondered what would

happen to him if he were found out. But he would not be found out. He had a water-tight case. Everything was as safe as houses.

"In a way I have changed my identity already," he went on. "I am getting accustomed to the idea that I am not Hugh Treleaven, that Hugh Treleaven is dead, and that I am Frank Barcroft, only son of the Reverend William Barcroft. No, there is not an atom of danger."

He went over the whole position again, point by point,carefully making mental notes of the situation.

"Why, Underwood accepted me as Barcroft without question the moment he came," he continued. "He called me Barcroft, thought of me as Barcroft, and naturally I played up to him. I wore Barcroft's clothes, and of course I was able not only to talk about my college days, but about my ordination. Everything was so easy. Barcroft had told me about his work during the long chat we had together before he was taken ill, and I have everything at my finger-tips. Every rag belonging to Hugh Treleaven was burned. For that matter no one saw him enter the mining camp. No one saw him in Frank Barcroft's hut. Therefore I am Barcroft. A good many of his books are in packages on this very vessel. All his papers are here. All his portmanteaux are in my cabin, with the letters 'F.B.' marked on them. Barcroft has not been in England for many years, therefore any little change in his personal appearance can easily be explained. A boy of twenty-two years of age is naturally different from a man nearly thirty. I have all Barcroft's money, and a list of his investments. As for the rest,—yes, it's as plain as a pikestaff." And again he laughed at the joke he was perpetrating.

And yet he was not altogether easy. It was true that his conscience had been blunted during the years that had followed his father's death. He was not by nature altogether vicious, but he had allowed himself to drift, and his companionships had warped and twisted a nature which, had circumstances been different, might have been in favor of good instead of evil.

But there it was. He was a fraud, a living lie. And yet while he determined to hide this lie, something at the back of his mind condemned him.

"Jove," he reflected, "don't I wish I were the man I am impersonating! Don't I wish I could go to St. Michael's as the real Frank Barcroft, with the desire to do good and to be true to the teaching of the Nazarene!"

During his journey home he_ had read some of Barcroft's books, and among others he had examined the New Testament Of course he had heard

it read daily as a schoolboy. He had read it in Greek while he was at Oxford; but now he looked at it with new eyes. He remembered that he would have to teach it, and in spite of himself he wondered whether there was not something in Frank Barcroft's faith. After all, it was a wonderful book,and it described a wonderful man; a man who had changed the life of the world.

"Anyhow," he determined as he paced the vessel, "I will give them a good show for their money. I will not let the parish down. And surely, after all, I can't be doing anything so very wrong, even if I admit there are such things as right and wrong. What should I be doing if I hadn't decided on this stunt? Most likely in some low den in a South African tOWn, while now I am Frank Barcroft, living a decent life. I am respected by everyone on board ship,—and——and—of course I'll do it!"

He went to his cabin, but he did not sleep. Looking at his watch he realized that in a few hours he would be at Plymouth. From there in a couple or three hours more the train would take him to the station nearest St. Michael's. He had no longer any fear of being found out; all the same, he felt strange. What wonder?

When at length the vessel drew near Plymouth, and as he saw the wooded hills and lovely creeks which abound on the Cornish coast, he became excited beyond words. He wondered with a great wonder what the future had in store for him. When the vessel entered Plymouth Harbor, however, he became strangely calm. He was Frank Barcroft who had worked for several years in South Africa; and who was now on his way to his new parish.

At length he found himself in the train nearing Saltash Bridge. In a few minutes more he would be in Cornwall. He was in a first-class compartment, and his only companion was a hale, rather florid-looking man of perhaps fifty years of age. He wanted to speak to him, but remembering that country people are often reserved with strangers he refrained from doing so; he thought that perhaps this man might think he was taking a liberty. It was now early summer, and the woods were clothed in living green. He thought he had never seen anything so lovely as the wooded inlets and innumerable bays which met his gaze. He sighed as he looked out of the window. There was something in the whole scene which influenced him strangely.

"Man alive, it's beautiful!" he said half aloud.

His companion in the compartment had been watching him ever since they had left North Road Station. He might have been wondering who he was.

"Ever been in Cornwall before?"

He turned and looked at his interlocutor. "Years ago," he replied.

"Excuse me, but you look as though you saw something wonderful in it all."

"I do. I have just come from Africa," he added.

"From Africa!" and his companion looked at him still more keenly. "Are you on a visit to Cornwall?"

"Rather more than a visit. I am going to live in Cornwall",

"Indeed! What part, if I may be bold enough to ask?"

"To a little village called St. Michael's."

"St. Michael's! Bless my soul, you can't be—" He glanced at the portmanteaux on the rack and saw the letters "F. B." there inscribed. "Excuse me, are you a clergyman?"

This was Hugh Treleaven's first test, and he had thought himself quite ready for it. Yet for a moment he hesitated.

"Yes," he replied at length. "I am now on my way to my new parish."

"Then you are Mr. Barcroft, the Reverend Frank Barcroft?"

"I am afraid I am not very clerical in my appearance," he replied. "Out in Africa, from where I have just come, especially in the wilds, they are not very particular about such things. But that is my name."

Why it was he did not know, but he felt somehow as though he had taken an important step in his new career.

The stranger, who had been sitting in the opposite comer of the compartment, came towards him eagerly with his hand outstretched.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Barcroft," he said heartily. "Let me introduce myself. My name is Trengrove, Hilary Trengrove, Squire of St. Michael's, and I am glad to be the first to welcome you. Perhaps you have heard my name?"

"I am sure you will forgive me," he replied, "but I am utterly ignorant concerning the parish. I have been in Africa for a good many years. Indeed, I have not been in England since soon after my college days. Up to a short time ago I don't even remember having heard of St. Michael's. That is why I am so ignorant."

“That’s all right, that’s all right!” exclaimed the Squire heartily. “You will be feeling a bit strange, too, I expect. Still, I am glad I decided to travel by this train. It seems like a special providence, doesn’t it? We down in St. Michael’s have been wondering for months what sort of a parson we should have, and we feared we mightn’t like him. But I am glad to see you, Mr. Barcroft, I am indeed.” And the Squire shook the other’s hand again.

“You are awfully kind.”

“Not a bit of it. And look here, if I can help you in any way I shall be only too glad. You must be feeling a bit strange. I thought I might have got a letter from you; but as you didn’t know my name I couldn’t, could I? Besides, everything is topsy-turvy in these days. I can remember tw0 new parsons coming into the parish when I was a boy, and both of them stayed at Budock for a few days before settling down in the Vicarage. Of course you will have heard from the Bishop,” he added; “as I the new Vicar you naturally would.”; Hugh Treleaven hesitated a second. Then he decided upon his course of action. “There must be no Hugh Treleaven,” he reflected again. “He is dead and done with. He doesn’t exist. I am Frank Barcroft. I have his past and his present and his future. I must think Barcroft, speak Barcroft, be Barcroft. The other name is wiped off the slate.”

“I will show you what correspondence there has been, Mr. Trengrove,” and he took from his pocket a packet of papers he had jealously guarded throughout the voyage. “These, as you see, are letters from Bishop Tyack to me during my stay in Africa. He was a great friend of my father’s,” he added. “They were at Oxford together, and were like brothers up to the time of my father’s death. Ever since the Bishop has treated me as though I were his own son.”

“Oh, yes,” murmured the Squire. “Very nice. I knew the Bishop well. I learned from the papers, with great regret last week that he was dead. A fine man, a great scholar, and a sound Churchman. No new-fangled notions about him!”

“You can imagine what a shock it was to me to hear it,” answered Barcroft.

“This,” went on Barcroft, for by that name we will now call him, “is all the correspondence that I have had in relation to my coming to the parish. There is the offer of the living,” and he passed a letter to the Squire.

“Yes, yes, all in order,” the Squire assented after he had read it. “I feel a little sore about this, Mr. Barcroft, but of course you are not to blame.

Indeed, you have nothing to do with it. All the same, it seems a little hard that I, who own two—thirds of the land in St. Michael's, should not have the gift of the living, but I haven't. That belongs to the Marquis of Gunnislake, and I see this comes from his solicitor. I remember, too, that he is a friend of Bishop Tyack's. Doubtless your father's friend will have written him about you."

"These," continued Barcroft, and he produced two heavy documents with a heavy seal hanging from each, "are my Letters of Orders. One, as you see, is my Deacon's Orders; the other, my Priest's."

"Good," said the Squire with a smile of satisfaction. He felt gratified that the new Vicar should pay him so much attention. Sleeman, on entering the parish, had not taken the trouble to show him his Letters. For that matter he scarcely knew that such things existed. All the same, as a lover of order, he was glad to see he had the Bishop's license, as he called it, which made everything straight.

"Well, I hope we shall be very happy together, Mr. Barcroft," he continued, after the other had folded up the letters and put them carefully in his pocket. "There is no reason why we should not be. You won't find us a hard people to deal with. As for the parish, there is not a more God-fearing parish in England. I am sure we shall get on well together."

"I hope so," replied Barcroft. "Anyhow, I shall do my best."

"Of course you will. By the way, are you High Church, or Broad Church, or Low Church?" and the Squire looked at him keenly.

Hugh Treleaven had never thought of this. Indeed, as may be imagined, it had not been of much import to him. He realized now, however, that it might be important. He had heard about quarrels in the various sections of the Church, and had read about the Romeward tendencies of many vicars. Then he called to mind what the I Squire had just said about Bishop Tyack, and also something of the conversation he had had with the man he was impersonating.

"I trust I am a sound Churchman," he said, "but have no new-fangled notions."

"Better and better!" exclaimed the Squire heartily. "Now I tell you what. You had better come to Budock with me for a few days."

"Budock?" queried the other.

"Yes. Didn't I tell you? Budock is the name of my house. The Trengroves have lived at Budock for I don't know how many generations,

and if anyone else but a Trengrove were to live at Budock the people would think there was a revolution in the country."

"You are awfully kind," replied the new Vicar, "and I should love to accept your invitation. To tell you the truth, I have been in somewhat of a dilemma. You see coming straight from Africa here has made it impossible for me to take the usual steps."

"Of course it has," replied the Squire heartily. "But you must not feel strange, my dear fellow. The Squire and the parson of St. Michael's have always got on well together; and although I have not always been able to see eye to eye with our late Vicar, we have always been friendly. For that matter it will be expected of you to stay a few days at Budock while things are being squared up at the Vicarage. Your *locum tenens* is occupying the Vicarage just now."

"My *locum tenens*?" queried Barcroft.

"Yes. Of course you didn't know, but Sleeman, our late Vicar, had to leave in a hurry. He has gone to an important parish in Leicestershire, and it was thought wise for him to go at once, so it was arranged that the Reverend John Trencrom, who has lately retired from St. Jude's, a parish not far from ours, should take your work until you arrive."

"And you said he was living at the Vicarage?"

"Yes, it was thought best. On his resigning St. Jude's he took a house some distance away; too far, in fact, for him to do the work of the parish. But you needn't fear. You will find everything in pretty good order. Old Trencrom is a widower, and has brought his housekeeper and servant with him. By the way, you are not married, are you? Excuse me for asking, but as I told you we know nothing about you and—and—" The Squire stammered a little confusedly.

"No, I am not married," and he laughed as he spoke. The Squire's question had aroused his risible faculties.

"That will be another reason for your coming with us to stay. By gad, you will have to find a housekeeper, and at least one servant. I suppose as a bachelor you will not need much attendance, but the Vicarage is a good-sized house and you will want it kept clean. Why, Mr. Rogers, who was there before Sleeman, kept four servants; but then he had a large family. He had private means, too," he added.

"And is Budock far away from St. Michael's village?"

“About a mile. It is even more in the center of the village than the church is. Yes, you must come to Budock and stay until Trencrom finds it convenient to return to his own house.”

“You are sure I shall not be inconveniencing you, Mr. Trengrove? Perhaps,” he added, “my coming will not be agreeable to Mrs. Trengrove. You will forgive me if I have made any mistake. Ought I to have said Lady Trengrove?”

“No, no,” laughed the Squire. “I am plain Hilary Trengrove and my wife is plain Mrs. Trengrove. We are just an old county family who have lived in the place for I generations. I am afraid a Trengrove will no longer be master there when I am dead,” he added with a sigh.

Barcroft did not reply to this. Nevertheless he looked questioningly at the Squire.

“You see, I have no son,” the latter went on, “and thus I am afraid the name will die out.”

The new Vicar wanted to ask other questions, but refrained. He must be careful not to offend any canon of good taste.

“Oh, I see what you are thinking about,” laughed the Squire. “Yes, I have a daughter,” and there was a peculiar intonation in his voice.

Still the new Vicar did not speak.

“Verity, We called her,” went on the Squire. “Her mother and I settled on the name the day she was born. It seemed so homely, and suggested the kind of girl we hoped she would be.”

Still the new Vicar did not speak. He was puzzled at the tone in which the Squire spoke.

“I may as well tell you at once, Mr. Barcroft, for you will soon find out for yourself if I don’t, that Verity will not be of much help to you in the parish.”

“No? I am sorry for that.”

“No, she isn’t what you would call a religious girl. Mind you,” and the Squire spoke earnestly, “she’s a fine girl for all that. She is as true as steel and as straight as a die. I’ve never caught her in a lie in my life. For that matter, she hates anything like deceit. That is why she won’t profess what she doesn’t believe. Perhaps it was owing to the free and easy influence of the school I sent her to, but she has given up everything like religion. She doesn’t go to church, and takes no interest in anything that has to do with

the religious life of the parish;—for that matter she was a thorn in the side of Sleeman. He said she hindered him in his work."

"In what way?"

"On the few occasions that we persuaded her to go to church she laughed at his sermons, declared that he had not an atom of reliable evidence for what he preached, and that his pretenses as a priest were a mockery. She didn't keep these things to herself either," admitted the Squire. "She informed other young people of her belief, or lack of belief. I did all I could to put matters straight, but she was too clever for me. She laughed at me just as she had laughed at the Vicar."

Barcroft's heart warmed towards, Verity Trengrove. He sympathized with her attitude, too. Remembering what he had felt a few months before, he understood that a modern educated girl would have no affinity with an orthodox parish Vicar.

"Don't mistake me," went on the Squire. "Although she has not an atom of religion, there is not a finer girl in the county. As I said, she is as straight as a die, and she hates anything that suggests deceit. She would forgive anything rather than a lie. Many of the ordinary standards of morality she laughs at, but lies are the devil with her."

At that moment although of course the new Vicar had not yet seen Verity Trengrove, he felt afraid of her. His coming to St. Michael's was a lie. Every word he would utter as Vicar of St. Michael's was a lie. His whole life was a lie. But it was not conscience that troubled him. It was something indefinable, unexplainable.

"I am sorry to have to tell you this, Barcroft," continued the Squire, "but it is better that you should hear it from me than from anyone else. You, as a parson's son, will have been strictly brought up, while your work since your ordination will doubtless make you shrink from many of the things which Verity thinks and says."

"Do you mean to say that she doesn't believe in Christianity at all?"

"Hasn't an atom of faith in it. She declares the whole thing to be a childish fable, and takes no pains to hide her opinions."

"And yet you say she is a good girl?"

"Yes, good, but not goody-goody. Sunday and Monday are all the same to her. As for saints' days and festivals— ah well, you will find out for yourself soon enough. Perhaps," added the Squire, "if you are abreast of

modern thinking, you may be able to help her. It would be a joy to me if you could."

The new Vicar was silent. Of what he was thinking who shall say?

"Yes, indeed, that's a good idea," the Squire went on. "You seem to be a clever fellow, and may be able to put things straight. But I warn you, you will have a difficult job. She can see through a fallacy like a flash of lightning. Goodness she respects, but mere profession of goodness is the very devil with her."

"Do you mean to say that she doesn't respect one's convictions, because they don't accord with her own beliefs?"

"No, I don't say that. She does respect convictions and is influenced by them. For that matter an old Methodist woman in the parish has far more influence with her than any parson because she simply believes in being good. But you should have heard her on the last night Sleeman was in the parish. He was up at the Hall—my place is called Budock Hall—and after we had had an evening together he determined to have one more try with her."

"He didn't do any good?" queried the other.

"Good! She shocked him; she shocked us all, and the worst of it was we couldn't answer her. You see, Sleeman spoke from the standpoint of a priest, told her he was a priest with a priest's powers. That was the devil of the whole business. She pierced his armor in twenty seconds, and tore his arguments to tags. But there, I have said enough about that, and here we are at the station."

A minute later the new Vicar found himself shaking hands with the station-master and the two porters. The Squire had insisted on introducing him, and Barcroft, determining to be true to his new calling, carried out the role of Vicar of the parish as well as he was able.

"We must be civil to these people, Barcroft," remarked the Squire, after they had seated themselves in the car which had been sent for him. "Besides, the station-master is a very decent fellow, and will do anything in his power to help us. Of course he's a Methodist," he added, "but we can't help that. You will find that your luggage will be taken to the Vicarage with every care."

The new Vicar was strangely silent as the car swept along the quiet country lanes. Although he had done his best, and thought he had succeeded, now that he was actually on the spot he could not feel that he

was the Vicar of the parish. He was outside of everything. Especially did he realize this as the car passed through the little village of St. Michael's. Everything was unreal, intangible; even the old church tower and the quaint little building which nestled beneath it seemed as a dream. Good gracious, how could he do what was expected of him? He saw villagers standing in their cottage doorways, and knew that they were watching him. Already they were forming their opinions concerning him. What should he say to them? How could he be true to the role he had adopted? On the outskirts of the village was the Chapel, square, plain, strongly built of granite. Wouldn't the people find him out? Should he be able to keep on deceiving them,—not for a day, not for a week, but always? Hadn't he better give it up before he went any further? Hadn't he better tell the Squire the truth right away?

But what would that mean? God only knew what it might not mean! . . .

"There, that's Budock!" The Squire nodded towards an old granite stone mansion that was partly hidden by trees. He saw the hills and dales which surrounded it, noted the river which coiled down the valley. That old house spoke of respectability and of position in the county. He heard the note of pride in the Squire's voice as he uttered the words, noted the look of importance in his eyes;—while he—

Yes, he would give it up. He was sure to be found out, and then—

The car swept up to the entrance, and a few seconds later a laughing-eyed girl appeared.

"This is my daughter Verity, Mr. Barcroft. Wasn't I lucky, my dear? I meant to have come home last night, but at the last minute decided to stay at the Duke of Cornwall. Then as luck would have it Mr. Barcroft and I got into the same carriage this morning."

But the new Vicar did not hear a word the Squire said. He was looking into the laughing eyes of the young girl.

Hugh Treleaven had never been a woman's man. Hence he had paid very little attention to them. Now he felt as though he were suddenly introduced to a new world, and he was charmed and frightened at the same moment.

He found himself holding the girl's hand and continuing to look into her challenging eyes. He saw questioning in them, saw doubt, saw laughter.

"She's laughing at me," he reflected. "She's thinking how she can make me an object of ridicule, thinking how she can score over me."

"Where is your mother, Verity?" he heard the Squire ask. "Ah, here she is."

“No, I will stay!” said the new Vicar to himself, as his lips tightened and his eyes hardened. “I will fight her and I will beat her!”

4.

THE LITTLE PARTY sat down to lunch, and the new Vicar found himself next to Mrs. Trengrove.

"I have no need to be afraid of her," Barcroft reflected, as he glanced at her kindly face. "She hasn't a shadow of doubt in her nature. Neither need I fear the Squire. He has accepted me without question; but I shall have to be careful of that girl. She is as keen as a razor, and if I make a false step I shall be done for."

The little party were seated in a spacious dining-room. From where he was seated Barcroft could see the broad lawns and far-stretching park lands beyond. When he reflected on the last few years of his life, the place seemed like heaven.

A little later he found himself talking to Verity, who sat almost opposite him.

"You will die of rust here," asserted the girl.

"How shall I?"

"The most exciting happening in the parish is a funeral," she replied. "Perhaps, though, you are fond of funerals?"

"They are not my particular form of amusements," he assured her. "But surely the place isn't as bad as that?"

"Oh, yes, it is. We are purely agricultural in these parts. Turnips, potatoes and mangold wurzels form our great interests. Have you ever lived in an agricultural district, Mr. Barcroft? Are you interested in farming?"

"I am afraid I am not."

At this point he was about to remark that as his father was a London solicitor, and as from fourteen to the time he went to Oxford he had been at a public school, he had had no chance to acquaint himself with country life. He remembered in time, however, that his father was not a lawyer, but a parson, and that he had lived in a country Vicarage in Devonshire.

"By Jove, I shall have to be careful!" he reflected. "There must be no lapses of memory on my part."

“Mr. Barcroft will have his work in the parish to do, Verity,” the Squire reminded her.

“And if he takes my advice, the less he does of that the better,” laughed the girl. “The only trouble Mr. Sleeman had while he was here was when he tried to make people religious according to his own order.”

“Come, come now, Verity,” protested the Squire a little uneasily.

“You know it’s true, father. The people don’t want any more religion than they have got. Those who are religiously inclined find it at the chapel, and if the Vicar drones out a quarter of an hour of platitudes twice each Sunday the congregation will be quite satisfied. We are a model parish from the clergyman’s point of view, Mr. Barcroft.”

The new Vicar did not reply. He was afraid of making mistakes, and he was determined to be sure of his ground before taking any definite steps.

“Do you mean to say,” he laughed at length, “that everybody goes to church or chapel?”

“Oh dear, no. From that standpoint we are very lax. It is true the old-fashioned folks are still religious, but the young people give it a wide berth. Are you one of the earnest kind, Mr. Barcroft? Do you intend to stir us up?”

He knew that she was quizzing him and trying to raise a laugh against him. But he kept control over himself, and neither said nor did anything which could rouse suspicion. Of course he felt strange amid such surroundings. It was several years since he had sat with such society under such conditions, but he had not forgotten his upbringing or the associations of his younger days. Besides, the weeks he had spent on the steamer had somewhat accustomed him to ordinary table manners.

“I expect you have lived rather a rough life these last few years, Mr. Barcroft?” It was Mrs. Trengrove who spoke. She was anxious to keep Verity from trespassing on what she regarded as dangerous ground.

“Yes, it was very rough,” he replied. Then, as he reflected on the five years he had spent in Dartmoor; the succeeding months on board the tramp steamer, and in South Africa, his muscles hardened. “Man alive, it was rough!” he reflected. “Shouldn’t I shock them if I told them the truth?”

“What kind of work were you doing, Mr. Barcroft?” It was Verity who spoke.

“Pioneer work,” he replied, true to his cue.

“And did you have nice people to work with?” asked Mrs. Trengrove.

"Nice people!" and again he thought of the past few years. "Nice people! The scum of human society. Many of them hadn't a thought above devilry and bestiality."

"And did your religion do anything for them?" asked the girl sweetly.

"Religion!" Again he remembered himself. "I am afraid you don't understand, Miss Trengrove," he replied. "All sorts of people drift to Africa, and while of course there are quite civilized regions, I was mostly away from them. I was in a mining camp when I first heard about St. Michael's, a good many miles from civilization."

"And did you have anything to do with the natives?"

"Natives? I should think I did."

"What? The blacks?"

"Yes, there were native villages within a short distance of the mining camp."

"I am told that a lot-of Cornish miners are in Africa," said Mrs. Trengrove. "Didn't they try to convert the natives?"

The new Vicar laughed again. Under ordinary circumstances he would have enjoyed the simplicity of these people.

"And was there any drunkenness?" persisted Mrs. Trengrove.

"Drunkenness?" he replied. "It was the devil's own curse."

In spite of herself Verity Trengrove was beginning to be interested in the new Vicar. Up to the present he had not been in the least clerical, and she was glad that he wore an ordinary tweed suit. There was something unconventional about him. The look in his eyes, which although she could not understand it, intrigued her. Under ordinary circumstances she would never have thought of him as a parson. Nevertheless, because he had come as the Vicar of the parish, her thoughts of him were colored by her preconceived notions.

"Of course you are a teetotaler?" she remarked.

"I a teetotaller!"

He started to deny it, then he remembered that Frank Barcroft was an abstainer. He had told him so on the first night they had spent together; told him that the devilry of Africa was generally associated with drunkenness and that he found himself obliged to be a teetotaler in order to fight it. Told him, too, that whisky was becoming more and more the curse of the African natives.

Years before he had been a hard drinker. He had drunk freely while at Oxford, and his father's heart had often been saddened by the bills for wine and whisky which had come to him. After his father's death, and when his future career seemed wrecked, drink had been a great factor in driving him further and further to the devil, and by the time he was committed for trial at the Assizes the habit had almost mastered him. During his years at Dartmoor he had perforce been an abstainer; but once free, the old habit had reasserted itself.

And he realized what that meant. He remembered not only that he had taken Barcroft's name and Barcroft's profession, but that he could be apprehended and punished for fraud. He had no right to be there. He knew enough about law, although he had not troubled about it for many years, to be sure that his action entailed a terrible penalty if it were found out. That he, an ex-convict coming to a parish like that, impersonating a clergyman, and producing his credentials, would be regarded as committing a criminal act. And that was not all. Not only had he taken Barcroft's name and profession, but he had been a thief. The money he had spent during his journey home was Barcroft's. He had appropriated his bank balance; he had practiced copying Barcroft's calligraphy so assiduously that he was perfect in it.

He reflected, too, on what would happen to him if his fraud were discovered. He pictured the ghastly future which stretched out before him. Further years of imprisonment, and then—

No, no, he had his chance now and he would make the most of it. Even although he suffered the torments of hell, not a drop of drink should pass his lips.

"Yes, thank you," he said quietly. "I prefer water if you don't mind."

"Now, Mr. Barcroft," the Squire said to him immediately after lunch, "I want you to make yourself perfectly at home. Personally, I shan't be able to give you much of my time this afternoon, as I find several things have to be attended to immediately. You see, I have been away from Budock for nearly a week, and there are several things that have to be straightened out. If you like, you can browse among my books in the library, or I have no doubt Verity would be glad to show you the neighborhood. Of course you will want to see your church, and have a talk with Trencrom. Verity will take you, won't you, Verity?"

“I should only be in the way,” the girl replied. “Mr. Barcroft would, no doubt, rather be alone.”

It must be remembered that the new Vicar was a young man. It must also be borne in mind that Verity Trengrove was a fascinating girl; thus the Squire’s suggestion made a strong appeal to him. It was years since he had been in the society of an educated girl, and he would have loved to have spent the afternoon with her. But he was afraid to fall in with the suggestion. For one thing he was not sure that the girl was pleased with the idea, and for another he was afraid. Verity’s searching eyes seemed to read his heart, and she appeared to understand the conflicting emotions that possessed him. Besides, he wanted to be alone, wanted to accustom himself to his new surroundings, and try to realize the inwardness of what he would have to do.

“I will not tax Miss Trengrove’s good nature so far,” he replied, “although it is awfully good of you to suggest it. After my years out in the wilderness I shall not be very exciting company for a young lady.”

“Well, do as you like, my dear fellow,” and the Squire went away to what he called his den, leaving him alone.

“I wonder if that girl has any suspicions?” he asked himself as he left the house. “But how could she have? All the same, I must be very careful, or I shall make a mess of it.”

It was a glorious day, and in spite of himself he found himself reveling in the scene of beauty by which he was surrounded. Budock was situated amid undulating country of woodland and farmland. Beyond this, however, was a wide stretch of moorland, and beyond this again was the sea. After the sterile wastes of Africa it seemed to him like Paradise, while compared with the years he had spent at Dartmoor—!

Leaving the grounds he found his way into a narrow, crooked lane. Everywhere was leafy beauty. Everywhere birds were singing, while above him was the blue sky in which fleecy clouds sailed.

“What would Barcroft do first?” he asked himself. “Supposing he came as I have come, what would he do?”

As if in answer to the question a turn in the lane revealed the square old church tower which stood on a slight eminence. Around it clustered the quaint little village.

“Yes, of course, that’s the natural thing for a parson to do. I must go and see my church—Man, what a situation!”

A few minutes later he was nearing the village, and saw how the old church tower dominated the place.

"Fancy me, an ex-convict, being here as the new Vicar," he went on ruminating. "Still, I must carry it through."

As he entered the village he passed the one public-house that St. Michael's possessed.

"The *King's Arms*," he read, noting the sign which hung above the door. He stopped for a few seconds and looked at it. There was an open space in front of the public-house, while near by stood the open gate of the churchyard.

He felt as though he were attacked by an overmastering thirst. No, no, it would not do. If he yielded to temptation his fraud would be discovered almost before he had begun to practice it.

He turned resolutely towards the churchyard gates, and a minute later found himself within the enclosure which had been the last resting-place of the St. Michael's people for long generations.

Passing down the pathway he saw a newly made grave. The earth which was heaped up could not have been there more than a few days.

"Think of it," he said to himself, "I shall be expected to officiate at funerals! I shall have to stand by the gravesides in a white surplice! I shall have to read those unbelievable words of which the funeral service is composed, and I shall be expected to speak words of comfort to the mourners. Still—"

With set features and compressed lips he found his way toward the church. It was a fine old edifice, and had evidently withstood the storms of many generations. Both church and tower were granite built, lichen covered, strong, dignified. There was an air of restfulness about everything, too. The tower with its four ornamented pinnacles rose perhaps forty or fifty feet above the many gabled sanctuary that nestled beneath it. There was nothing tawdry, nothing that suggested modernism in the grey old walls. Even the roofs were lichen covered, moss covered. Ivy grew over and partly covered the diamond-paned windows with their granite mullions. There was not a soul near. As far as he could judge no watchful eye was upon him. He was an atheist, he had no faith, no morals. He was a living lie, and yet he rejoiced in the thought that he had found a harbor of refuge. As long as he was undiscovered he was safe, and there was no danger of the truth being know. He had his credentials, and he was in a quiet out-of-the-way village

where he could spend the rest of his life in peace. Could he, though? How could a man of thirty years of age, with such a past as his, bear the thought of burying himself in this out-of-the-world hole? But if he didn't—

He entered the little porch. It seemed a part of the church itself. The granite stones beneath his feet had been worn throughout the centuries by the worshipers coming through. Age was stamped on the granite stones of which the fluted arch was composed. On each side of the porch were stone seam, while above them were the parish notices.

"I positively must accustom myself to the idea," he reflected, and then he turned towards the iron-studded door which hid the interior of the sanctuary. He placed his hand upon the iron ring, while a feeling like terror came into his heart, then he turned it and found himself within the walls of the little building. There were no signs of restoration, and he could not help being glad. At that moment he hated the modern world; hated its tawdriness, its eternal craving to have everything done quickly. There were no signs of haste here, at all events; everything was as it should be. The baptismal font, which stood near by him, was carved out of solid granite. The old oak pews with their quaintly carved figures at each end might be worm-eaten, but they touched his heart strangely.

He had closed the door behind him, and now stood alone in the church of which he was Vicar. Almost like magic the past receded into dim distance; the years he had spent at Dartmoor became only a dream; his life in Africa be— came as nothing, even his conversation with Verity Trengrove was far, far away. He was alone in this old parish church.

Gad, how silent it was!

Outside the song of the birds had greeted him; he had heard the rumbling of distant carts; the occasional voices of laborers while at work; but here all was silent as death.

Passing down the middle aisle he drew near the pulpit, and then, like a man in a dream, he climbed the steps and faced the pews. As he looked he thought they became peopled. He could see the weather-beaten faces of men and women who had come to repeat their age-old prayers.

"And I shall have to preach to them!" he reflected— "I—a fraud, a sham!"

He left the pulpit and turned towards the Communion. Here a new screen had been placed, but it perfectly accorded with the church. There was nothing tawdry about it. It was not one of those monstrosities made of

iron, and gilded to suit modern tastes. It was made of good solid oak, and had already become subdued by the atmosphere of the church.

He went to the stall opposite the reading desk, which he would have to occupy Sunday by Sunday, and tried to realize the situation.

No, he could not do it!—yet he felt he must.

Sitting down he again allowed his eyes to roam around the building. It was an old church, built, possibly, before the Reformation. For four hundred years, therefore, it had stood in the center of the village. To it through the centuries the people had come; some young, some old; some with life spread out before them, others nearing the eternal silence; and they had come to commune with the Unknown, to repeat words which, to some of them at least, had a tremendous meaning.

It was very strange. It was more than strange, it was wonderful, that a man born in a little tract of country on the east side of the Mediterranean nearly two thousand years ago was worshiped as the Son of God.

But of course he did not believe in it. The whole business was born in an age of ignorance and hence of credulity. Directly it was brought to the bar of reason and of critical investigation it was of no more value than sawdust.

Jesus save men from sin, indeed! He had for five years been in Dartmoor Jail among men who not only outraged everything divine but everything decent. Of course it was so much hocus—pocus.

And yet it had persisted for two thousand years. Even now in an age which might be called irreligious it held the faith of millions. But of course he did not believe it. How could he? And yet—

He left the Vicar's stall, and found his way into the vestry. He could not remember having been in a vestry before and he looked around like one fascinated. There hung the Vicar's surplice; there, too, were a number of smaller surplices, worn, he supposed, by the choir boys. Would he be able to get through the services without a hitch?

He laughed aloud at the thought, and was almost frightened by the sound of his voice as it echoed among the stone pillars which supported the roof.

Presently he opened an old oak box which looked as though it might have been there for centuries. Heaven! what was this? He understood presently. What he saw were the Communion cups and plates used for what was termed the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

And he would have to officiate at this function!

As we have said, he had for years been to all intents and purposes an atheist. Even while he was an undergraduate at Oxford he had, as he had said a hundred times, given all that sort of thing the go-by while in later years it had been as meaningless as the story of Jack the Giant-Killer. Of course he had been religious as a boy, and had gone to church with his father. He remembered, too, being strangely impressed when he had gone one evening with his father to hear a great Nonconformist Divine preach to a mighty crowd in the Metropolitan Tabernacle. But that kind of thing had long since gone out of his life, and for the last ten years—

And yet he had taken up this job. He, in order to cover up his past and begin a new life, had seized the opportunity which Frank Barcroft's death had offered him. Nevertheless, he shuddered at the thought of officiating at what was termed the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He did not mind preaching so much. There was an element of fun in it; something whimsical, something which appealed to his sense of humor. But the other —!

"Yes, I must get out of that," he reflected. "By hook or by crook I must get out of that. I must, I simply must."

A few minutes later he was out in the open air again, and seeing a boy in the village he asked the way to the Vicarage.

"Up that lane, sir," the boy replied. "You can't miss it; it's just round that turn there."

It was rather a fine old house that he saw a minute later, and he noticed that it stood well within its own grounds, and was approached by a pleasant drive.

"No," he reflected, as he made his way up to the entrance, "I'm not going to give up all this for a fad, and I'll carry the thing triumphantly through; perhaps some day— But for the present I'll see it through."

A minute later he was shaking hands with a white-haired old man.

5.

The Reverend John Trencrom was perhaps seventy- I five years of age, and, as he frequently said, richly deserved his rest in the evening-time of his life. He was hale and strong, however, and was, as the people of St. Michael's said, "good for many years to come."

Mr. Trencrom belonged to the old-fashioned school of Churchmen. During the years he had been at St. Jude the Squire of the parish and himself had had their own way in everything. New laws and new usages did not affect them. He had little sympathy with new schools of thought, or with the new customs that had crept in during the passing years. Church councils he abhorred.

"What right," he asked, "have laymen to interfere with the parson's work?"

He looked upon a parish as the parson's freehold, and he and the Squire had done everything that needed doing. He implicitly believed in the old-time idea that the parson should above all things be of good family and a gentleman. He did not say so in so many words; nevertheless he believed that the Church had, in placing a gentleman in every parish in the country, fulfilled an important part of its duty.

Not that he was negligent of a clergyman's avocations. He was never absent from a funeral or a wedding. He was never late for his Sunday services nor for any appointment to which he had committed himself. But he had little faith in the multiplication of offices according to the new ideas of a certain section of the Church. Neither did he encourage any of the views which were the result of the Oxford Movement, and which Cardinal Newman originated at the early part of the nineteenth century.

He was, in short, a clergyman of the old school. He regarded the Squire and himself as the only two gentlemen in his parish, and had never thought of making a friend of anyone else. Farmers and laborers were very decent, respectable people, and he treated them kindly. As for treating them as friends, however, it was out of the question. They belonged to a different

order of being. Consequently he had never worn himself out with pastoral visitation. Neither had he taken part in any of the movements that some thought necessary for the uplifting of the people of his parish.

This was the man who had become *locum tenens* in the parish of St. Michael's pending the arrival of the new Vicar. On retiring from St. Jude's he had found himself the possessor of a sufficient private income to live in comparative comfort. Nevertheless he was glad to come to St. Michael's after Mr. Sleeman had left. The honorarium was very acceptable to him.

"I have been daily expecting to hear from you," said Mr. Trencrom to the new Vicar when presently they became seated in the room which from time almost immemorial had been called the study.

"I am afraid I have been very remiss," replied the other; "but, as you may know, I have for a long time been far away from the centers of things. Added to that, I knew practically nothing about the parish or of what was happening here. The letter from Lord Gunnislake's solicitor offering me the living came to me while I was working in a mining camp far up the country. Perhaps you would like to see it," he added.

Mr. Trencrom did not speak, but he nodded his head in assent. Perhaps he was a little bit curious. The new Vicar spoke like an educated man, but he had none of the ways of a conventional parson. Of course all sorts of men could come into the Church in these days, especially in the Colonies. That was why he was interested in seeing the letter.

"Yes, of course," he said when he had read it, "that is quite in order." Then looking at the new Vicar again he said, "You have been in Africa for several years, I have been told. What parts, may I ask?"

The new Vicar told him.

"Oh, yes. Let me see, who was your Bishop? I ought to know, but I am afraid my geography is not good."

The new Vicar felt as though he were being put through a catechism, and he was not sure that his *locum tenens* accepted him at his face value. Doubtless the fact that he knew himself to be a fraud made him suspicious and uneasy. That was why he was so glad that he had had time to examine Barcroft's papers before Underwood came.

"Would you like to see a letter from my Bishop?" he replied. "I daresay he will have written to the Bishop of this diocese telling him all about me,

but he very kindly sent me this personal letter directly I wrote telling him I had cabled my acceptance of this living."

Again Mr. Trencrom stretched out his hand almost eagerly to take the letter that was handed to him. Doubtless the fellow was good-looking, and had the stamp of a good upbringing, but he was by no means reminiscent of a parson. It was true he wore a white tie, but otherwise he looked like an ordinary layman. Added to that, he had none of the tricks and mannerisms so common to the younger generation of the clergy.

If he had any doubts, however, the Bishop's letter must have reassured him. It was a very kind epistle from a Father in God to a young clergyman for whom he evidently had a great respect. It spoke of him as having done real, valuable pioneer work in the dark places of Africa, and commended him with all confidence to the parish of St. Michael's.

"He also gave me this about a year before I left," went on the new Vicar, handing him the photograph of an elderly prelate.

"Fancy that now," said the Reverend John Trencrom. "I knew Tyack well. We were at Cambridge together fifty years ago. Between ourselves he was regarded as a milksop and a cad, yet here he is a Colonial Bishop, while I—ah well, if you once bury yourself in an out-of-the-way parish you are lost and forgotten. You are an Oxford man, I hear?"

"Yes, Wadham. I came down in '21."

He was on safer ground now. Of Africa he was comparatively ignorant, but he knew his Oxford well, and remembering Barcroft's career, as well as their conversation on the night he had arrived at the mining camp, he was able to speak confidently.

"Of course you will show this to the Bishop," remarked Mr. Trencrom. "You say you arrived this morning at Plymouth. When will you go to see him?"

The new Vicar gave a start. The other's words made him feel uncomfortable. In his many reflections about coming to St. Michael's he had not thought about the necessity of paying a visit to the Bishop. He dreaded the thought, too. He knew nothing about this man, and he wondered if he would be put through a catechism more searching than the one to which he now felt he was subjected. Perhaps this Cornish Bishop might ask a lot of searching questions which he might find it difficult to answer. He had no fear about passing an examination upon the main outlines of a clergyman's life, but might there not be a lot of intimate

questions, technical questions, concerning which he knew nothing? He wished he had made his plans more carefully, and taken steps to acquaint himself with the *modus operandi* of everything.

"Will it be necessary for me to visit the Bishop?" he asked.

"Of course. Have you written him?"

"No, I didn't think there was any need. Ought I?"

"Naturally. Chirgwidden is very punctilious about such matters, and I should not be surprised if he regarded your neglect as a slight. Still, his bark is worse than his bite."

"Is his bark bad?"

"Yes, he has a sharp tongue," replied Mr. Trencrom, "and many of the younger men are afraid of him. Personally I have had very little to do with him. You see, I was Rector of St. Jude's long before he was ever heard of. I took care to tell him so, too. Not long after he came to Cornwall he tried to impress upon me the importance of some of his new-fangled ideas, but I quickly let him know that I was an old-fashioned man. However, we need not discuss that now, but the quicker you communicate with him the better; he will want to arrange about your induction."

The new Vicar almost uttered a cry of dismay, but he suppressed his feelings. After all, he had a water-tight case and he would go through whatever was expected of him without creating suspicion—if he could.

"Are you ambitious, Barcroft?" asked Mr. Trencrom presently.

"I suppose every young man is," was the other's noncommittal reply.

"I am past all that now, but if I were a young man and wanted to get preferment I should be very careful how I treated Chirgwidden. You see, the Bishop practically rules the diocese; and while there are very few plums in Cornwall, the Bishop has the disposal of them."

"I don't think I shall trouble much about his plums."

"And quite right, too. Lots of these ritualist fellows are straining every nerve in order to be made canons, rural deans, and that sort of thing. It wasn't so in my young days. A clergyman was a gentleman then. If good things came in his way he took them, but as for conforming to the Bishop's ideas—bah! By the way,—though perhaps I ought not to speak so freely,—you are not one of those fellows who want to run about in petticoats, are you?"

"There is no temptation towards that sort of thing out in the wilds of Africa," replied the other.

"And a good thing too. We are simply riddled with them home here, and what are we the better for them? I tell you, sir, the old-fashioned clergyman who was a gentleman of good family did far more good than these newfangled fellows with their incense and furbelows, and all the rest of it. Do you know the advice my first Bishop gave me? He was a bit of a cynic and perhaps not a great prelate, but he was a common-sense man. It was this: 'Preach the gospel, and keep down enthusiasm.'"

"And did you act on it?"

"I did my work in the parish, sir, and that was the main thing. Why, take the case of Sleeman, your predecessor. When he came here he got the whole parish by the ears. I do not hold with dissent; but on coming here, a parish three-quarters of whom are Methodists, he preached against dissent, and there was no end of a row. He would have had his way, too, but for the Squire." The Reverend John Trencrom laughed at this, and then went on: "Well, perhaps it was not the Squire altogether. I think, Verity had more to do with it even than her father."

"You mean Miss Trengrove?"

"Yes, Verity Trengrove. My word, Barcroft, but you will have to be careful there."

"In what way?"

"She has been a thorn in the side of Sleeman for the last four years. In fact, ever since she came home from school. I suppose she has been a lot of trouble to her father, too."

"How?"

"I am afraid I don't know particulars, and to tell you the truth, I have been afraid to tackle her. Besides, it wasn't my job. After all, I have only been *locum tenens*, but from all I hear she is a terror. As you will judge by this time, her father is a hidebound Conservative and a strong Churchman. As a consequence Verity is always treading on his toes. As for religion, she doesn't care an atom about it. In fact, I think she is an atheist. She used to laugh at Sleeman before his friends, and tell him that his pet beliefs were so many fables. Poor old Squire, I am afraid she will break his heart."

"Is he a religious man, then?"

"He's a strict Churchman of the narrowest orders, but it's not only that. She doesn't care a bit about family, or caste, or any of those things which the Squire almost worships. But that isn't the worst," and John Trencrom shook his head dismally.

The new Vicar looked at the *locum tenens* inquiringly. He had already become deeply interested in Verity Trengrove and wanted to know more about her, but he was afraid to ask intimate questions.

"Perhaps I ought not to tell you," went on the older man, "but you are bound to hear about it. It is said in the parish that she is throwing herself at the head of a blaspheming young blackguard, who has lately come from America, called Varcoe. I suppose he ran away from home a few years ago, went to America, imbibed all sorts of blaspheming ideas, and has lately come back to Cornwall. He is without religion—without morality for that matter—a drinking, swearing bounder. Nevertheless he is a good—looking, fascinating sort of fellow and has that devil-may-care sort of way which has caught the fancy of Verity. I hear they meet at night in lonely lanes, and heaven only knows what that may lead to with a fellow like Varcoe. It may mean any kind of disgrace."

"The Squire never hinted at that kind of thing to me," the other found himself saying.

"He wouldn't. In fact, he has told me again and again that she is as straight as a die and the soul of truth and honor; but I am afraid, Barcroft, I am terribly afraid. What lies at the back of it all, I dare not think."

"And has her father any control over her?"

"Not an atom. As for her mother, she may as well talk to the wind. Verity laughs at both of them; and yet; mind you, she is the cleverest girl I know; sharp as a needle and as quick as lightning."

"And yet you say she is swept off her feet by this young Varcoe?"

"Yes, I can't make it out. I met him once and had a talk with him—not about her of course, I wouldn't dream of such a thing.—A blatant, vulgar bounder, a showy, shallow scamp. And yet I am afraid he has fascinated her and may lead her into trouble. But you will find out these things later on, and it may be I have listened too much to evil tongues. But there it is. By the way, Barcroft, when do you want me to go?"

"Not for a long time," replied the Vicar after a long silence. "You see, not long after my ordination I went to Africa, where I have been ever since. As a consequence I am not altogether *an fait* with the etiquette of things home here. That is why I shall be awfully glad if you will stay here a few weeks, until I feel my feet, so to speak."

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Trencrom eagerly. "I shall be glad to do anything in my power to help you."

The fact was that Mr. Trencrom was more than a little relieved by the new Vicar's request. Since his retirement from St. Jude's he had felt a little lonely. The Vicar of the parish where he had gone to live had little in common with him, and no kind of friendship had sprung up between them. Added to this, after having been the chief man in St. Jude's for a great number of years he had felt it rather hard to be treated as a nobody. He was beginning to like this new Vicar of St. Michael's, too, and eagerly welcomed the idea of staying with him.

"I am not altogether dependent on my stipend," went on the new Vicar, "and shall be glad if, in addition to staying at the Vicarage with me, you will take a reasonable fee for your work. Mr. Trengrove has asked me to stay at the Hall until I can make suitable arrangements here, but I don't want to stay with him longer than is necessary. As a consequence, I shall be glad to be a sort of lodger with you until I can settle down to my work, and find a suitable housekeeper and whatever servants may be necessary."

Mr. Trencrom heartily agreed to this. It suited his book exactly, and he quite looked forward to the idea of staying until the other had found his feet, as he put it.

"I shall be glad to be of service to you," he repeated. "All the same you had better come here as soon as possible; and whatever else you do, don't neglect letting the Bishop know you are ready to call on him whenever it may be convenient."

The new Vicar went back to Budock in a very thoughtful mood. While his meeting with his *locum tenens* had been in every way satisfactory, and while they had parted on the best of terms, he realized the difficulties of the situation as he had never realized them before. That which had at first appeared to him as something in the nature of a joke was beginning to assume serious proportions now. He dreaded the idea of meeting the Bishop of the diocese. He wondered whether he would have to take any oaths and submit himself to any inquisitorial catechism. If he had, he was afraid he would come a cropper.

"I don't think I would have dared to have taken it on if I had known," he reflected. "And yet why should I care? It means nothing to me. Here I am received by the Squire of the parish, and am staying at his house. Added to that I have been accepted by the *locum tenens* without question. If I hadn't decided on this stunt I should be—" and again a picture of an ex-convict without money and without place flashed before his gaze.

“Yes, I must carry it through,” he went on thinking presently. “Dash it all, I’ll not be beaten.”

He turned into a piece of woodland at this, and having made sure that he could not be seen, he sat down on some dried leaves and pulled out the packet of letters, some of which he had shown to the Squire only that day. Remembering what had taken place between Mr. Trencrom and himself only an hour or so before, he became fascinated as he read. Possibly these Letters of Orders had originated partly to safeguard the Church from such impostors as himself. A little later he caught the humor of the situation. Yes, it was funny, it was—funny.

"BY THE TENOR OF THESE PRESENTS,

We, Edward by Divine Permission Bishop of Oxbridge do make it known unto all men that on Sunday 25th day of December in the year of our Lord 1923 we the Bishop before mentioned solemnly administering Holy Orders under the protection of the Almighty in our cathedral church of St. Luke do admit our beloved in Christ Frank Barcroft B.A. of Wadham College, Oxford (of whose virtuous and pious Life and Conversation and Competent learning and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures we were well assured) into the Holy Order of Priesthood according to the manner and form prescribed and used by the Church of England, and whom the said Frank Barcroft did then and there rightly and canonically ordain priest He having first in our presence made and subscribed a Declaration of Assent and taken and subscribed the Oath of Allegiance which are respectively by law required to be taken and subscribed. IN TESTIMONY whereof we have caused our Episcopal Seal to be hereunto affixed, the day and year written in the year of our Lord 1923 and in the tenth year of our Consecration.

EDWARD.

Yes, it was funny, funny, and yet he could not help shuddering. Of course he had not an atom of faith in the whole business. Priest’s Orders indeed! Still, it was necessary to have such things in such a huge institution as the Church of England.

He read the thing again:

“Of whose virtuous and pious Life and Conversation and Competent learning and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures we were well assured.”

He laughed again, laughed loudly.

"It's the greatest lark of the century," he chuckled. "No comic opera ever known was equal to it. Fancy me; who a few months ago was—"

He was not laughing now. The terror of the thing got hold of him again. In a way it was horrible. He didn't care about blasphemy as a general rule—But this—!

Still, he would see it through. A kind of sporting instinct possessed him, and he would carry this through though the thunders of the Church rolled around him.

He took another document from the package which he had so carefully guarded. He had not paid so much attention to it hitherto, but he saw its importance now. It was a letter signed by three African clergymen attesting to the faithfulness, etc., of Frank Barcroft, and endorsed by the Bishop of the African diocese.

Yes, that would have to be presented to the Bishop as well. Perhaps it would be better to send it by that evening's post when he wrote telling his lordship he had arrived.

He had everything clearly outlined in his mind presently and thought himself prepared for anything. He had, during the latter part of his conversation with Mr. Trencrom, learned fairly accurately the *modus operandi* of his induction. He had led the old clergyman to tell him this by a series of skilful questions which had not in any way aroused his suspicions.

Yes, it was a good thing he had thought of these things. A good job he had primed himself so carefully.

Then he began to think what would happen after his induction to St. Michael's. He remembered what Mr. Trencrom had said about Verity Trengrove. Was there any truth in it he wondered? He rather enjoyed the thought of her heretical opinions; but somehow—he could not tell why—he felt uneasy at the thought of her making engagements with that scapegrace fellow called Varcoe. Of course she was almost blatantly outspoken and delightfully unconventional, but he did not like the villagers gossiping about her in such a way. He could not understand it either. If ever a girl's face told anything, Verity Trengrove's face spoke of honor, spoke of innocence. She might be willful, might mock at old Sleeman's pretensions, but her very presence denied that she would be led away by a drunken, unprincipled fellow, such as Trencrom represented Varcoe to be.

To say the least of it, the thought was unpleasant. It was more than unpleasant. Even he, with a past which he Was doing his best to bury, did

not like it. Coarsened as his nature had been by the years he had spent at Dartmoor, he had a feeling like shrinking at the thought.

"And the Squire is hoping that I shall lead her from the error of her ways," he said to himself. "But why shouldn't I? It's what I am here for. Of course the Squire didn't hint at what Trencrom spoke about, but most likely he knows of it. Certainly it would be a feather in my cap if—if—"

He had left the wood by this time, and was making his way across the open park to the Hall. Looking intently, he saw a female form moving among the flower beds near the house. He did not know why, but a great longing came into his heart to save her from such a man as old Trencrom had spoken of. To say the least of it, it would be a pity for such a girl to throw herself away on a ne'erdo-well. Besides, he rather liked the Squire. Yes, after he had written his letter to the Bishop, he would have a chat with her and see how the land lay.

"Ah, Barcroft, here you are," cried the Squire as he entered the house. "Sorry to have neglected you so long, but I have been frightfully busy. I had a lot of letters to get off by this evening's post. By the way, have you any? The post-bag will have to be taken in a quarter of an hour."

"I have one I should like to write," he replied.

"Then come this way into my den. Can you use a typewriter? If so, there is one at your service."

He eagerly caught on to the idea. Of course he had learned to copy Barcroft's calligraphy; but it would take him some time to write to the Bishop if he had to use Barcroft's handwriting. But by this means—

In ten minutes his letter was typed and addressed. He had signed it Frank Barcroft. He took care to enclose the letter signed by the three African clergymen and endorsed by the Bishop of the diocese. This done, he went into the garden.

A minute later he found himself face to face with Verity Trengrove.

6.

VERITY TRENGROVE was fair to look upon. For that matter all young girls are. The very essence of youth is beauty, and although it is a matter of degree, youth is never destitute of good looks.

Not that she could be altogether regarded as a beauty. Her features were not quite regular, while an artist had once declared that her nose did not correspond with her chin. But she had frank, laughing eyes and a complexion which only comes from perfect health and an outdoor life. She was well formed, too, and her movements were not lacking in grace.

She had been weeding the flower beds, and her face was more than ordinarily flushed by the exercise she was taking. Holding up her hands before the newcomer, she exclaimed with a laugh, "Aren't I grubby, Mr. Barcroft?"

"Just a bit."

Again she gave a laugh. "I gave you an opportunity to pay me a compliment then," she said. "Why didn't you take it?"

"Truth before all things," he replied.

Her laughter ceased at this. Perhaps she wondered if he had any intention of being rude, or whether he had uttered the first thought that came into his mind. Anyhow she rather liked him for not seeking to pay her a compliment. It would have been rather inane of him if he had.

Without another word she returned to her work and began pulling up weeds from among the flowers.

"I am going to ask you a conundrum," she said a few moments later.

"I am awfully bad at conundrums."

"All the same, I am going to ask you one. What is a weed?"

"That depends."

"Upon what?"

"Upon many things."

"That's no answer at all. You see," she went on, "some of the weeds I am pulling up are as beautiful as the flowers that the gardener planted."

“A weed is a flower in the wrong place,” ventured the new Vicar.

“I’ll give you two marks for that,” she laughed again. Instinctively she recognized the quality of his answer.

He continued looking at her. Yes, she was a very pretty girl. Unconventional of course, but she had charm, and he liked being with her.

“Have you had a busy afternoon?” she flashed out presently.

“I’ve had an interesting time, at all events.”

“Why, where have you been?”

“To the church and the Vicarage.”

“And did you see the Reverend John Trencrom?”

“Yes, I spent a good deal of time with him.”

“Well, do you like him?”

“He seems a good sort of old boy,” he said, forgetting himself for a moment.

The girl looked at him a little curiously. Even though he had spent several years in Africa, this was not the proper remark for a clergyman to make.

“What did you talk about?” she asked at length.

“Oh, numberless things. You see I was curious to know about the parish, and the people who live here. I wanted to know about the Bishop too, and the kind of man he is. I shall have to go and see him soon,” he added.

“And do you dread the ordeal?”

“Rather.” For a moment something of his real feelings flashed from his eyes.

The girl had not the slightest suspicion about his genuineness. It was true, he did not behave like an orthodox clergyman, but she thought nothing of that. And yet she did not feel altogether comfortable in his presence. There was a look in his eyes which she could not understand; a look which told of a world unknown to her. She wondered what the new Vicar’s past had been; what his real thoughts were. There was something about his mouth, something, too, about the look in his eyes which was unpleasant. He did not seem to her like a holy man. She could not think of him as spending hours in prayer.

“You say you went to see the church,” she remarked presently. “How did you like it?”

“It’s a beautiful old church,” he replied, “and, praise to the gods, it has not been what is called renovated.”

"You believe in things old?"

"I like old churches, at all events."

"What did you do?" She hardly knew why she asked, but she felt interested. She reflected that African churches would be nearly all new, and she wondered how St. Michael's, which was built before the Reformation, would appeal to him.

"Among other places I went into the pulpit," he replied.

"And fancied you were preaching?"

A far-away look came into his eyes as he recalled the thoughts that had flashed through his mind as he stood in the old worm-eaten structure.

"In a way I did," he said slowly. "I thought the pews became peopled; not with modern people," he added,- "but by those that came there generations ago. It was a funny feeling." He was about to say "d— funny," but he checked himself. He reflected that he was talking to the Squire's daughter and that he must be careful.

"Did you go anywhere else?"

"Yes, I went to the Vicar's stall and to the Communion table."

"And how did they impress you?"

He did not reply. For a moment he could not. He remembered the thoughts that had come rushing into his mind as he stood in the old parish church an hour or two before. It came back to him that he had tried to picture himself officiating at what the people called Holy Communion, while he, who had not an atom of faith, and whose life was a violation of what he professed to be, was looked upon as specially ordained for this so-called sacred office.

"It's difficult to talk about, isn't it?" he said presently.

The girl had been watching him intently during the time he had been reflecting, and again she noticed his peculiar expression. As Mr. Trencrom had said, she was as quick as lightning, while as the Squire had remarked about her, she had a peculiar divination as to whether people were telling the truth. A thousand thoughts flashed into her mind as she looked, and she felt more than ordinarily interested. She had known clergymen all her life. Budock had been regarded as the parson's home. Whenever Mr. Sleeman had gone to another parish, the officiating clergyman had nearly always stayed there. Of late years she had become less and less interested in their calling, but she had liked to study their personalities. Some of them were utterly nondescript, mere replicas of hundreds of others; but this man was

different. He was young, and yet in; spite of his youth he might have gone through strange experiences. But this was not all. There was something at the back of everything that puzzled her.

Verity Trengrove was largely a creature of impulse, and said the first thing that came into her mind. Her method of arriving at conclusions was by intuition rather than by reflection.

"Mr. Barcroft," she said suddenly. "I want to ask you something. Will you answer me truthfully?"

"If I can." He felt a strange fear at heart while she said this. He was walking in unknown ways. He was treading on roads which, as far as he was concerned! had not been trodden before.

She did not ask her question immediately. Instead she stood looking at him like one in doubt.

"You are different from other clergymen we have had here," she said presently. "You speak differently. You seem to live in a different world."

His fear increased. Had the girl pierced his armor so soon? Was she going to denounce him? Then a feeling like revolt rose up within him. Why should he be afraid of this unsophisticated girl? He was ten years older than she, and had been through hell before she understood the meaning of life. In his heart of hearts he challenged her to do her worst. Besides, he had something "on" her. He was glad now that old Trencrom had told him about Varcoe.

"I have not been interested in clergymen for years," she went on. "Mostly they have all been cut to a pattern, and have said the things they were supposed to say. Some of the preachers we have had here," she went on, "have been positively ludicrous. How they have dared," and she spoke indignantly, "to try to teach other people about the deep things of life passes my comprehension. But you are different. I am interested in you."

"Thank you."

"Don't thank me. I am interested because I am not sure of you, and because—because—well, I'm not sure."

"I begin to be afraid," and he tried to speak as though he regarded the conversation as a joke.

"You promised to answer my question truthfully. You mean that, don't you?"

"Yes, I mean that."

“Then tell me, hand on heart now. Do you really believe in all these things?”

“Be a little more precise.”

“Well then, do you believe in—your profession? Do you believe there is any reality in Christianity?”

In spite of himself, his mind flashed back several months to the time when he had first seen Barcroft in the deserted mining camp. He remembered that the questions the girl asked him were almost identical with those he had asked Barcroft. He remembered, too, how the clergyman had answered, and how, when the end came, he had faced the great unknown without fear.

Of course, he believed nothing, and if he told the truth he would say so. For that matter he felt himself a fraud, realized that in order to be there he was a living lie. And now he stood before this girl professing to be a devoted clergyman, professing to believe in a system which, to him, was an outworn fable.

And she had put her finger upon his weak spot in a moment. She had asked the question which above all others he did not want asked. Did he believe in his profession? Did he believe that Christianity was true? No, he didn’t. In his heart of hearts he laughed at it as an old wives’ tale, as a myth long exploded.

But he would not be beaten. He would keep up the farce. It should not be said that this chit of a girl had seen through him almost at their first meeting. He would fight her, yes, and he would beat her, too.

Again the words of the real Frank Barcroft flashed into his mind, and almost unconsciously he found himself repeating them.

“I believe in nothing so much,” he said.

During his first year at Oxford he had been in great demand as an actor. Many had said that if he adopted the stage as a profession he would have risen high, and now, determined to convince this girl, he had uttered the words with conviction; he had spoken as if he meant what he said.

“I believe in nothing so much.” The words were echoing in his ears, and he felt as though he had freshly pledged himself to a career of fraud; that whatever happened he must abide by that pledge.

The girl took a step nearer to him. She had become interested in the new Vicar more than she had thought possible. She was not sure of him even yet, but there was something in the tone of his voice which impressed her.

“You believe, then, that Christianity is not a fable? You believe it is a great fact?”

“The greatest fact in the world,” he asserted earnestly.

Still she looked at him intently, inquiringly. He spoke in the tones of a convinced man, and yet she could not feel sure of him.

“And you believe that Jesus Christ can save people from their sins?”

“I not only believe it, I know it,” he replied, still quoting Frank Barcroft, all the time realizing that he was uttering a blasphemous lie.

He knew he was laughing at himself. He was pitting himself against this young girl, and he was uttering what he had not begun to believe, but he was uttering it seriously. He was not going to be found out. This quiet parish of St. Michael’s was already containing interest for him that he had not thought possible, and he would fight to the very last before being discovered as a fraud. Not that there was any danger of it. No, he did not believe that. No one had any doubts about him. No one ever would. Frank Barcroft was an orphan, neither had he any intimate friends in England. His fraud was safe from detection. As for this girl, Verity Trengrove, she was sharp and clever, of course, but she would never find him out. Neither did her questions really mean anything. She was simply a precocious chit who wanted to impress him with her unconventionality and her heterodoxy.

Still he watched her carefully. To say the least of it, the questions she had asked him were no ordinary ones for a girl of her age and position. That morning, when the Squire had spoken of her as having laughed his predecessor’s pretensions to scorn, he had sympathized with her. At the same time he had regarded her incipient heresy as of little importance. Now, however, he saw that she was dangerous and that the Reverend John Trencrom’s warning that he must be careful of her had more significance than he had at first imagined.

“Of course I must believe you,” she said slowly, “but aren’t you trying to hide something from me?”

“Hide something from you?” and he laughed almost silly.

“Isn’t there a secret in your life that you don’t want discovered?”

“There’s a secret in all our lives that we don’t want discovered, Miss Trengrove,” he replied. “Even you have a secret in your life, a secret which you have not yet told your father or mother.” He was determined to turn the tables on her. He would let this precocious girl know that he was not ignorant of her amour with Varcoe.

Verity was startled, not only by the man's words, but by his tones.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

"What I say," he replied. "I have no secret in my life, but you have in yours. Who knows, perhaps I shall be able to help you to keep it?"

"Is that a threat, Mr. Barcroft? Because if it is, it means nothing."

"Are you sure it means nothing? I don't know much about Cornish life; as you may imagine, I have been out of the world for several years, but human nature is always human nature and wherever there are women there is gossip."

"And you have commenced your work in the parish by listening to gossip, I suppose? Not a very good beginning, is it?"

"There are things which one cannot help hearing," he retorted, "and of course all that appertains to the Squire of the parish is eagerly noted. That is why Miss Trengrove's doings are of special interest."

He looked keenly as he spoke, as if watching for some confirmation or denial on her part; but she looked neither confused nor scared; instead she turned to the flower bed she had been weeding, and went on with her work.

Suddenly she turned to him again. "You said there was a secret in all our lives,"—and she looked at him steadily—"then immediately after you asserted that there was no secret in your own life. Don't you contradict yourself, Mr. Barcroft?"

In spite of himself fear got hold of him again. He realized that neither her father nor the Rev. John Trencrom spoke lightly when they said that this girl had a mind which was as alert as a panther, and that she leaped at truth intuitively. Neither did he understand her. He had expected to see her tremble when he hinted that she had a secret. Trencrom had told him that this girl had had private meetings with a worthless scamp called Varcoe; that the villagers were gossiping about it, and that although the Squire might not have heard of it, it would break his heart if scandal were attached to his daughter's name.

But she showed no signs of fear or of confusion; instead she had turned the tables upon him, and obliged him to defend himself. Now that he had gone so far, however, he determined to go further.

"I do not contradict myself, Miss Trengrove," he said, "although it may seem so. Of course there are secrets in all our lives. Secret thoughts, secret hopes, secret desires, which we do not care to tell the world. But I have

lived my life in the open, and there is nothing in it that the world may not know."

Again the girl flashed him a quick glance. She was not suspicious as to his genuineness, yet there was something about him which she could not understand. He seemed to be wearing a mask, and she could not see through it. But she did not speak. In spite of herself she was a little frightened, too.

"Would you like your father to know of your secret meetings with young Varcoe?" he asked, anxious to divert attention from himself, and, at the same time, to get some hold over her.

For some seconds she did not reply. It might seem as though she was still trying to look into the mind of this man, trying to understand something which had escaped her.

"Is not your question an assumption?" she asked.

"An assumption of what?"

"That the gossip which, I suppose, you have heard is true?"

"Isn't it true?"

"If I were a young clergyman coming to a new parish, I think I should want to verify any evil report I might hear about a parishioner before believing it."

"But you don't deny it?"

"Why should I deny it?"

A new fear entered his heart, and for the moment he forgot himself; he was thinking only of her. He had met her that day for the first time, and although a barrier seemed to stand between them, a real interest in her had been kindled in his heart. That she was no ordinary girl was evident. She had laughed at his predecessor's claims to sacerdotal powers. and defied ordinary conventions. More than that, her conversation had revealed a more than ordinarily quick mind. But that was not all. The girl's freedom from unconventionality, and her outspokenness suggested, not merely a desire to do or say something outré, but an innate truthfulness and innocence. At that moment he was sure that whatever truth there was in what Trencrom had told him, the girl was innocent of anything wrong, and impostor though he was, he hated the thought of her name becoming contaminated by association with that of an unprincipled fellow like Varcoe.

"But is it true?" he persisted.

Again she lifted her head from the flower bed, and this time she moved towards him. "Mr. Barcroft," she said, "you say you believe in what you

have come here to teach, and that you believe in nothing so much as the faith you profess. I am assuming that to be true; therefore, I am going to ask you a question. Is it not contemptible for one who goes into a parish for the purpose of doing good to fasten upon evil-minded gossip?"

Again she had turned the tables upon him, and for the moment he did not know how to answer her.

"It is always a doctor's duty to diagnose a disease before applying the remedy," he answered her presently.

"And you look upon yourself as a doctor, a spiritual doctor?" she queried a little scornfully; "but that is not an answer to my question."

"I have come into this parish to try and do a little good," he asserted. "Before I can do so I have to know something about the people among whom I have to work. I have not fastened upon evil-minded gossip, as you call it, but I desire to help you."

"And you have accepted the gossip as true?"

"You have not denied it."

"No," she replied, "I have not denied it for the simple reason that such stuff is beneath contempt. May I give you a piece of advice, Mr. Barcroft?"

"If you like."

"Then stick to the job that really concerns you."

"Pardon me, but I think this gossip, if true, really does concern me. This Varcoe fellow has a bad name; indeed, I am told that he is a bad man. And when a young lady like you has secret meetings with him it spells danger; possibly worse."

"Danger to whom?"

"To you."

For a few seconds she looked at him in speechless anger, and an angry flush surmounted her cheeks, but she did not speak; then for the first time he sensed something like wrong in her attitude.

For a few seconds the two looked at each other steadily. Of what she was thinking the man had no idea; but, strange as it may seem, a great longing came into his heart to save her from anything like harm.

"Miss Trengrove," he said, "you know young Varcoe? You have had secret meetings with him?"

She answered neither yes nor no.

"You have heard he has a bad name," he went on. Again he failed to understand the look in her eyes. He certainly saw fear, but he saw

something else; it might be shame, it might be guilt, and again he longed to save her.

"Miss Trengrove," he said, "I met your father for the first time this morning. I have taken a great liking to him. He struck me as a country gentleman of the best sort; as one who was the soul of honor."

The girl's eyes softened; he thought he saw tears start into them.

"Would you like me to tell him what I have heard?" he went on.

For reply she gave him a quick glance, a glance of which he did not know the meaning.

"As a clergyman I expect you regard that as your duty?"

He could not but detect a sneer in her voice.

"No," he replied, "as it happens I am an old public school boy, and have all a public school boy's horror of tale-bearing. The scandal may not have yet got to his ears, but it is not pleasant to think how much he will suffer if it does."

The girl laughed aloud. "Thank you, Mr. Barcroft," she said. "I believe, although you are a clergyman, you are a gentleman. You are not a tale-bearer. But I must leave you now; someone is coming up the drive whom I must see."

She walked away and left him as she spoke, while he stood looking after her.

"I have not pierced her armor," be reflected. "She neither admitted nor denied anything. By Jove, she is a handsome girl!—and she carries herself well too. I wonder now—"

He went away alone, thinking deeply. The day had been a revelation to him. He knew not why, but he felt a different man from what he was when he landed at Plymouth that morning. A new era in his life had commenced, a new leaf in the Book of Fate had been turned.

"Gad!" he exclaimed presently, "I wonder what the end of it will be?"

7.

THREE DAYS LATER the new Vicar of St. Michael's made his way to the house of his Bishop. He had received a letter that morning from this gentleman asking him to pay him a visit, and as that day was one of the dates which the Bishop had mentioned on which he would be at liberty, he thought it best to call at once.

Practically nothing had happened since his conversation with Verity Trengrove. He had browsed among the Squire's books; he had again visited the parish church, and had tried, as far as possible, to take stock, not only of the village church town, but of the various hamlets in the parish. At least he would acquaint himself with the geography of the district in which he had come to work. He had spoken to some of the people too. He wanted, as he told himself, to understand something of the mentality of the people who would be his parishioners.

It was all very strange, and yet its very strangeness was fascinating. At times a devil-may-care feeling possessed him and he laughed at the whole situation as a great joke. More than once he almost decided to fling caution to the winds, and appear in his true colors.

"Good morning, Mr. Barcroft, I am glad to see you," was the Bishop's greeting, when towards midday he was shown into his study.

The new Vicar of St. Michael's looked anxiously at the prelate who stood with outstretched hand. As may be imagined, it was with a strange feeling at heart that he found his way to the house. He had again and again gone over the situation, fearing lest his fraud might be discovered. But directly he looked into the old man's eyes his fears fled. Mr. Trencrom had spoken of him as a kind of martinet, but certainly, unless his appearance belied him, this old gentleman was kindness personified.

"You feel very strange, I expect," went on the Bishop.

"To be truthful, I do. A quiet Cornish parish is completely different from the wilds of Africa."

"Yes, and you have been roughing it, I hear."

"Has my late Bishop written you then?"

"Indeed, he did. He said some of the kindest things about you, and spoke of you as one who has done valuable work. I am glad to have you in Cornwall."

The kindly tones led the newcomer to look at him again, and he saw that his fears were groundless. Nothing but benevolence gleamed from the old man's eyes, and he felt strangely drawn towards him. He had a striking appearance. He was more than ordinarily tall, and, in spite of his years, had an upright, soldierly bearing. His face was cast in a classical mold, while the high, broad forehead and keen, piercing eyes suggested an intellectual acumen of no mean order.

Dr. Chirgwidden had many years before been regarded as a rising hope of the Broad Church school. He had been described as a follower of Dean Stanley, and the two volumes of sermons he had published bore out his reputation. Indeed, the noted volume *Lux Mandi*, published thirty years before, had created little more sensation than Dr. Chirgwidden's sermons. When in later years he had been appointed Dean of an ancient Cathedral, however, he became less heterodox, and certainly more careful about the opinions he expressed; still, he was spoken of as a representative of the modern school, and was held in high esteem by the best scholars of the Church. One of the reasons why he had been appointed Bishop of Truro was the belief that his broad-mindedness would have a good effect upon the diocese.

"I am glad Bishop Tyack wrote to you before he died," said the new Vicar of St. Michael's. "I hoped he would, al— though I said nothing to him about it. He was always very kind to me," he added.

"He would be," the Bishop assured him. "I knew Dr. Tyack years ago. A more generous fellow never lived. As I said, he wrote in the kindest terms of you. By the way," he added, "I have got his letter somewhere; you can see it if you like."

While the Bishop was finding the letter, Barcroft glanced round the room. It was the first time he had ever been in a Bishop's study, and he had wondered what it would be like. "The old chap is not very methodical," he reflected as he looked around, "or else his secretary doesn't know the A B C of his work."

The reflection was natural. Near the fireplace a heap of manuscript and periodicals had been thrown. The desk was covered with a heterogeneous

mass of stuE, and while the bookcases looked more tidy there was, as far as he could judge, no attempt at classification. History, theology, science and biography seemed to be jumbled together. In fact, what grouping there was appeared to be governed by the size of the books rather than by their subjects.

"Yes, I am very untidy," remarked the Bishop with a laugh, as he noted Barcroft's glance. "I am a sore trial to Williams, my secretary; he is often upbraiding me for my lack of order. I have always been careless about such things; I am told I have not a tidy mind," and the old man laughed pleasantly. "Oh! here is the letter. I felt sure I had put it in that pigeon-hole."

Barcroft read the African Bishop's epistle eagerly. Nor only was he anxious to know what he had said about him personally, but he hoped that he would find some hints that would help him if awkward questions were asked.

"You see that he had a very high opinion of you," remarked the Bishop when the new Vicar of St. Michael's had finished reading.

"He has been more than generous," said Barcroft, with a sigh of relief. "Nothing could have been kinder. By the way," he added, "your Lordship would doubtless like to see my Letters of Orders."

"It would perhaps be just as well," replied the old man; "of course there are no doubts about the matter, but it will put everything straight. I hope you are better," he added. "As you have noticed, Tyack spoke of you as having been troubled with fever many times."

"My voyage home did me a world of good," replied Barcroft. "I have never had a touch of fever since I left Africa."

"That's good, I hope your good health will continue. Now let me see— yes, we shall have to arrange about your induction. My dates are fully booked up for the next few days, but— Then the old gentleman turned to his diary and eventually fixed a day when he could come to St. Michael's.

"And now," he went on presently, "let's have a chat about things generally. You see, I know nothing about you beyond what Tyack has told me, and I am desirous to learn all I can."

Upon this he asked his visitor a number of questions on his theological and ecclesiastical whereabouts. Barcroft had dreaded this. It was the one domain in which he did not feel safe. As may be imagined, his knowledge

of theology was exceedingly limited, while everything that appertained to ecclesiastical matters was very nearly Sanskrit to him.

Yet his quick mind carried him through without arousing suspicion. He had done his best to prime himself during the three days he had been at St. Michael's, and although many of the answers he gave to the Bishop's queries would have given a more meticulous man doubts, he appeared so frank and open that his very unconventionality increased the Bishop's respect for him.

"You see," asserted Barcroft, as though in explanation of his ignorance concerning matters with which the humblest curate was supposed to be conversant, "I have lived a rough-and-tumble life in Africa. I was dealing, for the most part, with people whose thoughts were of the most elementary nature, and thus I did not think it necessary to trouble about such matters as you have mentioned. After all, Christianity is more than theology or mere Churchism," he added, using the words which the real Frank Barcroft had uttered on the night he had found him in the deserted mining camp.

"Yes, that is true," admitted the Bishop thoughtfully, and then added with a laugh, "not that that attitude would satisfy the new school of thought which is becoming more and more prevalent. By the way," he added, "you are staying with Hilary Trengrove, aren't you?"

"For the present," replied Barcroft, and then he told him about his meeting with the Squire the morning he had landed at Plymouth.

"Yes, he wrote me to that effect," and the Bishop's eyes twinkled.

"I was not aware of that."

"No, you would not be; but you see Trengrove is very pleased with you," and then the Bishop sighed.

Barcroft looked at the old man inquiringly; he did not understand the sigh.

"Trengrove is greatly troubled about his daughter," went on the prelate, as if in explanation, "and he hopes great things from you. What are your impressions concerning that young lady?"

"I have hardly been able to formulate them yet," was the reply. "She is certainly a very clever girl, while Trencrom tells me she is very unconventional."

"Sleeman came to see me before he left," remarked the Bishop. "She was a thorn in his side."

"Sleeman was more clerical than human wasn't he?" remarked Barcroft.

"Quite a good fellow," evaded the Bishop; "but he could not get on with Verity Trengrove. He seemed to arouse all that was antagonistic in the girl's nature, and his influence over her was not in the right direction. I hope you will be more successful."

"I am afraid I am not a woman's man," replied Barcroft.

"Nevertheless Hilary Trengrove hopes great things from you. He is a sound Churchman, and naturally anxious that his daughter should follow in her mother's footsteps. I am afraid he doesn't know all," he added.

Barcroft looked at the prelate inquiringly. He had been hesitating whether to take him into his confidence. He was afraid to speak plainly.

"Sleeman told me some strange things about her," went on the Bishop, after a painful silence. "Have you heard anything yourself?"

"I am afraid I have," and then he related what Mr. Trencrom had told him on the day of his arrival.

"And have you spoken to her? Do you think there is anything in the gossip? It would break Hilary Trengrove's heart if there is. Sleeman attributed everything to what he called the girl's heterodoxy, and maintained that laxity of morals were the direct outcome of lax faith. Personally I don't trouble much about her so-called heterodoxy. Hosts of young people get a kind of theological measles and are none the worse for it. But this other matter is more serious—if there is any truth in it. Do you say you have spoken to her about it?"

"In a way," replied Barcroft a little uneasily, "but I could not get an answer from her."

"Sleeman told me that this young Varcoe had obtained a great influence over her, and that the girl had been known to have met him more than once at night in lonely places. I am sure her father knows nothing of that," he added.

"I don't believe it's true."

Why he did not know, but a passionate desire sprung into his heart to defend the girl. He had told himself again and again that he had forever discarded ordinary standards of morals. That right and wrong were only names which in reality signified nothing, and yet before he was aware he found himself eagerly defending Verity Trengrove.

"I don't believe it," he asserted again; "she is not the kind of girl who would do such a thing."

“From what I could gather from Sleeman,” said the Bishop thoughtfully, “the affair had only just commenced when he left; but his statements were very circumstantial, and he seemed to have very little doubt about their truth.”

“I don’t believe it,” asserted Barcroft again. He spoke decidedly, almost passionately.

“Have you any reasons for saying that?” asked the Bishop.

“A hundred,” he replied. “No, I know no details of what Sleeman told you. As for Trencrom, he seems to be just as sure as Sleeman was that a kind of vulgar courtship is going on between this young Varcoe and Miss Verity Trengrove; but again I say I don’t believe it.”

“You said you had your reasons for saying that; what are they?”

“For one thing the girl is as proud as Lucifer and she has a very devil of a temper.” He had forgotten himself in his eagerness to defend her, and to prove that the gossip had no foundation.

“Forgive my unconventional language, please; but I am afraid that having mixed with a wild lot of fellows in Africa and elsewhere that I sometimes use unclerical speech. Besides, such talk makes me angry.”

“Go on, my dear fellow,” laughed the Bishop. He was rather pleased than otherwise at Barcroft’s outburst.

“You see,” went on Barcroft; “the girl’s very pride, if nothing else, would keep her from having a vulgar love affair with a fellow who is admittedly a fourth-rate bounder; and there is something else: she is frankness, truthfulness personified. She is so truthful as to be almost blatant, and even Trencrom says that she has a positive hatred of lies and deceit.”

“I hope you are right,” said the Bishop presently. “I have known her for several years, and I was very grieved at the attitude she has taken about religious matters. I was at St. Michael’s for confirmation just before Sleeman left, and I must confess I was shocked. I stayed at Budock, and Sleeman came up to the Hall with me after the service. The girl seemed to have a delight in ridiculing him before me. It was rather painful,” he added. “She not only laughed at Sleeman’s profession, but even ridiculed our common faith.”

“She may not care a—” he had nearly dropped an oath, but remembered himself in time—“a button about those things,” he asserted; “but every fiber of my being tells me there is some mistake. As you say, it would break her

father's heart if he knew that she allowed herself to be courted by this fellow Varcoe, and the girl worships her father. It doesn't require very much discernment to see that. She would go through hell for him, and I cannot believe that such a girl would pain him by doing what would break his heart."

"And yet she pains him by her blasphemy, or what Sleeman calls blasphemy," asserted the Bishop.

"That's another matter. She is a child of the age and in these days people are not supposed to be hurt by so-called heresy."

"Anyhow Mr. Trengrove is hoping great things from you, and if you can lead Verity from the error of her ways—or her beliefs," he added, "you will have won his heart for ever."

When he got into the railway carriage he found himself alone. He was very glad of this. He wanted to go over the experiences of the day, to assure himself that he had been true to his role.

Yes, he thought he had played his part very well. He had been the somewhat rough, colonial clergyman who had lived mostly in the wilds. Presently, however, he found himself less satisfied. Why had he taken Verity Trengrove's part so warmly? Why had he so passionately protested his belief in her innocence and declared so doggedly that the gossip which had reached even the Bishop's ears was a lie? Did he believe it was a lie? He was not sure, and yet he felt a kind of grim pleasure in the thought that he had defended her.

On arriving at the station near St. Michael's, he made his way to the vicarage to tell his *locum temens* of his interview with the Bishop, and to make arrangements for the future. He felt more easy in his mind now that the ordeal which he had dreaded was over without serious mishap.

"Did you find Chirgwidden genial?" asked Mr. Trencrom.

"Genial? he was the soul of kindness."

"Then he must have liked you. I was thinking, after you left here the other day that I gave you the wrong impression concerning him. Perhaps I deliberately tried to set his back up. I am of the old evangelical school, and I detest innovations whether they are in the shape of theology, or of ritual. Anyhow I am glad that you got on well with him. Of course you talked a good deal about parish work."

"Yes," assented Barcroft; "and by the way, I have been thinking that it will be best if you continue the work of the parish until my induction. He

has arranged to come here on the 19th, and until then I want to keep in the background."

"But it is your parish, although you are not yet inducted," protested Mr. Trencrom.

"Yes, I know; but somehow I feel strange. Pioneer mission work in Africa is not a good preparation for the duties of an orthodox country parish. If you will, I should be glad if you will carry on just the same as if I were not here."

As may be imagined, he had a purpose in saying this. He was terribly nervous at the thought of his forthcoming ordeal, and he wanted, as he termed it, "to feel his feet." Even yet he could not accustom himself to the idea that he was the Vicar of St. Michael's. In a way he felt himself on sure ground, and yet he was constantly haunted by the fear of being found out; thus he determined to be closely observant of everything so as to avoid mistakes.

"By the way," he went on presently, "the Bishop has heard of what you told me about Miss Trengrove."

"About Miss Trengrove?" queried Trencrom.

"Yes, about her supposed love affair with Varooe. Sleeman told him. I am going to get to the bottom of that."

"Bottom of it," repeated Trencrom. "I am afraid you will find the bottom very dirty."

"You don't mean that?"

"I am afraid I do."

"Is it general gossip in the parish?"

"I would not go so far as to say that. The Squire is held in great awe by the people, and they are afraid to talk openly about his daughter; but from what I hear she was seen with him late last night."

Again a feeling of protest rose in Barcroft's heart. He felt angry at what his *locum* had said, and a great longing came into his heart to prove that the gossip was a lie.

"I don't believe it," he asserted savagely. "It is a lie born in hell." The words had escaped his lips before he realized. Why had he uttered them? Verity Trengrove was nothing to him, and never could be. If she ever found out who he was, and the part he was playing, she would be the first to hoot him from the parish. Yet while he felt a kind of joy in the thought that he had the whip hand over her, he resented what the other had said.

“It is no lie,” and Mr. Trencrom shook his head gravely. “It can’t be kept from the Squire’s ears much longer,” he went on, “and I am afraid it will kill him. Think of the ghastly disgrace of it.”

“Tell me what has happened,” demanded Barcroft.

“Only that she was seen with him at midnight last night near Trenoweth Woods.”

“And who saw her?”

“The sexton of your own parish, my dear sir. He came this morning to tell me. He was going to see you, but remembered that you were staying at Budock, and felt that it would be useless. You have not started work yet, and for the time being, I am looked upon as the Vicar of the parish.”

“Who is this sexton? What is his name?”

“Crowle is his name,—Tommy Crowle he is usually called by the villagers.”

“What sort of fellow is he?”

“For that matter I am afraid he doesn’t bear a very good name. He drinks a good deal, and when he has had two or three glasses of beer his tongue becomes unloosed. That’s why he is so dangerous. Of course I have sworn him to secrecy, but I am afraid it is of very little use.”

“And he saw them at midnight last night near Trenoweth Woods?”

“So he declared to me. He says he was coming home from St. Dorcas, the adjoining parish, where he had been to see his brother. In order to take the nearest road to St. Michael’s he passed along a lonely lane, which leads through those woods, and it was there he saw them.”

“It was dark last night, and there was no moon.”

“He says he recognized them plainly. He says that Varcoe wore a broad-brimmed American Cowboy hat which he has aEected since his return, and he declares that he saw them kissing each other.”

“He saw Miss Trengrove kissing young Varcoe?”

“So he swears.”

“How could he be sure it was she?”

“He says he supposed he made a noise as he walked; anyhow they parted at his approach, and he followed her. He declares he could take his oath that it was she. He saw her enter the park by a little frequented gateway, and make her way towards the house.”

“What kind of looking fellow is Varcoe?” asked Barcroft.

“A tall, well-built fellow,” replied Mr. Trencrom. “He carries himself with a kind of swagger, is very good-looking, and has a mass of dark curling hair, just the kind of man to attract a silly, romantic, inexperienced girl.”

Barcroft was very thoughtful as he left the Vicarage, and made his way towards the village. Even though he had been in the parish but a few days, everything was different from what he had anticipated. He found himself becoming interested in things altogether alien to the past ten years of his life.

He had scarcely passed by the old parish church when he saw coming out of a public house a tall, handsome fellow who accorded with Trencrom’s description of Varcoe.

“I will speak to him,” he determined.

8.

YOUNG TOM VARCOE—for Barcroft was correct in supposing that it was he—waited outside the public house door while the new Vicar came up. Evidently he had been drinking. His face was flushed, and there was an unnatural brightness in his eyes. In spite of the licensing laws of the country, he had found means of slaking his thirst, and a self-satisfied smile played round his lips as he watched Barcroft making his way across the open space which lay between the churchyard gates and the public house door.

"It's a nice day," Barcroft greeted him.

"Not much doubt about that. The sun has been out for nearly a week now, which is a whole lot for the old country."

He spoke with a strong American drawl, as though he were anxious to impress the other that he was a traveled man.

"The worst of it is that this sorter weather makes a man feel so all-fired thirsty," he went on. "Don't you feel that way, Governor?"

Barcroft did not reply. He had been in England four days and had never once tasted an intoxicant since he landed at Plymouth. Since then he had resolutely tried to drive all thought of drink out of his mind. Now, however, Varcoe's remark had caught him in a moment of weakness. He felt as though he would have given his immortal soul for a long, strong whisky.

"How about a drink?" resumed Varcoe. "I have a graft on the man who keeps the little show inside, and could easily get you one. What do you say?"

For a moment Barcroft was strongly tempted. His throat was parched, While every fiber of his being called out for stimulants. Besides, would it not be a good policy to go with Varcoe into the public house? He could thus get on terms of intimacy with him, and learn what truth there was in the story Trencrom had just told him.

Then he looked at Varcoe's face, and was afraid. He saw the mocking laugh in the man's eyes, heard the sneer in his voice. This fellow, true to his

character, was doubtless trying to get what he would call a "rise out of" him; trying to show how little he cared for the clerical profession. For he was sure he knew who he was, and that he would boast of having invited the new Vicar to a drink.

Besides, what would his parishioners say if he accepted?

"No, thank you," he replied.

"You don't mean to say that you are a teetotaler?" asked Varcoe with feigned astonishment.

The new Vicar laughed a little uneasily. He wondered whether Varcoe had ever seen him before. "I am afraid that you are not a teetotaler yourself anyhow," was his retort.

"Not exactly, I'll take a drink with any man. You are a stranger here?" he added.

"Yes, I am a stranger here."

"I thought you must be. You look and talk as though you don't know me, and I am pretty well known in these parts. By the way, you are not—yes, I believe you are— you are the guy who— Say, what's your name?"

"My name is Barcroft," replied the other.

"Oh! then you are the new sky pilot. Well, I'll be jiggered."

"Why should you be surprised?"

"Well, you look like a real man; one who could take on a man's job, and a sky pilot's work in this place ain't a man's job. I guess I am not wise to a sky pilot's duties, but it's always struck me that they should be delegated to women. A full-grown man should have something better to do."

"There may be two opinions about that," and Barcroft laughed nervously.

"Of course it is up to you to say that, and I shouldn't be surprised if you don't like my freedom. But I come from a country where a man's job don't cut much ice."

"Have you lived in America all your life?" asked Barcroft, thinking it best to profess ignorance regarding the fellow.

"Me? I guess not. I am an old St. Michael's boy. Have you never heard of me? My name is Varcoe—Tom Varcoe."

"Yes, I believe I have, but I have never seen you before. You see, I only came here four days ago."

"Well, I have done well for myself," remarked Varcoe, with a smile of satisfaction. "When I left Cornwall I was only a youngster. When my old

man died I cleared out and went to the States. Yes, and I found that it was God's own country. I stayed in New York for quite a while, but I was not town bred, and seeing a man in a saloon one day, who had come from Texas, I got talking with him about that State. When he went back to Texas I went with him, and there I got on my feet. It was a rough life believe me, but I made good. I knew something about cattle over here, but I learned more out there, and soon became a prosperous man. I sold a thousand steers a year ago, sold 'em well, and I said to myself, 'I'll go back to the old country for a bit, and show 'em that the boy whom some of them looked down on can look down on them.' I knew that dollars talked in the States, and I fancied they might talk over here. I was not mistaken either. Why, my dear sir, the people who gave me the go-by years ago, are glad to make friends with me now."

"And are you staying in England long?"

"I guess I'll stay quite a while yet. I have a few plans to carry out."

"And what may those plans be?"

"I don't think I'll tell you right now; but I am in no hurry to get back."

"You are a very fortunate man."

"Am I? Well, perhaps I am."

"And you say you find the old country agreeable?"

"Agreeable enough." He hesitated a few seconds and then went on: "The people are so danged proud. That's the worst of these old countries. There was my father now. He thought because he knew who his grandfather was, he could be high—hat, as though that mattered. In the States now, dollars are the things that talk, and it doesn't matter whether a man had a grandfather or not. Home here they must have a pedigree from a man before they take him in."

"But you said that people who scorned you as a boy were glad to know you now."

"Yes, that's true up to a point. Well-to-do farmers are glad to drink with me, and all that kind of thing, but the danged"high brows"— Still, I mean to let 'em know."

"I don't follow you," said Barcroft, although he thought he knew what was in the man's mind.

Varcoe seemed on the point of saying more, but checked himself. Then presently he went on again: "I guess as the new sky pilot you can claim to be the equal of every one in this place. I hear you are staying at the big

house yonder, and the Trengroves have always looked upon themselves as little god almighties. Still, Torn Varcoe knows his way round."

"Are you a friend of Squire Trengrove?" ventured Barcroft. "I have never heard him speak about you."

"Haven't you? Perhaps you will though," and there was a truculent tone in Varcoe's voice. "There are more ways of killing a dog than by choking him with butter, as my father used to say."

"What is the meaning of that cryptic remark?" asked Barcroft, trying to speak banteringly.

"The meaning?" and Tom Varcoe answered him defiantly: "The meaning is that I don't play second fiddle to no man."

"Why should you? All the same I don't see why the Squire should talk about you unless you misbehave yourself."

"Misbehave myself, what do you mean misbehave?" The *soi disant* American looked at the other suspiciously.

"Well, I don't see why the Squire should talk about you unless you do something outrageous. Of course he is a magistrate and—"

"Magistrate!" broke in the other. "It won't be as a magistrate that Squire Trengrove will talk of Tom Varcoe. At present he thinks of himself as a little tin god, and is too mighty big to notice me, but he will be glad enough to notice me some day."

"Why? How?"

Varcoe laughed again, and then took a step nearer the new Vicar. "Look me straight in the eye," he said mockingly; "yes, straight. Do you see anything green there? I guess you don't, but those who live longest will see most," and without another word he turned and went into the public house again.

Barcroft left the village and walked down a quiet lane reflectively. Of course the interview might mean nothing, I but bearing in mind the conversations he had that very day; with the Bishop of the diocese, and his *locum tenens*, it made him uncomfortable. Did Varcoe have Verity Trengrove in his mind when he boasted that the Squire would be glad to acknowledge him?

"Surely, surely," he reflected, "it can't be true."

He pictured Verity Trengrove as he had seen her weeding in the garden on the day of his arrival, and he called to mind the proud look in her eyes and the refinement which was stamped on her every feature. No, she simply

could not so far forget herself as to have a vulgar love affair with such a fellow.

And yet might she not? Girls were sometimes swept off their feet by a fascinating man; so much so that they forget what was due to them. Could it be true that Verity Trengrove had so far forgotten herself as to allow this fellow to make love to her? She was little more than a child, and knew nothing of the ways of the world. Tom Varcoe, on the other hand, was not far from thirty years of age, and knew something of the ways of the world. In a way he was handsome too. He was tall, well-built, and from a certain standpoint well dressed.

No, the thing was too repugnant, too outrageous.

Presently he laughed aloud; why should he care? He knew nothing of the Squire's daughter and cared less. If she were fool enough to have a vulgar amour with this fellow let her. It was nothing to him; at any rate, he was not the man to worry.

He remembered his own past, remembered, too, that his very presence in the parish of St. Michael's was a mockery and a lie. Therefore, he was the last man in the world to trouble about Verity Trengrove's peccadilloes.

Looking at his watch, he saw that it was past six o'clock, and he knew that the Squire, who was always punctual at meals, would expect him to be ready for dinner at half-past seven. The distance to Budock was not very great, but he turned with quickening footsteps to a small gateway in the park walls which led by a much shortened way to the house. On reaching this gateway he stopped. Had Verity Trengrove been here on the previous midnight? It was close to Trenoweth Woods. Could it be that—?

He had scarcely passed through the little aperture in the wall when he heard a noise which sounded like the swish of a woman's dress, and turning he saw the girl of whom he had been thinking.

She met him frankly and with a laugh. If ever a woman's face belied such a story as he had heard, Verity Trengrove's did.

"Hullo! Mr. Barcroft, you have got back. Father told me you were going to see the Bishop. How did you get on?"

"Famously, I think." Barcroft's heart grew lighter as his eyes met those of the girl.

"You feared the ordeal of meeting him, didn't you?" she went on, "and I suppose it was not so bad after all."

"Not at all bad. He was kindness itself."

"I think he is an old dear," and she laughed as she spoke. "One or two of the clergymen who visit our house have spoken of him as a kind of ogre who has a bitter tongue, but I think he is just splendid. Of course he doesn't approve of me," she added.

"Why doesn't he approve of you?"

"Oh! I am a sort of dark horse with all the clergy, and I don't treat him as though he were a Right Reverend Father in God. He is just a dear fusty, musty, scholarly old man. Of course I have not seen him often."

"I expect you will see him again soon," ventured Barcroft.

"Why, is he coming here?"

"Yes, he has arranged to come to St. Michael's on the 20th for my induction."

"Oh, heavens!"

"Why that exclamation?"

"Because there will be such a fuss. Father will invite the clergymen from half a dozen parishes round to the house, and I expect the Bishop will stay the night, and everyone will have to be on their best behavior. We shall all be expected to kow-tow to the great man, as though he were something more than human. What a lot of bosh, isn't it?"

Barcroft agreed with her, although he did not say so, and he felt more than ever convinced that there could be no truth in the stories he had heard. This outspoken girl simply could not allow Varcoe to kiss her at midnight. The whole thing was absurd. How could she creep out of Budock, and, avoiding all watchful eyes, find her way to Trenoweth Woods? Still, he would make sure.

"I have had two interviews besides that with the Bishop," he informed her.

"Oh! with whom?"

"I stayed in Truro for lunch, and then taking the first train back to St. Michael's I reached the Vicarage in time for tea. I had a long talk with Trencrom. After I left him I came through the village where I met that fellow Varcoe. I was much interested in him," he added, looking steadily at the girl's face.

Yes, he could not deny it. Verity Trengrove flushed painfully, and looked confused.

"Why were you interested in him?" she managed to say.

"Don't you know?"

"How should I know?"

"Because I talked with you about him on the day of my arrival here, and you were very angry with me. Don't you remember?"

Yes, there could be no doubt about it. What he took for a guilty flush on her face deepened, while an angry light appeared in her eyes.

"You know him, don't you?" He watched her carefully and his heart became heavy as he looked.

Her face had undergone a change. The frank, sunny look with which she had met him had gone, and he felt sure an angry flush had taken its place. She looked confused too, and in spite of what he had said to the Bishop that very day, fear was in his heart.

"You know him?" he persisted.

"Well, what then?" and she turned towards him as he thought brazenly.

"I am very sorry, that's all."

"Why are you sorry?"

"I am convinced he is a bad fellow."

"How do you know?" and there was a dangerous gleam in her eyes.

"I know because I have it from various sources."

"Oh?" and there was scorn in her eyes. "I think I told you the last time we talked of this matter what I thought of a man, especially a clergyman, who listened to and repeated gossip. Besides, whether it's true or not, what has Varcoe to do with me?"

"This," replied Barcroft, taking a step nearer to her: "Tommy Crowle, the village sexton, told Mr. Trencrom only this morning that he saw you and young Varcoe kissing each other at midnight last night near Trenoweth Woods." He uttered the words distinctly, and although he hated what he was saying, he took a kind of pleasure in hurling them at her.

At first he thought she was going to strike him. There was mad passion in her eyes, and he saw her lips quivering. "How dare you?" she cried and her voice was hoarse.

"I dare because I want to save you," he replied, "and because it would break your father's heart if he knew. Why, the very thought of such a thing is—enough to make any decent man shudder. No, it's no use your being angry with me. I am telling you the truth: and you know it's the truth."

For some seconds conflicting emotions revealed themselves on the girl's face. Confusion, shame, fear, and as he thought guilt. But this was not all he

saw; there was something else which he could not describe; something which seemed to mock at his words.

Then suddenly she burst out laughing, and her laugh was almost hysterical. He was almost afraid for her; she seemed to be losing control over herself.

Presently, however, she mastered her emotion, or whatever it be; but the passion did not leave her eyes.—"And you!" she gasped—"you dare to come here to me like this! By what right?"

"By this right, Mis Trengrove: I——"

"I will not listen to you," she broke in.

"Then I am to—"

"It is all a matter of indifference to me what you do," she again interrupted him; then, without another word, she turned and left him.

If Verity Trengrove was angry, so was Barcroft. In spite of his experiences during the last few years, he was a proud man. It was not simply because Verity had refused to listen to him that he was angry, it was the fact that she had appeared to treat him with scorn. He had, so he told himself, spoken to her in kindness; spoken to her because of her own good name, and because he wanted to save her father from shame, and she had treated him with scorn. He called to mind the withering look she had given him after he had made his charge. "And you!" she had gasped, emphasizing the word in tones of bitter mockery, and again "you" as though he had been guilty of the worst kind of impertinence.

Never could an insult be conveyed by tones more strongly than she conveyed it.

Strange as it may seem, too, the way she had emphasized the word "you" made him feel, as never before, shame for what he was doing. She might have known who he was: what his past had been, and the fact made him writhe. Yes, even if the worst construction possible were put on her secret meetings with Varcoe, he had no right to speak, still less right to interfere. And yet he had taken upon himself the duty of upbraiding Verity Trengrove for something which might, after all, be as innocent as May flowers. And she had made him feel this. Feel it by the bitter emphasis she had placed upon the word "you." But that was not his strongest feeling. Anger, mad rage, overwhelmed everything else. He who had thought himself impervious to what other people might think now found himself as sensitive as a young girl.

But he would make her suffer for wounding him! He would get proof, irrefutable proof, of the stories he had heard, and then—

This was the prevailing determination in his mind as he made his way back to the house, and during the few minutes he had to get ready for dinner he formulated plans as to how he might accomplish his purpose. He would also keep a very watchful eye upon her in order to discover her secret. Of course she would be very restrained in his presence; how could it be otherwise? She would remember what he had said to her and what she had said to him, and act accordingly.

To his surprise, however, she met him at dinner with perfect freedom from restraint. As far as appearances went, nothing might have happened. She was full of laughter and good humor and talked freely with him about his impressions of the Bishop.

So natural to her was the role she had assumed that neither the Squire nor her mother had the slightest idea that angry words had passed between them.

"Of course we must invite the Bishop to stay the night," Mrs. Trengrove remarked. "Perhaps you can get him to stay a day or two, Hilary? I am sure I shall be always glad to have him; he is such a nice man in the house."

"He is a busy man, my dear," replied the Squire; "far too busy to pay us anything like a visit. I am very glad he is coming, though. He will give you a good send-off, Barcroft, and make your work in the parish easier."

"I have arranged with Trencrom to stay for a little while," Barcroft thought it wise to say. "You see," he went on, "I shall find the work in a Cornish parish very strange after my experiences in Africa. I don't know the ropes, so to speak, and might easily make a *faux pas*!"

"But you will preach next Sunday, Mr. Barcroft," remarked Verity innocently. "I am sure the people will be expecting you to, although you have not yet been inducted. They will want to hear their new Vicar. I should not be surprised if you had a good congregation."

"And you will go to Church yourself?" queried her father, more than glad at the interest she was evidently taking in the new Vicar's work.

"Of course I shall," she laughed; "and see that you preach a good sermon, Mr. Barcroft. I am going to be a terrible critic."

Barcroft did not understand her. Instead of being confused, reserved, or anything like angry, she was lighthearted and gay, and appeared to encourage a kind of camaraderie which he could not understand.

“It is her way of showing that she is afraid of me,” he reflected; “she has been thinking of what passed between us this afternoon and this is a kind of sop to Cerberus.”

“No, I shall not preach until after my induction,” he asserted. “I have arranged with Trencrom for him to take all the services until then. Of course, technically speaking neither the church nor the parish is mine until then; after that I shall feel as though I really have a right to be here.”

“A right to be here,” cried the Squire almost indignantly; “of course you have a right to be here. Your official induction, after all, is only a formal affair.”

“Yes, I know,” Barcroft replied, “but it is not as though I have been in England during the whole of my clerical life. In spite of all your kindness, I can’t help feeling strange. I have arranged to go to the Vicarage on Monday,” he added. “It is no end kind of you to have me here so long, but I can’t trespass on your hospitality any longer, and Trencrom has made all necessary arrangements.”

“Nonsense, you need not go so soon,” protested Mrs. Trengrove; “we are delighted to have you, aren’t we, Hilary? As for Verity, I have never known her take so much interest in the Vicar as she is taking in you.”

Barcroft cast a quick glance at the girl’s face as if expecting either denial or resentment at her mother’s words, but again he was disappointed.

“Oh! that’s because Mr. Barcroft is not cut after a pattern,” she laughed. “Why, once or twice he nearly rapped a good swear, and it made me feel more kindly towards him. I like a man who is unconventional,” she added, “only I wish he had said the words which were on the tip of his tongue, instead of saying what was far more tame and unexpressive.”

“I shall be very strict in performing some of my clerical duties anyhow,” he said, looking steadily at the girl. This time he felt he had pierced her armor. She flushed painfully and there was a look in her eyes which told him that she had not forgotten their conversation.

Only for a minute, however; the hauteur and anger passed away almost as soon as they had come, and she became a laughing-eyed siren again. “And she is barely twenty,” he reflected. “What a perfect little actress she is! No wonder her father and mother have no suspicion ’of her goings on with Varcoe.”

That night, instead of going directly to bed when he reached his room he stayed for a long time thinking over the experiences of the day. It was all so

strange, so very strange.

For the first time a real sense of shame possessed him. To impersonate a man in any other profession would not be so bad—but this!

He remembered how kind Mr. and Mrs. Trengrove had been, and he remembered the fatherly words of the old Bishop. Yes, he was in a real sense of the word a true Father in God, while he—l Was there not even now some way out of it? But that would mean—what would it mean? No, he would play it to the bitter end. But what would that end be?

The thought had scarcely passed through his mind when he thought he heard footsteps in the corridor outside. It was now past midnight; who would be moving along the corridor at such an hour? He thought of Verity.

Quick as lightning he moved to the door, and opened it, but he could see nothing. He listened intently, but all was silent; surely he must have been mistaken.

But he was not. He heard footsteps in the entrance hall, followed by a slight noise at the front door.

Rushing to a window through which he could see the open space outside the main entrance, he looked steadily. No clouds were in the sky, and it being summer time, in spite of the fact that there was no moon, there was sufficient light for him to observe all outstanding objects. He saw the steps leading up to the front door plainly; saw the carved figures which had been placed on the terrace.

Then his heart gave a leap; he saw a woman’s form move across the open space. Yes, he felt sure it was Verity Trengrove; he could almost swear to the fact. He recognized the dress. She had thrown 0E the evening clothes she had worn at dinner and had adopted the dress she had worn earlier in the day.

What should he do?

9.

THE NEW VICAR felt paralyzed. He wanted to throw I of the lethargy which had possessed him; rush down the stairs and follow the retreating form of the girl. He wanted to go after her wherever she went; wanted to protect her. For he felt that she needed protection; felt that whatever might be in her mind she was playing a dangerous game. Like lightning the conversation he had with Varcoe a few hours before flashed through his mind. What did the fellow mean by his threatening words? He was evidently chagrined at the fact that the Squire had failed to notice him, and this young upstart with his newly-found wealth could not understand the old aristocrat's attitude. Perhaps it was a thirst for revenge as well as vanity that made him think of getting Verity Trengrove in his power. By such means perhaps he thought he could bend the Squire's will to his own, gain a position in the parish, and at the same time win the most beautiful girl in the district for his wife. But he could do nothing. He felt incapable of action.

Then suddenly the stunned feeling which the sight of the girl had given him passed away. He wanted to act; but what could he do? He was enough of a countryman to know that it would be as easy to find a needle in a haystack as to follow Verity Trengrove. He did not know which way she would turn, and the house, standing as it did amidst large stretches of woodland and parkland, afforded many hiding-places. No doubt she and Varcoe would have an agreed meeting-place. But where was it?

It might be only a hundred yards away, or again it might be a mile.

A change of feeling passed over him, and he became hard and cynical. Let her go to the devil, and to ruin if she would; he was not going to bother. Besides, supposing he was discovered making his way dOWnstairs at that hour, what reason could he give? No, he had his own safety to consider, and he would consider it.

He went back to his bedroom—but not to sleep. Try as he would, sleep would not visit his eyes, and it was not until the stable clock struck four that he found himself becoming unconscious. When he awoke it was with a

heavy feeling at his heart, and he wondered what had happened. Why did he feel so tired and ill?

The stable clock struck eight.

Half an hour later he felt strong and vigorous again. A cold bath and the pure morning air had refreshed him, and when presently he found his way to the breakfast room his mind was keen and alert. He had scarcely taken his seat when Verity appeared. Barcroft looked at her keenly. He was wondering if her midnight vigils had left any marks on her. To his surprise she showed signs of neither weariness nor restraint. She met him with a laugh, and declared to her mother that she was as hungry as a hunting dog.

"Do you want your breakfast badly, Mr. Barcroft?" she asked.

"I can't say I do," was his reply.

"Then you need a tonic," she asserted. "Old Dr. Stevens told me the other day when he came here to visit one of the maids that to be hungry at breakfast was a sign of good health. He said you could test your health by that. If you sat down to breakfast with a good appetite, you were well, but if you didn't you needed somebody's pills. I forget whose. Mother, I will have porridge first, then fish, then bacon and eggs. Is the coffee hot? I hate cold coffee."

By half-past nine Barcroft was on his way to St. Michael's church town. He had made up his mind what to do. He was just entering the churchyard gates when he met an old man who was evidently making his way towards the *King's Arms*, where he had met Varcoe on the previous day. The man started on seeing the new Vicar and looked confused.

"Mornin', sir."

Barcroft looked at him keenly.

"The grave's nearly finished, sir. 'Twon't take me j more'n another hour. I shall be ready by three o'clock oal I right."

Barcroft remembered that Mr. Trencrom had told him that an old woman had died two days before, and that he; would bury her on the next day. He called to mind, too, how relieved he had felt when Mr. Trencrom had told him that he had arranged to take the funeral. Doubtless, this old man was the Peter Crowle he had mentioned, and Peter Crowle was the man he had come to see.

"I ded'n think you'd mind, sir, and tee terble 'ot, and I wad'n goin' to stay for more'n two or three minutes. I be a very mod'rate man, sir; just one pint of beer, that's all.',

“And so you were going to the public house in the middle of the morning, were you?”

“I a’n’t a tich a drop for more’n two days, sir,” protested Peter, looking at him nervously, “and I be chukkin’ with thirst. Grave diggin’ is a terble ‘ot job, sir. I ’ope you don’t mind my taakin’ a drap 0’ beer. Maister Sleeman ded’n, and Dr. Stevens do say that ’tes good for the digestion.”

Barcroft felt very sympathetic with the sexton. His own throat was parched with thirst and he would gladly have gone into the public house with the old man and joined him in his libations. But remembering who he was he dared not. Besides, he had his plans to carry out.

“You are Crowle, the parish sexton?”

“Bin sex’n for more’n forty year,” Peter informed him. “I have seed passons come and passons go, I ‘ave. I ’ope as ’ow you will be very ’appy ’ere, sir. But you won’t mind if I be lavin’ ’ee for a minute or two. I be terble thirsty. I’ll be back dreckly.”

“I have come to have a chat with you, Peter, a very serious chat,” said the new Vicar.

“Good lor’, sir! there ed’n nothing wrong, es there? The grave’s nearly finished, and ted’n eleven o’clock yet.”

“Come into the church,” commanded Barcroft. “I want to talk to you confidentially. You must do without your beer this morning,” he added.

“But you ba’ant—?” The sexton stopped suddenly, and with a sigh followed the other down the churchyard path. A minute later Barcroft had opened the church door and was leading the way towards the vestry.

“What ’ave ’ee got to say to me?” asked old Peter a little fearfully. “Tes terble wisht in ‘ere. We could talk better out in the sun, couldn’t us? Tes nothin’ worldly you want to say to me, I suppose?”

“I want to talk to you about several things,” replied Barcroft. He was wondering how he could lead up to the topic he had in his mind.

" ’Cos if tes worldly I’d rather not talk about it in ’ere," remarked Peter. “I bean’t what you call a religious man, but I doan’t hold with talking about worldly things in church.”

Barcroft felt like laughing, even though he could not help being impressed by the quiet restfulness of the old sanctuary.

“Come into the vestry,” he said.

“Good lor’!” exclaimed Peter, “I ‘ope you bean’t going to be ’ard upon me because I was goin’ to have a glass of beer.”

For reply Barcroft assumed the Vicar's chair and pointed to another for the sexton.

"I had a long chat with Mr. Trencrom about you yesterday," he began.

"He can't say nothin' wrong about me," asserted Peter confidently.

"He told me among other things that you are given to drink."

"Tes a lie! Leastways 'e've overstated the case. I doan't say but what—"

"I don't want your explanations now," interrupted Barcroft; "we will come to them presently. He also told me that while under the influence of drink that you imagine things that never existed, and then talk about them afterwards."

"Another lie!" replied Peter. "Is, I do say it, ef 'ee es a passon. I doan't say I be deef and dumb. The Lord Almighty did give me a tongue and I do spaik when I do think I ought to spaik; but as for being a craakin' man, tes a lie! As for fancying things I never seed it's the first time I've 'eard anything about it."

"You had too much to drink the night before last," asserted Barcroft.

"Another lie," declared Peter. "I doan't say but wot I 'ad a glass or two. I went to see my brother. 'E's an older man than I be, 'ee is, and seeing we 'ad'n met for more than six months, although 'ee do live in the next parish, I doan't deny we 'ad a drop. But I wad'n drunk, maaster—no, nothing of the sort."

"You came home from St. Dorcas by way of Trenoweth Wood," went on Barcroft, "and there you fancied what you never saw."

Peter's eyes twinkled. "Aw, I d' see what you be comin' to, now."

"You never saw what you told Mr. Trencrom you saw. Confess the truth now!"

"Did Mr. Trencrom tell 'ee about it?"

"Of course he did."

"Then I'll tell 'ee wot," said Peter with a great show of indignation, "'ee had no business to tell 'ee what I told'n as a secret. That's wot I do say!"

"What he told me, he told me as the Vicar of the parish, and because he thought I ought to know. But you were drunk, Crowle, and you only fancied you saw what you told him."

"I vow," said Peter solemnly, "before God that I seed what I told'n."

"Are you ready to swear to it?"

"I bean't a swearing man, maaster, but ef anyone d' tell me I'm a liard I shall swear!" and Peter banged his hand heavily upon the vestry table.

“And do you dare tell me what you told Mr. Trencrom?” _

“I seed what I seed, and nothin’ caan’t alter it. Yes, I knaw you may say that she’s a young laady, and I’d knaw that you may say she’s the daughter of a Squire, and wud’n have nothin’ to say to a fellow like Varcoe, but I seed ’em kissing each other, maaster. That’s wot I seed, as plain as i a pikestaff I seed it. ’E kissed she, and she kissed ’ee. She may be the Squire’s daughter, but ’tis true.”

“But, my dear man, it’s impossible! Do you mean to tell me that Miss Trengrove would so far forget herself as to—”

“Miss Trengrove es a wumman!” remarked Peter with emphasis. “She may be the Squire’s daughter, but she’s the same as other wimmin.”

“You must be mad, man,” asserted Barcroft. “I know Miss Trengrove, and I have met Varcoe; and I tell you that she is incapable of—”

“Incap’ble o’ what?”

“Meeting a fellow like Varcoe at midnight in Trenoweth Woods.”

“‘Ow old be ’ee, maaster, makin’ so bold?” asked Peter, eyeing him keenly.

“What has that to do with it?”

“You caan’t be more’n thirty or thereabouts,” remarked the sexton. “Was ’ee ever married maaster?”

“No, I was never married. But I don’t see—”

“Look ’ere,” and Peter leaned forward in his chair towards the new Vicar. “You ain’t never been married; that’s why you think you know all about wimmin. You think you know what they’ll do, and wot they won’t do. I’ve been married three times, and I’ve buried three wives. Three, maaster, three! and now at seventy years of age I d’ confess that I doan’t know nothin’ about wimmin except this: they be all alike. What one will do t’other will do. There’s no understanding wimmin, maaster; and I tell ‘ee this, you might ’ave knocked me down with a feather when I seed what I ded see down at Trenoweth Woods the other night. I hardly slaiped for the night thinkin’ about it, and I went straight to Mr. Trencrom first thing in the morning and told him, because I thought he ought to know.”

“It’s impossible,” asserted Barcroft again.

“Maaster,” went on Peter solemnly, “ther’s nothin’ impossible to a woman. When I was a young fella ‘bout your age I thought as ’ow I knawed all ’bout wimmin; thought I knawed what they wud do, and what they wud’n, and now I be old I do knaw that I doan’t knaw nothin’ ’bout ’em.

They be a mystery, maaster, a mystery, and gentle or simple it doan't make no difierence. When a woman do lose her 'ed about a man—well, tee all up with 'er. If anyone had told me at ten o'clock on Thursday night that I should see what I ded see, I should have said the man was a liard. But I thought it out afterwards, and I said to myself, gentle or simple, wimmin be all alike, and there bean't no understanding any of 'em. Besides, there wad'n no 'arm in it, as you might say. He kissed she, and she kissed 'ee. 'Ee called she a beauty, and she called 'ee a dear. And that's all 'bout it."

"And you can swear to this?"

"If anyone do call me a liard I shall swear. Not that I be a swearing man," he added.

"And you are sure it was Miss Verity Trengtove?"

"I be sure of it, maaster."

"And that the man was Varcoe?"

"I be sure of it, master."

"But it was dark, man!" cried Barcroft. "How could you be sure it was she?"

"'Twad'n so dark as that. This is summer time, and it was a clear night. Besides, d'you think I could mistake 'er? I've knawed 'er ever since she was a cheeld. Many a time she've spoke to me. Iss, me the parish sexton, and she the Squire's daughter. A dear little maid she was when she was a cheeld, and I've watched her grow up year by year gettin' prettier and prettier each day. No, I wad'n mistaken. I could tell 'er amohg a thousand."

In spite of himself a cold feeling crept into Barcroft's heart. Why he did not know, but he had believed or tried to believe, that the whole thing was a fabrication of the sexton's drunken brain, but the old man had spoken with such conviction and such certainty that doubt seemed impossible. This girl, Verity Trengrove, was guilty of a vulgar love affair with this fellow.

Well, why not? As he had told himself scores of times, it was no aEair of his. As the old sexton had said, women were all alike, and human nature was the same all the world over.

And yet he hated the thought of it. Believing himself impervious to all such cares, he found himself caring for the future of this young girl.

"Now listen to me," said the new Vicar after a long silence. "I don't say you are a liar."

"I bean't!" asserted Peter warmly.

“I don’t say you are a liar,” repeated the other. “I don’t say you don’t believe what you have just told me.”

“I don’t believe nothin’ about it,” interjected Peter. “I d’ knew, and knawing is more’n believin’. Passon Sleeman used to preach a lot about faith and what great things ’twu’d do. But this, maaster, ed’n a matter of faith. Tes a matter of knowledge. Wot I seed I seed, and that’s oal there is ’bout et.”

“Now listen,” said Barcroft earnestly, “I don’t believe you saw anything, or if you did you are utterly mistaken about the people. You were drunk at the time and couldn’t tell who was who.”

“I wasn’t drunk, I tell ’ee,” asserted Peter. “I be a difficult man to get drunk, I be. I can car’ more beer than any man in the parish, I can.”

“Anyhow,” went on Barcroft, “I don’t believe you saw what you thought you saw. Now listen; you are the parish sexton?”

“Bin sex’n for more’n forty year,” asserted the other.

“Do you want to keep your job?”

“Keep my job? There ed’n no one else could do it. I tell ’ee maaster, ’twill be a wisht day for this parish when I do die. Tis aisy to get a passon, but who’s going to take my job I don’t knaw.”

“Anyway you must bear this in mind, Peter: whether you keep your job or not depends on me. I have only to say the word and out you go.”

“There’d be a revolution in the parish if you sacked me,” asserted Peter.

“Revolution or not, your staying depends on me. Now then, you want to keep your job, don’t you?”

“’Course I do. It’s my living. I bin sexton so long that I bean’t fit for anything else. Why, I should starve but for this job!”

“Exactly. Now then, I have this to say to you. If I hear one word of what you told me, you lose your job.”

“But that wud’n be fair,” protested Peter.

“I should know,” went on Barcroft, “that you had been talking. Mr. Trencrom told me yesterday that you had sworn never to breathe a word about what you say you saw. Have you kept that oath to him?”

“I ded’n swear,” asserted Peter, “I only promised. No, I ain’t breathed one word, not one.”

“Very well. If you do—and remember I mean what I say—you are no longer sexton of the parish.”

Peter looked very serious. “I don’t deny,” he said, slowly and solemnly, “but wot I be giv’n to speakin’ freely when I’ve ’ad a drop of drink.”

“Then you must be a teetotaler, Peter.”

The sexton looked at the new Vicar steadily for some seconds. Then without another word, he rose slowly and went out of the church.

Five minutes later Barcroft was on his way to the Vicarage. He had decided to tell his *locum* of his interview with the parish sexton. He determined also to extract a promise from him that he would mention Peter Crowle’s story to no one. He was afraid that Mr. Trencrom in talking with some crony would tell what he, the sexton, believed he had seen, and, although he did not know why, he felt that he would move heaven and earth to keep such gossip from becoming public property.

Meanwhile Peter Crowle had, in spite of the new Vicar’s admonition, found his way to the *King’s Arms*.

“Me and the new Vicar ’ave bin talking over parish affairs,” he informed Bill Best, the landlord. “You av’n spok to ’n yet, I expect?”

“Never a word,” replied the landlord. “Wot did ’e say to you?”

“I bean’t goin’ to tell ’ee,” asserted Peter. “Me and the new passon be the two principal parish officials, and naterally we ’ad to talk things over. But wot we said was in confidence.”

The landlord looked at Peter steadily. He was a great gossip, and was anxious to know what the new Vicar had said to him. He reflected that it might form an interesting subject of conversation among his customers, and might be beneficial to trade.

“Look here, Peter,” he said, “in honor of the new Vicar’s coming I’m goin’ to stand treat.”

“Wot do ’ee main?” asked Peter.

“Wot I say,” replied the other. “Instead of your drinking beer, we’ll have a glass of whisky each.”

“No, you don’t,” replied Peter warmly. "I’d knaw wot I can stand, and wot I can’t stand. D’reckly I’ve ‘ad my beer I’m goin’ back to my grave. If I’d ’ave one glass of whisky I shall want more, and then I shall get talking.

No, no, a pint of beer is nothin’. I can stand beer, but I can’t stand whisky."

“But there wud be no harm in telling me what the Vicar said to ’ee,” argued the other.

“Parish secrets is parish secrets,” asserted Peter. “Concerning wot I think of the Vicar I’ll tell ’ee freely, but not one word shall pass my lips wot ’e said to me.”

“Well, wot do ’ee think of ’im, then?”

“I’ll tell ’ee wot I doan’t think,” replied Peter sagely; “I doan’t think ’e’s a converted man. I doan’t think ’e ’as got the grace of God in ’is ’eart.”

“Why don’t ’ee think so?”

“For one thing,” replied the sexton, " ’e’s down on the drink, and for another ’e’s got a bad eye."

“A bad eye! Wot do ’ee mean?”

“An evil eye, an evil eye. We shall ’ave trouble in this parish as sure as my name is wot ’tis.”

It was nearly one o’clock as the new Vicar was finding his way back to Budock. His conversation with his *locum* had been more momentous than he had imagined. The matter of the sexton was quickly dealt with, but when Mr. Trencrom told him that he would have to leave the parish directly after his induction Barcroft felt frightened.

“But you promised to stay with me several weeks,” he reminded him.

“I know I did. But circumstances have arisen which have compelled me to leave here. But there’s nothing for you to trouble about. Your induction takes place on the twentieth, and after that you will naturally take on your own work.”

It was this that troubled Barcroft as he made his way to Budock. Mr. Trencrom’s words had made him realize the situation as never before. Again the services which he would have to take became vivid to him. He saw himself in the pulpit preaching to those who had gathered in the old parish church; saw the face of Verity Trengrove in the Squire’s pew; realized that he would be called upon to officiate at Holy Communion.

“No, I’ll chuck it!” he said aloud. “Better clear out while I can, and leave the whole thing behind me.”

For a few seconds he stood still and looked around him. It was a beautiful sight that met his gaze. He saw the old church tower lifting its head above the trees which almost enshrouded the cottages; caught a glimpse of the Vicarage which nestled in its beautiful gardens; saw a wide panorama of hill and dale.

Yes, it was beautiful. A fairer sight could scarcely be seen, and if he gave up his project he would have to give up all this, and go back to—he

dared not think what.

Then he turned and looked at Budock, the ancient home of the Trengroves, standing among giant trees, well-kept gardens, and wide-stretching parklands. And Hilary Trengrove, owner of all this, had been more than kind to him. He had welcomed him almost as if he had been a son. He had written the Bishop concerning him. He had promised to befriend him in all he would have to do in the parish.

But that was not all. As he looked, he saw Verity Trengrove coming towards him. Whether what Peter Crowle had told him were true he did not know; but he remembered that if he left St. Michael's he would never see Verity Trengrove again.

Then he realized that something had been born in his heart which shook his life to its very foundations.

10.

THE INDUCTION of the Reverend Frank Barcroft as Vicar of St. Michael's was a great success, and was one of the most interesting events that had happened in the village for many years. Even the most fervent Methodists had to admit that the recognition of a new minister into the circuit was nothing when compared with the induction of the new Vicar. For one thing Methodist preachers came and went in the natural course of events. It was the rule that a minister should only stay three years, and as a consequence it caused no great excitement. But the coming of a new Vicar was diEerent. He might stay there throughout the whole of his life, and it might be that many of the people would not live to see the advent of his successor.

But more than all that the Reverend Frank Barcroft was inducted into his new living by the Bishop of the diocese, while no less than eight clergymen from the contiguous parishes had been present. When Mr. Sleeman came comparatively little notice was taken of it, and the induction services attracted but little attention. It was said that the Squire was not favorably impressed by Mr. Sleeman and therefore failed, as the villagers put it, to give him a good send-0E. In the case of Barcroft, however, all was different. The Squire was greatly interested in him, and did all in his power to magnify the occasion.

Added to all this, it was generally admitted that the new Vicar was a very interesting man. For one thing, it was freely said on every hand that he had done wonderful work in Africa. Some there were who asserted that he had converted all sorts of savage people to Christianity, and that he had more than once been in danger of being eaten by cannibals. Then again, he was young and good-looking, and what was of more interest still, he was unmarried. This was a fact that had greatly enhanced his popularity. Would he remain a bachelor or would he take a wife? Moreover, if he did take a wife, would he select one from out of the parish? It was a question of vital importance, and gossips mouthed it freely.

But besides all this, the new Vicar was a great change from the old one. Mr. Sleeman was conventional to a degree and was a cleric all compact. Mr. Barcroft, on the other hand, was unconventional, and was in no way reminiscent of his predecessor. Indeed, he did not look like a parson, did not talk like a parson. Many there were who, like the sexton, declared that he had not been converted; while others, especially young men who had largely given up attending any place of worship, declared they were sure he was a chap worth hearing.

Thus it came about that the church was crowded on the evening that the Bishop preached at St. Michael's. People came from far and near. Not only were Church people present, but large numbers of Methodists turned up, many of them wondering what a Vicar's induction would be like. It was an impressive service, too, and, while the new Vicar did not figure largely in it, the excitement was intense. Especially was this the case when, according to the time-honored custom, he left his pew, made his way towards the belfry, and rang one of the bells. Some there were who said they felt a shiver go down their backs as they heard the deep toll of the bell reverberating, not only through the church, but through the countryside. The Bishop, too, preached an interesting sermon. He, also, was an unconventional man, and had prepared a special address, which was, in many respects, a kind of charge not only to the new incumbent but to the parishioners.

"I may tell you this," the Bishop said during his address, "I have had a letter from the Bishop of. the diocese in Africa from which our young friend has come, and he has spoken of him in the highest of terms. He has told me that he has done the most valuable pioneer work in the hardest stations in the Dark Continent with remarkable results. Many there are who have been led to the Light through him, and the name of the Reverend Frank Barcroft is not only venerated, but loved by people who a few years ago knew nothing of the Gospel. I may tell you this also. The Bishop of the diocese has informed me that your new Vicar has great powers as a preacher, and that he was gladly heard in Africa by all sorts and conditions of people. Up to now you have not had the privilege of hearing him, he having elected to remain silent until this service is over. Presently however, there will be a public recognition meeting, when he will speak in response to the hearty welcome which I am sure you will give him. Then on Sunday next, no doubt, you will throng to the church to hear the message he has to deliver.

“But above all the good Bishop in his letter to me spoke not only of the noble work he has done, and of his gifts as a preacher; he spoke most feelingly and strongly of his character and life. For that is, after all, the principal thing. If a man does not live the Gospel he preaches his work is of little avail, and here I speak strongly with regard to the new incumbent of this parish.”

Whereupon the Bishop went on to speak in almost eulogistic terms of the life and character of the Reverend Frank Barcroft.

Meanwhile the subject of this eulogy sat in his pew with bent head. Never surely had any man a stranger experience. Here was he, an ex-convict, a skeptic, a convicted swindler, posing as a successor of the Apostles. He was not Frank Barcroft. Frank Barcroft had died months before, away in the heart of Africa. He was Hugh Treleaven, who because of his advantages as a boy and as a young man was able to pose as Frank Barcroft. But he had no right to be there. If the truth came to light, all sorts of scandal would be rife, while he——

He almost shuddered as he thought of these things, even while in a way he enjoyed it.

Then another thought possessed his mind, and Verity Trengrove’s face rose up before him. He had not looked at her, although he knew she was sitting in the Squire’s pew only a little distance away. But her face was as vivid to him as though he saw it in the flesh.

He called to mind the morning he had talked to the sexton; remembered, too, what he had said to the old man; remembered how on his return to Budock he had almost made up his mind to throw up the mad scheme which must inevitably end in disaster. Something, he knew not what, had made him feel ashamed; made him realize the meaning of the word sacrilege. So much so that he had almost determined to give up all that his coming into the parish meant to him.

Then he had seen Verity Trengrove.

He forgot where he was as he remembered it; forgot that he Was sitting in the old parish church while two or three hundred people were listening to the Bishop’s sermon. Forgot that a few minutes before the key of the church had been given to him, and that he had rung the deep-toned bell as a sign and symbol that he was Vicar of the parish, and that he stood in his own church. He only remembered that when he had seen Verity Trengrove coming towards him something had come into his life which changed

everything. Even yet he did not know what it was. He only knew that he would not leave St. Michael's, and that, although the heavens might fall, he would stay there and carry out the purposes he had in his mind.

But what were those purposes? He could not have defined them. The future was as vague as a cloud, but he would stay on.

Still, he was a fraud, an impostor, a walking falsehood, and his being at St. Michael's as the clergyman of the parish was one of the greatest fiascos ever known—

He gave a sudden start. For several minutes he had sat there oblivious to his surroundings. Now he realized where he was; what was taking place.

"My brethren," the Bishop was saying, "if Christianity is true, it is the greatest thing in the world. Yes, I repeat it. *It is the greatest thing in the world*. It is the root cure of all our difficulties, the panacea for all our woes. If it is true, the welfare of the world lies in understanding the secret of Jesus. We are living in a testing age. Whatever may be true of other countries, this country is being revolutionized. On every hand new forces seem to be at work, new difficulties are arising. Anarchy is in our midst, unrest is everywhere. Politically, industrially, socially, the world is rocking to its foundations, and if Christianity is true, the cure for everything is in Christ. And it is true. *It is true*. IT IS TRUE.

"Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit," and so on to the end.

The sermon was over, and the people were opening their hymn books to find the closing hymn. Some minutes later Barcroft heard the organ, whose tones filled the church to a tune he remembered singing many years ago. Almost, automatically he joined the others:

> "Thou, O Christ, art all I want,
> More than all in Thee I find."

He could have laughed aloud. What a fiasco it all was! What rubbish the Bishop had talked. As though the secret of life lay in a Jewish peasant, who had lived in an unimportant strip of land on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, nearly two thousand years before.

The benediction was pronounced, and he found himself with many others making his way towards the village schoolroom.

The schoolroom was packed to the doors, for although many who had been to the service had found they would not be able to stay to the after meeting and had gone away, many who had not gone to the church found their way there. Bill Best, the landlord of the *King's Arms*, was there. As he declared afterwards, he had not been to church for years, and he did not go that night although the Bishop was preaching, but he had dropped in at the public meeting. That, at all events, was not ostensibly religious. Several of the habitues of the *King's Arms* were also there. It was not like going to a chapel meeting, they declared. It did not pledge them to anything. They did not pretend to be religious, but the Vicar was a parish institution; therefore they had dropped in to give him a welcome. Peter Crowle was also there. Although he was the parish sexton, he was not at all regular in his attendance at church, and rarely went to any of the few meetings which were held. But this, as he remarked, was a special occasion.

The new Vicar, who sat on the little platform at the end of the room, looked eagerly at the audience and noted many whom he had been informed were very lax in their religious duties. But he did not trouble about these. There were two people in the room who claimed his attention.

One was Varcoe, who, following in the wake of Bill Best, the landlord, had decided, as he afterwards declared, "to give the new guy a show."

Yes, there could be no doubt about it. Varcoe had a striking personality. He had not even a nodding acquaintance with being a gentleman, but there was something about him that attracted attention. In his way he was handsome. In his way, too, he was well dressed. But more than all that, he had a striking individuality. No one would pass him by as a nonentity. No wonder he was a favorite with the fair sex.

Seated in another part of the room was Verity Trengrove, who sat by her mother's side. She, too, had been to the induction service, and had followed her father into the schoolroom for this public welcome meeting. Almost instinctively the new Vicar associated her with the young man who constantly proclaimed himself to be an American. In spite of himself, he could not help asking himself for the hundredth time whether the sexton's story of their meeting in Trenoweth Woods was true. He hated the thought of it, but it constantly haunted him. The faces of both were plainly visible to him. Could that proud, patrician girl allow herself to be kissed at midnight in a lonely place by that loud—speaking, self-assertive fellow? He studied

her face. No, it was not perfect by any means but he saw pride in her eyes, refinement in every feature.

It is not my purpose to describe in anything like detail the welcome given to the Vicar. The Bishop presided, and again spoke most kindly of the new incumbent of the parish, whom he commended most heartily to the parishioners. After he had said his say, he called upon the Squire, who, as the Vicar's warden, would be the most appropriate person to speak.

"I gladly respond to your call, my lord," the Squire said. And then he went on to describe his fear as to the man they should get, and presently told of his meeting with Barcroft in the train.

"We have got the right man, my lord," he said. "Many of us felt at first we would rather have had a man from a home parish, but since we have known Mr. Barcroft all our doubts have departed. He has stayed with me several days at Budock, and both my wife and I are satisfied. He is a real man, an earnest man, a genuine man, and as the Vicar's warden I welcome him most heartily into our midst."

After the Squire sat down the Bishop called upon the people's warden to speak, who welcomed Barcroft in the name of the parishioners.

"We Cornish people," declared this man, who was a farmer, "are a plain, simple people. We don't want any flummery or nonsense. We like the old Church services; plain, simple, beautiful and dignified. And we want a simple gospel preached. Well, I have had a talk with our new Vicar, and I tell you frankly and plainly, he just suits me. Without putting on any side or making any pre— tensions, he is a real Christian and a real gentleman. Perhaps some of you who had got used to Mr. Sleeman may think he is a bit brusque and unconventional, but I like him all the better for that. Besides, he is a true man, and as the Squire says, a genuine man."

"Heavens! if they only knew!" thought the new comer as he listened. "It almost makes me feel as if I were what they say." And again there arose in his heart, in spite of his unbelief of, and his derision for the whole business, the determination to act as though he were the real Frank Barcroft.

When at length he was called upon to speak he was received with tremendous enthusiasm. Round after round of applause greeted him, and the evident sincerity of the welcome almost unmanned him. There was something wonderful in it all, and even while they were cheering him he was trying to analyze the situation.

They little knew whom they were welcoming. If they did, Heaven knows what might happen! No, they were welcoming him because he represented something very dear to them, something in which they had great faith. What was the secret of this Something?

When he rose to speak his heart was beating wildly. All his thoughts had fled, and for some seconds he knew not what to say. Then he realized his position, and determined to do what he was expected to do. He had not been speaking more than a minute before his old power of speech came back. He had been a member of the Oxford Union when at the University, and was one of the most popular speakers. He had often been called upon to speak on the spur of the moment, and this practice stood him in good stead now. Besides, the people were eagerly expectant, and he would not let them down. Added to all this there was a certain vainglory. Looking towards Verity Trengrove, he thought he saw her laughing at him, and he determined to win her admiration.

In a few minutes he had won the audience completely. This was his first attempt at public speaking since he had been in the parish, and, as many of the villagers declared afterwards, "they never 'eard nuthin' like it." '

He turned all the weapons in his armory upon them, and he used each of them with good effect.

"By the good Lord, I am a success!" he said to himself as he proceeded; "these people absolutely believe in me."

Humor, pathos, witty anecdote, manifestations of sympathy, all were used, and used to good purpose. In a way they could not understand, the people felt that here was a man who knew of what he was talking, who spoke, not as one who had lived aloof from the world, but who knew it intimately. Moreover, he made them feel that he was in earnest, and being, as we have said earlier in these pages, a born actor, his every word carried conviction.

"I've only one thing more to say," he remarked in conclusion. "The Bishop finished up with a great note in his sermon just now. 'If Christianity is true,' he said, '*it is the greatest thing in the world!* It is the cure for everything. The secret of the world's welfare lies in the Man of Nazareth.'" He paused a moment, while the people waited in silence.

"*If* it is true," he repeated; "*if it is true*. But is it true?—Or is it only a worn-out myth? It is my business, and it shall be my business while I am here in this parish, to make it true to you."

He felt as though he had taken a further pledge as he spoke, and again a great terror possessed him as to what the future might bring forth.

11.

BEAUTIFUL, wad'n it?" an old woman remarked to a neighbor outside the schoolroom after the meeting.

" 'Twas for sure. He ded'n talk like a church parson 'to'al. And he seemed so sincere, too."

Barcroft heard this as he stood outside the village schoolroom, and while he could not help being pleased, it was like a stab in his heart. For he was not sincere. He didn't mean it. He was only playing a part.

"You will come up and have a bit of supper, Barcroft," the Squire invited him. "My wife is expecting you, and I can send you home in a car at whatever time you desire."

"But there is no need, Squire. It is only a short walk to the Vicarage, and I shall only be troubling you."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow! We shall be glad to have you. Indeed, we shall all be disappointed if you don't come. Besides, the Bishop is expecting you. He was tremendously pleased with your speech," he added. "Indeed, we all were."

Yes, these people were taking him at his face value, and their kindness was manifest on every hand.

What would they say if they knew?

He was making his way towards one of the Squire's cars, when he heard a voice beside him.

"I would like to speak to you, Parson." It was Varcoe who spoke. "I would like to say that I haven't been to a religious meeting of any sort since I left the old country years ago when I was a kid, but I have enjoyed myself tonight. You gave us a good speech, a darned good speech. I am inclined to think you will do a power of good in this place. For I may as well tell you that I have a sort of belief in religion. I am afraid it doesn't cut much ice with me, but it is a very good thing in its place."

Half an hour later a merry party sat down in Budock Hall to supper. The Bishop, who had arranged to stay the night, was there. So were some of the

clergy from neighboring parishes. The Bishop had been freely congratulated on his sermon that night, and was pleased as a consequence. Even Bishops are human.

"What I was most pleased about," remarked his lord— ship, "was the interest taken in Barcroft's address. I can see you doing a great work, young man."

"Did you believe what you said, Mr. Barcroft?" asked Verity Trengrove.

"Didn't I seem to?" he countered her.

"No, you didn't."

"I am sorry. I thought I did."

"Your speech seemed like so much play-acting," she asserted.

A silence fell on the little gathering, while both the Bishop and the Squire looked pained. The latter, as we have said, had thought great things of Barcroft's address.

"You don't mean that, Verity," said Mrs. Trengrove a little anxiously, looking towards the new Vicar. Kind, motherly soul that she was, she was afraid that her daughter might have hurt Barcroft's feelings.

"I do mean it," replied the girl. "Indeed, it seemed to me that the whole affair lacked reality. Everybody seemed to be trying to bolster up something out of which all life had gone."

"For shame, Verity! Didn't you believe in the Bishop's sermon?"

"In some of it," replied the girl.

The Bishop looked a little angry, and, if the truth must be told, looked upon Verity in the light of a forward, ill-mannered child who deserved to be spanked. And yet she spoke as if she meant it. There was nothing flippant or self-assertive in her tones, and there was something in her face which kept the old man from saying what was in his heart.

"In what part of my sermon did you believe?" he queried.

"In the closing passage," said the girl. "You said that if Christianity were true it is the greatest thing in the world. I believe that."

"And it is true, my dear," urged the kindly old man.

"Isn't that the point at issue?" she persisted. "Everything depends on that." ""

"Don't you believe it to be true?"

"No, I don't. If it were true, there would be no sin in the world. If it were true," and a strange light flashed from her eyes, "the world would be heaven."

Of course it was a foolish, superficial remark to make, and yet she spoke so sincerely, and with such pathos in her voice, that even her father could not reprimand her.

"That was why I was disappointed in Mr. Barcroft's speech," she went on. "For one thing, it lacked conviction. And for another, he didn't even say that he believed Christianity was true."

"Verity, Verity!" exclaimed her mother.

"It's true, mother. I listened very carefully, more carefully than you did. He quoted the Bishop's words, and said that if Christianity was true it was the greatest thing in the world. 'But is it true,' he added, 'or is it only a worn-out myth?'"

"Yes, but what did he say afterwards?"

"He said, 'It is my business, and it shall be my business while I am here, to make it true to you.'"

"Well, what more do you want than that?" asked her father.

"I want everything more than that," replied the girl. "It was as much as if he said, 'I will do my best with the job I have in hand. It isn't true to me, but I will try to make it true to others.' Isn't that what you meant, Mr. Barcroft?" And the girl's eyes flashed quickly upon him.

Barcroft did not speak. He couldn't. It might seem as though the girl had seen right into the depths of his mind. More than once he had heard it said of her that she had a kind of intuition whether people were speaking the truth. He knew that all eyes were upon him, knew that he was expected to defend himself. And yet, much as he wanted to convince this girl of his sincerity, he continued to be silent.

"There, you see!" and there was a suggestion of triumph in Verity's voice.

"I don't think you are quite fair, my dear," urged the Bishop, who, while he knew nothing of Barcroft's real thoughts, fancied he saw what a difficult work the young man might have in the parish. "The very fact that he went to Africa, and gave his life to disseminating the truth among the heathen; the very fact that he stayed there year after year while his health was being undermined proves that he believes what he says."

"And do you believe it, Mr. Barcroft?" She knew that it was bad taste to speak like that, especially to a guest, while others were listening eagerly, but she persisted.

“If it isn’t true,” evaded Barcroft, “there is, as far as I can see, no hope for the world. If it isn’t true, the Greeks were right, and there is nothing better for us than to eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

“And weren’t they right?” asked Verity. “The young people of today are often condemned for their mad race after pleasure and things of that sort. It is said that they have ceased going to church, and that they have no interest in the more serious matters of life. That all they care about is motoring, dancing, flirting, and all the rest of it. But why shouldn’t they? Why should they be bound by old-time conventions? After all, what is right and what is wrong? In a few years we shall all be dead. Why not take what life can give us, while we can get it? Didn’t the Pagans get hold of the truth, and weren’t the Puritans whom the Bishop lauded so tonight altogether mistaken? What is the religion which we are taught to believe in but a negation of life’s happiness?—if there is any happiness in life,” she added.

I know I may be alienating some of my readers from Verity Trengrove by recording this. Some who read may say she was a forward, superficial young minx, who, in the worst of bad taste, paraded her views about a subject of which she knew nothing. Possibly they may be right. But I am telling of Verity Trengrove as I knew her, and I am quoting as nearly as I can what she said. Remember this, too. She was, in some ways, a modern girl personified. She believed scarcely anything, and as a consequence old-fashoned standards had little or no meaning to her. And yet, in many respects, she was a fine girl. She hated meanness. She hated lies. She took delight in exposing what she thought hypocrisy. Moreover, she thought more deeply than many gave her credit for; and although she loved pleasure, ofttimes to the exclusion of duty, she had deep yearnings of which she told no one.

“I know what you are thinking of me,” she went on with a careless laugh. “But isn’t what I have said true? Do people really believe in Christianity? Come to that, ought they to believe in Christianity?”

“My dear, my dear!” protested the old Bishop kindly.

“Mostly when I go to church,” Verity continued, “I come away laughing. The sermons one hears as a rule wouldn’t satisfy the intelligence of a child in the third year of an elementary school, much less grown-up men and women. But tonight the Bishop’s sermon was more than elementary, and the occasion was one that leads one to think. Perhaps,” she added, "young

people think more than they are given credit for. That is why, if the Bishop will forgive me for saying so, his sermon was so unsatisfying.'

"For shame, Verity!" exclaimed Mrs. Trengrove.

"No, no," laughed the Bishop, who was just a little angry. "It is interesting to hear what the young lady says. Why was it unsatisfactory?"

"Because you assumed that in essence life was a good thing," replied the girl.

"Well, isn't it? Come now, you are a young girl, surrounded by beautiful things. You have a kind mother and father and everything the heart can desire. Don't you think life good?"

Barcroft was watching Verity's face as the Bishop asked his question, and he noted something in her eyes which he could not understand. For a moment he had forgotten his part in the conversation. He was thinking of Verity, and wondering whether what she had said was an attempt to justify her amour with Varcoe.

"Bishop," asked Verity, "do you ever read Thomas Hardy?"

"Yes, I have read him."

"Do you regard him as a great man?"

"I suppose so. Yes."

"As you know," went on the girl, "he has been spoken of as one of our greatest writers, and one who more truly interpreted than any other man the underlying truths of life. I read a story about him the other day."

"Indeed!" remarked the Bishop. "Let's hear it."

"It was said that he was out walking with a friend just after he had published jade the Obscure, and was at the zenith of his popularity. He asked this friend a question. It was this: 'If, knowing what you do, you had the choice of being born, would you have been born?' The friend in answering said, 'Would you?'

" 'No,' said Hardy, 'I would choose never to have been born.' Wasn't he right? Is life a good thing, and would a lot of us if we had had the choice ever have been born at all?"

"Well, what do you argue from that?"

"That if life is in essence a poor aEair ought we not to get what pleasure we can out of it regardless of convention? And isn't Christianity, as a consequence, an untrue interpretation of life?"

"If death ended all, life would be a poor affair, indeed, but Christianity shows us otherwise. Do you want Christianity to be true?" asked the

Bishop.

"If it is true," replied the girl, "if Jesus is all He claimed to be, then it is the greatest thing in the world. I believe that. But who believes it is true?"

"Mr. Barcroft believes it is true," asserted the Squire. He still had hopes that the new Vicar would have a good influence upon his daughter.

For a moment shame mantled the girl's facez and she looked around as though angry with herself.

"Oh, forgive me for monopolizing so much of the conversation!" she cried. "I am sure that you must regard me as a sort of fourth-rate prig talking like this, but I really am interested. I——I—" she stopped a little confusedly. "Do you really believe it is true, Mr. Barcroft?" she went on.

He felt that her question was a challenge, and at the moment he would have given all he possessed to make her believe in him.

"If I only can," he reflected. "If I can only convince her of my genuineness. Dash it all, I'll have a good try? I—I—yes, I will! I'll read up the subject. Perhaps, after all, I am mistaken. The Bishop is an intelligent man; an educated, cultured man; and he believes."

"There is nothing I believe in so much," he lied with a great show of conviction. "It is the greatest thing in the world, and it shall be my business, as I said tonight, to make it real to others."

"It will have to be real to you before you can make it real to others," she asserted after a somewhat painful silence.

When Barcroft reached the Vicarage that night, he sat alone for a long time thinking. It had been a strange and trying day to him, and although, as far as he could see, he had passed through the ordeal successfully, he seemed like a man in a dream. His early boyhood was real; so were the days he had spent at Oxford; while afterwards— Man, alive, that was real, too! Those terrible years at Dartmoor; the months he had been a vagrant in Africa; his visit to the deserted mining camp;—all that was real, terribly real.

But since then?

No wonder Verity Trengrove had said he was like a man play-acting! Yet here he was in the Vicarage as Vicar of the parish. He had been inducted that day by the Bishop of the diocese. He had, in honor of the occasion, worn clerical attire, and as he saw the reflection of himself in a mirror opposite, he felt that it was Hugh Treleaven who was dead, and that he was Frank Barcroft.

But it was not so. He was an ex-convict, a fraud, an impostor.

Like lightning the events of the day flashed through his mind. The ritual of the Church, the Bishop's sermon, the meeting afterwards, and above all the gathering at Budock Hall. Yes, he had newly pledged himself that day to his career. He was now officially recognized as Vicar of the parish.

He caught himself thinking of Verity Trengrove. Of course she was guilty of bad manners. He quite agreed with, although he resented, what the neighboring clergymen had said about her after supper. All the same, she was right. The whole business was a sham and a farce.

"It will have to be real to you before you can make it real to others," she had asserted, and the memory of her words stabbed him like a knife. He felt that in spite of the bad taste the parsons had accused her of, she had a kind of consciousness as to what was truth and what was lies.

"If I am ever found out," he reflected, "it is that girl who will do it."

Then something else came to him, something of which he had been dimly conscious on the morning he had talked with the sexton, but the deep meaning of which he was not then aware. He, Hugh Treleaven, swindler, prison bird, bogus parson, had fallen in love with this young girl! It shook his whole life to its foundations; he found himself trembling like one in fear.

It was madness; it was worse than madness; but it was true. He knew now why he wanted to prove that the old sexton's story was wrong, why he hated the thought of her name being associated with that of young Varcoe. Whether it was true that she had been guilty of a love affair with this loud-voiced individual or not, he did not know. He only knew that he would give his life willingly, to have made this girl love him as he loved her.

And he was a forger, an ex-jail-bird, a liar, an impostor. But he did not care. Why should he? In for a penny, in for a pound. "As well to be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb," the old proverb had it, and he was not going to let any scruples stand in his way now. He had taken on a bigger job than he had expected, but that did not matter. He would go through with it. He made up his mind to be assiduous in his duties, and to do the work of the parish faithfully. And he would, too.

And above, and more than everything, he would win the love of Verity Trengrove. He would get to the bottom of the story which the old sexton had told him, and learn whether it was truth or lies. In any case, he would drive Varcoe out of the parish, and win Verity for himself. He believed that

his chances were good, too. He was sure that the girl was interested in him, and he would see to it that her interest was increased.

He started to his feet and began to pace the room. As he did so the old eight-day clock which stood by the wall began to chime. He turned and saw that the hands pointed to midnight. He continued to pace the room, until he heard something which made him start. Surely there were footsteps coming up the drive?

In a few seconds there was a rat-tat-tat at the door. Almost mechanically he left the room, made his way into the entrance hall, and opened the door.

"Please, sir."

"Yes, what is it?"

"Grandfather sent me up to know if you would come and see grandmother."

Looking he saw what he took to be a youth of about seventeen or eighteen years of age. In the dim light he looked a tall, clumsy fellow, and by the tones of his voice Barcroft judged that he was apologetic for being there.

"I don't quite understand," he said. "Who is your grandfather? And why does your grandmother want to see me?"

"Please, sir, it isn't grandmother that wants you to see her. She's dying, she is. The doctor's just bin, and he d'say that she won't live through the night. That's why grandfather do want for you to come and pray with 'er. He said 'ee wouldn't have axed 'ee, but Jimmy Yelland is poorly, and the traveling preacher d'live miles away."

"And who are you?"

"I'm Tom Truscott, sir. My father and mother be both dead, and I do live with my grandfather and grandmother."

"And who is your grandfather?"

"He's William Bennetto, sir. We d'live in the little cottage close by the churchyard gates."

"And is your grandfather a religious man?"

"No, sir, not what you might call religious, but grandmother is. That's why grandfather d'want somebody to come and pray with her, and that's why 'ee sent me to you. I'm sorry I'm so late, sir, but the doctor only just left,-and 'ee said grandmother would be dead before moming. May I go back and tell grandfather you will come, sir?"

It was a strange commentary on what he had determined to do. He had vowed only a few minutes before that he Would do the work of the parish faithfully, and now—

"Is your grandmother conscious?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. Her mind is as clear as a bell."

What should he say? What should he do? He had never been at a death-bed since the night he had been in the deserted mining camp, and had sat with young Barcroft; and now to be called on to go and pray with this old woman—he simply couldn't do it. And yet what would be said in the parish if he refused? What would Verity Trengrove think of it? What excuse could he make?

"You say your grandmother was not a Churchwornan?"

"No, sir, she's a Wesleyan. So's grandfather; ef 'e's anything," Tom Truscott added. "But as I told 'ee, Jimmy Yelland is poorly, and the traveling preacher d'live miles away; but grandfather said you would be better 'n nobody."

For a moment he felt like laughing at the back-handed compliment which the youth had paid him. Nevertheless, the matter was serious enough in all conscience. But he must see it through. He could not refuse such a request.

"Very well. I will be at your grandfather's house in ten minutes from now."

A minute later he was back in the study again. He had given his word that he would visit this dying old woman, and he must keep his promise. What should he say to her? How could he to whom death was a great nothingness talk to her? He looked around the room wondering whether he could find some book that would help him, and presently he saw a New Testament lying on the study desk. During the few days he had been at the Vicarage he had more than once examined the Prayer Book in order to avoid mistakes in the services he would have to conduct. He remembered, too, that there was a special section for the "Visitation of the Sick," but somehow this did not appeal to him now. Opening the New Testament almost at the first page, he scanned it eagerly. The first words that caught his eye were the opening phrases of the Sermon on the Mount:

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," he read.

Of course he remembered the words. They had been familiar to him from boyhood. He had read them in Greek while at Oxford, and he had

heard the chaplain repeat them while he was at Dartmoor, but they had conveyed no meaning to him. Now, however, something of their true significance rushed upon him.

“Man, alive, it’s tremendous!” he repeated. " ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’ That man Jesus saw deep into things."

A minute later he had put the Prayer Book and the New Testament in his pocket, and left the house. Surely he could find something suitable. Nevertheless, it was with a strange feeling in his heart that he made his way towards the village.

Coming within sight of the church he heard footsteps, and a few second later he heard a voice which sounded familiar.

“You are out late, parson.” It was Varcoe who spoke.

“Yes, it is rather late. I am on my way to see Mrs. Bennetto. I am told she is dying.”

“Well, I don’t envy you your job. I prefer something more pleasant,” Varcoe laughed. uI’m not a sky pilot."

Barcroft wanted to stop and talk with Varcoe. At that moment, common as the fellow was, he had a curious fascination for him.

“Everyone seems in bed,” he said. “What keeps you out so late at night?”

“Pleasure, Parson. You say you are going to see someone who will soon be dead: I am going to see someone who is very much alive,” and again Varcoe laughed.

“Who?” he asked.

“That would be telling. Good night.” And Varcoe moved rapidly down a narrow lane.

He wanted to follow him; a ghastly fear had come into his heart. The words of his late *locum* flashed through his mind, and he remembered what the sexton had said to him. For the first time since he was a boy he knew what jealousy meant.

But, no, it couldn’t be! The girl with whom he had talked an hour before, who had pleaded for sincerity and truth, could not be guilty of deceiving her father, and having a midnight meeting with this man in her mind, at the same time. And yet had she not been pleading for an untrammeled life, for freedom from convention? He had watched her face while she had argued with the Bishop, and had wondered what she meant when she had asked him whether it was not right to snatch at whatever happiness life oEered,

regardless of whether it was what the world called right or wrong. Yes, she was the Squire's daughter, and seemed to be planets removed from this loud-talking young man who had just left him. And yet—

He would go after him, and he would find out the truth. Verity Trengrove had become all the world to him, and he must know. He simply must. Why, that lane down which Varcoe had gone led to Trenoweth Woods, and a picture of Verity making her way across her father's park towards this rendewous flashed before his mind. He took a few steps down the lane, and then stopped. Was he not insulting the girl whom he loved more than his own life by harboring such a thought? And yet—

He turned on his heel, and quickly found his way to Mrs. Bennetto's cottage.

12.

AN OLD MAN opened the door, an old man grey and A bent. It was easy to see by his drawn face and, tear-dimmed eyes that he was suffering.

"Come in, maaster, will 'e?"

"I am the new Vicar," he stated. "You sent your grandson for rue."

"Ess. My ould dear is dyin'. The doctor 've bin and l he d'say she can't last till mornin'. We've lived together: for more'n fifty year, and now she's going. She was a; butaful young maid when I married her, and now—" '; Great sobs shook the old man's frame.

"I can't do much for 'er now," he went on, "but she: was allus a prayin' woman, and I thought she'd like some one to put up a prayer with 'er. Come this way, maaster."

The visitor felt he would have given years of his life to have been spared this. What could he, an impostor, say in the face of such sorrow? What message had he for a dying woman? Never had he felt the meaning of the word sacrilege so much as now. Nevertheless, he grimly followed the old man up the narrow stairway into the room of death. It was dimly lit. Only a single candle stood near the head of the bed. Near the candle stood a placid-faced, motherly-looking woman of about forty years of age. On the bed lay an old woman, her face like wax. In the light of the candle which shone directly on ', her face it looked at the first glance like a dead face. But I the newcomer saw that she was not dead. Life was manifest in the quivering lips.

She took no notice of his advent, and as he stood watching her, it seemed as though her mind was far away. Presently he heard her murmur:

"Mary, my butaful."

"Ess, mother, what is it?"

"T'want be long now. I can hear the rustling of the angels' wings."

"Can 'e, mother?"

"Ess. You mustn't grieve, my dear. I'm going home to the Lord. I be an old woman, I be, and I've bin waiting for the Lord to call me for a long

time. And now I be glad to hear His voice. T'ed'n hard to die. Mary. It's only going home. Is that you, William?" She spoke in panting breaths, and scarcely above a whisper, but in the silence of the night every word was plain.

"Here I be, mother. I've brought Mr. Barcroft, the new Vicar, to see 'e."

The old woman's eyes, which had been partially closed, opened at this, and she looked at the young man who stood near the end of the bed.

"Come nearer, my dear," she whispered, and like a man in a dream the new Vicar obeyed her. For a few seconds she looked steadily into his face, and then closed her eyes with a sigh.

"Do you know the secret of the Lord, my dear?" she asked.

Barcroft was silent. Something sealed his lips.

"I learned it more than fifty years ago when I was converted at the little chapel," she went on, "and ever since I've held to it. It's very butaful, my dear. It's been a joy to me throughout all my life, and it's a joy to me now."

All thought of scoffing left Barcroft's mind as he stood watching her. The placid, smiling face was so serene, so beautiful, that he wanted to ask her questions. He instinctively knew that what she said was true. She had learned the secret of life. He did not know how it was, but somehow the stone walls of skepticism seemed to melt away, and a world other than the sordid, material world appeared. He had not felt it in conversing with the clergymen that night. He had not even felt it when talking with the Bishop of the diocese. Instinctively he knew that this old woman was nearer to God and to truth than they. And yet the truth was hidden from him. Even though the blank walls of materialism had melted he was incapable of seeing.

" 'Aven't he got anything to say to me, my dear?" the old woman asked presently.

"No, it is I who must learn from you, not you from me," he could not help replying.

Another silence followed this. Then he heard her whispering to herself:

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.

"He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

Still Barcroft did not speak. He felt as though it would be blasphemy on his part to utter a word. She might be ignorant; she might know nothing of the wisdom of the world, but she had learned a secret far greater than he had ever dreamed of.

"Butaful, isn't it, William?" she whispered.

"Ess, my dear," the old man sobbed.

"You mustn't grieve, William. I shall be waiting for 'e. You'll come to me when your time do come, won't 'e?"

"If the Lord will let me."

"He will if you turn to Him for strength, my dear. I bean't feared to die, William. Be you?"

"Ess, I be."

"There's no need to fear, William. It would be terrible if I hadn't Christ on my side. But He's here. I can see His Face now. Look, my dear, don't 'e see 'n? He's here now, just as He was with Mary and Martha, in Bethany. Why, I can hear Him speakin'… 'I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.'

"There, didn' 'e hear, William? I did."

He did not know why, but Barcroft felt tears trickling down his cheeks: he, whose eyes were strangers to tears. He was living in a new world, and he realized what faith, real faith, might mean.

"Won't 'e say a prayer, my dear?" He felt her eyes upon him as she spoke. Her voice scarcely rose above a whisper, and yet it sounded like a command.

He had no prayer to offer, yet almost instinctively he fell on his knees, old William Bennetto and his daughter Mary following his example.

He did not utter a word. He could not. He dared not. In a way he could not understand he knew that he was on holy ground; that something more than could be seen with mortal eyes was in the room. He thought of the Prayer Book he had brought with him, remembered the section for the Visitation of the Sick. How poor, how tawdry, it seemed in the light of the faith of this simple old woman! He longed, as he had never longed for anything before, to be able to enter into the holy of holies where she dwelt.

"Say a prayer, my dear," she whispered again. "I be feelin' cold."

Then before he knew what he was doing he found himself praying.

"O God—" He stopped. He did not know what to say more. "If there is a God," he reflected. "O Christ—" Then he stopped again. Even in that solemn hour he remembered that old William Bennetto and his daughter were listening, and would report what had taken place. Not that it mattered much. Nothing mattered in the face of eternal things. "O Christ," he went on, "make the way very plain unto this dear old soul, and let the Light shine."

Why he said the last words he did not know. They came to him involuntarily, and had passed his lips before he was aware. That was the end of his prayer, for at that moment the old woman raised herself on the bed as if by some kind of supernatural strength, and her voice became clear and resonant.

"They're here, William!" she said triumphantly; "the chariots and the horsemen of the Lord! They are here to take me, and the Lord Jesus is with them! Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

She fell back on her pillow as she spoke, and Barcroft thought that her spirit had flown. But she was still breathing; a little later her eyes opened again, and she seemed to be looking away into space; seemed to be waiting expectantly.

"Ruth!" she said aloud. "Why, it's Ruth! I'm coming, my dear."

Then she closed her eyes again.

For more than a minute the three remained kneeling and watching. Then Barcroft realized that the spirit of the old woman had fled.

"She's gone, father."

"Yes, Mary, she's gone."

"Did you hear her call to Ruth?"

"Ess, my dear, I heard her."

There was a sob in the old man's voice, but he spoke calmly.

"'Tis five years now since she died. Nearly twenty since she married Tom Truscott; but mother recognized her."

Barcroft rose to his feet and slowly made his way down the stairs, leaving the others in the death chamber. He did not leave the house. Why he could scarcely tell, except for a thought that old William Bennetto might want him again. Sitting in the little cottage kitchen, be reflected on what he had seen and heard.

He caught himself remembering a conversation he had had years before with a Roman Catholic priest, who had told him of the rites his Church had

arranged at the time of death; told him of Extreme Unction, of prescribed prayers, of the lighting of candles, and other things. It had seemed picturesque at the time, but how trivial and small it all appeared now! What were rites and ceremonies to this faithful old soul who had reached her journey's end? After all, what did Churches matter? What did anything matter, in the face of such a simple and triumphant faith?

He heard movements upstairs, and a minute later he saw William Bennetto descending.

"It's very kind of you to wait, Mr. Barcroft."

"It isn't kind. I couldn't help it."

"It was very kind of you to come, too," went on the old man without seeming to notice his words. "Not that you need to 'ave. Mary knew in Whom she believed, but it's very kind of 'e all the same. I think your coming meant a lot to her, too."

Barcroft was silent. O God, if they only knew!

"I'll be going now," he said, rising to his feet. "If there's anything I can do—"

"It's terrible hard to think of, Mr. Barcroft. She has been my companion for more'n fifty years, and the thought of laying her in the grave is terrible hard to bear, terrible. I shan't be long before I follow. Would Sunday afternoon be convenient, sir?"

"Sunday afternoon?" queried Barcroft.

"Iss. The funeral," the old man replied.

He murmured something, he knew not what, and then left the house. This also would be part of his duties as Vicar of the parish of St. Michael's.

On leaving the road he quickly found himself in a little open space outside the churchyard gates. Not a soul was near, or at least he thought so, and he stood still reflecting on what he had seen and heard. Presently he gave a start, and a shiver passed through him. It was only the boom of the church clock striking, but he had become sensitive and the least thing startled him.

Then suddenly the influences which had surrounded him for the past hour left him. It seemed to him that something mundane, something almost evil was near him.

"Oh, it's you, parson, is it?" He had not noticed that Varcoe was near him.

"Yes, it is I."

“How did you find the old lady?”

“She’s dead. I watched her die.”

“Well, as I said, I don’t envy you your job. Good night.”

“Did you meet the person you went to see?”

But Varcoe did not reply. He entered the public house where he was lodging.

Barcroft went back to the Vicarage. A multitude of thoughts rushed through his mind; a multitude of emotions flooded his being.

“I didn’t think it would be like this!” he said aloud after he had been sitting for a few minutes. “I didn’t think it would be like this!”

His visit to William Bennetto’s cottage had been a revelation to him. As we have said, he had given up all faith in anything appertaining to the spiritual world. Christianity was simply a respectable creed, a part and parcel of the hocus-pocus of the world, which thinking people had been led to abandon. It was true his father had been a religious man, but the fact had made very little impression on him. Those years at Oxford when he had become mixed up with a fast setg—those years, too, after his father’s death — But he would not think about that. It was too painful. Anyhow, he had chucked everything like religion. Then afterwards those years at Dartmoor. — He remembered the grey skies, the misty moors, the slavery in the quarries, the language of his fellow prisoners— Religion! As well talk about religion in hell! As for the services in the prison chapel,—who believed in them? Who cared anything about them? Why, the chaplain’s sermons were little more to him, as they were to the others, than subjects for profanity. The whole business of Sunday dragged him further away from faith, rather than led him nearer to it.

Again he thought of the voyage to Africa when he had had it in his heart to kill the mate; afterwards there followed those months when he had earned a precarious living as best he could. He had been the friend of the scum of the populace, a regular wandering Cain going from place to place. Now he was a billiard-marker; then he was a tapster; and again he was a boots. Anything like religion had been as distant from him as heaven is distant from hell. He was simply a piece of dirty flotsam on the heaving seas of life… .

Then came that night in the deserted mining camp when he met the real Barcroft. He recalled the conversation that had taken place; remembered what the young parson had told him of his life in the wilds.

It all seemed like a dream now. The words of the young clergyman just before he had gone into the Great Unknown seemed as though they had no part in his life.

But afterwards!

He remembered the thoughts that had flooded his mind when first the idea came to him to take Barcroft's identity; to be Barcroft. He had become weary of being a vagrant, —an outcast. How much he hated it! He had had no moral compunctions. He had only wondered whether he could carry out the project successfully. Then he had come to his decision. He had buried Barcroft's body under the débris of the mining camp. He had dressed himself in Barcroft's clothes; he had appropriated his papers, his bank-book, his possessions, his name, and had come to England as the Vicar of St. Michael's. So far, too, he had carried out the project successfully. He had that very day been inducted as Vicar, and the people had given him a great welcome.

But he did not think it would be like this. This, his first real Work as Vicar of St. Michael's, had opened his eyes. It had made him see the reality of what he had done; of the work he had undertaken. That old woman had met death not only calmly and fearlessly; she had met it triumphantly. She had seen the horsemen and the chariots of the Lord…

There must be *something* in it. There was something in it! That old woman might be ignorant. She might not know the A B C of learning, but she had possessed something which made her fearless about that of which i he was fearful. He hated the thought of death. At the best, it was to him a great black nothingness; but to her it was eternal Light. Yes, she possessed a secret of which he was ignorant…

And he was expected, as Vicar of the parish, to officiate at her graveside on the following Sunday afternoon. He would have to read what, if true, were surely the greatest words ever uttered by mortal lips.

"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die."

No, he could not do it! He simply could not! The meaning of the word sacrilege had gripped him now, and held him like a steel vice. Blasphemy! —tbat would be blasphemy!

"I'll chuck it!" he cried aloud. "I'll chuck it! I'll leave this parish tomorrow, catch the first boat to America, and, under a new name, live what

life I can."

Then he realized what "chucking it" would mean. He would never see Verity Trengrove again—never see Verity Trengrove again!

The meaning of the words flooded his mind, and everything became black at the thought of it. It was only that night that he realized how she had become all the world to him. He remembered her as he had seen her first standing at the door of Budock Hall. What a picture she had made! Her bright eyes had flashed with merriment. How fair and girlish she was! Even from the first he had been attracted, fascinated. He had hated the thought of her name being associated with that of Varcoe, and he had sworn to save her from him. But he had never felt until a few hours before what she had become to him. Why, she filled his whole horizon; she had, in many ways, made the world new!

Besides, if what the sexton had told him were true, she was in danger. She had become enamored of a worthless fellow, who would not only ruin her life, but make her a byword and a scoffing—… He wished he had never seen St. Michael's! He cursed the day he had drifted into the deserted mining camp and met Barcroft. Why had he been such a fool as to yield to the farcical temptation to impersonate another man? It was the epitome of madness; it was madness run wild.

Day was beginning to break when at length the new Vicar of Saint Michael's found his way to his bedroom.

As he thought of it afterwards it seemed to him that he had only been sleeping a few minutes when a knock came to the door.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Please, sir, it's ten o'clock, and Squire Trengrove has come to see you."

"Squire Trengrove? What does he want?" He was yet only half awake, and did not fully grasp where he was.

"May I come in?" It was the Squire's voice.

"Of course you may. What is it?"

The Squire entered, a bluff, hearty figure, exuding health and good will.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" he almost shouted with a laugh. "Why, it's past ten o'clock, and as you left Budock soon after ten last night, I thought you would have been up and had breakfast long ago. I am taking the Bishop back to Truro, and he thought he would like to come and have a chat with you. He will be shocked when he knows that you are still in bed." And again the Squire laughed—a good—humored, breezy laugh.

“I didn’t get to bed until four o’clock this morning,” Barcroft apologized. “You see, I hadn’t been home long last night when a boy came and asked me to go and see a dying woman.”

“Oh, yes, I remember now. It is for me to apologize. I am so sorry, my dear fellow. I have only just been told that Mrs. Bennetto is dead. I think one of the servants was telling the Bishop when I came up just now. Will you be busy this morning?”

“I needn’t be busy. Why?”

“Well, the Bishop wants to get back to Truro by twelve o’clock, and he also wants a chat with you. Then, added to that, Verity wants me to bring you back to lunch. Can you manage it? Say you will right away!”

“If you will clear out of this room right away,” and Barcroft laughed like a boy. The thought of Verity asking him to lunch banished all sad thoughts.

“That’s good!” cried the Squire. “I’ll tell your housekeeper you will be down in ten minutes, and that she is to have a snack of breakfast ready for you, which I will give you five minutes to consume.”

Barcroft laughed again as the Squire left the room. His very presence had done him good. His buoyant good humor, his freedom from convention, and his evident determination to treat him as a friend, made everything bright.

“I say, Barcroft,” exclaimed the Bishop as a few minutes later he came downstairs. “I had no idea how you were engaged last night after you had left us, or I wouldn’t have suggested calling on you this morning. Mrs. Bray has told me all about it.”

“About what?”

“About your being kept up all night with that dying woman.”

“How did she know?” asked Barcroft. “I didn’t tell her. Indeed, I haven’t seen her since I came back.”

“Oh, these country people have a way of finding things out. Telephones and telegraphs are entirely unnecessary in a country village. The people have a system of information far quicker than any known in more sophisticated regions. It was rather a good beginning for your work, my dear boy,” the old man continued.

“How did she come to think of sending for you? I am afraid the Jews and Samaritans have no dealings with each other.”

Barcroft gave the Bishop particulars of Tom Truscott’s coming.

“His grandfather seemed to think I should be better than nobody,” he concluded.

The Bishop laughed at this. He had a keen sense of humor, and was quick to fasten upon the humorous side of things.

“Well, this was your first pastoral visit, I suppose?” he queried.

“Yes, I am glad it happened in that way.”

“Why? How did your experience appeal to you?”

“It made me feel like a sham,” replied Barcroft.

“A sham? Why?”

Barcroft told his story. He told it well, too; described it graphically, while the old Bishop listened in silence.

“Yes, my boy,” he said, “it was a great experience,— a very great experience. I am glad you had it.”

“I shall never forget it,” went on Barcroft. “I think it will make me wiser. Perhaps it may make me—” He did not conclude his sentence, for he realized that he was on the point of saying something for which he might be sorry afterwards. If he had been alone with the Bishop, he might have been led to make a confession which would have ended his work at St. Michael’s for ever. But the Squire was there, and, much as he liked him, Barcroft could not talk about such matters in his presence.

A few minutes later the three men were in the Squire’s car, and were being rapidly driven towards Truro. The Squire sat by the chauffeur, while Barcroft and the Bishop sat behind.

“I wanted a few minum’ chat with you very badly,” said the Bishop. “Mr. Trengrove can’t hear us, can he?”

“No,” replied Barcroft, “that partition between the chauffeur’s seat and ours destroys all possibility of anything we may say reaching him.”

“That’s all right, then. You see, I want to talk to you particularly about Trengrove’s daughter.”

Barcroft did not answer, but a hard look came into his eyes. He wondered what the Bishop was going to say.

13.

"YES, I AM A GOOD DEAL BOTHERED," continued the I kindly old prelate. "I have a great regard for Hilary Trengrove, and I have known Verity for years."

Still Barcroft did not speak. He wondered what the Bishop would say if he knew what was in his heart.

"I had a talk with her alone after you left last night."

"Yes?" queried Barcroft as the Bishop hesitated.

"I felt I ought. You remember our conversation when you came to see me? I told you what I had heard. I'm terribly afraid, Barcroft."

"But, my lord—"

"You see," the Bishop went on, without noticing the other's interruption, "Verity is passing through a very dangerous phase. All young girls pass through it, I suppose, and I'm not sure that Trengrove was wise to send her to the school he did. From what I can gather, the religious education there is not very prominent, and according to the custom which now prevails in big public schools, girls are allowed a great deal of latitude. Anyhow, Verity is giving him a good deal of anxious thought."

"In what way?"

"Well, as you saw last night, Verity has theological measles very badly. In fact, she believes practically nothing. She has broken away from all the old moorings, and is, in many senses, a free-thinker. You noticed that of course?"

"It would be difficult not to notice it," replied Barcroft uneasily.

"She pained me very much," went on the old Bishop. "I make great allowances for young people, and I think I can see how girls of a certain class of mind take a pride in being regarded as heretics. But Verity's case is dangerous!"

"In what way?"

"Mark you, I don't want to be mistaken or misinterpreted. Verity is in many ways a very fine girl. From what I can gather from her father she is

very high principled, and thinks along healthy lines. I would not fail to recognize that for anything. She has a scorn for shams, too, and has the class of mind that fastens upon essentials. At the same time, I can't help being anxious. Theological and ecclesiastical heresies," went on the old man with a nervous laugh, "don't trouble me so much; but ethical heresies are a different matter. You noticed what she said last night?"

"I naturally listened very attentively to the conversation; but to what are you referring?"

"To her loose conceptions of right and wrong. To what she said concerning the breaking away from conventions, and her justification for snatching at happiness although it came in a way that religion condemned. I know I am not expressing myself very well," the Bishop almost apologized. "It is difficult in such a case to do so, especially as I have so little to go upon. But perhaps you can see what is in my mind?"

"Perhaps I can."

"I shouldn't have thought so much about it," went on the Bishop, "but for what I had heard about her infatuation for that Varcoe fellow. In theory, at all events, she has no belief in class distinctions or anything of that sort, otherwise the very fact that she is Hilary Trengrove's daughter might make it impossible for her even to be friendly with a fellow of the Varcoe order."

"As I told you when I saw you in Truro, my lord," Barcroft could not help saying, "I don't believe the story is true. The whole thing is a fabrication, an evil-minded mistake."

"You speak strongly," said the Bishop. "What are your reasons for saying that?"

"I have no reasons," and he spoke almost savagely, "except that I have spoken to Varcoe."

"Spoken to Varcoe! Did you in any way refer to—"

"Oh, no. I would not insult Miss Trengrove by doing that. But I have met him once or twice and have tried to see into his mind."

"Well?" queried the Bishop, as Barcroft hesitated.

"As you know, I stayed at Budock for nearly a week, and naturally saw a lot of Miss Trengrove."

"Yes. And then?"

"Nothing," replied the new Vicar, "except that she could not think of such a fellow save as an outsider. At all events, she is a lady."

"And those are the only grounds for your convictions?"

“I want no other grounds,” and still there was something like a savage ring in his voice.

“I think I understand your feelings,” said the Bishop. “You naturally infer that a young lady reared amid refined associations would naturally be repelled by a fellow of the Varcoe stamp. But perhaps you haven’t studied women? You have been out of England for many years.”

“No, I know nothing about women. I—”

“I think I understand, and perhaps, if I were situated as you are, I might hold the same opinion. But I have had a wide experience. I am getting to be an old man, and have met many curious cases. When I was Dean of Gray’s a young girl gently reared, apparently religiously inclined, actually eloped with her father’s chauffeur. There seems to be no law as far as women are concerned,” and a grim smile passed over the Bishop’s face. “Anyhow, I am afraid your conclusions are wrong in this case.”

“How? Why?” asked Barcroft eagerly.

“Because, as I told you, last night after you had gone I managed to have a chat with her.”

"Yes?’,

“I told her frankly what I had heard, and asked her if there was any truth in it. Of course I tried to be diplomatic and put my questions in a careful way.”

“And?” queried Barcroft eagerly.

“Her replies were very unsatisfactory. In fact, she can scarcely be said to have replied at all. Anyway, of this I am certain: there is some understanding between her and this Varcoe fellow.”

“It’s a lie!” burst out Barcroft. And then: “I beg your pardon, but I believe there is a mistake.”

The Bishop shook his head sadly. “I wish I could believe it,” he said slowly. “I am afraid I slept badly last night owing to thinking so much about it. I went over our conversation again and again, and in spite of myself I was led to the conclusion that there was some sort of understanding between them.”

“Have you any definite reasons for saying that, my lord?”

“As I said,” replied the Bishop, “I am getting to be an old man, and I have been brought into contact with hundreds of girls. I have prepared many for Confirmation,” he added, “and if the experience of forty years does not deceive me, that girl is in danger.”

"In danger of what?"

"Oh, do not mistake me. I believe she is innocent of any real evil, and it may be she can be saved from the calamity I fear."

"What calamity?"

"I dare not put it into words. But I am glad to have had this talk with you, and of course our conversation is confidential. I know she has a very high opinion of you."

Barcroft laughed bitterly.

"Oh, yes, she has," and the old man laid his hand kindly upon Barcroft's arm. "I know she almost insulted you last night, but there was nothing in that. She said the same thing to me. She doesn't believe that I am convinced of Christianity, or if I am, that it is in a superficial sort of way. But she has a high opinion of your intelligence, and she is pleased that her father thinks so kindly about you. In her case, her actions are influenced by her faith, or rather her want of faith. You said last night in your address, which I very much liked, that it would be your business to make Christianity real to people. Make it real to her, my dear fellow, and you will save the whole situation."

"Oh, if he only knew!" thought Barcroft.

He remembered his experience with old Mrs. Bennetto on the previous night; remembered that he perforce had to be silent in the face of the old woman's exultant faith, and again he felt ashamed. He wanted to tell this godly old prelate that he was an impostor, that he had no right to be there; but again he dared not. While, on the one hand, every bit of manhood in him rose up and protested against the part he was playing, he was, on the other, constrained to stay on at St. Michael's in the face of all difficulties to be near the woman to whom he had given his whole life.

"That is what I wanted to say to you," went on the Bishop. "That is why I called on you this morning. I felt that a little private conversation between us might clear the ground, and help you not only to save the girl but to win her back to faith."

"Do you think that by winning her back to faith, as you term it, she could be saved from any danger she is in in relation to Varcoe?"

"I don't doubt it. After all, faith is the mainsng of action. We act according to our beliefs. It is simply because that girl has no anchor in her life that she is drifting. Make Christianity a real thing to her, as it is to you and to me, and all such opinions as she expressed last night would be

impossible to her. That is why I am urging upon you to gain her confidence. Take every opportunity you can of seeing her, and making her realize the reality of the faith you profess."

Again he longed to tell the Bishop that he was a sham, that he had no faith; that the creed for which he, the Bishop, stood, was to him worthless, and had no foundation in fact. But he could not utter a word. How could he? By doing so he would not only go into the wilderness himself but he would be powerless to help Verity Trengrove.

"And your lordship is really convinced that there is something between her and this fellow Varcoe?" he asked at length, as if still in doubt.

The Bishop shook his head sadly. "I am afraid I am," he said. "She as good as admitted to me, although she did not say so categorically, that she has met this fellow in secret."

"You are quite clear about that?"

"Yes, I am quite clear about that. Moreover, when I pleaded with her to have nothing more to do with him, she would promise me nothing."

"And her father has heard nothing about it?"

"Up to the present I am sure he hasn't. I suppose everyone has been afraid even to hint at such a thing; but it is bound to reach him sooner or later, and then I dread to think what will happen. It is hard on you just at the beginning of your work to be faced with such a difficulty. All the same, the situation is full of great possibilities, my son," and there was a fatherly tone in the old Bishop's voice.

"Mr. Trengrove told me a little while ago that she wanted me to come to the Hall to lunch today," Barcroft said like one ruminating.

"Go by all means," replied the Bishop eagerly. "It would be the natural thing to do after last night; make her feel how real the faith is to you, and it is bound to affect her. Tell her of your visit to the old Methodist woman last night; tell her the story as you told it to me."

Barcroft could not help being impressed by this godly old man's presence. For his position as Bishop of the diocese he had not an atom of respect. Nevertheless, he was a good man, a sincere man, and the kindly way in which he treated him appealed to him to tell the truth. He simply could not go on doing what he was supposed to do. The very mockery of it judged him, condemned him. All the influences of his boyhood, returning to him under his new and favoring conditions pleaded with him to have done with this big lie once and forever. Besides, he felt sure that this wise old

man would understand, and in understanding forgive. And after all, what good could he do by remaining? It was true that a great passion for Verity Trengrove had been born in his heart, but he instinctively felt how hopeless it was. Even had he been the genuine Frank Barcroft, his love for her would have been hopeless. Besides, how long could his pretenses last? The truth must come to light. On every ground he had better have done with the lie for good and all.

Meanwhile the car dashed on. A few minutes more and they would be in Truro. He even tried to think of words whereby he could commence his confession.

"I think I told you that I liked your address last night," the Bishop said, "and I am sure you must have felt that you made a good impression."

"No, I didn't."

"But you did. It was remarked to me again and again how sincere and how honest you were. At first when I heard you had accepted the living, I felt like Trengrove, and wished that it had been offered to a man from a home parish. But since I have met you I am glad you came. I am sure you will do a world of good."

"I wish to God I had not accepted it!" blurted out Barcroft, who felt he could not be silent any longer.

"But, my dear boy—"

"I am not the man for the job. It is all very well for people who have not been living in a rough and tumble world to talk about fitness; but I am not fit. I—I—think of resigning right away."

"But—but—" exclaimed the Bishop in astonishment.

"I felt the mockery of it when I went to see that old woman last night. She saw the horsemen and the chariots of the Lord—while I—"

"I understand you, my son," broke in the other hastily,- "and I think all the more of you for feeling as you do. Naturally you who have spent years in the African wilds must find it strange to come to a parish like St. Michael's, and I can quite understand that you feel your unworthiness before an old saint who has heard her summons to appear before her Lord. But, as I said, I think all the more of you because of your doubts as to your fitness. It is a thousand times better than the smug cocksureness of a section of our younger clergy, and your robust honesty can't help appealing to the parish."

"Robust honesty! But you don't know Bishop. You can't begin to realize what a—"

What he would have said I do not know. At that moment a confession was upon his lips, and he was prepared to blurt out the whole truth. But just then the car dashed into the city.

"Remember that you have all my trust," the Bishop interposed. "I shall look forward to hearing great things from St. Michael's."

"He wouldn't hear me! He wouldn't let me tell him the truth," he reflected, as, half an hour later, the car was returning to St. Michael's, "and I'm glad he wouldn't. By Jove, I am glad! I felt so soft that in another minute I should have blurted out everything. Well, as he wouldn't let me tell the truth, I'll be a lie. Seeing I am expected to carry on the farce, I will act up to expectations. I will play the hypocrite. I will tell lies galore. I'll—I'll —"

"Dear old fellow, isn't he?" And Hilary Trengrove, who had been silent for some time, burst in upon Barcroft's thoughts.

"Splendid!" laughed the other. "He is all that a father in God ought to be. He has no more side with him than is absolutely necessary. Do you know him well?"

"Known him ever since he came to the diocese, and have always found him as kind as a father."

"Isn't he too kind? Don't people impose upon him?"

"Not a bit of it. He has a side other than the one you have seen, I can tell you. Lots of the parsons look upon him as a Tartar, and shiver in their shoes when they have to go and see him. And he is keen as a razor. He sees through shams and hypocrisies almost instinctively, and I can tell you, he is down on them. But he has taken to you, taken tremendously."

Barcroft was silent again. It seemed to him as though everyone were determined to force him to be an impostor. He knew that he had not acted like a parish Vicar ought to act, especially when he had gone to see old Mary Bennetto the previous night. And yet he had not aroused a single doubt. He felt sure that a man of the world would have seen through him a few minutes before, when he had tried to tell the Bishop the truth, but now the Squire was just as trusting.

"Yes, the Bishop was very good to me," he confessed, "far better than I deserve. If he only knew what a villain I am!"

The Squire looked at him with a friendly guffaw. “I am glad you have a sense of humor, Barcroft,” he laughed. “Old Sleeman hadn’t a laugh in him, while his sense of humor, if he ever had it, had become atrophied. But you are out of the usual line of parsons, and I am very glad of it. And I want to say right here, that I believe you and I are going to be great friends, Barcroft, and I am more glad than I can say that you have come to us as the new Vicar of St. Michael’s.”

Two hours later, while the Squire was enjoying his afternoon nap, Barcroft was sitting on the terrace in front of Budock. A casual observer might have said that he was looking at and enjoying the scenery. But he had no thought of the scenery. He was too much engrossed with other things. Yesterday’s experiences were still fresh in his mind, while his morning’s talk with the Bishop still haunted him.

“I suppose you feel that you are now really the Vicar of St. Michael’s?” Turning, he saw Verity Trengrove standing near him.

“Why do you emphasize the word now?”

“Because of yesterday. Just fancy all the flummery that took place. Why, it will be the talk of the parish for months to come. Only this morning the servants were describing the holy look on your face when you were walking in procession with the other clergymen. As for your speech last night, anyone might think from what people are saying that you are another Demosthenes come to life.” The girl spoke in tones of raillery, but looking at her closely Barcroft fancied that she had something serious to say to him.

“I expect there will be a great crowd on Sunday evening to hear you,” she went on. “Have you made your sermons yet?”

“Nary a one,” he replied, mocking her whimsical tones.

“What are you going to preach about?”

“Are you coming to church?”

“Of course I am. Wasn’t I as devout as Saint Theresa yesterday? Didn’t I listen attentively to the Bishop’s sermon, and come to the welcome meeting afterwards?”

“And mocking at everything all the time.”

“Was I?” and again he saw a half-serious look in her eyes. “Come, tell me what you are going to preach about.”

“Why do you wish to know?”

“Because I am interested, of course. I am told that, in the Methodist chapel, the ‘traveling preacher’ preaches to the saints in the morning, and to

the sinners at night. Are you going to do that?"

"Is that what you would advise?"

"Yes, I think I would. There won't be many people at the church in the morning, but in the evening I expect the Methodist chapel will be empty. Everyone will come to hear you. Besides, the people who have not been to church for years will roll up. Oh, yes, it will be a great occasion."

"Now," and Barcroft looked at her steadily, "suppose that you had been inducted as Vicar of the parish yesterday, and that next Sunday you were going to preach, what texts would you take?"

"Are you serious in asking me that?"

"Serious as a judge."

The whimsical look passed from the girl's face, while into her eyes came an expression of great longing. Perhaps there was something more than longing. Barcroft thought he saw doubt, fear, in them.

"I don't think I should take a text in the morning," was her reply. "I should just talk in a homely way to the people. I should try to make them feel what you said last night in your address."

"What was that?"

"That your message was very real to you, and that you wanted to make it real to them. Then I think I should appeal to them. I should ask them to help you, to cooperate with you."

"So much for the morning," said Barcroft, "but what about the evening?"

"I should talk about the wages of sin," said the girl, "and I should take for a text, 'the wages of sin is death'— death," and there was a tragic tone in her voice. "At any rate you believe in that," she added.

"Most certainly, I do!" Then turning sharply to the girl he said, "Do you believe it, Miss Trengrove?"

"Not in the way you profess. Of course I can't close my eyes to the laws of life. In a sense, sin is a breach of nature's laws; and if you disobey nature, nature punishes you. We are quite serious, aren't we? Now tell me Mr. Barcroft. You are now Vicar of St. Michael's, properly inducted by the Bishop of the diocese, and possess Letters of Orders. Do you really believe in the rest of it?"

"What do you mean by the rest of it?"

"That there is any remedy for sin."

Barcroft felt the girl's eyes upon him, and he was sure that at the back of her questions there was something real. The conversation he had had with the Bishop came back to him. Was she thinking of Varcoe? Was she thinking of her relations to him?

He did not speak. He could not. In the light of the girl's searching eyes he felt that it would be a mockery for him to have said what he longed to say.

"Have you no faith at all in these things?" he asked.

"Not an atom."

"You are an atheist, then?"

"No, I am not an atheist," she replied. "There must be some Power behind everything. What it is I don't know. Call it a force, call it God. God is as good a name as any, I suppose. As for the rest—no, I don't believe in it. Neither do you. If you did—"

"Yes, if I did? What then?"

"I wish you did. I wish you had a conviction, a consciousness that in essence it is true—true, true!" and her tones gathered in intensity with each word. "If it were-— why—why— But you don't believe it! I am sure you don't!" and without speaking another word she left him.

Her words were to Barcroft a taunt. But they were more than a taunt, they were a challenge, and he sat thinking for a long time what they meant. He was sure that she had no doubt about his identity, that she had not the slightest suspicion that he was not Frank Barcroft. No, there was no danger in that direction nor had such a thought entered her mind. All the same, her words were a challenge.

"I'll do it," he said, as he walked across the park towards the Vicarage that night, "I will convince her; although I do not believe in it myself, I will make it real to her!"

He stopped in the drive as he uttered the words. The reality of his determination flooded his mind.

"What a lark it all is," he said to himself as he went on his way again, "and what a farce! Great heavens, what a farce! But I will make it real to her. I will, I will!

Then something else came into his mind. "No, I shall never be able to make her love me," he thought bitterly. "No, I shall never be able to make her do that."

14.

THE FOLLOWING SUNDAY was a day of days. Scarcely a cloud hung in the sky. The winds from the sea were fresh and exhilarating.

As the hour for the morning service drew near, the bells pealed out joyfully. St. Michael's had a fine peal of bells, and the people were proud of them. Even those who said that bells had nothing to do with religion, boasted that the church had the finest in the country.

The new Vicar felt exhilarated by them as he made his way from the Vicarage to the church. There was something helpful to him in their joyful sound. As may be imagined he was greatly excited, and more than a little nervous. It seemed to him a day of fate, a day of destiny. As he followed the choir boys from the vestry into the church he felt like a man in a dream. He wondered, more than once, whether he were not the real Frank Barcoft. Hugh Treleaven was a creature apart. He had no connection with this time-worn building, or the age-old service which he was about to conduct.

Presently, however, when he found his way into the Vicar's stall, and prepared to read the opening sentences of the service, it became real to him.

Even the advent of the new Vicar had not drawn a large morning congregation, but the Squire was there; so was Mrs. Trengrove and Verity. The rest of the congregation was made up of a few farmers, a few laborers, a dozen women, and a group of youths who had come out of curiosity.

"When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness…"

Barcroft almost shuddered at the sound of his own voice, and after uttering the first words he hesitated a moment, but with grim determination finished the sentence.

"I will arise, and go to my father, and will say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son…

"Dearly beloved brethren, the Scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness… Wherefore I pray and beseech you, as many as are here present, to accompany me with a

pure heart, and humble voice, unto the Throne of the Heavenly Grace, saying after me…"

He went through the service without making any serious mistake. He had rehearsed it many a time in the privacy of his study, and even the most captious could not have pointed to any outstanding error. It was true that his manner was utterly unclerical, but it was all the better for that. There is nothing more ruinous to the stately beauty of the Church of England Liturgy than the unnatural drawl which some clerics assume.

As presently, during the singing of the second hymn, he went from the Vicar's stall to the pulpit, he thought his knees would give way under him. Like a flash of lightning the memory of his first visit to the church came back to him. He remembered that he had gone into the pulpit, while the empty pews had seemingly become peopled with past generations of men and women who had made their way there in faith and hope. But now all was diEerent. Men and women of flesh and blood had gathered; all were watching him eagerly.

He had brought no manuscript with him, neither had he prepared any. He determined to follow Verity's advice and to talk to the people in a homely way. A few thoughts as to what he should say had formed themselves in his mind, and he was convinced that it would be more fitting to say them from an apparently full heart than to read them from a written page.

The hymn was finished, and the people settled down to listen.

"In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Again the meaning of the word sacrilege gripped him like a steel vice. How dare he speak in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost? For some seconds he stood silent. The thoughts which had been clear a few minutes before had gone. There seemed nothing for him to say. Twice he essayed to speak, and still no words came. Then a mad longing filled his heart. He wanted to tell these people that he was an impostor, that he was not Frank Barcroft at all; that the man who ought to be there was dead, that he had buried him under the débris of a deserted mine in Africa. Yes, he would tell them, and the devil take the consequences.

Then turning he looked towards the Squire's pew, and saw Verity Trengrove. He thought she was laughing at him. Certainly there was a quizzical smile upon her lips.

His brain cleared in a second. All that he had wanted to say came back to him, and he was master of himself.

During the quarter of an hour he was speaking there was a deathly silence in the church. Every eye was fixed upon him, everyone listened intently. Whatever this man might be, he possessed the power of compelling attention.

Directly after the service was over he hurried towards the Vicarage. He knew that the Squire was waiting for him, while probably Verity would wish to speak to him, but he dared not trust himself. Unbeliever as he might be, impostor as he undoubtedly was, he felt ashamed. Although the service had meant nothing to him, it had meant something to others. He wondered for the hundredth time whether he could make it mean anything to Verity Trengrove.

By three o'clock he had again donned his surplice. It had been arranged that Mary Bennetto's funeral should take place at that hour, and, although he trembled in every limb, he determined to take his part, for the widowed hus— band had desired his presence. His visit to the dying woman's bedside had been much talked about; and although his ministrations had undoubtedly been unorthodox, they had been very favorably commented on. Besides, even the most pronounced Dissenters in this country village regarded the Vicar as the proper parson to bury their dead.

Presently a bell tolled out mournfully, while the procession made its way towards the time-honored sanctuary. A large crowd was present. For one thing Mary Bennetto had been very much beloved in the parish, and many wanted to pay their last respects to her. Added to that, it was Sunday afternoon, when everyone was at liberty, and as little happened in the parish, even a funeral was regarded as an exciting event.

The service in the church called for no comment. The Vicar read every word plainly and impressively. To him everything was so much empty patter, but, according to his promise, he tried to make everything real to others. But when they stood at the graveside all seemed different. Perhaps three hundred people stood around on the grass-covered graves, and a great wonder came into his mind as to whether Mary Bennetto, at whose dying bedside he had stood, had any reason for her faith. Was this show, after all, an empty profession, or was there something in it?

"And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: Yea, saith the Spirit; that they may rest from their

labors…"

Who said that? Then as he stood there he cast his mind back to what he had heard years before. Those words were written by the Apostle John when he was on the Isle of Patmos. Had he seen? Had he heard?

"Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God to call to Himself the soul of our sister here departed, we therefore commit her body to the ground, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Barcroft stopped. He did not believe in what he had just read, but the word were wonderful.

"If it is true," he reflected.

He did not know how it was, but he felt that some comment was needed. Of course he was not expected to say anything. It was for him to read the service, and have done with it. But as he stood there, surrounded by hundreds of mourners, his mind went back to the night he had visited Mary Bennetto. Her every word, her every look, were stamped on his memory.

"Men and women," he said, "I was with the deceased woman when she died, and although she was old and ignorant I envied her. She far more truly ministered to me than I to her. I was a sinful man and she was a saint. She in the face of death had no thoughts, no fears. I—" but he could not talk about that… "She repeated the words I have just read to you, the words which the man Jesus is said to have uttered as he stood near the tomb of his friend; said them to the sister of that friend. 'I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die!'"

"Are those words true, or are they false? If they are true they are the greatest ever uttered. As far as my knowledge of literature goes, there is nothing like them, either in the English or in any other language. But are they true?"

He did not know why it was, but at that moment he was tempted to throw his Prayer Book on the ground, and tell the people that it was so much hocus-pocus and that he did not believe in it. He wanted to laugh at the faith of many who had gathered there; wanted to tell the whole truth about himself, but again something held him back.

"Are they true?" he repeated again. Then, after a tense silence, he answered his own question: "They were true to her; …and remember she was dying when she repeated them… The death dews were on her brow,

and she knew that within a few minutes she would be gone to that undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns. Yes, those words of the man Jesus were real to her. What was more, she said she saw the horsemen and the chariots of the Lord. She declared, too, that she saw her Lord, and she met Him with a shout of triumph. Call it a hallucination; call it the wanderings of a weakened mind; but that is what she said she saw, and her faith made her triumphant in the last moments of her life."

Again he paused for a few seconds. Why was he talking like this? He did not know. It had come to him to say these things and he had said them. Around the quiet graveyard great trees stood, and near by nestled a number of cottages. Close to him, too, was the old church with its grey pinnacled tower. Perhaps these things had their eEect on him, perhaps they recalled memories and emotions long since dead. Be that as it may, he knew that he was surrounded by strange influences and that the people who stood listening and watching were less real to him than those deeper influences that were closer to him than breathing, nearer than hands or feet.

"Was that old woman's faith true?" he repeated. "Tonight I am going to talk about the wages of sin, but now I can think only of the triumph of a saintly life, and a simple faith."

He read the closing sentences of the service, and walked back to the vestry of the church like a man in a dream. Directly he was alone he seemed like one who had awakened from a trance. He was the scornful, sin-hardened Hugh Treleaven again.

"Dash it all," he reflected, "I have done very well, and I have made a jolly good impression. This will get talked about," he went on thinking. "It is unlike any other service ever conducted in this graveyard. Before the week is out it will be discussed throughout all the district, and in all probability it will read Verity Trengrove's ears. I expect, too, that it will considerably increase my congregation tonight. I wonder whether that fellow Varcoe will come? I saw him on the outskirts of the crowd."

"Butaful, wad'n it?" remarked old Betsy Truscott, the village gossip, to Ann Bassett, who had the reputation for being the biggest liar in the parish.

"In a way 'twas," replied Ann.

"He's a wonderful man, my dear, and altogether defrent from Mr. Sleeman. 'E'll do a lot of good here; don't 'e think so?"

"He id'n a man of God," remarked Ann decisively, "and 'e 'aven't got the grace of God in his heart."

“My dear life! ’ow can ’e say so?”

“I tell ’e there’s something wrong with ’un.”

“You must be maazed, my dear. I never enjoyed a funeral so much in my life. Why, think of the butaful things ’e said.”

“Ins, and what dad ’a say?” retorted Ann. " ’13 only said what Mary Bennetto said. Then he asked if it was true; but he ded’n say it was true. Still, it was a very good funeral."

“Never seed anything like it in my life afore,” replied the other. “He made everything so raal. He ded’n talk like a passon at all.”

Thus the people gossiped. Many there were who said that Frank Barcroft was a man sent from God, while others were not so sure; but all agreed that the new Vicar was altogether out of the common.

That night the church was crowded to the doors. On this occasion, at all events, the congregation at the church far outnumbered that at the chapel. Not only had almost every villager taken the opportunity of hearing the new Vicar, but the people had come for miles around. As the Bishop had told Barcroft, country people had a wireless telegraphy of their own, whereby every outstanding event became known; and the unorthodox way in which he had conducted the funeral service spread like wildfire throughout the countryside.

The light in the sanctuary was dim, so that the Vicar found it difficult to distinguish faces. As we have said huge trees grew around the graveyard, and these being now in full leaf threw dark shadows upon the building. Moreover, the mullioned windows were small, and the leaded panes let in but little light.

As he walked behind the choir boys into his stall he could see nothing but a dark mass of humanity, but as his eyes became accustomed to the dimness he was able to outline the faces of the people.

He saw that the Squire was in his pew, also Mrs. Trengrove and Verity. In the adjoining pew to that of the Squire’s he could see a number of servants from the Hall, and he noted the look of eager expectancy upon their faces.

People who had not been to church for years were there, while many whose custom it was to attend the chapel were in evidence.

Barcroft had intended to commence the service by reading the passages printed in the Prayer Book which are usually associated with Evensong, but chancing to open a hymn book instead of a prayer book, a verse caught his eye, and the stately majesty of the lines impressed him. Acting on the impulse of the moment he gave out the number of the hymn of which the verse formed a part. The organist, who had not expected this, busied himself with a tune book in order to find the music, while Barcroft slowly read out the words.

"Before Jehovah's awful Throne,
Ye nations, bow with sacred joy;
Know that the Lord is God alone;
He can create, and He destroy."

For a few seconds after he had read the verse there was a silence. Everyone in the congregation knew it well, but there was something in the Vicar's voice which added to its impressiveness. Then the tune of the Old Hundreth was played.

Perhaps there is no part of the country in which the people have clearer and more tuneful voices than in this, the most western county of England. Singing is a natural gift of the people, and they love it with a great love. Barcroft thought he had never heard anything like it before. The sonorous music was fitted to the majesty of the words.

Skeptic as he was, the meaning of the hymn appealed to him. Not only was there a note of assurance, but also a note of warning.

"Know that the Lord is God alone;
He can create, and He destroy."

"These people believe this," he reflected, "believe it whole-heartedly. And it has had its effect, too. Why, Cornwall, before the advent of John Wesley, was one of the most debased counties in England. Through the work which was begun through him it has become the most law abiding, the most godly county in the whole country. What is the meaning of it? People who were as bad as the men who were my fellow-prisoners at Dartmoor were changed, reformed, given new life. Yes, that is a fact of history. Suppose that the religious element were taken out of these people's lives? Suppose that all

faith were destroyed, what would become of them? Would there not be a reversion to type? Would they not drift back to devilry? And does it not mean that after all there is something in religion. Something— But what is it? Can a lie produce good throughout nearly two thousand years? Can it continue through age after age giving comfort, confidence, strength?"

Then, forgetful of where he was, he almost burst into laughter.

Think of it, he an impostor, a fraud, a living lie, to be influenced by this.

Still, he was the accepted Vicar of the parish, and it was for him presently to go into the pulpit and preach to the crowd of people that had gathered there. And they were not ignorant yokels. On his way from Africa he had imagined that the people would be heavy-witted, unintelligent, and easily deceived by anything one might say. But he had given up that thought. These country people had keen intelligences, and would appreciate the best he was capable of giving. They would fasten upon any fallacy he might utter, and would tear it to pieces. He was glad he had prepared his sermon so carefully.

Then, as it seemed to him, the congregation took on a more triumphant note, and he noticed that they were singing the last verse of the hymn.

"Wide as the world is Thy command;
Vast as eternity Thy love;
Firm as a rock Thy truth shall stand,
When rolling years have ceased to move."

How their voices rose and swelled! The hymn sounded like the march of a triumphant army. How small, how despicable, was the life he had lived in the light of those tremendous lines!

And he an ex-convict, an impostor, a sham, was the Vicar of the parish!

He went on with the service. Prayer followed prayer, response followed response, collect followed collect. Then with fast-beating heart, during the singing of the appointed hymn, he found his way into the pulpit. By this time his eyes had become accustomed to the semi-darkness, and he was able to see every face plainly. Yes, singing with the rest of the congregation, was Bill Best, the landlord of the *King's Arms*. He had heard it said that it was twenty years since Bill Best had been to church. That was a kind of triumph, anyhow. And who was that close beside him, partly hidden by a pillar? At first he scarcely believed his eyes, but at length he could not help being convinced. It was Varcoe, who had been seen by the sexton kissing

Verity Trengrove at midnight near Trenoweth Woods. He had heard a good deal about Varcoe during the last two days. As far as he could judge, his name had not been freely associated with that of Verity Trengrove, but he had been referred to as the worst type of blackguard. He was spoken of as a libertine who laughed at everything good, and boasted of his conquests among young girls.

And he had been seen at midnight with Verity Trengrove.

A kind of passion possessed the new Vicar. If he could only—

Presently a hush fell upon the congregation. The people in the closely packed pews were eager, expectant. What would this man, who so impressed them at Mary Bennetto's graveside a few hours earlier, have to say to them?

Forgetful of the formula which usually precedes the sermon, he stood for a few moments in silence. Then his voice, though trembling with excitement, rang out clearly through the building.

"I am going to speak to you tonight on the wages of sin. I told some of you that this afternoon, didn't I? I said a few words about the triumphant way in which an old saint met her death, and announced that tonight I was going to speak on the wages of sin. I have chosen for a text 'The wages of sin is death'" then looking towards the Squire's pew, and remembering what Verity had said to him a few days before, he repeated the word, "death."

All listened intently, though many thought it a strange subject for the Vicar to commence his ministry. Still, they reflected, he has come from the wilds of Africa, and would act differently from others.

When two hours before, he had read the sermon he had so carefully written, he thought it was a striking piece of work; but reading it before the listening congregation everything seemed poor, stilted, unreal. Great heavens, he knew more of the wages of sin than he was reading to these people, and after five minutes, he, with an impatient gesture, thrust aside the manuscript and began to speak extempore. At first he stammered a little, and seemed confused, but recovering himself he began to talk of cases which he had known; of youths who had been brought up in good homes and amidst refined associations, and who, because they had yielded to temptation, had drifted to the devil. Then his subject really gripped him and he forgot where he was; forgot conventionalities, forgot the pulpit, forgot everything. Yes, he would make these people realize the wages of sin. He

would tell them of the real thing. He would tell them about sin, not in polite words, not cloaking it with pious niceties. He would get dowu to the quivering nerve of the thing, and would portray it in all its ugliness and devilry. And he did. Never had such a sermon, if sermon it can be called, been heard in St. Michael's Church. He spoke out of a terrible experience. He spoke of lives he had known in Dartmoor, and in Africa, and while kept by a kind of instinct for self-preservation from revealing the fact that he had participated in the sins he described, he ruthlessly made the listening congregation feel as he felt, see as he saw. This was no orthodox discourse. It was a transcript from life, life with all polite fictions torn away, life bare and tragic.

"The wages of sin!" and his voice rang throughout the church. "I have heard men in their dying moments uttering the vilest blasphemies; I have heard them cursing the day they were born; I have heard them cursing God. I have seen them in life, lust-sodden, drink-sodden, devil-sodden, men who thirty years before were clean minded, but who through sin had lost all sense of manhood and decency. And ahead and before them was nothing but hopeless, unfathomable darkness. That is the wages of sin."

He paused for a long time; paused painfully. He realized that he had been like a doctor describing a disease, but giving no hope how the disease could be eradicated.

Like a man in a dream he looked at his watch. He had been talking for more than half an hour, and he remembered that Verity had told him that no Vicar would be tolerated if he preached more than a quarter of an hour.

"I have been speaking to you of sin; what sin is, and what its wages are," he continued, "and my time is more than up. Perhaps I have even been speaking too long, and yet I have only touched upon one side of my subject. Is there a remedy for sin? Can it be conquered, overcome, destroyed?" Then forgetful of where he stood, he continued: "It would be the devil's world if it could not. But I must leave that for another occasion. 'The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Is that true? I will tell you what I think about it some time soon."

Then, forgetting the formula commonly used at the end of a sermon, he gave out the closing hymn.

When the service was over the Squire came to him and asked him to come back to supper, but he refused. Even although Verity joined her pleadings with those of her father, he remained adamant.

When he returned to the Vicarage he was very silent, and hours after the servants had gone to bed he sat thinking.

15.

FOR SEVERAL WEEKS after the Sunday we have described, the new Vicar was hardly ever seen outside the Vicarage grounds. He paid but few pastoral calls, and although the Squire asked him several times to come to the Hall, he could not be persuaded to accept. His housekeeper said that he spent many hours in his study, reading and thinking.

Neither had he fulfilled his promise to complete the sermon which he had only commenced on his first Sunday evening. People had come to crowds expecting him to do so, only to be disappointed. Not that he failed to interest them. They declared one to another that never before had such sermons been preached in St. Michael's Church. Nevertheless, they were curious.

"Why should 'a say he would do it unless he maimed et?" they said one to another. "He promised as faithful as could be that 'e would. Why 'ave 'n'a done et?"

"Because 'e can't, my dear," Ann Bassett had replied more than once. " 'E id'n a man of God, that's my belief, and that's why he can't finish the semen 'e commenced."

Ann was one of the few who did not admire the new Vicar.

"You be a fool, Ann," more than one said to her. "Mr. Barcroft not able to finish his sermon! Why, think of the wonderful sermons 'e've preached. Nothin' like them 'ave ever been heard in the parish afore; and see what congregations there 'ave been! Why, the church have been nearly empty for years, and now the people do come for miles round to 'ear un."

This was true. Never before had such congregations been known. Whatever else the new Vicar possessed, he had the power of compelling attention and of arousing interest. As was constantly said, he did not talk like a parson at all, but spoke in an unconventional way out of a seemingly full heart. It was true that many, including the Squire, had been almost shocked by some of his unclerical utterances, many of which were declared to be unfit for the pulpit. Nevertheless, people had been impressed, and the

new Vicar's sermons were the chief subject of conversation throughout the whole countryside.

The truth was Barcroft was passing through a very strange experience. Knowing himself to be an impostor, he had vowed that he would make the faith in which he pretended to believe, a reality to Verity Trengrove. He had her in his mind in every address he prepared, and he noted with satisfaction that she was present at every service. Both she and her father had told him directly on his coming to St. Michael's that she had practically given up church going, and that she regarded what he pretended to believe simply as a worn-out myth. She had also told him that she did not believe in his profession, and that she was sure he himself had no faith in what he professed to believe. And yet she came Sunday after Sunday, and listened to him with evident attention. What was the meaning of it?

Meanwhile the new Vicar realized that his interest in her was increasing daily; that what he had at first hoped was only a passing fancy had become the absorbing passion of his life. He had to confess, in spite of everything, that his love for Verity Trengrove grew stronger as the days went by. Not that he had the slightest hope of her ever loving him. How could she? She had even held him up to ridicule before the Bishop and the neighboring clergymen. Added to this were the ghastly stories he had heard about her and Varcoe. He had not as yet inquired into the truth of those stories. Somehow he could not. It would be insulting to her to believe that she was associated with such a fellow in a vulgar love intrigue. And yet what was the meaning of what Trencrom had told him? What was the meaning of what Peter Crowle, the sexton, had vowed he had witnessed? There must be a substratum of truth in it.

In any case, she could never care for him. Neither had she a suspicion of the great consuming passion which burned in his heart.

It was a strange love that he had for her. A love which he could not explain, even to himself. As he remembered what she had said to him, and of the way she regarded him, he felt angry with her; angry and indignant. He felt that in her heart of hearts she had no respect for him, no belief in him. And yet he wanted more than words can say to make her believe in him. And he had vowed that he would, too. He had, on the night of his induction, in his own thoughts, taken up the challenge which she had thrown down, and sworn to convince her of the things in which he had no belief. Perhaps there was some thought of self-glory in all this. He wanted

to impress his own individuality upon her, to prove himself strong enough to meet her accusations.

And yet he did not go near her. He did not accept the invitations which her father had sent him to visit the Hall. He longed to do so more than words can say, and more than once had been on the point of yielding to the temptation. But he had resisted. Perhaps it was fear that held him back. Not that he had any fear that she would discover his fraud. That did not enter into his calculations. He was afraid of something he could not put into words, something indefinable.

Incongruous as it may seem, he went through a course of hard reading in the hope of proving Christianity to be true. He could not believe. He never would. Yet, true to his vow, he was constantly thinking of plans whereby he could make Verity Trengrove believe.

Then one day things were seemingly brought to a head. He was seated in his study one morning, when a servant came and told him that Peter Crowle, the sexton, wanted to see him.

"Who did you say, Mary?" he asked, although he knew that he had heard her words plainly.

"Peter Crowle, sir. I asked him what he wanted to see you for, but he wouldn't tell me. There's nobody dead in the parish," she added, "so it can't be nothin' 'bout a funeral."

A minute later the old man was shown in, and seemed to be very uncomfortable in the Vicar's presence. He looked around the room nervously, as if in fear, then turned to the door as though wanting to run away.

"What is it, Peter?" asked Barcroft.

"I be almost feared to tell 'e, sir," replied the sexton. "You d'know what you told me up in the vestry?" Then sinking his voice to a whisper, he said, "I've seed 'em again, sir."

"Seen who again?"

Peter gave another nervous glance around the room, and then said, "There's nobody hearkenin' is there, sir?"

Instinctively Barcroft felt what the sexton wanted to say to him, and a great fear came into his own heart. He was as eager as Peter that no one might hear. He went quickly to the door and opened it. The girl who had shown the sexton in pretended to be working in the passage outside.

"Why were you listening at the door?" he asked.

"Please, sir, I wasn't listening! I—I—was only dusting."

He thought he saw guilt on the girl's face, and was on the point of speaking angrily to her, but refrained.

"Anyhow, don't remain here," he said in tones which frightened the girl. "If I find you listening at the door again, there will be trouble, mind that. Don't come near here again until I ring for you."

White-lipped and fearful-eyed the girl slunk away. Much as she wanted to listen, she was afraid.

"Now then, what is it?" he asked Peter on his return.

"I've seed 'em again, sir," Peter repeated.

"Seen who again?"

"You d'knaw, sir. That young Varcoe and the Squire's daughter."

Barcroft felt as though a cold hand were laid upon his heart. He felt he would have given worlds to know that the old man had spoken a lie, yet in a way he could not understand he was convinced of the truth of his words.

"I thought you ought to'knaw," went on Peter. "I d'mind what you said to me up in the vestry, but I couldn't help comin' for all that. As sure as there is God above, sir, there's trouble brewin'."

Barcroft hesitated a second, and looked keenly at the other. He saw a frightened look in the old man's eyes, noted that his lips were tremulous.

"I a'n't said a word to anybody 'bout what I seed last time," he went on, "I'll swear to et. Not one word. Bill Best offered to treat me with whisky if I would tell un what passed between us up in the vestry, but I wouldn't 'ave noan. I was feared. I'm ready to take my Bible oath, sir; I am for sure."

Barcroft wanted to ask the sexton questions, but he was too eager to know what he had to tell him.

"Well, what is it, Peter?"

The old sexton drew his chair close to that of the Vicar, and seemed to be on the point of speaking. Then suddenly he burst out again. "You be sure that maid isn't hearkenin', sir? Would 'e mind going again and seein'?"

"Yes, I am sure. Still, I will go again."

Rushing to the door he opened it quickly. But the passage was empty; all was silent.

"You can speak freely, Peter," he said on his return. "Now then, take your time and tell me plainly."

"I don't want nothin' to be traced to me," and Barcroft could not help noticing that Peter's voice trembled. "If the Squire was to find out that I

told ‘e— Good Lord! But I must tell ’e. I’ve hardly slept a wink for the night thinkin’ ’bout et.”

“Well, what is it?” and Barcroft spoke impatiently.

“I was coming home from St. Dorcas, same as I was last time,” Peter affirmed, “and I seed ’em in the same place.”

“Saw whom in the same place?”

“That Varcoe and the same young woman.”

“You mean Miss Verity Trengrove?”

“I do, sir.”

“You are sure it was she? There must be no mistake about this, mind.”

“I’ll swear to et, sir. The night was clear, and I could see everything plain.”

“And you say you saw Miss Trengrove with this fellow Varcoe?”

“I ded, sir, but doan’t tell Squire I told ’e so.”

“What time was it?”

“Near to midnight, sir.”

“You are sure of this? Tell me everything.”

“Well, sir, I’ad’n seen my brother for goodish bit and I stayed rather late. It was just eleven o’clock when I left his house. I remember remarkin’ upon it.”

“Had you been drinking?”

“Only two glasses of mild beer, sir, which, as you may saw, was nothin’ ‘toal. No, sir, I wad’n drunk. Notbin’ of that sort.”

“And you swear that you saw Varcoe and Miss Trengrove together?”

“I do, sir. I’m willing to take my Bible oath now here in your presence. She was in trouble, sir.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“That was what made me fearful. She was sobbing as though her heart would break.”

“Miss Trengrove was?”

“Yes, sir, and she kept on sayin’, ‘I’m ruined! I’m ruined! I’m ruined!’”

“And did you speak?”

“No, I did’n. I was feared. I just kept hearkenin’.”

A thousand questions sprung to Barcroft’s lips, but he was silent. The tensity of the old man’s face, the look in his eyes carried conviction.

“Well, what besides?” he asked at length.

"Tha's 'bout all," Peter replied. "As I said, she kept on saying, 'I'm ruined! I'm ruined! I'm ruined!'"

"And did Varcoe reply?"

"Iss, he kept on saying things to her, but what they were I don't knaw. He had 'is arms round her while she E was sobbin' out the words."

"And did they see you?"

"No, they did'n see me. I don't knaw how 'twas, but I was sort of feared to shaw myself."

"And how long did they stay together?"

"While I was there, sir; 'bout five minutes. I thought he was trying to persuade her to do something, but she would'n promise. I can't swear to that, but tha's 'ow it seemed to me."

"You say this was in Trenoweth Woods?"

"Iss, sir, same place as 'twas last time."

"You are sure that it was Miss Trengrove—*sure*, mind you?"

"I could'n be mistaken, sir."

"And did Varcoe go back to the Hall with her?"

"No, sir, he ded'n. She seemed to be threatening him, but I could'n catch the words she said. After a bit she left him suddenly and ran towards that little door in the Park walls. You d'knaw it, sir, don't 'e?"

Barcroft did not reply. He remembered the door Peter had mentioned, remembered how he had gone into the Park that way, and had scarcely done so before he had met Verity Trengrove. He had reason for remembering it. He had accused the girl of having secret assignations with this fellow, and she, as he thought had with a look of guilty fear on her face, at first broke into hysterical laughter, and then had turned upon him with angry scorn.

"I thought I ought to tell 'e, sir," went on Peter after a long silence.

But Barcroft did not reply. His mind was busily at work thinking out the possible meaning of the old man's story, and trying to understand the significance of the girl's cry, "I'm ruined! I'm ruined!"

He shuddered as he thought of it. He recalled the stories he had heard about Varcoe since he had been the Vicar of St. Michael's—stories which revealed him as a blackguard, as a man without morals, as a libertine. When they had first come to his ears they impressed him but little. Who was he, with his past career, to trouble about the morals of other people? He could afford to laugh at such peccadilloes. And he did. Of course the thought that Verity Trengrove was associated with such a fellow struck him

unpleasantly. Something within him had shrunk from the idea, but he had troubled nothing about Varcoe's morals, and he had spoken to Verity largely because it had seemed the correct thing to do. But now—

Then he realized that a change had come over him; that his thoughts were different, that his outlook was different. When he had come to St. Michael's at first his one desire had been to make a good impression, his one fear that he would be found out. Now these things had sunk into the background, and new thoughts, new hopes, possessed him. He felt more sensitive to the right and wrong of things. He had a greater sense of shame. Forces had been at work within him that were changing him. Not that he believed, any more than he believed on the night he had first met the real Barcroft, in the truth of Christianity. To him it was still only a myth. Christian dogma was baseless. Nevertheless, something was changing. He no longer felt like laughing at the sermons he prepared. The difference between right and wrong was becoming more and more marked in his consciousness. When he had left Dartmoor long months before he would have laughed at the story Peter Crowle had told him, and enjoyed it as a good joke. But he did not enjoy it now. Rather it filled him with strange longings, strange feelings which he could not exress.

Presently he looked towards the old sexton, who still: sat watching him. That he had told him the truth he did not doubt, but something deeper than his mind told him that it was all a great, black, damnable lie. Again he thought of Verity Trengrove as he had seen her first; remembered the flash of her laughing eyes as she greeted him. No, it was not possible. And yet—

"Are 'e goin' to do anything, sir? I think Squire ought to knaw."

The words recalled him to the urgency of the situation.

"Peter," he said, "not one word of what you have told me. You must not breathe a syllable of what you have told me."

"But you are going to do something, arn't 'e, sir?"

"I don't know what I am going to do yet. But you mustn't utter a syllable. You did quite right to come and tell me, and I shall take what steps I think are necessary. That's all."

"Somehow he's def'rent from what 'e was when he first spoke to me up in the vestry," Peter reflected as he made his way towards the village. "What the def'rence as I don't knaw, but he's def'rent."

As for Barcroft, he sat in his study hour after hour thinking. He had planned to read a book by the Bishop of Birmingham that morning, a book

in which the writer claimed to prove that Christianity was a reasonable faith. But not a word of it did he scan. His mind was too full of other things, things more vital to him than the Bishop's arguments. Presently his way seemed clear to him. His mind was made up.

Directly after lunch he left the Vicarage and made his way to the village. Arriving there he entered the *King's Arms* public house, and asked if Varcoe was within. The girl to whom he spoke pointed to a closed door.

"He's in there, sir," she said. A significant laugh accompanied her words.

Barcroft opened the door, and looked into the room. Seated in an armchair with a glass of half-consumed whisky before him was the American. He was half asleep. Barcroft judged that he had not only had a heavy meal, but had been drinking freely. Why it was he did not know, but he had no desire to drink himself. A few weeks before he had longed to enter this same public house and drink deeply, but the longing had passed.

Varcoe did not seem to realize that he had a visitor. He was half seated, half lying in a semi-comatose condition, breathing stertorously. Barcroft looked at him like a man fascinated. Yes, in spite of his dissipated habits, the fellow was handsome. His features were well formed, and he gave every evidence that he had a vigorous mind. He was well dressed, too, and the new Vicar could not help reflecting on the fact that he would be very attractive to a susceptible girl.

"Mr. Varcoe."

The man opened his eyes a little wider, but did not seem to recognize his visitor.

"Mr. Varcoe, I want a talk with you."

He sat up in his chair at this, and with an effort threw off some of the effects of his libations.

"Oh, it's the sky pilot," he laughed; "pleased to see you, sir. What may I order for you to drink?"

"Nothing, thank you. I want a chat with you."

"Well, there is nothing to hinder you. Say what you have to say."

"Not here," replied Barcroft. "I want you to come for a walk with me."

"What the—" Varcoe looked at him steadily, and then laughed. "What do you want to say to me?" He spoke truculently.

"Something which I don't wish to say here."

Varcoe was wide-awake now, and he looked at the Vicar suspiciously. “Something you don’t wish to say here, eh? You are afraid of listeners. Well, perhaps you are right. Just the same, I don’t feel disposed to leave the house, so say what you have got to say right here.”

Barcroft felt the difficulty of the situation. He noted the look in the man’s eyes, and judged that he was in a quarrelsome mood. He was not sufficiently under the influence of alcohol to be called drunk, but evidently his nerves were raw.

“I don’t think you would thank me for saying what I have to say here. I want to speak to you about last night.”

“About last night? What the heck do you know about last night?”

“More than you think.”

Varcoe reflected for a few seconds. Perhaps he knew that the girl, who was the maid-of-all-work at the public house, would probably be listening at the door. There was not much privacy at the *King’s Arms*. All the same he did not like being dictated to by the Vicar. He had a proper scorn for what he called the “big bugs of the Old Country,” and declared that he, an American citizen, was not going to stand any nonsense from them. He remembered, too, that this “sky pilot” was a friend of the Squire, and as such—

“I think you will go with me,” Barcroft insisted, looking steadily at the other. “In fact, I am sure you will.”

The eyes of the two men met, and each seemed to be reading the other’s mind. It was a struggle between two personalities; a test of which was the stronger.

“All right,” ejaculated Varcoe presently; “it’s a nice afternoon for a walk. Come on.”

16.

PRESENTLY they were following a footpath which led through an open field.

"I guess there will be no listeners here. What do you want to know?"

Barcroft felt the difficulty of the situation. If possible, he wanted to avoid any mention of Verity Trengrove's name, and yet it was she who filled his mind.

"You were seen down by Trenoweth Woods last night," he began.

"Well, what if I was?" The man spoke defiantly. A devil-may—care look was in his eyes.

"You were seen with a young—lady." The words came from him with difficulty. He hated the task he had set himself.

"I say neither yes nor no to that," replied Varcoe. "Anyway, it is my own business."

"It may be the business of others as well."

"What do you mean by that? It isn't any concern of yours. I don't allow any man, sky pilot or squire, to interfere with me."

"I shall interfere with you, anyhow. Remember I am the Vicar of the parish."

Varcoe gave him a quick glance, and then laughed unpleasantly.

"Is that what you dragged me out here to say? Because if it is I am not listening, mind that. I don't allow I anyone to interfere with my affairs. I can pay my way, and as long as I can do that sky pilots can go to blazes."

Barcroft tried. to understand the significance of the other's words. So far he felt he had not got nearer to what he wanted to say.

"Look here, Varcoe," he burst out presently, "the young lady you were with last night was in trouble. Her trouble was because of you. You won't deny that, I suppose?"

Varcoe looked on the ground, and gave no answer.

"There are such things as decent feelings," went on the Vicar, "such things as caring for the disgrace of others. Remember, what has been told

me has been told me in secret, and is not as yet public property. I want to save it from becoming public property, and I want to appeal to your sense of honor, to your sense of decency."

"And so you thought you would pry into my private affairs, and stick your nose into what doesn't concern you? Now, look here, I am a man with a hot temper. I have been through some rough experiences in my time, and can look after myself. More than that I'm going my own way. If I tread on somebody's toes, and hurt someone's feelings—well, that's my affair. It is all the same to me, whatever you say or think."

"And have you no care for the sufferings you may cause others, or the lives you may wreck? No sense of right or wrong?"

Barcroft knew he had not got to the heart of the thing he wanted to say. More than that, something forbade him to utter words which would even hint at Verity Trengrove.

"I think it unmanly, caddish, devilish," he went on.

"Look here, Vicar. I am sure disappointed in you. I went to the meetings when you were welcomed as Vicar of this parish, and, to tell you the truth, I took a kind of liking to you. You struck me as a man of the world, as a man who understood what men feel. I said to myself, here's a man of the world; a man who isn't tied down by cut-and-dried opinions of how a fellow should enjoy himself. Of course I understood that he must spill a lot of pious stuff that sounds swell. That was why I as good as told you that I liked you, and that I liked the little speech you trotted out. But, man, you seem as bad as any other preacher. But you don't cut any ice with me, Parson. If I have my fun, I am prepared to pay for it."

"But have you no sense of right and wrong?"

"Right and wrong be d—d!" ejaculated Varcoe. "Right and wrong depend upon the company a man keeps and the circumstances in which he is placed."

"And have you no sense of honor, no decent feelings?"

"Yes, I have a sense of honor, and I have decent feelings. That's why if I have my fun I am prepared to pay for it. That's why—"

"But is it nothing to you," broke in Barcroft, "that you disgrace an old name, that you blight a young girl's life? That you bring ghastly misery into a happy home? That you make hell where there should be heaven?"

The words escaped him almost before he was aware. The remembrance of the great love that Hilary Trengrove bore for his daughter, and the

thought of what he would say and feel when the truth were made known, caused him to forget himself.

Varcoe looked at him steadily for some seconds. Then he laughed as though he were enjoying himself.

"That was a very nice little speech," he said mockingly; "a very nice little speech."

Barcroft felt his powerlessness. There seemed no vulnerable place in this man's armor; nothing to which he could appeal. He seemed to have no sense of right or wrong. Neither did he stand in fear of anything he could do. Even if his worst imaginings were true he was helpless.

Then a ghastly thought struck him. He thought he understood what was in Varcoe's mind. He remembered when he had seen him first. The fellow had been angry because what he called the "high-brows" would take no notice of him, and he had declared that he had his own thoughts how they would be obliged to recognize him. He knew what a proud man the Squire was. Could it be that—?

"Remember, there is a law in the land," he burst out suddenly.

Varcoe laughed scornfully. "What do I care about the law?" was his reply. "I guess I could square all the lawyers that ever lived. Besides, who would call in the law?"

"I would." Why he said that he did not know. Certainly such an act would be far from his real feelings.

"I have no fear of shyster lawyers. Besides, you have as much to fear from the law as I have, perhaps a bit more. You haven't always been the saint you profess to be here. I am told that you have been living for some years in Africa, and that you have lived in parts where there ain't no Ten Commandments. Ah, I see you don't like that. Perhaps you have done things in your time that you wouldn't like known in this parish. If I were you I should let sleeping dogs lie, and not concern myself in things which don't concern you."

Barcroft felt the blood recede from his face as the man spoke. What he had said was true. He had far more need to fear the law than Varcoe had. Besides, who was he to speak to this man of right and wrong? If the truth came to light, it would not be Varcoe that would be driven from the parish. What a hypocrite he was! He was pretending to appeal to Varcoe's moral sense, when by every law of decency he ought to be hiding his own head in shame.

He felt that the man's eyes were upon him, that he was reading his thoughts, and he wanted to run away. How had he dared to place himself in such a situation?

"Well, is that all you have to say? Because if it is, I'll go back to the Pub and have a drink. I am not the kind of a guy you thought I was. I am a real man, and believe me I am going to have my fun even if I have to pay dear for it. Yes, and let me tell you this. Tom Varcoe isn't a lad to be played with. He will make you and your fine friends sit up and take notice, whatever they may say and do. So long," and then he turned on his heel, and sauntered back to the village.

Barcroft was in hell. He had failed. Had he not been the worst kind of fool he would have known that he would fail. He had done no good; rather he had done harm. Did this fellow know anything about him? Was there any meaning in his words when he said that he had more need to fear the law than the other had? No, that was only an angry retort containing no real threat. Nevertheless, the man had seared his soul as though with a hot iron. He had made him feel that he, the Vicar of St. Michael's, was a far more contemptible sinner than the man he had accused.

What could he do? As yet he had not been found out, and he did not believe he would be. Yet a thousand voices seemed to tell him that he must leave St. Michael's for ever. But he would not—he could not.

He wandered in the direction of Trenoweth Woods, and presently came to the spot Peter Crowle had described. It was here, according to the sexton's story, that Verity had sobbed out her agony on Varcoe's shoulder.

But he loved her, and never as much as now. Whatever truth there was in Peter Crowle's story, whatever reason there was for the girl's cry of anguish, he loved her. Besides, it was not true! Every fiber of his being, every instinct in his nature, rose up and denied it as blasphemous lie. It was not true.

And yet why not? The girl laughed at conventional morality, and had pleaded with him before the Bishop for the right to enjoy what life could give, in spite of what religion might say. And why might she not allow Varcoe to make love to her? She had no belief in, neither did she care for class distinctions. She had told him so a dozen times. But no, it could not be. There must be some other explanation of the sexton's story.

He wished now he had never come to the parish; that he had never yielded to the mad temptation which had come to him in the deserted

mining camp after the real Frank Barcroft had died. The old saying was true: one lie led to a thousand others. In his case it had meant that he had become a living lie. Yes, that was what he was— a living lie.

He laughed aloud as he thought of it. Yes, it was the greatest joke imaginable, and yet it was a joke which condemned him, scorned him, pleaded with him to make an end to the whole thing.

He made his way back to the Vicarage, and sat hour after hour, thinking and planning.

On the following Sunday morning the Vicar announced that in the evening he was going to conclude the sermon he had commenced on his first Sunday.

Why he did this he did not know. He had prepared no sermon for that Sunday evening. He could not. Ever since his talk with Varcoe his brain had been in a mad whirl, anything like consecutive thought seemed to have left him. And yet he felt he must do something. Verity Trengrove must be saved. From what to what he did not know, but somehow it seemed laid upon him to save her.

He had not the slightest thought of making any announcement when he went to church that morning. As we have said, he had prepared no evening sermon, and had no notion of what he was going to say.

Then suddenly, just as he was on the point of giving out the concluding hymn, he remembered what the Bishop had said to him. The old man had declared that if he could make Christianity real to Verity Trengrove he would save her from Varcoe. He remembered too that it was she who had suggested his first Sunday evening's text. It was a most incongruous text with which to commence his ministry, but he had taken it. He had preached on the wages of sin and had set the whole district talking. But he had not finished the sermon. He had admitted it to the congregation, and had said that sometime he would finish it. Well, why not tonight?

So, acting on the impulse of the moment, he announced that on that evening he would preach from the text: "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ."

He had not the slightest notion of what he would say. Neither had he any belief in the words he had announced. Still, he had announced them, and he would preach from them.

Looking round the church he saw that Verity Trengrove was in the Squire's pew. She had not missed a single Sunday service, morning or

evening, since he had become Vicar of the parish. He thought that she looked pale and anxious, and he could not help associating the look in her eye with the story Peter Crowle had told him.

"Won't you come to lunch with us, Barcroft?" the Squire greeted him, when presently he left the church. "I dare not, Squire. I have this evening to prepare for, and it's a big job."

"I can quite understand that," said the Squire sympathetically, "but come up tonight after the service."

"Please don't think I fail to appreciate your kindness, Squire," he replied, "but I have felt like a piece of chewed string every Sunday night after my work has been done. I have not been fit company for a dog, and tonight will be a big thing."

"It will be a big thing or it will be nothing." It was Verity who spoke, and turning he saw that the girl's eyes were upon him. "Hosts of people will come," she went on. "This morning's congregation will see that it is well advertised. Besides, you promised, you know."

"What did I promise?"

"You remember, don't you? After you preached that terrible sermon on the wages of sin you asked if there was any remedy, any hope, for the sinners you described. Then you repeated the text which you said you would preach from tonight."

"You have a good memory, Miss Trengrove," he said.

"I have," the girl replied. "You see, although I have no faith, I am terribly interested."

"Anyhow," the Squire burst in, "if you won't come tonight, you must come to dinner tomorrow. Come now, I'll take no refusal. Tomorrow night at half-past seven."

"All right," assented Barcroft, "tomorrow night at half-past seven."

He seemed to have no part in the arrangements they were making, and yet he felt that everything was charged with some tremendous destiny, that something beyond all thought or word would soon happen.

Hilary Trengrove and Verity left the churchyard and made their way towards Budock, leaving Barcroft alone in the path. For some seconds he stood with a far-away look in his eyes, then suddenly he returned to the church and made his way into the vestry. Seizing writing materials, he wrote the following note:

"Mr. Tom Varcoe is urgently invited to come to church tonight. —FRANK BARCROFT."

Then placing the note in an envelope and addressing it, he made his way towards the *King's Arms*.

"Is Mr. Varcoe in?"

"Yes," the girl replied, "he's in, but he isn't down from bed yet."

"Will you give him that letter when he comes down?"

"Yes, sir."

Why he had done this he did not know. He had simply acted upon impulse. It was a part and parcel of the rest of his proceedings that morning.

After lunch he locked himself in his study, and was seen by no one until it was time to go to church.

Never had he felt such a hypocrite as he felt that afternoon. Never had he less belief in the Christian story than he had that day. Remedy for sin indeed! Hope for the poor devils who had lost honor, will power—all that was worth living for? No, there was no, remedy, no hope.

"The wages of sin is death." Yes, that was true enough. Put what interpretation one would on what sin meant; excuse what was called sin because of heredity, tendencies over which the sinner had no control, weak will, association, training, the wages were the same. Looking over his past he realized it. Memories of what he had felt when he had committed his own crime came back to him. Recollections of those ghastly years at Dartmoor flashed through his mind. Great God! Yes, the wages of sin were death. That was true enough.

But the other!—

Of course it was all hocus-pocus. Who said it? Paul. Who was Paul? A pedantic Pharisee who knew nothing of life as he knew it.

Still, he had promised to tell the people whether he believed there was a remedy for sin. And he would be true to his word. At least he was enough of a sportsman to be true to the promise he had made.

And so doggedly, grimly, he set to work. What though he had no belief in what he was going to say? He was a lie, an impostor, a sham. A few more lies did not matter. While he had been studying law he had often read of great barristers who had to plead hopeless cases. Oftimes they had no belief in the cases they advocated, no belief in the prisoners they defended. But they had spoken to their belief. That was their duty, and they had done it. Well, he would speak to his brief. As for the consequences—what had they

to do with him? But they had. He had two people to whom he was going to speak. Verity Trengrove and Varcoe. It was his business to convince them of the truth of what he was going to say. Each had challenged him, and there was mockery in their voices as they had done 50.. Besides, there was the ghastly fear which haunted him.

As a consequence every faculty which he possessed was brought into use. Imagination, memory, fear, pity, hope. All his brain power, all his other powers, were utilized.

“Why did I write that note to Varcoe?” he asked himself again and again. uWhy am I so anxious he should be present tonight?" He could give no answer to his own questions. He only knew that he was a kind of automaton who acted because he must. All the same, when church time came his sermon was not finished. He had struggled in vain. He could give no answer to the questions he had raised.

St. Michael’s Church was full. Perhaps it was not so crowded as on his first Sunday evening, but not a seat was vacant. Moreover, there was a look of expectancy on the faces of all present. When the time came for him to go into the pulpit, every eye was upon him.

As he looked at the congregation a fear such as he had never known before fell upon him. It seemed to him that everyone in the church knew that he was a sham, that he was not Frank Barcroft at all, but a man who had spent several years of his life in a convict prison. But, strange to say, this was not the thing which troubled him. Something indefinable, something terrible, had gripped his heart-strings and made him feel as though he were standing on the brink of some black, unfathomable chasm. Still, he would not be beaten. He would go through with the thing.

He gave out his text: “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

At first he scarcely recognized his own voice. It seemed as though someone else were talking. But presently a sense of reality came to him. At any rate, he knew the wages of sin. That was a fact.

He began to recapitulate his former sermon. Then his subject gripped him, and he found himself talking again on the wages of sin. He saw sin in its meanness, its selfishness, its cowardice, its lying, its ugliness as he had never seen it before, and what he saw in his mind he told the listening congregation.

Presently he paused to look around him. Yes, his note to Varcoe had not been without its effect. The man was sitting near him, gazing at him with wide-open eyes. He did not mean to do it, but he found himself describing an imaginary scene in which a man had committed the sin of which he thought Varcoe was guilty. It was a terrible picture he drew. He portrayed its selfishness, its meanness, its cowardice, and then he described the wages—the loss of self-respect, the loss of manhood, the anguish, the loneliness, the desolation, the ruin.

A great sobbing sigh rose from someone in the church, and for a few seconds he ceased speaking, while the listening congregation seemed afraid to breathe.

"Yes," he said, "sin is real, and the wages of sin are as certain as they are real. I told you that the first Sunday night I was here. You and I will all receive the wages due to us because of our sin. But is that all? Is there no remedy, no hope?"

At that moment it seemed to him that there was no remedy, no hope. The spirit of utter abandon was upon him, and like a man in wrath he was about to hurl a message of despair to the people. He knew that they were expecting something else from him; something that would lift the black shadow that was resting upon them; but he could not. He had no gospel, no good news. Even he was not hypocrite enough to tell them such a lie in that time-honored building.

For some seconds he was silent. It seemed a terrible thing to him to tell those waiting people that even God, if there was a God, could find no remedy for sin. Then he remembered that night in the deserted mining camp when he had first seen the real Frank Barcroft; remembered the stories he had told him of things he had seen with his own eyes, heard with his own ears.

"Well, I am Frank Barcroft," he said to himself, "and I can at least tell them what I have seen and heard."

Again his gift of speech stood him in good stead, while his powers as an actor made him simulate what to him was not real. He determined that as he had made the wages of sin real so would he make the other real. So he told the stories which Frank Barcroft had told him with an air of conviction. For the moment indeed he was the real Frank Barcroft. He had seen the vilest men and women change their lives by some Power greater than themselves.

“What I tell you is true,” his voice rang out. “I, Frank Barcroft, have seen and heard what I have told you. I cannot explain it. I do not want to, but the things I have told you are transcripts from life.”

Again he paused, while the listening congregation seemed spellbound.

"The gift of God is eternal life. What is eternal life? Life is health, life is vigor, life is power, and through that health and vigor and power you can overcome sin. Through that power you can say to the mean and dirty devils that haunt you ‘get thee behind me.’ Through that power you can strangle the devils that tempt you. Through that power you can become healthy and clean. That is the gift of God through Jesus Christ.

“But there must be no dallying with sin. You cannot have the power to fight it while you cherish it and nurse it in your own hearts. Repentance is essential. If thy right hand or thy right eye offend thee, they must be destroyed, and the gift of God is the power to do that. If you have harmed anyone, wronged anyone, you must make restitution. Otherwise all is mockery. This gift of God which is eternal life can never be possessed by those who have it in their minds to go on sinning. But if you want to be clean in heart, strong enough to cast out the devils which have possessed you, you can have it. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.”

I, who write this, can only hint at the burning fervor of his words, at the abandon of his appeal. It was not Hugh Treleaven who spoke, it was Frank Barcroft, the saint and hero, who spoke through him. By some alchemy of which I do not possess the secret, the man for a moment was Frank Barcroft. He spoke with his sincerity, his power, and the listening congregation realized that this man was telling them what he knew to be true in his own heart.

Half an hour later the new Vicar was back in the vicarage. He had spoken to no one. Many wanted to tell him of the wonderful impression his sermon had made. But they were afraid. His face was pale as death; in his eyes was a light they had never seen before. All felt that speech at such a time would be sacrilege.

Barcroft went through the form of eating supper, but his housekeeper, who was anxiously watching him, afterwards declared that he had not eaten enough to keep a robin alive. After supper he found his way into his study, where he sat for a long time thinking. He tried to analyze his own words, tried to understand the motives which had prompted him to utter them, tried to understand his own feelings.

Presently his housekeeper entered.

"A man wants to see you, sir," she informed him.

"A man? What man?"

"It is the man who lodges at the public house, Varcoe, I think they call him. If I were you, sir, I wouldn't see him."

"Not see him? Why not?"

"Because I believe he's mad."

A minute later Barcroft and Varcoe were alone together.

17.

THE TWO MEN looked steadily at each other's faces.

Both seemed waiting for the other to speak. It was Varcoe who first broke the silence.

"Why did you send me that note?" There was indignation in his voice.

"I don't know."

"I didn't mean to come to your church again. As soon as I read it I tore it into pieces. But I went."

"Yes, I saw you there."

"You were preaching to me, weren't you?"

"I don't know—yes, I think I was. I was preaching to myself, too; more to myself than to you."

Varcoe looked at the Vicar steadily, and seemed to be trying to understand what he meant.

"I went to church tonight because I couldn't help it," he went on. "I have come here because I couldn't help it."

There was a suggestion of the Varcoe as he had seen him last, but there was another Varcoe also. Then he had been defiant, mocking. Now a new light was burning in his eyes, a new tone was in his voice. Some great passion was evidently working within him.

"What do you know about me?" he burst out suddenly.

"What is the good of talking about that?"

"No good at all. Listen, I didn't mean to do it. When she asked me to come to you, I laughed at her. Yes, I did. As I told you I was willing to pay for my fun, but, good gosh! I have been in hell for all that. You were right there, parson, the wages of sin is death. When will you marry us?"

Barcroft tried to speak, but he could not. The man's question opened up such a world of ghastly possibilities that his tongue was paralyzed, his lips would not formulate the words he wanted to say.

"Marry whom?" he managed to say at length?

"Why, me and my girl. The girl to whom I owe marriage, but whom I never meant to marry."

"Then you confess that what I have heard about you is true?"

"I don't know what you have heard about me. But if you have heard that it is up to me to marry that girl at the Hall it is true. Yes, I admit it. I have been a mean skunk. A meaner skunk never lived. I will tell you about it. I never meant to, but I am going to."

Agony such as Barcroft had never felt before gripped his heart.

"No! No!" he ejaculated. "For mercy sake not that!"

"Why I am going to do it I don't know," went on Varcoe, "I expect it was that Squire's dirty pride that maddened me. He treated me as though I were scum, not fit to associate with such as he. I expect that is why it was I made up my mind to pay him out. I know it was contemptible, and that I have acted like a villain in a fourth-rate melodrama. I have seen barn-stormers act them repeatedly in America, and, although I laughed at them there, they gave me the idea."

"And so—" began Barcroft, but he could not conclude his sentence.

"Yes, I did. Of course you have seen her and know her. You lived up at the Hall for quite a while. You must have seen her many times. She is just like the Squire's daughter, too. The two might be taken for sisters; the same build, the same walk. She carries herself like a lady, too."

Barcroft did not speak. He felt as though a part of his burden were lifted from him. A flood of light illumined that which had been dark.

"She may be only Miss Trengrove's maid, but she is as much a lady as she is, and she looks it, too. Although she wears Miss Trengrove's cast-off clothes, she might pass for her. Indeed, she has been taken for her. That was how stories got around that I had been seen around with the Squire's daughter. But I didn't deny it. I said let the people talk. Sooner or later it will get to the Squire's ears, and then— But that sermon of yours tonight bowled me over, and I felt I must do the straight thing. When will you marry us, parson?"

Here was an explanation which he had never hoped for, and of which indeed he had never dreamed. He had rarely seen Verity Trengrove's maid, and had certainly never given her a moment's attention. Now the meaning of what he had heard became plain. It was the maid who, wearing Verity Trengrove's clothes, Peter Crowle had taken for her mistress. It was because of this the Bishop had spoken to him. What a fool he had been!

What a blind, senseless idiot! The maid was scarcely known in the village. She seldom left the Hall, but by some means Varcoe had become acquainted with her, and the rest had followed. Yes, it was, as the fellow had said, like a plot in a fourth-rate melodrama. But it was quite possible in a country village where the people caught at every fragment of scandalous gossip, and made much of it. Besides, it would suit Varcoe's book. His pride would be gratified at knowing that his name was associated with that of the Squire's daughter, while his petty desires for revenge would be fulfilled at the pain the gossip would cause the Squire himself.

By this time Barcroft was able to think more calmly, able to understand the things which had been troubling him. He looked at Varcoe again, and did not at all wonder at his housekeeper declaring he was mad. The man's face was ghastly pale, while in his eyes there burned a strange light. Some power had gripped him, and had made him do what he had determined not to do. The confession he had made must have cost him dearly. It would be no light matter for him to come to the vicarage and tell him what he had told him.

"Look here, parson," went on Varcoe, "I told you on the night the Bishop preached that I had a kind of belief in religion. Well, I suppose I had. You see, my old Dad was a religious man and I kind of believed it for his sake; but it had no more effect on my doings than the stars have on the sun. I was always out for a good time, and I meant to have it. I did have it, too, in a way, and after I had made money I had everything that money could buy. Then you came along, and what you said set me thinking. Not that I meant to come to church tonight. When I got your letter I was in a mad passion, and I said, 'what the heck has he got to do with me?' All the same I went."

The man was evidently speaking under the stress of strong emotion; great beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead, and his voice was hoarse and raucous. "Looking round the church," he went on, "I saw her."

"Saw whom?"

"Why, Mary Clemmo, the girl I have been going with. I tell you I felt mean, meaner than I ever felt in my life before. But I didn't make up my mind to do anything. I just laughed to myself. Then you began to preach—I say, parson, can you tell me why parsons as a rule talk such stuff? They might do a lot of good if they talked as man to man without a lot of gush that is over his head. Anyhow, you talked straight, and I couldn't help feeling that you knew what you were talking about. Of course the early part

of your sermon was very much a repetition of what you had said before, but when you began talking new stuff you got me. I felt sure you were preaching at me especially when you described the man who was guilty of sin. Then when you paused a minute, I heard someone give a kind of a sob, and I knew it was Mary. After that I was done for. I knew I was a mean skunk; a dirty-minded, shabby, selfish devil. Then I remembered what my father had been, what my mother was, and I wanted to be another Tom Varcoe. Then you asked how a man could be stronger than the devil. I say, parson, but you must have lived a strange life in Africa—and seen strange things, too. Anyhow, the stories you told us of those men and women you had known—dirty, diseased wretches, being made strong and clean—was great stuff."

The man paused again. He seemed to be living over the experiences of the evening again.

"I don't know what I felt like after I left the church," he went on. "There seemed to be two angels fighting within me, one good and one bad, one black and the other white. One told me to believe in what you had said, while the other said it was all moonshine. One told me to be a clean, straight chap; the other said that only by going on as I had been, could I get any fun out of life. Presently I found myself near Trenoweth Woods. There Mary came to me, parson. She had followed me in the hope of persuading me to do the right thing. She begged me to come to you and make a clean breast of everything."

Again he ceased speaking and swallowed hard as if something were choking him.

"I came back to the *King's Arms*, and then I did a thing I haven't done for years," he went on. "I went up to my bedroom and knelt down and prayed." He laughed as though it were something of a joke. "I guess it was a funny place to pray in, but I prayed, and I hadn't been at it long, before something said to me, ' go up to the Vicarage and have it out with that parson chap.' And I have come. When will you marry us, parson?"

If Tom Varcoe was deeply moved, so was the counterfeit Frank Barcroft. He had listened to the other's story with a curious feeling in his heart, a feeling which he could not define. To say the least of it, it was an unheard—of thing that a man who was a fraud and impostor should influence another in the way he had influenced Varcoe. Then, added to that, was the feeling of relief, amounting to exultant joy, that the thing he had feared concerning

Verity Trengrove had no foundation. But more than all this was a sense of wonder and awe. This man, who for years had been living the life of a devil, had now sufficient desire for good to come there and make such a confession. Nay, more, some power greater than the power of evil had so far entered his life that he had been enabled to put his desires into practice. And yet was that so? Was he simply yielding to an emotion which would quickly spend itself?

"Look here," he said, "you have gone the whole hog, haven't you?"

"There is hardly a sin in the calendar that I haven't been guilty of-"

"And what about the future?"

"The future? What do you mean?"

"What about repentance, restitution?"

"That's what I have come about. I want to do the straight thing. I guess I shall never be a pattern saint, but Tom Varcoe is going to be a different man. I've got that solid. I'm going to marry Mary and I want you to put up the banns next Sunday. I can leave that with you can't I?"

"Yes, you can leave that with me," replied Barcroft. He did not realize the significance of the words as he uttered them. He spoke as an automaton might speak.

"And there is something else," went on Varcoe. "I don't know the meaning of that Eternal Life business you were talking about, and yet in a way I do. I shouldn't have been able to come here but for that; I shouldn't have been able to make up my mind to do the straight thing by Mary. It's a big thing. I could no more have done it yesterday than I could fly, but as I knelt in my bedroom over at the King's Am: a sort of something came over me. You said that Eternal Life meant health, power. Well, a sort of power came to me which has given me the pluck to come to you determined to do what's right. That's why I want to ask you before I go,_ to kneel down right here and pray to God for me."

"I! pray for you!" gasped Barcroft.

"That's so. You must be a man of God or you couldn't have made me do what I have done."

"I didn't make you do what you have done!"

"Didn't you? No, perhaps it wasn't you. But something got hold of me, parson, it's in me right now, and it's making me say this to you. I suppose you would call it religion. I don't care what you call it, but I know that I

haven't felt so much like a man, a real man before. That's why I want you to pray with me and for me."

Barcroft had passed through many strange experiences during the last few weeks, but surely never one like this. He had never prayed for years, unless the words he had stammered at Mary Bennetto's bedside could be called a prayer. For that matter he had been a confirmed disbeliever. There might be some Eternal Force at the back of everything, but as for believing that the Eternal Force was anything like the God Christians pretended to believe in, had been sheer impossibility. And yet—

He knew that Varcoe's eyes were upon him, knew that the man expected him to offer a prayer. But how could he? Preaching a sermon such as he had preached in the church was hard enough, but that was as nothing compared to what was expected of him now. How could he, an ex-convict, a fraud, a hypocrite, a man who even at that moment was impersonating someone else, kneel by the side of this repentant sinner, and offer a prayer to a God in which he did not believe to give this man eternal life? The whole thing was impossible. And yet—

He looked at Varcoe again. Yes, doubtless a great change had come over him. Something had been at work within him which had revolutionized him. His outlook, too, was different, his hopes and determinations were different. What had done it? This man who had lived simply to gratify his own appetites and lusts wanted to lead a new life. What had wrought the change? Was it a mere figment of the imagination, or was there something real behind it all?

He could not pray! Why, it would be worse blasphemy than anything he had yet been guilty of. He felt like the Ancient Mariner in Coleridge's poem. His heart was dry as dust.

And yet in a way he could not understand he wanted Varcoe to be true to the new life which had come into his heart that night. And he felt thankful to Something or Someone that the man had been led to make his confession, and to do the right thing. A great cloud had been lifted from his own life. The haunting fears concerning Verity Trengrove were now things of the past; and although Verity could never be anything to him, a great throbbing joy such a he had never felt before filled his being.

"You are about done for, parson," said Varcoe, looking at him steadily. "No wonder. To preach as you have preached tonight would have taken it

out of any man, and I am told you were mighty sick before you came to England. Still, I want you to offer a prayer with me before I go",

The sympathy in the man's tones, the change in his whole being affected Barcroft more than the words he uttered, and before he knew what he was doing he found himself kneeling by Varcoe's side. But he was dumb. He could not, he simply could not offer the prayer he longed to utter. He thought of the Prayer Book he had been studying so assiduously, and wondered whether there was some section in it which would deal with such a case. But he could think of nothing. Even as he realized that printed words seemed vain as he knelt beside Mary Bennetto's deathbed, so did printed words seem vain now.

"O God," he stammered, and the words seemed dragged from him in spite of himself, "help me to help this poor chap, and do You please help him to be true to what he has made up his mind to do tonight. If the gift of God means eternal life, and if eternal life means health and power, may we both have more of it."

He tried to think of something else to say, but nothing came to him, and he was silent.

For more than a minute they remained on their knees, and then without knowledge of what was in each other's mind they rose.

"Thank you, parson," said Varcoe. "You have got at the heart of the thing. You will see about the banns next Sunday, won't you?"

"Yes, I will see about that. Good night."

Varcoe moved towards the door and then having reached it he stood still like one in doubt. Perhaps he thought that Barcroft's dismissal was somewhat curt.

"Good night, parson. I have done the hardest thing that I ever did in my life, but I am glad I have done it."

"So am I; and, look here, I am no end glad that you came to me. I am afraid I haven't been able to help you much; all the same, you have done the biggest thing tonight that you have ever done in your life, and if ever I can help you in any way I want you to come here without hesitation. I don't think I can help you very much, but I want you to know that any help I can give you is yours."

For some second Varcoe did not speak. He seemed to be fighting with himself. Then his lips began to tremble, and tears welled up in his eyes.

"You are a real white man, parson," he sobbed, "the whitest man I ever knew, and you are the only sky pilot that has ever touched me. Why, years ago when I was out on the ranch in Texas a sky pilot used to pay us periodical visits, but every cowboy among us laughed at him, just laughed at him. But you are different. You have made me do what I thought I never should do, and if ever there was a man of God you are he. I shall have the heck of a fight, but I am going to fight, parson. Good night, and may Almighty God bless you."

Barcroft stood at the door of the Vicarage and listened while the man's footsteps died away in the silence of the night. Then he returned to his study.

For some minutes everything that had taken place was blurred, chaotic. He might have been dreaming a curious dream. Nothing stood out in clear outline. All the same, he knew that what had taken place was not a dream.

How silent the house was! He had no realization of time; did not know how long Varcoe had stayed. Why he did so he did not know, but he started on a tour of the house. He went into the dining—room, drawing-room, morning-room, kitchen. All was silent. Everyone had gone to bed.

As if not satisfied, he continued his tour of investigation. He went up the stairway and stood on the landing. Still all was silent.

The servants, as he knew, occupied the top story; but he did not go further. Standing for some minutes at the staircase window he looked out into the night. There Was no moon, but the stars shone brightly, so brightly that the elm trees which grew around the garden could be seen plainly. Not a breath of wind stirred. All was still.

"All alone!" he whispered, "I'm all alone—except for God."

When he went downstairs again he thought he would turn out the study light and go to bed. But he did not. Somehow the thought was repellent. He was sure he could not sleep. He threw himself into what was called the study chair, and began to think.

The old eight-day clock began to chime, and he counted the strokes Twelve. He remembered hearing it strike the same hour on the night Mary Bennetto had died. More than four hours since he left the church, since which——

"You are a white man, parson, the whitest man I ever knew… If ever there was a man of God, you are he."

The words seemed to sear his heart like a hot iron. He a white man! He a man of God!

A feeling of unutterable shame swept over him. He felt like crying out in pain.

The events of the night came to him plainly. His experiences were no longer blurred and chaotic. Everything was clear cut, definite. The letter he had written to Varcoe, the crowded church, the sermon, and what followed afterwards.

Yes, he had a feeling of gladness because of what Varcoe had said, and it was not altogether because of Verity Trengrove. Something that he could not define caused a kind of exultation to come to him because Varcoe was going to do the right thing. He imagined what that poor girl Mary Clemmo had suffered; imagined the agony, the thought of disgrace that must have filled her life. What would she say when Varcoe told her what he intended to do? For a moment his own part in the matter had dropped out of sight. Come to that, he had done nothing. He was simply glad because of the girl and Varcoe. Then he remembered the latter's words. "You will see about the banns next Sunday, won't you? For a moment the words struck him as strange. The population of St. Michael's was not large. The weddings were very few, and he had not yet been called upon to officiate at a Marriage Service. Now, however, he would have to marry Varcoe, and he would have to call the banns next Sunday.

Then he remembered. He was not Frank Barcroft, he had never taken Orders, hence although he might read the Marriage Service the marriage would not be valid, and thus Tom Varcoe and Mary Clemmo would not be married at all. The thought staggered him, and again a feeling like fear crept into his heart. He was a fraud, an impostor; thus any marriage at which he might officiate would not be a marriage at all.

"I must get out of it somehow," he reflected. "There must be no doubt about the legality of Varcoe's marriage."

But how could he? He was sure that Varcoe would insist on his being the officiating clergyman. And yet if he were he would do Tom Varcoe and Mary Clemmo a great wrong. They would not be married at all.

He would give it up. No, he simply could not remain there as Vicar of the parish any longer. The whole thing had been the epitome of madness from the very beginning, and he would give it up, lock, stock, and barrel.

But what about Verity Trengrove? Could he leave her knowing that he would never see her again? He had promised the Squire after the morning service that he would go to dinner at Budock on the Monday night, and the girl, as he thought, seemed pleased. Great heavens, how he loved her! Every fiber in his being called out for her. No, he could not, would not, leave her.

When he went to bed, he was still undecided what to do.

Throughout the whole of the next day Barcroft remained within the precincts of the Vicarage. He wondered much what Varcoe was doing, and half expected him to call. But he did not appear, neither did any sort of message come from him. Barcroft wished he knew something of his movements. Would the good resolutions of the previous night end in nothing, or would they be carried into effect? Was there, after all, some truth in what he had said? And had some power come into Varcoe's life which could fight and overcome the devil?

Presently he found himself in the garden where Richard Beard, who had been gardener and general factotum to three preceding vicars, was working. Richard Beard was something of a character, and was generally spoken of as one who was always " 'gin the Government."

"Mornin', sir," Richard greeted him as he came up.

"Good morning, Richard."

"How be 'e feeling this mornin', sir?"

"All right, Richard. Why shouldn't I be?"

"No, I don't see why you should'n. After all, 'tis only a flash in the pan."

"What's only a flash in the pan?"

"Your popularity. Oh, ess, I can't help admitting that; but 't'won't last."

"What won't last?"

"Your popularity. Besides, what d' it amount to? The church was full of people last night, and the people listened to 'e as though you was sayin' somethin' wonderful. But what about Summercourt Fair?"

"What about Summercourt Fair?"

"Why, I have seed bigger crowds than was at church last night hearkenin' to clowns outside the shows at Summercourt Fair just in the same way they hearkened to you. And what did it amount to?"

"Then you don't think I did much good?"

"I don't say that, sir. But I have seen parsons of all sorts come and go, and what I say is this, you mustn't take too much notice of the first few

weeks. Why, I have known travelin' praichers at the Chapel who have drawn big crowds for over six months, and then 'ave failed as flat as ditch-water. Besides, I bean't a great believer in revival sermons, I bean't."

"Was mine a revival sermon?"

"In a way 'twas, although I an't heard of anybody as has been converted. In fact, I never heard of anybody being converted in church. You must go to chapel for that. Now if you could convert a few people I should begin to think your popularity would last."

"Who do you want me to convert?" asked Barcroft, who was thinking of Varcoe, and wondering what sort of effect his story would have when it became known.

"Oh, if you were to convert Bill Best, the landlord at the *King's Arms*, Jack Buddle, Harry Bragg, and that young chap called Varcoe that d' live up at the public house, I might begin to think there was something, in it. What about the day of Pentecost when three thousand people were converted? That's the kind of thing to make people believe. Besides, come to that, yours was'n a real converting sermon."

"No?"

"No. When I was a boy over to the Chapel the preachers used to preach hell fire. They used to shake the sinners over the mouth of hell, so to speak. But, law, they don't do that now. Tha's why religion is dying."

Barcroft could not help laughing as he left Richard Beard in spite of the many thoughts that surged in his mind. Perhaps the old gardener's words were a kind of healthy tonic to him, and kept him from brooding. In any case, no news of Varcoe had reached Beard, and as he was reputed to be the first to obtain any news in the parish, it was pretty certain that the fellow had not made known what had told him. Did this mean that his repentance of the previous night had evaporated with the morning, or was there some other explanation? At any rate, he would know before the day was over. If need be he would see Mary Clemmo, and tell her of what had taken place.

At six o'clock that night Barcroft started for Budock. At least, he would spend one more night in Verity Trengrove's society. His heart beat fast at the thought of it.

As he passed through the village a group of men stood talking. Some of them touched their caps, while others eyed him curiously. But beyond a muttered "Good evening" no one spoke, and he judged from their demeanor that Varcoe had made no open confession.

Passing the *King's Arms*, he was tempted to go in and inquire after him, but desisted. Perhaps it would not be me.

Half an hour later as he drew near Budock he saw the Squire and Varcoe coming towards him. They appeared to be talking earnestly.

18.

BARCROFT was on the point of making his way towards them, when reflecting that his presence might not be welcome, he turned aside into a copse, so that they might not see him. But they had seen him, and before he was out of sight, he heard Varcoe calling his name.

"Now, Mr. Barcroft, don't think you are going to get away like that," the man shouted. "I have been up here quite a while and made everything right plain." There was a new tone in his voice, and, as Barcroft thought, a new look in his eyes. "I want to say this, Mr. Trengrove," he went on, "and if ever a man felt pleasure in saying a thing I feel it right now. I guess I am no plaster-of—paris saint, and never will be, but I want to do the right thing. I have been pretty much of a devil, and the man who made me feel ashamed of myself is this man here. Will you shake hands, Mr. Barcroft—There—that's it.—This is my friend, Mr. Trengrove; he's a white man; the whitest man God ever put breath into. He has made me want to be a white man, and if ever he wants a friend, Tom Varcoe will be proud to be that friend. And now I'll leave you. I guess you two will have a lot to say to each other. Good evening, gentlemen."

He left them as he spoke, and made his way to the park gates.

For some time neither the Squire nor Barcroft said a word. They both thought they knew what was in the other's mind, and words did not come easily.

"I expect you know what he has been telling me," said the Squire at length.

"Probably I do."

"He came up early this afternoon," went on the Squire, "and asked to see Verity. At first I thought of ordering him off the place. I never liked the fellow. Indeed, I always looked upon him as the worst kind of bounder. I knew he was a hard drinker, too, and there have been a lot of nasty stories about him. You have heard them, I expect?"

Barcroft nodded.

“I didn’t understand why he should ask for Verity, and I was angry when she went and spoke to him as if she knew him. Still, you know what Verity is. When she makes up her mind to do a thing she does it. I’m afraid I haven’t tried to control her very much, but after she had been with him for some minutes I determined to find out why he had come. I was on the point of going to her, when she came to me, and told me that Varcoe was in the sewing-room with Mary Clemmo. I objected to this, as I didn’t like the fellow in the house, but Verity persuaded me not to interfere, especially as Varcoe had something to say to me.”

The Squire, who was usually calm and composed, was evidently under the stress of strong emotion. His slow and somewhat measured manner of speech was gone, and he spoke quickly, excitedly.

“Do you know? Barcroft, it was a wonderful story the fellow told me,” the Squire continued after a rather awkward silence. “I had been feeling for some time that there was something wrong, but I couldn’t tell what. I couldn’t understand Verity’s behavior, either, while Mary Clemmo’s pale face, and the fearful look in her eyes, haunted me. I wanted to get rid of her, but Verity wouldn’t hear of it. As a matter of fact she had told her of her trouble weeks and week ago. If she had told me, I should have packed her out of the house, bag and baggage. But Verity is different. The child has been thinking all the time of means whereby she could help her maid. She never told anyone, either. She regarded her maid’s confession as sacred, and although I am sure she must have been sorely tempted to speak, she never uttered a word. That is the kind of girl she is. She looks upon Mary Clemmo not only as her maid, but as a friend, and as such felt responsible for her. Anyhow, she kept the girl’s secret in her heart, while all the time she dreaded the future. Perhaps you knew about that, too. The man told me he had made a full confession to you.”

“No,” replied Barcroft, “I knew nothing about that.”

“Look here,” and Hilary Trengrove caught hold of Barcroft’s arm; “you remember that night when the Bishop was here; you remember, too, what Verity said. She has always admitted that she was a bit of a skeptic, but what she said to you and the Bishop shocked me, made me sad. But I tell you what, Barcroft, that girl is a thousand times more of a Christian than many a goody-goody parish worker. She may laugh at parsons and religious people generally, but she has the root of the matter in her heart.”

Barcroft nodded. While the Squire had been speaking he had been picturing Verity Trengrove bearing her maid's trouble, and trying to devise means whereby she might help her.

"Well, presently," went on the Squire, "Varcoe had finished his talk with the maid, and then asked to see me. I was altogether in the dark about what he had come about, and was entirely unprepared for what he had to tell me."

"What did he tell you?" Barcroft did not know why he asked this question. Perhaps he was curious as to how the fellow had approached the Squire.

"He told me the whole story, told it as though he wanted to get it off his chest. He excused nothing, minimized nothing. At first I felt like knocking him down, and then having him whipped out of the place. But I didn't; perhaps it was the straightforwardness of the man, as well as his honesty, which I could not help admiring. Of course Varcoe's impression explained everything. I saw the meaning of the girl's pale face and haunted eyse; knew why she always wanted to be alone. Do you know, Barcroft, that Verity had been to see this man, and pleaded with him to do the straight thing. In fact, she tried every means of getting him to do his duty."

"He told me about you, too," went on the Squire. "Told me how you had met him and pleaded with him; how, although you never spoke of it to anyone, you had tried to make him atone for his evil doing. But it was last night that completed the work, and honestly, Barcroft, I don't wonder at it. As you know, I have been a religious man all my life, and have been Vicar's warden for a good many years, but I never felt so impressed by a service as I did last night. I tell you it was great, and I don't wonder at Varcoe's doing what he did. You preached a sermon that—"

"Please, please, don't!" Barcroft stammered.

"But I must, my dear fellow. Never did I believe so much that God sent a man into a parish as that God sent you here. I took to you from the first, although there were certain things about you that I couldn't understand. I knew in a minute that you were not a cut-to-a-pattern parson, but even then I couldn't quite understand some of your unconventional ways and sayings. Now I thank God that you are not one of that sort; that your rough life in Africa knocked a lot of the pietistic stuffing out of you. I am glad of it, my dear chap, and I want to be your friend more than ever."

Barcroft did not speak. He could not; somehow he felt too ashamed.

"He told me what you said to him," the Squire went on; "told me you had promised to call the banns next Sunday. Told me what a grand chap you were, and how he wouldn't dream of letting anyone else marry him but you."

"If he only knew!" reflected Barcroft. "If he only knew that I am not a parson at all, and cannot marry anyone. But I must tell him, I simply must! Before this night is over he must know that I am not Frank Barcroft, that I am a thousand times worse than Varcoe."

No, he would make a complete confession even as Varcoe had confessed. He was no believer in Christianity, but the sense of decency which still remained with him in spite of his past, urged him to give up for ever the great black lie which he was living. Yes, he would make his confession now. The Squire had been moved by what Varcoe had told him that day, and he felt kindly towards Barcroft. Perhaps——who knew—he would think kindly of a poor wayward sinner who to rise out of his miserable past had adopted a career of deception.

"Squire," he said, "you are very kind, and your kindness helps me to say what I feel I must say. I am not worthy of your good opinion. I ought not to be here at all. I am unfit to be Vicar of St. Michael's. I am —"

The Squire broke in with a laugh.

"You are the best fellow that ever lived, Barcroft, and I never took to anyone as I have taken to you. Why, see, what you have done for Varcoe! You have made a contemptible villain do his duty, and I will not hear—"

"No, no, Squire, you must hear me. It is right that you should, and—"

"Oh, there you are!" and a merry ringing laugh met Barcroft's ears. Turning he saw Verity Trengrove.

At that moment it seemed to him as though she had saved him from a ghastly calamity. If she had not appeared he Would have insisted on making his confession, and then, in all probability, he would have been driven out of the place. But the sight of the girl seemed to make confession impossible. Evidently she was in great good humor. Laughter was in her voice, happiness was in her eyes. Her challenging demeanor had gone, and she looked at Barcroft in a more friendly way than he had ever known her look before.

No, no, he could not, simply could not tell his miserable story now. At least, let him have a few hours' happiness first.

“Now, Dad,” cried the girl, “run away and dress for dinner. It’s seven o’clock, and it will take you quite half an hour. You know what a stickler you are for being in time. See what a good example I have set you,” and she pirouetted before him. “Don’t I look nice? Doesn’t this dress suit me? I have dressed early in order to have a chat with Mr. Barcroft before dinner. Now then, run away like the old dear you are.”

The Squire looked whimsically at Barcroft, and then obeying his daughter’s bidding, left the young man and the girl together.

19.

BARCROFT had never seen Verity Trengrove look so I beautiful, so fascinating as now. The light of happiness was in her eyes, the hue of health was in her cheeks. She was just a healthy, care-free child of nature, and girl like, she rejoiced in the fact that she looked beautiful. Her dress fitted her to perfection, and she was surrounded by beauty on every hand. Summer was now at its height, while the gardens that stretched around them were abloom with flowers. The old grey stone mansion which stood in the near distance, had been the home of the Trengroves for generations. It was also hers. What wonder, then, that she was happy? But more than all this the thing which had saddened her life for months had passed away.

As we have seen, Verity had a serious side to her nature, and what was called her Socialism was more than a mere name. She really cared for Mary Clemmo, and the thought of the girl's disgrace, together with her own apparent helplessness, had made her hard and skeptical. But now all had changed. The new Vicar, whom she had met with almost flippant scorn, had done what she had failed to do. Something had come into Varcoe's life which had revolutionized him, and in her thankfulness her doubts had for the time flowu. What wonder, then, that she should meet Barcroft with a friendly laugh, and with a desire to atone for what she had said in the past?

"Do you remember what I said to you yesterday morning?" she began.

"I think I remember everything you have ever said to me, up to the present," was his reply.

"Now that's very nice of you, and spoken in the proper spirit. But I am not joking. When you said yesterday morning that you couldn't come to lunch because you hadn't prepared your evening sermon, and that it was a big job, I replied that it would be a big thing or it would be nothing. I don't know why I said it, but it was true. I don't want to compliment you—I hate preachers who like being complimented—but it is true. It was a big thing. Please don't thank me for saying so."

"I am not going to," replied Barcroft.

“Mr. Barcroft,” went on the girl, “you did the biggest thing you ever did in your life last night.”

“Yes?”

“That man Varcoe has told me all about it, and I don’t think I ever listened to anything so eagerly before. I want to speak to you with absolute frankness. There is no other way in which one can speak about such a thing. Of course I knew the trouble Mary was in, and the agony she was suEering. And I couldn’t say anything about it. She had told me in confidence; but I tried to do my best. I did everything I could with him. I tried to appeal to his sense of decency, has manhood, his honor. I tried to tell him of what she was suffering through him. But all in vain. Then you did what I failed to do. I am afraid I don’t believe much in what the Church teaches, Mr. Barcroft; but I can’t help believing in what you said last night. If ever a miracle took place, it took place in Varcoe. I don’t pretend to explain it, or tell what it is, but something has come into Varcoe’s life which has utterly changed him. He who was the worst kind of villain, now wants to do right to the girl he has wronged; he wants to do everything to make her happy; and I know that nothing less than a miracle could have wrought the change.—At least, I can’t help seeing that.”

“I am awfully glad,” was all Barcroft could say.

“Glad!” repeated the girl. “If you could see the change in Mary Clemmo! If you could understand the awful fears, the awful dread, the black ruin which faced her; and then see her as she is now—! And she owes it all to you, Mr. Barcroft.”

“No, no,” he could not help saying, “she owes me nothing.”

“But she does. In a way she owes everything to you. And there is something else I want to say to you. I want to ask your pardon.”

“Ask my pardon?”

“Yes. I haven’t treated you fairly, and I feel ashamed of myself.”

“How haven’t you treated me fairly?”

“I haven’t believed in you. I don’t know how it was, but the day you came here first I felt you weren’t genuine, that you were acting a part. Forgive me for speaking plainly, won’t you?”

“Say what is in your heart.” He feared the girl’s confession; all the same, he wanted to hear it.

“Well, then, I didn’t believe you were genuine.”

“What do you mean? Did you think I was an impostor?”

"No, nothing of that sort. I thought your profession was a mockery. I didn't believe you had any faith in your religion. That was why I said the things I said about you. Even on the night the Bishop preached your induction sermon I felt it. But I was mistaken, and I want to apologize. What that man Varcoe told me today has destroyed every doubt. Besides, you couldn't have preached the sermon you did last night if you had been a hypocrite. Why, after hearing you I almost believed myself."

"Then you no longer regard me as a fraud."

"How can I? But for you Mary Clemmo's life would be ruined, while Varcoe— No, I can't help believing in you after that!"

It seemed harder than ever to confess now. How could he sacrifice Verity Trengrove's good opinion when it meant everything to him? How could he tell her that he—

Looking at her, their eyes met, and he thought he saw that which lifted him to heaven and made him forget his previous determination. Was it possible that Verity Trengrove cared for him; that she thought of him not only as one who had changed Varcoe's life, but as one who—?

"Miss Trengrove," he said, "you cannot think how happy you have made me. There is no one in the world for those good opinion I long for as much as yours. I think if you were to turn against me, I should go mad."

"Now you are laughing at me."

"Laughing at you! I——I dare not tell you!"

"Dare not tell me? Why?"

"I wish you would let me call you Verity," he stammered at length.

"Well, why not? We are friends, aren't we?"

"I wish I were sure."

"Well, aren't you?" The girl looked up at him with a laugh in her eyes.

"Perhaps if you knew the kind of man I have been you wouldn't have me as a friend," he managed to say at length. "The friends I have had in the past—if one could call them friends—have been little short of devils."

"Tell me about yourself," and she spoke with all the freedom of the modern girl. "Of course I know you have lived a wonderful life. You couldn't have described the scenes you did last night if you hadn't. But tell me more. Yes, you may call me Verity, and we are going to be friends." She caught his arm as she spoke. "Dinner won't be ready for at least a quarter of an hour yet, and there is time for us to walk down to the woods and back."

The girl's hand upon his arm and the winsomeness of her presence seemed to drive away the last vestige of hesitation. A minute later they were walking through the gardens together towards the woods.

"Now tell me," she commanded.

"What shall I tell you?"

"Why, everything, of course. Tell me first what led you to become a clergyman."

As though by some strange magic the scene which surrounded him ceased to exist. He saw no longer the old country mansion surrounded by trees and parklands, but a deserted mining camp; saw a number of wooden shacks and heaps of debris, saw himself in one of those shacks with the real Frank Barcroft.

Tell her why he became a clergyman!

He remembered when the thought first entered his brain. He saw the dead body of Frank Barcroft lying in a corner of the room, saw himself examining his papers; remembered what he thought when first the temptation had gripped him.

Tell her why he became a clergyman!

The thing was ghastly in its mockery, and a sense of shame overwhelmed him. He felt at that moment that he would rather a thousand times that his fraud should be discovered, and that he should be hooted out of the parish as an impostor. He felt the girl's eyes upon him, and fancied that she was reading his thoughts. And yet, no. She was trusting Him completely. She was offering him her friendship, perhaps more than her friendship. He could have met her scorn with a certain equanimity. He would have denied any accusation of being there under false pretenses. But this—!

He the saviour of Tom Varcoe! He a white man! He a man of God! Every kind word that the Squire had spoken to him, every overture of friendship which Verity offered him, whipped him, scourged him. Good Lord, what a hypocrite he had been!

The wages of sin. Yes, he had at the girl's behest preached on that, and he had made a good case. He was able to. He had only to draw from his own experiences to make the text a reality. But the other—"The gift of God is eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ!"—And he had dared to preach on that! Surely never since Cain murdered his brother, never since Judas Iscariot betrayed his Lord, had any man been capable of such blasphemy.

Almost unconsciously he found himself thinking of some lines in Richard III.

> "My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
> And every tongue brings in its several tale.
> And every tale condemns me for a villain."

He wanted to rush away, wanted to get out of St. Michael's in hot haste; wanted to bury himself in some obscure spot where no eye could see him.

But he could not.

The girl's hand rested upon his arm, and although it seemed only a feather's weight it was more binding than a thousand chains. Why was it? A year before he would have laughed at such feelings as now stung him. What had wrought the change? He had thought himself dead to conscience, dead to all moral scruples.

Then the truth came to him. He wanted to be a better man. He was ashamed of himself because the latent manhood within him stood up and demanded recognition.

But he could not tell this girl. How could he when in spite of everything he loved her, and when every faculty in his being longed for her good opinion?

"No," he said almost harshly. "I cannot tell you that."

"But why, Mr. Barcroft?"

"Why, because—" Again confession was on his lips, but he could not utter it. No, no, he dared not blacken himself before the eys of this innocent girl. She looked upon him as a man of God, as a man who had made Varcoe, a scoundrel, and a betrayer of women, determine to lead a new life. But, although he hated himself for his silence, he spoke no word.

"It is nearly half-past seven," he said presently; "let's go back."

Perhaps Verity was disappointed, anyhow she was very silent as they walked back to the house.

Throughout the evening Barcroft was an enigma to his host and hostess. Sometimes he was almost uproarious in his laughter, and talked freely. Then again he was silent and almost morose.

"I don't think I am very well, Squire," he excused himself when nine o'clock came, and if you don't mind, I think I'll get back home."

“You don’t look quite up to the mark,” the Squire admitted. “Well, no wonder. No man could have stood the excitement you have been through without feeling it. Besides, perhaps you have not altogether got rid of the malaria which bothered you when you were in Africa. You must have had a rough time there.”

“Yes, it’s Africa! It’s Africa!” exclaimed Barcroft. He thought of the night he had buried the real Frank Barcroft underneath the rubbish in the deserted mining camp. “I will go now if you don’t mind,” he went on. “I am not fit company for a sick dog.”

Verity, who had been very silent: during the evening, spoke at this. “But not yet, Mr. Barcroft,” she asserted. “I promised Mary Clemmo that you should speak to her before you went.”

“Mary Clemmo!” he exclaimed. “What have I to do with Mary Clemmo?—Oh yes, I forgot. Of course I will see her.”

He followed Verity to what was called the sewing room, and was there met by a girl of Verity’s own age. A quiet ladylike looking young woman she was, and so like her mistress that no wonder she had been taken for her.

“Mr. Barcroft has come to see you, Mary.”

For a moment the girl flushed painfully, and seemed ashamed. Then, looking at him steadily, she took his hand.

"You have heard all about me, she said excitedly.

“I have heard nothing but good,” he managed to say.

“Oh, but you don’t know! Even you don’t know! But you have done everything for me! You have created a new world for me. You have lifted the blackest cloud that ever rested upon a woman’s life. If—If—It would have broken the hearts of my father and mother!—I think they would have gone mad! They are godly, respectable people; but they are proud, and if I had disgraced them —!” She burst out sobbing, and was unable to speak further. Presently, however, she lifted her head again, and looked at him with a smile.

“But you have changed everything for me, Mr. Barcroft. You have made a new man of Tom—and—and—you make me think of Jesus Christ!”

“No! no!” The words escaped him as though he were in agony. This was the last straw.

“But you do.” Then lifting his hand, which she had been holding all the time, to her lips, she kissed it passionately. She then abruptly left the room.

Even Verity was frightened as she saw the look on Barcroft's face. It was something indescribable, something too terrible for words.

He tottered and was about to fall when Verity caught his arm and, by an almost superhuman effort, helped him regain his balance.

"Let us get out into the air," she said when he appeared able to stand again without her solid support. "One would believe that I had been indulging in something a bit stronger than eulogies of myself," he replied, with a forced smile as, leaning slightly on Verity's arm, he allowed himself to be led into the garden.

For a few moments they walked along the gravel path without either of them speaking. A gentle, caressing breeze swept their faces and soon restored his fevered brain. The silence was first broken, however, by Verity who asked softly:

"Do you feel strong enough to talk, or shall we enjoy the air a while, in silence?"

"I feel entirely recovered," he said quickly, secretly hoping that she would not withdraw her arm. "You are very kind to me, a—a, well, you must believe me: this is the most precious moment of my life."

"Why, how absurd!" she answered. "What do you mean?"

"Only this, I do not ever expect to have another moment in my life, as dear to me—that will mean as much to me as this."

"Indeed! What do you predict is going to occur that will make this occasion so memorable? Oh, perhaps your parish duties from now on will not afford you time for such trivial things as this."

"You do not believe that."

"What else can I infer from your dire prophecy?"

"Verity, this is the first time and probably the last I shall address you in this way. After tonight you will regret you ever knew me."

"Don't be ridiculous,—Frank. I cannot understand you tonight. One would think that you were about to be executed, instead of being hailed as the most desirable Vicar of a most desirable parish. You haven't told me why you became a clergyman."

"I would give my life, cheerfully, to tell you the whole story and retain one atom of your respect. You must believe me when I say it is impossible. Soon you will know it—yes, the whole story, but tonight I cannot tell you. I cannot."

“Do you think anything you may say would change my feeling toward you, she asked, after a while.”

“There is no doubt of it.”

“Can you believe that of me,” she exclaimed, springing away from him, and with a shade of bitterness in her tone. “After what you have just witnessed do you really believe that I cannot forgive anything in a man I I —er—respect?”

Barcroft glanced at Verity quickly before replying, but even in the uncertain light of the new moon he read plainly the story she had all but told him from her lips.

“Don’t, don’t!” he cried in anguish. “This is too much. It is more than mortal can stand! Oh, God in Heaven help me!”

“Let us go back to the house,” said Verity deeply puzzled, even alarmed at the evidence of his great distress.

A few minutes later the Vicar bade her “Good night” and with a mind torn by many conflicting thoughts he walked rapidly toward the Vicarage. Then he had made up his mind what to do.

20.

"YES, SIR, his lordship is in, and will see you. Will I you come this way?"

As Barcroft neared the door to the Bishop's study he was greeted by the sound of familiar voice in conversation. The Squire and Verity were evidently telling the Bishop of the happy conclusion to Mary Clemmon's unfortunate story, punctuated occasionally by pleased ejaculations on the part of the kindly bishop.

His heart sank at the thought of relating his thoroughly degrading story to the three persons he most highly regarded, but nothing on earth could have stopped him now.

"Good morning," he said, with a nod to the Squire and Verity, who rose as he stepped into the room, and he stood facing the Bishop.

"Ah, Barcroft," exclaimed the Bishop heartily as he entered the room; "glad to see you. You must have been up early to get here so soon. Sit down, what can I do for you?"

Barcroft stood looking at the old man steadily. "I'll stand if you don't mind, sir." For a moment he scarcely knew why he was there. "I have come to place my resignation in your hands," he stammered at length.

"Your resignation! I don't understand," and the old man looked at him with troubled eyes.

"Yes, my resignation."

"Your resignation as Vicar of St. Michael's?"

"Yes."

"But why, my dear fellow? Are you ill, or is there something else?"

"It is everything," replied Barcroft. "I have been in hell and damned."

For a moment the old prelate seemed to have doubts as to his visitor's sanity. Perhaps, too, he was a little annoyed at his behavior. He had met him with no suggestion of the respect which was due to him. Neither had he appeared to regard him as a young Vicar should regard the Bishop of the diocese.

“In hell and damned?” and still the old man spoke doubtfully; “that is curious language, isn’t it?”

“It is not as curious as I feel,” replied his visitor. “Anyhow, I have come to place my resignation in your hands.”

“But why?”

“Because I have been a sham, because I am not fit for the job.”

“Sham! That isn’t true, my dear fellow. Why, I have heard all sorts of glowing accounts of your work in St. Michael’s. I have heard that the church is crowded, and that you have won golden opinions on every hand. Surely you are not serious?”

“Serious? I was never so serious in my life. It’s no use my lord, I can’t go on any longer.”

“Perhaps we had better go,” broke in the Squire, he and Verity having risen, with amazement showing on their faces.

“Please stay,” pleaded Barcroft, “you must hear me.”

Again the Bishop looked at him in astonishment. “But I don’t understand!” he ejaculated. “You surely don’t mean what you say. Resign! —why—only today I had a letter from Mr. Trengrove telling me about the service on Sunday night. He said you preached a sermon such as had never been preached in the church before; that it made a tremendous impression, and that he was sure it would do a great amount of good.”

“Yes, that was it,” and Barcroft laughed mockingly. “Who am I to preach such a sermon? Why, every word of it was—” ’

“Yes? Was what?”

“I can’t tell you, and I can’t go on any longer.”

“But you must tell me, my dear fellow. I can’t accept the resignation of one of my clergy without knowing something about it. This is a most serious, a most unheard-of step. You have only been at St. Michael’s a few weeks, and—”

“I know. Merciful God, don’t I know! It has been a step well nigh impossible to me.”

Again the Bishop looked at him searchingly. He saw by this time that the young man had a deep—seated reason incoming to him. The deadly pallor of his face, the twitching of his lips, the look of deadly earnest in his eyes, all told the same story. This man was not trifling with him, neither was he seeking to perpetrate a cynical joke. There was something at the back of it all which he must find out.

"What is the matter?" he asked at length. "Tell me everything, and tell me plainly."

"What is the matter? I am a fraud, a liar, a blackguard. That is the matter."

Again the Bishop scrutinized him. These were not the words of a sane man. His mind flew back over the last few weeks. He remembered the letter he had received from the African Bishop, speaking of Frank Barcroft as one of his most zealous and trusted clergymen; remembered, too, the morning Barcroft came to see him; called to mind that he had presented his Orders, and the usual letters of recommendation. Everything was strictly according to convention. Then his mind flashed back to the day of Barcroft's induction. He looked upon him as a man of far more than ordinary ability; as one who would have a distinguished and honorable future. And now this —

"Tell me what you mean," and his voice assumed a stern tone. "You called yourself a fraud and a lie. Why?"

"Because that is what I am. On my knees last night I found the truth. That is why I have come to you."

"But look here, Barcroft—"

"I am not Barcroft. That is the heart of the whole business. Barcroft is dead and buried—I buried him. But I can't keep up the imposition any longer. I came to St. Michael's an impostor—an atheist. It is because I have come to believe, that I have come to you now."

He was calmer now, and was possessed of something of the same feeling he had had when he first entered the room. The Bishop's kindly greeting had almost made him lose his self-control, but now the grim resolution he had taken was regaining its power.

"I didn't mean to say all this," he went on presently. "I had everything clearly outlined in my mind, and I thought I should be able to tell my story connectedly and calmly; but the sight of you, and your kindly greeting, made me forget everything. But here is the fact. I am not Frank Barcroft. I am not a clergyman at all. I have never been ordained. The letters I presented to you I stole from Frank Barcroft's desk. I am the last man in the world who should be a parson. Yes, I have no doubt you have heard some strange stories in your life, but never one so strange as mine."

By this time, in spite of his excitement, the Bishop had grasped the meaning of the other's words. This man had come to him to confess a fraud,

a crime,—from his standpoint the worst crime a man could commit. He was not only an impostor, he was guilty of sacrilege, of blasphemy.

A kind of terror came into the old prelate's heart. Unconventional as he was in many ways, he was still a cleric, and he regarded his own position jealously and with a sense of awe. He began to realize what this strange confession might mean, what it must mean. It would create a terrible scandal throughout the whole diocese. It would set a thousand gossiping tongues wagging. It would mean—heaven only knew what it would mean! He had heard no details as yet, but the fact, the ghastly fact, stood out plainly. This man before him had professed to have taken Holy Orders. He had been inducted as Vicar of St. Michael's parish. He—

"Have you pretended to celebrate Holy Communion?" His voice was stern and angry.

"No, not that! I have avoided that. I have had Mr. Sleeman administer the sacrament, for I had to draw the line then."

The Bishop heaved a sigh of relief. Realizing the significance of what he had heard, he looked anxiously around him, then as if to make assurance doubly sure he asked Squire Trengrove to step into the hallway and see if anyone else was within hearing.

"Let me hear the whole of this," he commanded as the Squire reentered the room, closing the door after him. "Let me know everything from beginning to end." He had become the wise, cautious, far-seeing prelate again.

"It is all summed up in what I have told you," replied the other. "I am not the man I pretended to be. I have never taken Holy Orders. I am an impostor, a liar, and a blackguard. There, that is the whole thing."

"Yes, but who are you?"

Then Hugh Treleaven told his miserable story. Told of his upbringing, his education, his years at Oxford, his father's death, his fall; described something of his life at Dartmoor, and what was said to him on the day he left prison.

Then he told of his arrival in Cape Town, and of his life in Africa until presently he drifted to the deserted mining camp.

"And it was there you met Barcroft?" asked the Bishop.

"Yes. In thinking of it since I have realized that I had become tired of being a tramp, and I hoped that I might have good luck in what I thought was going to be a rich mine. I had a sort of admiration for Barcroft, too.

You see, I knew him at Oxford, and we got talking of old days together. He didn't preach at me either, but talked as man to man, and aroused within me a desire, not much, but still a desire, to make something more of my life than I had been making of it in the past."

The Bishop asked him many questions about his stay with Barcroft, and the other told him freely what had taken place.

"I know it was a mad thing to do," he exclaimed when he finished the story.

"Not only mad, but bad; it was a crime," interrupted the Bishop.

"I simply cannot realize it," said Verity.

"It was villainous!" exclaimed the Squire, with some heat.

"Yes, I well know it now, but I didn't feel it then. All I thought of it was as an opportunity whereby the past could be buried, whereby Hugh Treleaven could cease to be."

"And so you came to England?" inquired the Bishop, after many questions had been asked and answered.

"I came to England, came to St. Michael's."

By this time the Bishop had somewhat got over the shock of the man's confession, and keen student of human nature that he was, he began to be interested in the psychology of the story he had heard. He wondered why this man, who had no moral scruples about taking the identity of another man, was led to give up everything when his position seemed assured.

Dr. Chirgwidden was not only a scholar and a theologian, he was also a student of human nature and loved to probe into the causes and motives which led to certain actions.

"You say you were practically an atheist when you left Africa?" he asked presently.

"I suppose I was."

"And are you now?"

"No, I am not; I've found the truth. It was this great thing that came to me that made me ashamed of myself, that told me what a mean, lying hound I was."

The cleric was still strong in the old prelate, but something stronger had mastered him. He had a great faith in mankind. He tried to analyze the workings of this man's mind and heart, and saw what a smaller man would have failed to see. It was not fear of discovery which had brought the so-called Frank Barcroft to him. It was something deeper.

"Tell me," he said at length, "what led you to come to me this morning."

"Because I have been through hell. I have been suffering the torture of the damned. The truth of my Sunday night sermon for which I took as my text 'The Wages of Sin is Death' had come home to me in full."

"All last night long I spent on my knees asking my Maker to show me the way to true repentance. I poured out my soul in anguish. I prayed for a vision of God, which I longed for with all my strength. I felt it necessary to believe in order for me to live."

"Toward morning the light grew brighter within me as the day unfolded around me. My old faith such as I had known in childhood returned, and with it a peace I had never known. I had come to a full realization of the wonderful gift we have from God of eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ."

"It was not hard to come after the experience I had. Indeed I felt a strange joy in knowing that the truth would be told, in knowing I was on my way to full repentance for my deed. Well, you have heard it all. My life is in your hands."

"Eh?" The Bishop spoke like a man whose thoughts were far away.

"I have told you everything now. What are you going to do with me?"

"May the Lord give me strength to do the right thing," said the Bishop fervently.

21.

DURING THE CONFESSION Barcroft dared not look at Verity Trengrove, although he felt that her eyes were upon him, and that she was listening eagerly to every word. It was only when he came to his experiences with the real Frank Barcroft, and when he told of when the thought first came to him of impersonating the young clergyman, that he lifted his eyes to her face.

Oh, what a look of loathing and disgust he saw! The girl seemed horror-stricken, and even then his mind flashed back to their first meeting. He remembered her as gay and careless, and as one who poked fun at conventional morality. She had seemed to regard a clergyman's position more in the light of an empty profession than anything else. But now—

Barcroft's question had brought the hard facts of the case back to the prelate, and for a time he became ecclesiastic again. The Bishop realized that he was the head of the diocese, and felt his responsibilities. Before him was a self-confessed impostor. This man had come to St. Michael's bearing testimonials to which he had no right, using a name which was not his own, and performing duties which he was not fit to perform. For the moment it did not matter what had led him to make his confession. The work which he had done in the parish must not affect his judgment.

But what should he do? Turning to the Squire, at length he said: "Do you wish to question this man?"

The Squire turned to Barcroft and looking steadily at him said: "And so you are a fraud, an impostor. a liar?"

"Yes, all that."

"And your sermons have all been one great piece of blasphemy?"

"They were at the time I preached them. Now I have come to see—"

"Great Heavens!" the Squire broke in, "I never heard of such a thing. You ought to be whipped out of the parish!"

Barcroft was silent.

Verity Trengrove had been sitting spell-bound. She had understood though—more than her father. She had read between the lines, and had got something of the inwardness of what the man had been saying. Hilary Trengrove had only fastened upon the confession of fraud, of a great imposture. Up to now he had not considered what had led the man to make the confession. But his daughter was keener sighted. She saw deeper. Suddenly she broke in:

"You didn't believe in it—I mean in your profession?"

"No. I believed that Christianity was a play-out myth, a fable born in an ignorant age. Perhaps that was why I didn't mind. It was true that sometimes it came to me that I was playing a low-down, dirty trick, but it scarcely troubled me."

"Do you believe in God—in Jesus Christ?"

"Yes. That led to everything; it lies at the heart of everything. But for that—"

"Tell us," the girl insisted, as Barcroft hesitated.

"I couldn't go on pretending," he stammered presently. "I—I couldn't go on acting a lie about the greatest truth in the world. I was not going to say anything about that."

"But you must!" The girl's voice was eager, imperative.

Barcroft was silent for a few seconds. Then he seemed like a man trying to recall the past.

"You remember the night of the Bishop's induction sermon," he said. "I was laughing at it all the time. I thought what a silly old Johnny he was, and how easily the people were gulled.——You saw through me, Miss Trengrove. You told me I was acting a part, and I was. You kind of challenged me, too, and I said to myself, 'I will take up the challenge. Although I don't believe that there is anything real in Christianity, I will try to make it real to others, and I will try to convince this girl.'—But I didn't believe in it. Then when I got back to the Vicarage a young fellow came to me and asked me to come to a dying woman. I think that was what set me thinking. She met death so triumphantly, so grandly, that I wondered whether there might not be something in faith after all. Then—then—" He ceased speaking, as though it were difficult to say any more.

"Yes? Go on. Then what?"

"I heard things about you," he blurted out.

"Things about me? What things?"

“The gossip about you and that man Varcoe.”

“What gossip?” It was Hilary Trengrove who spoke this time. “What gossip did you hear about my daughter and that fellow Varcoe?” His voice was angry.

“Be quiet, father. Mr. Barcroft is going to tell us everything.”

“It was said that you were mad about him, and that you had secret meetings with him. I didn’t want to mention this, but I made up my mind that if I could I would save you from him. I wondered in a confused sort of way whether the faith which had made Mary Bennetto triumphant in death could make a man of Varcoe—I didn’t believe in the stories, Miss Trengrove, I can honestly say that, and yet I was troubled. Then, as you know, I preached that night several weeks ago on the wages of sin. I was able to do that—God knows, I was able to do that! I saw Varcoe in the church and I preached at him, I think. But somehow—I don’t know why—it seemed to me that I had only given half my message, and so without thinking I promised to preach on the other part of the text. Not that I had any faith in it.”

“Yes. And then?”

“Well, I did last Sunday night. Even then I didn’t believe in it. I was certain of nothing. But for the time I seemed to become the real Frank Barcroft, and I preached as if I were he. I told what he told me. You know what followed. After the service Varcoe came to me, and— but you know all about that. Here was I, an ex-convict, acting a lie and pretending to believe what I didn’t believe—and—and he asked me to pray with him!”

“And did you?”

“I had to. Something compelled me, and I asked God to help the man who had been such an arrant impostor to be a real man.”

“Yes, and then?”

"When he was gone— Well, you don’t understand! You, who have lived such a sheltered life, and seen nothing but pleasant things, can never understand what I felt—

Something came to me,—I don’t know what it was,— came to me and told me to have done with lies for ever."

He went back to his seat again, sat down, and pillowed his head in his hands.

“I had to give in,” he went on presently. “I couldn’t stand it any longer. I felt that I must come and tell the Bishop everything, so I came. That’s all.”

“Wait!” and again Verity’s voice was imperative. Do you say that you believe now in what you have been preaching?"

“Would I be here else?” and his voice was hoarse and raucous. “Why, ten thousand devils have been at me pleading with me not to make a fool of myself, showing me how to stay on here and have a good time. But that at which I laughed was stronger than the devils. Now I have told you all—no, I haven’t though,” and his last words seemed dragged from him almost against his will. “What haven’t you told us?”

“Never mind. It would do no good, and you would be angry if I told you.”

“But you must tell us.”

“Do you say that?” and his words were like a challenge.

“Yes, I do say it.”

“Then it was you who made me see the light. You were the prime cause of everything.”

“I?”

“Yes, you!” And he almost shouted the words. “Do you think I could stay here without loving you? Do you think I could see you again and again without giving my heart to you?—Oh, yes, I know I had no right to. I know it blackens me in your eyes more than ever, but I couldn’t help loving you; and then knowing that I loved you, how could I go on living a lie? There, you know everything now!”

His words came out like a thunderbolt, and while each stared at him in astonishment no one spoke.

“I didn’t mean to tell you this,” he went on. “I never dreamed except in my wildest moments that anything could ever come of it, and I know it is nothing but a mockery to me now. Still, there it is. I have raked out the bottom of my soul, and you can see what a contemptible cad I have been. But it doesn’t matter. I have finished now.—No, I haven’t, though! From this day I am going to be a man. I am going to make good.”

The Bishop had not spoken during this time. Finally he he spoke slowly and sorrowfully. “I don’t know whether I am doing right or not,” he said. "Perhaps I ought to insist that you call the people of St. Michael’s together and make full confession. I dare say it is weakness on my part, but I have decided not to do that. Let me see, today is Tuesday. Sometime today Varcoe must know everything, and before this time tomorrow you must be out of the parish.

“No, no,” he exclaimed, “what is done shall be done now. I’ll do as you command,” he added, as he staggered toward the door like a drunken man, and began to fumble with the handle.

“Good night and goodbye,” he said in a voice that no one would have recognized as his own. “I can’t ask you to forgive me.”

No one spoke. All seemed too bewildered to realize what was taking place. They heard him walk across the entrance hall. Then the Squire rushed quickly to his side.

“I wish you well,” he said. “I hope—” Then he stopped confusedly.

“Don’t try to say anything, please. I know how you feel, and—and you have been kinder to me than I deserve.”

Turning he saw that Verity had followed her father. “I would ask your forgiveness if I dared,” he continued in the same unnatural voice; “but of course I can’t expect it, and you will never see me again.”

“Where are you going?”

“I don’t know—don’t look at me like that!” He seemed on the point of breaking down. “Haven’t you a word to say to me?”

“I hope you will be true to what you promised,” Verity said slowly. “I hope you will make good, and I wish you well. I shall think of you.”

22.

A YEAR PASSED, two years passed, and nothing was heard of the man who, for a few weeks, had been Vicar of the parish of St. Michael's. A new Vicar had come in his place and the incident was no longer a subject for village discussion. Mary Clemmons had been married to Varcoe by the Bishop himself, shortly after Barcroft's disappearance. They settled down in the village and were obviously very happy.

Of course the whole parish, for that matter the whole countryside, had been full of gossip concerning Barcroft. Why he had gone, and where he had gone, was a black mystery. Everything in the house was in perfect order. Every book was in its place, while all parish accounts had been carefully kept and administered. Whatever had become of the Vicar no scandal concerning money matters was attached to his name.

Meanwhile, however, no one knew where he was, or what had become of him. Had he stayed in England, or gone to some far-off country? No one knew.

Then one morning, news came.

Verity Trengrove, on coming down to breakfast, found a letter on the table before her. It was a bulky package and bore an Australian stamp. For a moment Verity regarded it curiously. The handwriting was strange to her, and she could not think who could be writing her from Australia. Then suddenly her interest became tense, and tearing open the envelope with trembling hands, she looked feverishly at the signature.

A moment later Verity, forgetting her breakfast, rose from the table, and went rapidly out of the room.

"What's the matter, Verity, my dear?" asked Mrs. Trengrove anxiously. "Aren't you well?"

"All right, mother. I'll be back soon." She scarcely knew what she was doing or thinking. She only felt that she must be alone.

Rushing into the library she locked the door, and read the letter. At first the words swam before her eyes, and she could not decipher a single line or

letter. Presently, however, she was sufficiently calm to read intelligently. This was the letter:

"DEAR MISS TRENGROVE,—

"I should not have dared to write this, but for what you said when I last saw you. As you may remember, I had told you my miserable story, when you said this to me:

"'I hope you will be true to what you promised. I hope you will make good, and I wish you well. I shall think of you.'

"But for these words I should not, as I have said, dared to write. They have been ringing in my ears ever since you uttered them, and they have been one of the inspirations of my life. For you, I am only an ex-convict, a man who was a forger, an embezzler. It may give you some measure of relief, therefore, to know that I have been cleared of the charges for which I was sent to prison, and full pardon has been sent me. The more serious offence of being an impostor only God in His mercy can pardon. Still you spoke kindly to me, and you seemed to have some little faith in me. That emboldens me to write.

"I will not trouble you with what took place immediately after leaving your house, nor tell you my thoughts and feelings. Enough to say that after much heart-searching I decided to go to Australia, and if possible begin a new life in a new country. I reached Melbourne without mishap. As soon as possible I moved far away from centers of population and came to the farm on which I am now living. I was fortunate. I came here at a time when the farmer was in difficulties because of lack of labor, and he was glad to employ me. As it happened, moreover, the farmer and his wife had lately lost their son, and as it appeared I somewhat resembled him, they took me to their hearts and treated me more as a member of the family than as a hired servant. I do not propose to give you any details of my work here. Suffice to say that I worked hard, and gave the farmer, John Richards by name, who came over here as a boy, of my best. Richards was a hard-working man, and toiled assiduously to do his best by his farm, but he was not over intelligent and did not get the best either out of his farm or his men. I had no experience in farming and was, of course, unaccustomed to farm work; still, I flatter myself that I am not altogether without intelligence, and although the life was rough and often uninteresting, I adapted myself to the circumstances.

"The result of this was that at the end of a year John Richards' prospects were much brighter, and for the first time since he owned the farm, there was a considerable margin of profit. This led to his giving me more and more authority and responsibility.

"You will be glad to know that his trust was not misplaced. During the last two years John Richards has become a comparatively rich man. The value of his property has increased rapidly, and by dint of intelligence, great care, and hard work, not only his crops, but his livestock have more than quadrupled in value.

"I am saying this not in a spirit of boasting; that is farthest from my mind, but I want to assure you that I have made good. As I told you before, the last words you spoke to me have been ringing in my ears ever since, and the remembrance that you were thinking of me has been an inspiration and a strength to me during three lonely years.

"And now I have something more to say to you,which I write with more satisfaction. After being six months with John Richards and his wife I decided to tell them my story as I told it in Budock library. On consideration I did not think it right to keep the truth from them. They were much interested, and not a little surprised, but more than that, they received my story kindly and in no way lessened their trust in me. On the contrary, twelve months ago Richards asked me to put my little savings into a scheme he had for the extension of his farm, and offered me a half-partnership with him. Both he and his wife told me that they regarded me more as a son than anything else, and declared that they owed their financial salvation to me. Of course I was glad to do this. It gave me a position in the district I had not held before, and made me feel that I was not altogether a failure in life. You will be glad to hear that our new venture has been a phenomenal success, and that although it is only three years since I came here I am favorably regarded within a radius of many miles from this place. I am telling you this perhaps in rather a boastful way, and yet I feel that you will understand that my pride in my success is not altogether unjustified.

"I have just read what I have written, and as I have done so, mingled feelings have possessed me. I feel that I have expressed myself badly, and yet I doubt if I rewrote everything whether I could improve on anything I have written. In spite of the pleasure I have felt in writing, it has been a difficult task. I have realized with every line I have penned that you are aware of the ghastly facts which lie behind them, facts which must cause you to think of me with loathing. And yet it is because of what I told you that I am able to tell you of what yet remains to be told. You know what led to my confession. You will remember that that Something to which I can give no description caused Varcoe, who had made up his mind to act otherwise, to be a man and do his duty towards the girl he had wronged. It was that same Power which revolutionized my life and made me do what I did. I may tell you now that that Something has remained with me during the three years, and is one of the great facts of my life. Because of it I have been one of the chief instruments in building a church in this district. What is more, I have become, owing to the strongly expressed desire of the people, its unpaid minister. This may appear to you as continued hypocrisy on my part, but it is not: it is the working of an Unseen Power, which I all God. I am writing this with hesitation and humility, as I would not, if I could help it, touch sacred things with profane hands. Nevertheless, what I have told you is true, and it gives me more joy than I can say to be able to attest to the fact that the Power which made Tom Varcoe a different man, and compelled me to cease to be an impostor, is felt in hundreds of lives throughout this district.

"I ought to cease writing here, but I cannot. Perhaps I shall anger you, nevertheless I must tell what is in my heart. You and I will never meet again. When I bade you goodbye it was for ever. And yet the love of which I dared to tell you, and which, in spite of myself, was born in my heart while I was at St. Michael's, still remains. More, it is intensified with the years, and although it is hopeless, it is, humanly speaking, the dearest thing in the world to me. Many thousands of miles separate us, but distance matters not. I love you still, and shall love you while my heart beats.

"Perhaps it is wrong of me to write this, but I cannot help myself, and although I do not expect ever to see you again, the mere telling gives me joy untold. More than that, I know that God has used my love for you in helping me to work out my salvation. Because of this I am yours for ever and ever,

"HUGH TRELEAVEN"

This letter, long as it was, Verity Trengrove read from end to end, and then, as if not satisfied, reread it again.

"Verity." It was her father speaking at the library door.

"Yes?"

"Why have you locked the door?"

"Because I wanted to be alone."

"But why? Is anything the matter?"

"No."

"But you have had no breakfast, child. Come and get it."

"I do not want any. I want to be alone."

"But why? You must tell me, my dear."

"All right. I will tell you presently."

She went to the door and unlocked it.

Just at that moment the telephone bell rang, and the butler summoned the Squire to attend the call.

"Is that you, Trengrove?"

"Speaking. Who is it?"

"The Bishop of Truro. I want to see you. Will you be at liberty this morning?"

"Certainly to you, Bishop. Has anything of importance happened?"

"I think so. Anyhow, you may expect me in an hour or so."

The Squire returned to the library. From the tone of her voice he was afraid his daughter had received terrible news. To his surprise, however, he

saw a look on her face which he had never seen before, a look of gladness, a look of infinite joy.

"What is it, my dear?"

"Read that, Dad," and she handed him Treleaven's letter.

"Isn't it wonderful? Isn't it splendid?" she exclaimed when he had finished.

The Squire did not speak, but stood for a minute looking out of the window at the wide stretch of parklands. Then he turned to his daughter.

"Verity," he said slowly, "you have been keeping something from me. You love that man."

"Of course I do," she replied with a laugh.

"But, my dear, don't you see it's madness?"

"I know it, Dad. But isn't it splendid?" and there was gladness in her laugh. "Don't you see he has fulfilled his promise. He has made good—and —and—oh, Dad!"

Again the Squire looked at his daughter, and as he looked he sighed.

"I doubt his making good," he said at length.

"Doubt!" cried the girl. "Why, you can't have read his letter!"

"Yes, doubt," persisted the Squire. "If he had really made good he would have sent the Bishop the money he appropriated when the real Frank Barcroft died. According to his own account he is well off now and to me it seems hypocrisy for a man to talk about having made good when the money he stole has not been refunded."

"How do you know it has not been refunded?"

"If he had done that, he would have told you. 'By the way, the Bishop of Truro is coming here this morning. He has just telephoned to me. May I show him this letter?"

"The Bishop of Truro coming here this morning?"

"Yes. He is on his way now."

"Why is he coming?"

"I don't know. He seems to have heard some important news and wants to discuss it with me."

A quick light flashed into the girl's eyes. "He will have written the Bishop, too," she said in a whisper. Then aloud she went on: "Yes, he can see all this, except for the last page."

"Let me read it again," demanded the Squire presently, for Verity had gone to the Squire's desk, and was eagerly re-perusing Treleaven's epistle.

“If everything weren’t so impossible,” murmured the Squire, when he had reread it. “And if—but of course Verity can’t think of him in that way.”

An hour later the Bishop arrived and was immediately ushered into the library.

“The most wonderful news, Trengrove!” exclaimed the Bishop excitedly. “I could scarcely believe my eyes when I saw it.”

“Saw what?”

“Oh, I forgot. I haven’t told you. I don’t know when I have been so excited.”This morning I received a letter from Treleaven informing me that his innocence of the crime for which he went to prison, has been established. Have you had one, too—yes, I see you have. May I see it, Verity, my dear? “Yes, yes,” he went on a few moments later, “this is practically what he told me. It’s wonderful, isn’t it?”

“I should think more of it,” replied the Squire, “if his making good meant repayment of the money he stole from that man in Africa.”

“But he has—didn’t I tell you? I must have forgotten. Here is a banker’s draft for far more than he took from Barcroft. He has accounted for every penny with compound interest. Added to that, he has sent me a large sum for church work. Isn’t it wonderful? I don’t know when I have been so thankful for anything.”

He had scarcely ceased speaking, when there was a knock at the door, and the butler appeared.

“Mr. Tom Varcoe wishes to speak to you very particularly, sir,” he announced.

“Varcoe?” repeated the Squire. “I can’t see him now. Will you tell him to call later?”

“He seemed very urgent, sir,” the man ventured to protect. “He said he wouldn’t keep you for more than a few minutes, but he said he wanted to see you—very particularly.”

“See him by all means, Trengrove,” said the Bishop. “He may have heard from him, too, and he will want to tell you all about it.”

A minute later Varcoe appeared, evidently under the stress of great excitement. There was a wild light in his eyes, and his hands were trembling.

“I say, Squire, I’m sorry if I am intruding, but— Good Lord, if it ain’t the Bishop! Well, that’s good, just as I should have wished it to be. I say, Dr. Chirgwidden, I’ve heard from him!”

"Heard from whom?"

"From whom? Why, our late Vicar! Yes, yes, I know, but you will tell a different tale presently. Didn't I say, Mr. Trengrove, that he was a white man, and a man of God? Well, I have got proof of it. I got a letter from him this morning—you shall read it presently—the grandest letter that ever one man wrote to another, and there isn't a prouder man in the parish than I am at this time. Did I tell you that I made him take a loan from me? I had a difficulty in doing it, but I couldn't bear the idea, when he told me what he did, letting him leave without a penny in his pocket. Still, he returned it. I got it this morning. Here is the banker's draft, not only for what he owed but compound interest for three years. What is more, he sent a handsome present for the kid. Just think of it! And see how he signed himself, 'your sincere friend, Hugh Treleaven.' Gosh, ain't I a proud man!" And Varcoe, whose voice had been husky all the time he was speaking, mopped his eyes vigorously.

"Yes, it's wonderful, simply wonderful," said the Bishop a little later when Varcoe had gone. By this time Mrs. Trengrove had come into the room, and had been informed of what had taken place.

"Yes, it is wonderful," remarked that lady, whose opinions about ecclesiastical matters were very lax. "Wouldn't it be grand if he could be Vicar here again?"

"Of course that's impossible," remarked the Squire severely.

"Why impossible, Hilary?" exclaimed Mrs. Trengrove. "His character has been cleared, and he has done everything that a man could do. Besides, when he was here the church was full, but since Mr. Titrnarsh came it has rapidly emptied. I arn sure the people would welcome him gladly."

"I am afraid it would be impossible, nevertheless," was the Bishop's reply.

"But why, my lord?"

"Became—well, you see, it would take a long time to explain, but there would be insurmountable difficulties."

"What difficulties?" It was Verity who asked the question.

"It would be without precedent, Verity, my dear. You see, the whole case has been discussed throughout the parish, and there would be no end of scandal."

"Isn't it because we don't believe in the New Testament?" cried the girl. "Isn't it because we don't take Jesus Christ at His own word? Wouldn't He,

if He came to this parish, take him back?"

"He would," replied the Bishop, quietly, "but we are not Him. Moreover, the situation is not, entirely, in our hands."

"But wasn't it He who said, 'I say unto you there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety-nine that need no repentance'? she went on passionately. Isn't it because we don't believe in our Lord that our religion is a mere convention?"

"Do you believe in our Lord, my dear?" asked the old Bishop.

"I do," replied the girl. "And it was the man whom we are discussing who made me believe in Him. He made me believe in Him in spite of myself."

The old man looked at her steadily for some seconds. Then he said slowly: "We are all friends here, so I can speak plainly. Do you love this man, Verity?"

"Yes," replied the girl. "I love him with all my heart and life. Oh, yes, I know what you would say; but he is the only man in the world to me, and there will never be anyone else." There was a defiant ring in her voice, but there was something besides defiance. A great joy lit up her eyes, and spread over her face. Perhaps Verity had told her mother more than she had told her father. Be that as it may, Mrs. Trengrove put her arm round her daughter's neck and kissed her, while the Squire looked steadily out of the window.

"I am afraid matters will have to continue as they are," said the Bishop.

"No, they will not," said the girl.

"It may be that in time," and the Bishop spoke very slowly, "when the excitement has died down, and when the people have had time to understand, that he may come back again. I cannot promise anything, but it may be possible. Meanwhile, we must wait in patience."

"I am not going to wait."

"What are you going to do then?" asked the Bishop.

"I am going to the man I love," replied the girl.

The End

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