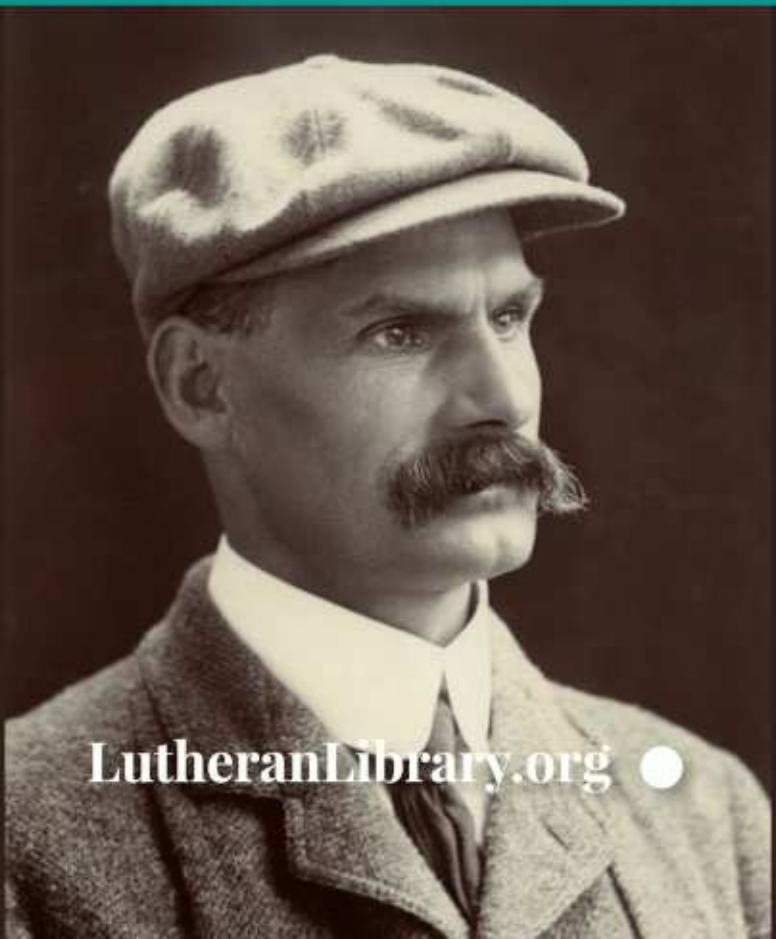
Joseph Hocking

The Story of Andrew Fairfax



Joseph Hocking (1860-1937), was a Cornish writer and United Methodist Free Church minister. His novels were immensely popular in his lifetime. Many of his 100 books are available at no charge from the Lutheran Library.

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THE STORY OF ANDREW FAIRFAX

BY

JOSEPH HOCKING

Author of "All Men are Liars," "Ishmael Pengelly," "Jabez Easterbrook," "Zillah," etc.

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BOOK I

FINDING HIS WORK

CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING OF THE BATTLE

I HAVE undertaken the work of writing the story of Andrew Fairfax. I could have wished that this duty had been placed in abler hands; or rather I wish I were able to do greater justice to that which has been given me to do. For, after all, I should not like any one else to tell his story. The truth is, I have been honoured in that I have been allowed to call him my friend, and thus, because that word means so much to me, I have gladly accepted a responsibility which others, from many standpoints, could more ably bear.

Do not think, however, that I am going to weary those who will read this with talking about myself. I can promise that my name shall appear as few times as possible—only, in fact, when the thread of the story shall necessitate it. There is little in my life that I regard worthy of telling, save the fact that Andrew Fairfax made me his friend and confidant; thus, however pleasant it may be to yield to the temptation, and make personal digressions, I will not do it. Jethro Haynes shall be as much as possible an outsider, relating in plain, unvarnished terms, the story of the

man who has made such a lasting impression on the minds and hearts of so many.

Only another word—of explanation—need be written before proceeding to the fulfilment of my duty. Many of the facts of this history have been told me by Andrew himself; the others I have obtained from reliable sources; so that not only shall the incidents of my friend's life appear in true chronological order, but they shall be told as they actually occurred.

* * * * *

The funeral of William Bernard was over. A large concourse of people had attended the obsequies of the great man. For he had been great in the world of money and social influence as had been his fathers before him. He had been the managing director of one of the principal banks in London; he had likewise owned estates of land in the country; so that when it was given out that his remains would be interred on such a day, it was no wonder that a large concourse of people should be present.

However, it had all come to an end. The man, a stroke of whose pen could stagger or advance the enterprise of thousands, was laid in the silent earth, and those who had sought to pay their last tribute of respect had departed to their several destinations.

The Bernard family had all gathered together at their town mansion, near Hyde Park, all the legal formalities had been complied with, the men of law had gone, and the great house was comparatively silent.

In a small but cosy room, away towards the top of the building, sat a young man, with his head resting on his hand. There was a far-away look in his eyes, as if he were trying to pierce the veil which hung between the known and the unknown. He had followed the banker to his grave, and his heart was very sore when he saw the oak coffin lowered into the cold, dark earth, for he felt that his truest friend had gone.

A long time he sat, but he made no movement, save now and then to heave a deep sigh. Evidently his sorrow was real.

A knock came to the door.

"Yes," he said dreamily.

"If you please, your presence is desired in the library."

The young man got up and opened the door.

"Anything the matter, John?" he said to the servant.

"There's a kind of family conclave, Mr. Andrew. It seems to me as 'ow somethin' important is on."

The young man, without any comment, followed the servant to the library door, then, after a moment's hesitation, quietly entered.

There were five people in the room. As each will have something to do with this story, they had better be introduced.

First in order comes Mrs. Bernard, widow of the late squire and banker. She was about forty-five years of age well preserved, and would be regarded by many as handsome. Her eyes, however, were small, her chin narrow, while her mouth was drawn down at the corners. There was a look of suspicion in her face, as though she were constantly looking for bad motives, while the peculiar glitter of her small grey eyes indicated that she was capable of doing a great deal to satisfy any malice she might bear towards any one. Altogether the face was not prepossessing.

Next to her sat her eldest daughter. She was like her mother might have been five-and-twenty years before, only with a difference. Isabel Bernard's eyes were large, dark, and flashing. They were full of seductive power, too, and she seemed to be able to change them at will. When she pleased she could make them beam with tenderness, so much so that she had caused many a young man's heart to flutter with hope, but by apparent change of mood she had made them hard and repelling, thus dashing hopes to the ground. She was a great favourite everywhere, and was proud of her influence.

Close to her elbow sat her younger sister, Beryl. The name suggests beauty; but she was not beautiful. She was sallow, and unhealthy looking. She looked tired and weary, too, as though, in spite of her youth, life were a disappointment. Had it not been for her large brown eyes and glossy hair, she would have been called ugly. These, however, gave her an earnest, beauty of and endowed her with a kind of charm, in spite of her other drawbacks.

The youngest sister lay on the couch. She was an invalid, and never went out. Her spine had been injured when a child, and although she was not quite a cripple, no hopes were held out that she would ever possess robust health. She had a beautiful, pale, patient face, however, and her eyes lit up with tenderness as the young man entered the room.

Behind his mother's chair stood Wilton Bernard, the son and heir of the deceased banker. He was not a prepossessing young man. His figure was short, and inclined to stoutness. His head was round and bullet-like, while his pimply skin suggested a good deal of wine and late hours. He was evidently no fool, however; there was a look of sharpness in his eyes, and a wary, calculating expression on his face.

All the party were attired in deep mourning.

"Will you be seated?"

This was the greeting of Mrs Bernard to the young man who had just entered. She treated him as a stranger, and yet he had lived as a member of the family for many years.

He took a chair, and looked questioningly around the room.

"I thought it better to call you at once," said Mrs. Bernard. "It would not be right that I should leave you in ignorance any longer."

"Thank you," he said quietly. He seemed about to add something, but checked himself.

"My late husband," she went on, "foolishly kept back from you things which you ought to have known from the first, and I think, more foolishly, has to a great extent unfitted you for your proper vocation in life."

"Mr. Bernard told me that I should know everything directly after I took my degree. He also told me that he would make provision whereby my future should be cared for."

An angry look shone from her eyes. It is true her husband had been buried that very day, but she spoke without a tremor in her voice.

"I know" she said, "I think he was unwise; but he always feared to give pain. However, here is a copy of what was taken down by Mr. Say, our family solicitor. It

cost Mr. Bernard a great effort to dictate it, but he did it, and signed his name at the close."

She passed it to him without a word, and he took it eagerly and read as follows :—

"My Dear Boy,—

"Forgive me for keeping you in ignorance so long. I thought it best. Your father's name was Andrew Fairfax. He was a farmer, and rented his land from me. Your mother, Mary Fairfax, died when you were born, leaving your father broken hearted. When you were three months old, I was bathing in the river which flows through the farm your father then occupied, and was seized with cramp. I should have been drowned had he not plunged in and dragged me out. He caught a chill through his deed of heroism, however; and, in spite of all our endeavours to save him, died soon after, leaving you an orphan. I promised him before he died that I would care for your future. You know how I have fulfilled that promise. You have been brought up in my home, and, although I told you that you were not my son, you have borne my name. I have never regretted this step,—I hope you never may. I have made provision for your future; my wife will tell you what. Be careful to—— I can say no more. My love——"

The lawyer had evidently written the words as the banker had uttered them. As Mrs. Bernard had said, he was very much exhausted.

Following the letter was Mr. Bernard's signature. Evidently his hand had much trembled, but it was plain—

William Bernard.

The young man's eyes were moist when he had finished the letter. He read between the lines, and knew what his foster father would have said. His illness had been short, and Andrew did not know anything about it until he got a telegram, saying that Mr. Bernard was dying. He was at Cambridge at the time, and he hurried to London immediately; but not in time to see or speak to the one who had heaped so many kindnesses upon him.

The news, therefore, came upon him with crushing

power, and, added to the grief he felt because of his loss, it seemed as though a blight had fallen upon his life. He had fancied himself a gentleman; he had met with gentlemen, and had been regarded as their equal And now to be told that he was practically a charity boy, fed, clothed, and educated because of his father's services, was hard. Still, he was not foolish. He felt that he was the same, whatever his name might be, and now that his benefactor was dead, it did not matter so much whether he was called Bernard or Fairfax. There was not so much in a name, and he would manage somehow. Arrangements had been made for him, no doubt good ones. He would, of course, finish his course at the University, and then probably a sum would be set apart to support him until he could get a sufficient income from the profession he should choose. He had received so much that it seemed natural that the rest should follow.

"Have you read it?" asked Mrs. Bernard at length, and there was a touch of asperity in her voice.

"Yes Mrs. Bernard." He had always been taught to address her thus.

"Well?"

"It has come as a great grief to me, a great blow. I had always thought I was in some way related to Mr. Bernard, and entitled to the name I had borne."

"You see you are not."

"I see," sadly.

"And for the future you will not use a name to which you have no right."

The young man looked at her keenly, and then said quietly,—

"No, I will not use it."

"You will be called Andrew Fairfax."

"Yes, Andrew Fairfax."

"Son of a small tenant farmer. Reared and educated because your father had the luck to render service to mine."

It was Wilton who spoke. His voice was harsh and rough. Evidently he was glad to have this opportunity of paying off old scores. They had never agreed as boys, and both Wilton and his mother had ever been jealous of Andrew because the latter had been so handsome, so clever

and such a favourite. It had been the same wherever they had been. No one wanted Wilton when Andrew was near, and this, added to the constant disruptions between the two youths, had aroused a feeling of bitterness in the hearts of both mother and son.

Andrew bit his lip at Wilton's sneer. An angry retort was upon his lips, but the memory of the dead, and thoughts awakened by the letter, checked him, and he was silent.

For a little while no one spoke; them Mrs. Bernard said,—

"Would you mind saying what arrangements you have made for your future?"

"You know that I can have made none," was his reply. "Besides, this letter says that provision has been made for me, and that I am to inquire of you. Would you mind telling me what that provision is?"

"Nothing has been done." There was a curious look on her face, and an angry flash in her eyes as she said this. "Mr. Bernard was too ill."

The young man was struck dumb for a second, but soon recovered himself.

"Then what is to be done?" he said.

"I am disposed to be generous," she said, after some little silence; "that is, as generous as I can be in accordance with justice."

Andrew waited in silence.

"You are, of course, no relation of mine," she went on; "neither am I bound to you in any way. I consider that my husband far more than paid for what your father did. You have been brought up, I think unwisely, as a gentleman. You have had the advantages of our home; you have received much kindness both at my hands and at Mr. Wilton's; as for the girls, they have treated you as a brother. This you have never received in a proper spirit."

Andrew lifted his head as if to speak; but she went on without giving him time to utter a word.

"You have never regarded the fact that you have had no claim upon us. You have never taken what we have done as kindness, and although Mr. Bernard always took your part—all the—these things must come to an end."

"But, mother!" it was Beryl, the sallow-faced daughter

with fine eyes, and Edith, the invalid, who spoke together.

"Silence, children!" said Mrs. Bernard sharply.

"What are 'these things'?" asked Andrew.

"It means that you must pack the duds you call yours, and bolt," said Wilton. "I've told you times enough that a time would come when I should pay off old scores. That time has come now."

Andrew's eyes flashed dangerously

"Was this Mr Bernard's wish?" he asked, in a husky voice.

"I am going to treat you better than you deserve," said Mrs Bernard "As my son has said, you cannot live here now. You have had a good education. If you haven't, it is your own fault. I will give you fifty pounds to-morrow, when I presume you will wish to leave."

With these words she linked her arm in that of her son, and the two walked out of the room together, while Andrew's lips quivered and his hands trembled with excitement.

CHAPTER II

THE END OF THE OLD LIFE

IT was some time before Andrew recovered himself. His experience was so unexpected, so unnatural. Only that morning had William Bernard been buried, while his widow had been seemingly brokenhearted. He had thought her to be altogether crushed by her bereavement and would be unable to think of anything but her sorrow for days to come. Instead of this, however, she had complained of her late husband's conduct, and, in utter disregard of all his wishes, had ordered him to leave the house. It is true she had never liked him, while he had never sought her favour; but he had never suspected that matters would take such a turn. It was a great blow to him. The thought of going into the world with £50 in his pocket, with his education unfinished, without having learnt any trade or profession, and with no means of earning a livelihood, was anything but inviting; while to have it reported among his friends that he was the son of a small farmer, and had been educated on charity,

was altogether out of accord with the tastes he had acquired among his fashionable associates.

But Andrew had grit in him. He was young and strong, and he would get on somehow; so, as I said, he recovered himself at length, and began to face the inevitable. Besides, one bright hope cheered him. It was a hope that he hardly dared to acknowledge to himself, and yet it was real, and gave brightness to his life. He had learnt to love Isabel Bernard. Her fascinating eyes and, to him, winsome ways had charmed him; and although in years past he had regarded her as his sister, he had during the last few months loved her with more than a brother's love, while she had seemingly returned it. Indeed, a kind of understanding had grown between them, that they loved each other, although neither had said so in so many words. And so, while all else was dark, there was the brightness remaining. Isabel, he was sure, would not change, in spite of altered, circumstances; she would cheer and comfort him in every adversity. Her glorious eyes would still beam upon him, her sweet voice would tell him to be brave, and with such help he would carve out a future somehow. It was true he knew nothing of the world, and, because of the plenty in which he had always lived, fancied that money could be easily got. But then, to the young and inexperienced, hope leaps bouyant. Anyhow, it was so with Andrew Fairfax. He should not leave the house disgraced. He had done nothing wrong, and could help nothing that had happened.

For a time he was scarcely conscious that the three girls were in the room, but remembering the fact, he apologized for his behaviour.

Only Ethel, the invalid, spoke.

"Oh, Andrew, I am so sorry," she said.

Beryl looked towards the window, and a close observer would have seen her lips tremble; but Isabel played carelessly with the tassel of a cushion.

"You will forgive me if I leave you," he said. "I naturally want to be alone to think." And without waiting for a reply, he left the room.

On regaining his room, however, he found that his thoughts would not shape themselves. His brain refused to work—at least, in any definite way; so, almost with-

out being aware of what he was doing, he found his way to the library again.

He found Isabel alone. Eagerly he went across the room towards her. She raised her head as he approached, and then he stood still. Her eyes were cold and repelling.

"Isabel" he said "you are sorry, you are grieved that your mother, has been so unjust."

She rose from her seat.

"I do not care to discuss the matter," she said.

"No I ought not to have spoken so of your mother" ne said; "but my thoughts are confused. Still, I do not mind so much. You will cheer me, won't you, Isabel? We shall love each other just the same whatever happens, shan't we?"

"I forgive you your words," she said, "because I think you must be mad. The shock has been too much for you."

"But, Isabel——!"

"As we shall probably never meet again, it were best that you should not remember my name.

"What do you mean? Why, Isabel—you——"

"I mean that mother has arranged for you to leave the house to-morrow. From this time we do not know each other. I've no acquaintances among the sons of any who rent our farms. Still, I wish you well."

She left the room as she spoke.

Probably his love for her had only been a boyish love, but to him it had been very real, and for a moment he thought he should have gone mad. His head seemed hot as fire, while his brain reeled. He had partially recovered from the first blow he had received, but the second was far more terrible. His was no cold and unfeeling nature. He was warm-hearted, enthusiastic. With him to do anything was to do it with all his heart, and to be thus repulsed—insulted by the one in whom he had trusted. —was terrible.

He left the room and went upstairs to the apartment he had been occupying, and, taking a portmanteau, he began to pack some clothes.

"Everything I have Mr. Bernard gave me," he muttered, "and I can take them all." And so, article by article, he placed them away in the receptacle. He had just suc-

ceeded in filling it when a knock came to the door.

"Yes."

"If you please I have brought a note from Mrs. Bernard."

Without noticing the old servant, who anxiously watched his face, he took the letter and closed the door, while the man waited outside, wondering, what to do.

It read as follows:—

"On consideration, my son and I have decided to secure a clerkship for you in the bank with which Mr. Bernard was connected, and in which I have some interest. This however, will be done only on condition that you use your own name, and that you make not the slightest reference to your past association with our family. Having entered the bank, your promotion must depend entirely on yourself. Nothing will be done further for you in this quarter. The sum I promised you is also herewith enclosed. It will prevent the necessity of a further meeting between us, which is undesirable.

"ALICE BERNARD."

On looking at the slip of paper enclosed in the letter he found a cheque payable to Mr. Andrew Fairfax. The sum mentioned was £50,—a year's salary for a junior clerk. Surely he ought to be thankful!

Not a muscle of his face moved as he read it. It might have been a dressmaker's advertisement for all he seemed to care. He found another portmanteau and went on packing. When he had finished he sat down, and took a few sheets of paper from his desk, and began to write letters.

The first was to his college at Cambridge, informing the authorities that he should not return to that seat of learning. The others were to friends, bidding them good-bye. He was perfectly calm, and his handwriting was steady.

After he had finished these, he began to nibble his pen as if in thought; then the colour mounted to his cheek, and dipping the pen into the ink, he wrote rapidly:—

"MADAM,—I cannot accept your money, and I will not wait until to-morrow before leaving your house. You need

not fear that I shall claim relationship with you, or trade upon my connection with your family. As I must decline the honour of a clerkship in the bank with which your name is associated, I do not think there is any probability of your being troubled with the knowledge of my whereabouts. I have taken the liberty of packing the clothes with other gifts of your late husband. He was the only father I ever knew, and I am sure he would wish this. I shall not trouble anyone by saying good-bye. I am sure it is unnecessary.

"ANDREW FAIRFAX."

It was the first time he had ever written the name, and he looked at it curiously.

"It does not look bad," he muttered. "Quite as good as 'Bernard.' Perhaps I can make it as much respected."

He rang the bell as he spoke, and then, seeming to remember something, he added a postscript to the letter he had just written,—

"Would you kindly give particulars as to my birth and birthplace? I may find them useful."

He had just written this when a servant came in answer to his summons. He gave the man the letter, simply saying that he was waiting for an answer. When he was alone again, he took out his purse and began to count his money.

He possessed over £20. His watch also was a good one, and would, he was sure, command a good sum. Besides this he had several articles of jewellery. Altogether, he had as much as the value of Mrs. Bernard's cheque, just sent back to her.

Another knock came to the door. It was timid, hesitating. To his surprise he found not the servant, but Beryl, looking more sallow than usual.

"I have brought something from mother," she said.

He took a little package from her hand and opened it. He found two separate papers. One was a certificate of his birth. The other contained several names and addresses. He read them aloud.

"Parish—St. Neot. County Loamshire.

"Clergyman, Rev. Arthur Childs, M.A., The Rectory. St. Neot.

"Registrar, John Oliver, St. Neot.

"Name of farm, Trevadlock.

"Nearest railway station, Morgan Cross.

"Particulars of Mary Fairfax's maiden name, &c., obtainable at the clergyman's."

"She has all these things to hand," he thought; "one might suppose she was prepared for such a contingency as this."

He put the documents in his pocket-book, without speaking, however, and prepared to leave the house.

It was now October, and it was dark.

"You are not going to-night, Andrew?"

"Yes, Beryl; good-night."

"You and I have never been great friends. You and Isabel were always together."

"Yes," grimly.

"I cannot forget all the past, Andrew. We have been like brother and sister, and we can part friends."

"Your mother would forbid it, and I do not think it wise."

"But Andrew——"

"Mrs. Bernard has offered me £50 to go away quietly. I am going away quietly without it. I have just discovered that there is a great gulf between us. My father was a small tenant farmer, yours the squire from whom he rented his little farm. I have neither home, position, nor money; you have all these things."

"But you will let us know where———"

"I do not think it best. I shall go out into the great world, and you will forget me. Naturally so. Isabel, who, I thought, cared for me, scorns me: as for you—Good-bye, Beryl."

Her sallow face was haggard and drawn. Her eyes looked large and wild. Certainly she was not beautiful. Perhaps this softened Andrew, for he said quickly,—

"Forgive me if I seem harsh. If you think, you will not wonder. I hope that you and Ethel will remember me kindly. Say good-bye to her for me."

The girl looked at him strangely, he thought coldly, but she held out her hand.

"Good-bye, Andrew. Think the best you can of us."

That was all, but it was a manifestation of feeling, and to Andrew it was like a bit of blue in the black wintry sky. After all, Beryl was kinder-hearted than Isabel, and, perchance, she had used the letter as a means whereby she might be able to see him.

He carried his portmanteaux down the stairs himself, and then, putting on his hat and overcoat, he opened the door, and soon found his way into the busy thoroughfare.

And so the young man entered on his new life. He had a few pounds in money. He had youth, health, and vigour. He had been educated after the manner of gentlemen, That is, he knew Greek, Latin, French, and German, but only in a limited degree. When he had gone up for the "little go" at Cambridge, he had passed it; but as for any thorough knowledge of these languages, it was not his. The same might be said of other subjects. Still what education he had was in his favour, as were his youth and health.

But there were many things against him. He had no experience of the world. He had never been taught the true value of money. He had never known the meaning of hardship. Many a boy of ten knew far more than he about the ways of the world. And he was practically thrown out upon the great world of London without a friend.

No doubt he might have been wiser had he swallowed his pride and gone into the bank, but he loathed the thought. Not only was it bitterness to think of accepting a favour from Mrs. Bernard, but the thought of a dreary routine life such as was found in a bank was unendurable. But then what could he do?

He hailed a hansom.

"Where, sir?"

He named a street off the Strand. He had, in passing through it one day, noticed a modest private hotel. He did not expect to be able to stay long, but he could make it his headquarters for a few days, until he was able to make permanent arrangements.

Arrived here, he engaged a bedroom for a week; by that time he thought he should know what to do.

He was soon left alone to his thoughts, and he had plenty to think about.

Only a few hours ago he was Andrew Bernard, Esq., supposed relation to the late rich banker. His associates were rich and educated. He had lived in the West End of London; he had studied at Cambridge. His society had been courted. He had been smiled upon. Now he was Andrew Fairfax, son of a small farmer, with but little money, and without means to get more. It was a terrible fall. But more than that, his heart was sore. His hopes, his dearest hopes, had been dashed to the ground. The girl he loved had scorned him and had left him with a sneer on her face.

But Andrew Fairfax possessed a strong, determined nature. He did not belong to that class which produces suicides. He calmly accepted the inevitable, and a look of grim resolution came upon his face.

"Yes," he muttered, "I must, I will do something—but what?"

What could he do?

"A man can never succeed in anything unless he likes it," continued he. "What do I like?"

He remembered his studies at college, and thought of his strong subjects.

"Languages as languages I was weak in," he thought; 'and yet I always revelled in the literature of France and Germany. Yes, history, poetry, and general literature were always my strong points; all the rest I shirked. But what good are they in getting a living? A general knowledge of Heine, Kant, Goethe, Voltaire, Lamartine, Victor Hugo, Montaigne, Molière, and a good idea of English literature can't be made a money-making commodity, I'm afraid. Can I teach, I wonder? I might try that; but, I should hate it. Or could I get a clerkship? I might, perhaps; but I should hate that, too. However, I'll see to-morrow. Everything is so upset that I can hardly realize where I am.

He went into the Strand. The theatres were just closing, and crowds thronged the street. There were a vast number of all sorts. There were the rich from the neighbouring squares and from the West End; there were the middle classes who came from the suburbs; there were the clerks and shopkeepers who had spent two shillings in order to find enjoyment; and there were the crowds of the People who came from the galleries.

"Ah," thought the young man, "these people either have money or the means of getting it. It is a wonder, though, how everybody finds something to do; but I suppose they do."

He was ignorant then of what he afterwards learnt.

He walked along the crowded street until he came to Charing Cross Station, where he turned down the street which led to the underground railway.

There he passed girls trying to sell flowers, and boys trying to sell matches. Farther down he found youths trying to sell back numbers of obscene papers. Still he walked on, until he got to the little square outside the station.

"*City Chatter*, sir?" he heard a voice say.

He turned and saw a young fellow with a bundle of papers under his arm. Something in his voice and in his general appearance caused him to stop.

"What is it!" he asked.

"A society paper," said the young man; "shows all the swells up in style.'

The voice, the manner were refined and Andrew, changed in feeling by his changed circumstance, spoke again.

"Surely you need not try and sell such stuff as that for a living! You seem to be educated."

"Education's no good in getting money unless you've been brought up in a groove," said the young fellow. "I was brought up to nothing, and so I'm glad to do what I can in order to keep from starving."

"But——" And Andrew moved towards him.

He turned on his heel at Andrew's approach, went swiftly towards the arch close by, and was lost in the darkness.

"Evidently he doesn't want to be known," thought Andrew. "I wonder now if——" And then he went back to his hotel as though a dark thought haunted him.

Next morning he started out into the streets of London to seek work. He did not care so much what it was for the time. Anything would do until he could get a footing in the world, which in his heart of hearts he sought to enter.

CHAPTER III

BEGINNING THE NEW LIFE

NONE but those who have tried know what it is for an inexperienced man to get anything to do in London. Everything needs preparing for, and nothing is got without it; that is, unless some secret strings are pulled, some potent influences are at work. Look at the great horde of men, ay, and of women too, who get their living by clerkships. It seems so easy to be a clerk. You have simply to do a certain amount of mechanical work, which requires only a very ordinary amount of knowledge and ability.

At least, so it seems. But even this, as all the world knows, has to be prepared for. Mostly clerks begin as boys and then, step by step, work themselves up. In nearly every other line of life it is the same. When a boy leaves school he becomes an apprentice, and then by slow degrees he takes responsible positions, and as a consequence draws a better salary. But nothing is jumped at. The demand in every line of life is for trained men and women, and the poor untrained stand very little chance.

"I will look out for a clerkship," thought Andrew, as he looked down the advertisement columns of the morning papers.

He found dozens of situations seemingly suited to him under the head of "Situations Vacant," and then found as many suitable people under the head of "Situations Wanted."

"It seems as though there can be no difficulty at all for all these people to be suited," mused the young man, "and I'm afraid I shall stand but a poor chance. And yet, surely, a fellow who has had a university education should receive more consideration than such applicants as these. At any rate, I can try, and I must try, for I must live."

And so, noting several addresses, he started. There was one thing in his favour—he had a good presence. His features were clearly cut, his eyes were frank and bright, his expression was pleasing. He was well dressed, too; dressed, in fact, as but few clerks can dress. His tailor was a West End expert, and the cloth was of the finest material. Thus no one would take him for a needy sharper.

His first call, however, was not very helpful to his complacency. It revealed to him his difficulties. At first, the business man who had advertised for a clerk seemed to regard him favourably. His appearance, no doubt, was prepossessing. But a few questions placed everything in a different light.

Then the man of business looked at his watch.

"I am afraid, young sir, that your chances in the business world are very poor," he said. "First we want references as to trustworthiness and respectability."

Andrew's face flushed.

"Don't be angry young man; I am using precious time in talking thus to you; but I am doing it so that you may not go on blindfolded. Second, we want references as to ability and general intelligence. Third we want either practical experience in business matters, or such a knowledge of business transactions as will stand in good stead until that experience is gained. A boy of fourteen, just from school, whom I could get for nothing, or who would probably give a premium, could be just as much use as you are——probably more, for he would learn his work more easily. As for giving you a salary, there's not a man in London would do it."

Andrew left the office crest-fallen. It was terrible to be humbled so at the very first step, and yet he felt that the man had been kind and had told him the truth. Still, he would not give up at the first failure. He would try the next name on his list. Here he was less courteously treated. He could not comply with the usual forms, and was consequently dismissed in less than a minute. The next application was just as unsuccessful, and the next, and the next. Everywhere it was the same story. He was a man, and yet he had had no training. He had not learnt to *do* anything. If he had been a carpenter, a mason, a draper, a clerk, he could have found work, or, at any rate, he would have had a chance to get some, but he was none of these things, and thus at the close of the first day he had not progressed an inch. It is true he had gained experience. He had learnt how useless was the man who had not been taught something definite, but beyond that—nothing.

When he returned to dinner there was only one other person in the coffee room besides himself, and he took but little notice of him. Besides, he was a little stand-offish man, who had buried himself behind a newspaper, with evidently no desire to enter into any conversation. So Andrew looked steadily into the fire, and tried to solve the problem of his life.

For a long time he sat, until he became oblivious of the fact that any one was in the room, or that the little man occasionally gave him furtive glances from behind his newspaper.

Before he went to bed he had formed a dozen plans.

One of them he was sure must turn out well. At any rate, he resolved to be up in good time in the morning, and thus give the whole day to his schemes.

As for the little man who sat in the coffee-room with him he turned from paper to paper. Liberal, Conversative. Radical, Royalist, it did not seem to matter to him. He read them all, evidently regarding them as of equal value, and from the mocking look on his face his estimate was not very high. But in addition to his reading, he found time to watch Andrew. At first his impressions did not appear to be favourable, but after a while they apparently improved.

"Something in him, something in him," he muttered. "Wonder who he is; but what business have I to wonder? Um—an old fool as usual!"

When Andrew had gone to bed, he went to the proprietress of the little hotel, and asked her who the young man was.

"He has given his name as Andrew Fairfax, sir."

"Andrew Fairfax, eh? When did he come, eh?"

"Last night."

"Staying a long while, eh?"

"He's engaged the bedroom for a week."

"A week, a week," muttered the little man. "What business have I to inquire about him? but I like the looks of him.

"Do you know what he is doing! Is he a business fellow, or no?" he continued speaking to the lady.

"I don't know, Mr. Pinns. I know nothing of him."

"Just like my impudence to inquire," replied Mr. Pinns;

" but then young men are such puppies nowadays, that when one sees a right sensible-looking chap, one likes to take a second look."

Mr. Pinns went back to the coffee room like one accustomed to the house, and sat down again.

" Staying a week, is he ? Well, and what of that, Ezra Pinns ? " he muttered. " What have you got to do with him ? You are not the man who takes interest in young chaps. You see too much of their ways. You are taken up with this young man, Ezra Pinns, but don't make yourself a fool ! "

The little man went to bed soon after, muttering all the time.

Next morning Andrew was up in good time, and prepared to face the difficulties of the day. He looked at the advertisement columns of the papers as he had done the day before, but now he looked with a keener eye.

" Surely," he thought, " young men who have a knowledge of two modern languages are not so plentiful that they are at a discount ! There must be firms which have Continental connections, and which, therefore, must need foreign correspondents. At any rate, I will look out for these."

He found two or three which apparently suited him, and these he determined to investigate without delay. Once he was tempted to invent a story which would explain his want of references and his lack of previous experience, but his better nature quickly recoiled. " No," he thought, " I'll be truthful, whatever else I am. I would rather starve than be a liar." And so he went to the men who had issued the advertisements, determined to give a straightforward statement of facts.

Fortune was against him, however. He found that no commercial man would listen long to him.

All through the day he had been tramping, and everywhere it had been the same—a hurrying, struggling humanity. What did it all mean ? What was the great lesson to be learnt ?

He went on to Charing Cross, and then walked back to the Law Courts, and still it was the same. There was no rest, no peace,—ever the same succession of beings. All sorts were there—the grave, the gay, the sinful, the pure ;

those whose lives were puddled, others who were pure amidst dire temptation. Each jostled the other, each took his part in the great drama of human life. Some openly proclaimed and lived lives of sin, while others as openly preached that sin dragged hell and destruction at its heels.

But they all lived, and all apparently, possessed means of obtaining current coin. How?

When he entered the little coffee-room he saw Mr. Pinns sitting by the fire with various newspapers scattered around him. There were also two other men in the room, but they took no notice of Andrew. Mr. Pinns, however, nodded his head.

"Nights getting chilly, young man, eh?"

"Yes, very chilly," replied Andrew sadly; then he prepared to retire, while the little man watched him closely.

"I must try a different tack to-morrow," he thought, when he got to his room. "My money can't last long, and something must be done. There's nothing for me in the commercial world. Clerks, travellers collectors, assistants in all branches, are all people who know how to *do*, and I can do nothing. There's teaching. Surely I know enough to teach! I could refer to my professors; they would give me testimonials sufficient to gain me a bearing among schoolmasters. But then the matter will in some way be referred to Mrs. Bernard, and that must not be. I'll never be dependent on that woman as long as I've strength to crawl.

"But there, I'll not trouble any more to-night. I'll surely succeed to-morrow. Then, having got the means of obtaining bread, I'll devote my spare hours to my dream. It will not bring money at first; but, after a while—well I'll try, anyhow."

CHAPTER IV

TALKING ABOUT IT

IT was evident that Isabel Bernard's hold upon Andrew was very slight. He had almost ceased to think about her. The blow had been heavy, but he soon recovered from the effects of it. His idol had been shattered; she had

revealed her true character, and he had ceased to respect her. When a healthy-minded man ceases to respect, love soons drops out of the question. Thus it was that Andrew calmly ceased to think of her, save as one who had been. True, his heart was sore at times,—that was natural,—but he had no longings for her. He had loved her with a boyish love, but it had been torn from his heart with one cruel wrench. It had saddened, embittered his nature for the time, but there was no doubt about the wound healing.

He was very comfortable at the little hotel, and he decided to stay another week, in the hope of something turning up, or rather in the hope that he might be able to turn up something. If he failed, he must go into cheaper lodgings.

He went out every morning hopeful; he came back in the evening dejected. After he had been in the little hotel four days, a bright thought struck him, and he immediately acted upon it. He got a packet of manuscript paper, for which he paid a shilling, three pennyworth of Waverley pens, and a bottle of ink. His stock-in-trade cost him one and fourpence. He wrote an article, and sent it to the *Daily Information*. The next day it was returned. He smiled grimly as he undid the wrapper containing his precious document. He glanced at each sheet to see whether the editor made any comments.

Not a word.

"Hardly to be expected, I suppose,' he thought. "I have aimed too high. No doubt a powerful daily like the *Information* will have the best staff that money can buy. I'll try a story, and send it to one of the magazines. He sat down to think about a title. A host of stories flashed into his mind. "A Lover's Revenge," "A Midnight Murder," "A Strange Apparition." These and a dozen other similar subjects suggested themselves to him.

He took up his pen to write.

"I must get something romantic, something striking," he thought, "or no editor will look at it. 'A Strange Apparition,' that's the best subject," and he tried to find words for the introduction.

But there was a sense of disappointment almost amount

ing to pain at his heart. It seemed wasted time to conjure up improbable scenes, and he wondered why he had always wanted to be a novelist.

Still he wrote; and as he got interested in the characters of his story, he forgot how useless was his work. He sat far on into the morning, and finished it before he went to bed. Immediately after breakfast he took it to an editor, and asked for an early reply. Again his appearance was in his favour, and the editor told him that in a week he should know. He happened to be one of the few editors who keep their promises. He gave his answer in the time specified, but with his letter he returned the story. It was not suitable.

Meanwhile he had kept on trying for a situation in the earlier part of the days, and writing during the later. It was all to no purpose. His commercial value was not known, his talents were not appreciated.

The fortnight for which he had engaged his room at the hotel came to an end, and he found himself exactly where he was on the night of his entrance, except that he was five pounds poorer. He had no situation, and no idea how to get one. None of his articles or stories had been accepted. Some were in the possession of unthankful editors who gave him no encouragement. The world generally did not look at all bright; the world of letters looked especially dark.

Andrew had found and engaged a little room, for which he had agreed to pay *7s 6d.* per week. This was exclusive of light or fire. The landlady agreed that the servant, a poor goggle-eyed creature, about fifteen, should clean his shoes for this, in addition to which she would fry some bacon for his breakfast. All other meals must be taken out. He engaged the room for one month, and counted his money. At any rate, he would be able by careful management to last out the winter.

Then he went back to the little hotel to spend his last evening before establishing himself in the domain of dinginess and dirt.

He drew his chair before the coffee-room fire. It was November now, and the nights were getting cold. Only Mr. Pinns was in the room. The old gentleman had seen

the young man's luggage in the little hall, and heard him ask the proprietress for his bill, and he watched him keenly as he sat looking gloomily into the glowing grate.

"You are leaving us, young sir, um?" said Mr. Pinns at length.

"Yes."

"Leaving London, eh?"

"No—not yet, at all events."

"Ah, perhaps you are changing your situation?"

"No."

"No?"

"I've none to change, to tell you the truth, and, what is more, I don't know where to find one."

"Ah! and yet you seem steady."

"Oh, yes I'm steady enough."

"What were you brought up to now, um, eh?"

"Nothing."

"Ah, thought so. Just like me, an old fool, but I wonder now—then you are changing lodgings, eh?"

"Yes, and——" Andrew looked at the old man again before saying more, as though he wanted to know what sort of a heart he had.

"I'm doing it for economy's sake," he said quietly "I've no income—yet; so I am obliged to be careful."

"What have you been trying for, um, eh?"

"Everything."

"And succeeded in nothing?—nasty, but very natural, *ver-y* natural."

Andrew was silent, but he was pleased to hear the little man talk.

"I am a very impudent old man," said Mr. Pinns, "very; but would you mind telling me what you think of doing?

"Trying again."

"What at?"

"Anything, everything, until I succeed."

The little man smiled.

"You predict bad luck," said Andrew who had interpreted Mr. Pinns's smile.

"I predict nothing, um. But you are plucky. I like to see pluck. Nowadays, everybody have things done for them, and real dogged pluck is dying out."

"Well, I've nothing done for me."

"I see, I see."

A servant girl entered the room, bringing his bill. Andrew looked at it and whistled.

"You are not going yet, young man; eh?"

"Yes, I'm going at once. Why?"

"This room will be empty till eleven o'clock. They are all gone to the theatre, or some such place. I suppose you are not expected early at your new lodgings?"

"Oh, no; it does not matter what time I get there."

"That's right, then; let's have a talk."

Andrew went to the mistress of the establishment to pay his bill, while Mr. Pinns grumbled with himself.

"Ezra Pinns, you are a fool; you are. What business have you to be bothering with this young swell? He'll laugh at anything you can say. Of course he will. Ah! here he comes."

Andrew came back and sat down beside the fire again. He was glad to talk with Mr. Pinns. Non-success had made him desire a companion. Besides, he would soon be lonely enough.

"It seems strange for an old fogey like me to want to talk to a young fellow like you, doesn't it, eh?"

"Yes, it isn't worth your while," said Andrew gloomily.

"Still, you want work."

"Yes, I want work. Can you direct me to any?"

"I don't know, I don't know."

"It's the old story, I suppose," said Andrew bitterly. "You—that is, if you know of work—would want references and experience. Well, I've neither. Yes, I have experience, though. A fortnight's struggling to get something to do, and failing."

"I suppose you have something in your mind that charms you most, eh?"

"Yes—a literary life. But I am afraid there is no chance. I have had no success."

"Of course not.

"How do you know?" asked Andrew.

"Because I'm in that line myself."

Andrew's face fell. Up to a fortnight ago he had never conceived any picture of literary men or a literary life, not-

withstanding the fact that he had ever a secret drawing towards it. Since he had been out in the world alone, however, he had felt a kind of awe when thinking of editors and literary men. Charles Dickens was once editor of the *Daily News*, and Sir Edwin Arnold was supposed to edit the *Telegraph*, and although he did not suppose all knights of the pen reached their height, he fancied they would be men of commanding appearance and exceedingly scholarly. Indeed, he had met some, and while he took but little notice of them at the time, he remembered that they were refined and gentlemanly. Thus when he heard Mr. Pinns declare that he was a literary man, he felt, to put it mildly, exceedingly disappointed.

"Yes, I'm in that line myself. I belong to the *Soho Times*."

"I never heard of it."."

"No I suppose not. I belong to it, anyhow."

"Could you"—Andrew hesitated a minute—"could you get me on your staff?"

"Staff! staff!" chuckled Mr. Pinns. "Call it staff, do you? Well, if you could write shorthand, I could give you something to do. As it is I might—but ah! I don't suppose you'd do it; but I might use you to go around and pick up bits of local news. Short bits, you know—perhaps a column a week I could spare you."

The little man jerked out this as if uncomfortable.

"And how much could you give me for this?"

Mr. Pinns hesitated. Evidently he was going out of his way to help Andrew. Besides a small weekly local paper in London is anything but a gold mine.

"I could give you—say—five shillings—a—week," he stammered.

"But—but I could not live on that" said Andrew.

"No no—I know; but I could introduce you to a man who publishes short stories. You might write some for him. Then you would have a chance to pick up the profession. Bah!—the profession. Eh!"

They had sat talking a long time and the little clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven.

"I'll write and let you know to-morrow" said Andrew; "I must be going now."

"Very well," said Mr. Pinns; "literature is all humbug, but you can let me know to-morrow."

Andrew went to his lodgings, and as he got into bed and thought about the dirt and discomfort of his surroundings, he began to question himself as to whether he had not been very hasty and Quixotic.

"I'm afraid I've been very proud, and have gone on wrong lines," he muttered to himself. "If I'd gone to some of my old friends, they would have helped me on to something. I'll see to-morrow, for this kind of life is not cheering."

CHAPTER V

THE OLD LIFE AND THE NEW

NEITHER a business nor a literary life looked attractive on the following morning. A November fog had set in, making the dark street in which he lived look darker than ever. Andrew had left his old home a fortnight before with but little doubt that he should succeed somehow, determining that whatever happened he would never seek assistance from those who had cast him out on the world. But that was before he tried to fight life's battle for himself. Now he looked at things differently. Business life was impossible to him; he could not get a footing in it, at any rate unaided, while his dream began to lose its rosy hues. He saw that a position on the literary staff of any respectable paper was out of the question, while to do the work Mr. Pinns had suggested was altogether opposed to his ideas of a literary life. And yet he longed, intensely longed, to write. Surely, surely there must be, a possibility for him to climb, somehow, to the height he desired! Why could he not write a novel, a real work, depicting the struggles, the sorrows, the joys of life, at the same time holding up a glorious ideal, and thus lead the thousands who he hoped would read his book to higher realms of thought and life? It was a beautiful picture he drew, bringing colour into his face and light into his eyes. But then what had he to tell the world? To dream was

all very well; but when the dream was translated into actual life, what was it worth? His knowledge of life was small, his vision as to life's possibilities was but little larger. His dream was only a dream—yet, he had not really seen life. Humanity was a book whose pages he had not read. And yet the longing remained.

He put on his coat, and went towards Piccadilly. As he walked along the Strand he saw that the fog was lifting, and the sun was trying to pierce the clouds. By the time he reached Piccadilly Circus the light had increased; evidently the day was going to be bright. By the time he reached Hyde Park gates he felt as though he were Andrew Bernard once more, and that the past fortnight had been a curious dream. He saw the crowds who had gathered in the park, and as he walked along he became interested in watching the carriages. He sauntered along Rotten Row, and looked to see if, among the ladies and gentlemen on horseback, there were any he knew. Presently his heart gave a leap. Passing close beside him was the Bernard carriage, containing Mrs. Bernard, Wilton, and Isabel. His eyes met theirs, but they gave no sign of recognition, save that a mocking smile wreathed Wilton's lips, as if to tell him that a great gulf lay between them.

Andrew clenched his fists, and set his teeth. He had expected nothing else, but it was hard to bear, and he almost regretted having come so far West. Still he crushed the bitter feelings that rose in his heart, and made up his mind to call at the house of one of his old friends, who, he knew, was in a position to help him. He was not long in reaching Connaught Square, and as he stood at the door of a stately house, he almost forgot that he was Andrew Fairfax, who had taken a dingy room at seven and sixpence a week in a narrow street at the back of the Strand. When the door was opened, however, he realized it very keenly. Over-sensitive, he thought he saw an insolent grin on the servant's face, and when told that Mr. Gilbert was not at home, he regarded it as a dismissal from the house. As a matter of fact, the gentleman he sought was not at home, while the supposed insolent grin on the servant's face was simply owing to a flirtation he had been having with the fat cook. Andrew knew nothing of this, however, and

he walked through the park in anything but a good humour. A few minutes later he met with an old acquaintance. Not that they had been friendly, for the young man, Elfrad Steele by name, was a suitor for Isabel Bernard's hand, and was always madly jealous of Andrew. Moreover, he was an effeminate puppy, and was glad of an opportunity of venting his spleen against a man who, he was sure, had despised him. At this time, however, Andrew would gladly have shaken hands with him, he was so lonely and downhearted.

As soon as he saw him, therefore, he rushed up to him with outstretched hand, and, forgetting for the minute the probability of coolness, said heartily,—

"Holloa, Steele, old fellow, how are you?"

Steele, however, did not see the hand. He stepped back slightly, then, taking out his eye-glass, he deliberately adjusted it, and stared at Andrew as though he were a curiosity. After that he walked on without saying a word.

Andrew did not see another person in Hyde Park. He dashed through it as though the Furies were at his heels. He saw neither cabs nor buses as he hurried along Piccadilly, down Leicester Square, through Trafalgar Square, into the Strand, and from thence to the dingy room. He was too excited, too indignant. After that he would rather have died than ask a favour of his former West End acquaintances.

The truth was Elfrad Steele had been acting according to instructions. Isabel Bernard had told him if ever he met Andrew to cut him, as he had no claim to be recognized as a gentleman, and Steele, like a faithful slave to his lady's whims, had obeyed.

That morning's experience was the decisive point in Andrew's life. Had he been met kindly, and had some of his old friends offered to help him, it is not probable I should have been asked to write his life. But it was otherwise. Not that many would not have gladly given him the position he wished, for he had been respected and loved by most who knew him. He knew nothing of this, however. Over-sensitive, he fancied himself despised and ridiculed, and so he vowed that, whatever might

happen, he would never again go to the West End for help.

When he arrived at his "little den," as he called it, he sat down and wrote a letter to Mr. Pinns, telling him that he would be glad to call on him when convenient.

"Anyhow, I am going to begin at the bottom of the ladder," he said to himself when he had finished the letter. 'What will the end be, I wonder? What shall I make out in life?"

After addressing the letter to the little hotel in which Mr Pinns was a permanent resident, he sat down and tried to compose a story, but he found that his pen, like the wheels of Pharaoh's chariot, "drave heavily." He felt a great deal, but somehow he could not put his feelings into words. His thoughts came rapidly, but he could not centralize them. As we have seen, he had great ideas concerning literature, but no burning question appealed to him for solution, no great abuse appeared to him, demanding that he should tell out to the world what was a disgrace to civilization.

The following morning he received a letter from Mr. Pinns, asking him to call at his office that day at eleven o'clock.

Andrew was not late in keeping the appointment, although his heart did not beat with very high hopes. Still, he met Mr. Pinns very cheerfully, and tried to suppress his disappointments. It was in a little room, at the back of a printing office, in which that gentleman received him. Certainly there was no luxury in the premises of the *Soho Times*. The place was musty, and ill-arranged. Great heaps of papers were thrown into the corners of the room, while facing a window, the only one, was Mr. Pinns's desk. There were three chairs—a high one, suited to the desk; an arm-chair, a great deal torn, with the springs showing; and a hair-seated one, likewise revealing the material with which it was stuffed. The carpet had been new a great many years before, but at present it was impossible to discover its pattern. Moreover, in several places it revealed the nature of the flooring.

Mr. Pinns wore a short greasy coat, the sleeves of which were slightly turned up, while on his feet was a pair of

office slippers, which had the advantage of being very airy.

"Well, you've come," he said to Andrew.

"Yes, I've come."

"And not thought better of it, eh? I didn't expect to see you again. Why, you can see now the value of the literary profession. It isn't worth a straw, I tell you, not a straw. Um!"

"I hope it may be worth a great deal to me," said Andrew. "I hope to write a real novel, one that is worth while."

"Do you still feel that you *must* write? MUST! mark you!"

"Yes," said Andrew, "I must. Every day I seem to hear some one telling me to write something real. I ask what, and the only reply I get is, find out. I have tried to give up the idea of becoming an author. I have thought of emigrating, of going to sea, of becoming a soldier. I have no doubt I could soon pass the examination necessary for a commission either in the army or navy. But I couldn't do it."

Ezra Pinns gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"Leave London?" he said.

"Leave London! Where would you have me go?"

"Your father was a farmer, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Have you never had any desire to go to the old home? Eh! Look here. Who keep the towns alive? The village people—the country people. But for them the towns would die out. The excesses of the towns would eat out the vitality. The constant stream from the country keeps us alive. They feed us, they bring to us the strength of natural life. And yet the country is neglected!"

Andrew gave a great leap from the chair, his eyes flashing.

"I know! I've seen!" he cried.

"What do you mean?"

"I've got what I want at last. It's all clear now."

"What will you do?" said Mr. Pinns eagerly.

"I'll go down to my old home; I'll try and get work on my father's old farm; I'll live among the country people,

share their toil, enter into their life, and then—God helping me, I'll tell their story!"

Ezra Pinns jumped to his feet, and a look of gladness came into his eyes.

"Right, right," he said, "and if you are not a fool after all, you will be a novelist, and by a novelist I mean,—and, mark you, I would have all others driven from the field of fiction—by a novelist I mean a poet, a preacher, a leader of the people, a prophet, a man inspired of God!"

Andrew thought of the distant voices which he had heard of the hands held up as if appealing for help, and the faces which expressed unutterable longing, and his heart fluttered strangely.

"Fairfax," continued the little man, and there was tenderness in his voice, "I knew what you wanted to do, and what you ought to do a long time ago. At least, I thought I did. It struck me the first time I ever spoke to you, and so I have—acted—as—as I have. I tried to lead you to despise literature—and, mark you, a lot of literature should be despised. It is mere—well, never mind. I could have done differently for you, but I wanted to—to—see of what stuff you were made."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Andrew.

"How will you live in the country?"

"By working."

"With your head or body?"

"Both."

Mr. Pinns gave a grunt of satisfaction.

"When do you go?" he asked.

"To-morrow."

BOOK II

PREPARING FOR HIS WORK

CHAPTER VI

"FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD"

BY midday Andrew had found his way to the station, and was soon rushing through beautiful country fields and woods, towards the scene of his birthplace, with a feeling of wonder in his heart.

What should he do? What were the first steps that he must take? He was entering upon a life of which he absolutely knew nothing, and he must be careful. At best, the idea of his taking this step would be called Quixotic by all well-balanced minds. But he did not care for that. Strange as the proceeding was, he knew he was doing right. It was true he could not sketch out any plan of action; but he had no doubt he would manage somehow.

He had, on the recommendation of Mr. Pinns, got a rough suit of clothes—quite unlike what farm labourers usually wear, it is true, but nevertheless suitable for the life he sought to lead. A part of his old attire he had left in Mr. Pinns's care, while he had brought just enough to remind him of the days when the world was different.

Morgan Cross, he found, was a little roadside station. It had been called Morgan Cross owing to the fact that close by were four crossways, while on the hedge near by was an ancient cross, supposed to be put there in a far-off age, when a convent, by the name of Morgan Convent, flourished in that part of the country.

Andrew was the only passenger who alighted there, and

he could not help being oppressed by the wondrous stillness that reigned. The silence was so great that it seemed to make a noise, and as after the train had swept out of sight the porter came to take his ticket, a sort of awe crept over him, for he felt he was entering, to him, an unknown world.

"This is Morgan Cross?" he said to the porter.

The porter nodded his head.

"There is no inn of any kind here?"

"You main public-ouze? No."

"Which is the nearest?"

"There's wawn, the Oss and Waggon, 'bout a mile on. Then there's two in St. Naot."

"St. Neot you mean?"

'Tha's wot I zed."

"How far is it?"

"'Bout vower mile,—p'r'aps ha'af mile mooer."

"There's no conveyance here?"

"No. Verrel's van do call wance a week, goin' ta St. Lerrick, tha's oal."

"I want to go to St. Neot to-night. How am I to get my bag there?"

"Git'n there? Why, car un yuzelf. Aw! aw! aw!"

Andrew found he had been making a mistake. If he would get on, he must conform to the customs of the people.

"Luk 'ere," said the porter. "'Ere's a bit o' rope. Ther' now, zee that? Tak' hould o' that end, an' leck un ovver yer shoulder. Ther' now, you can car'n to St. Naot now like winkin'. Gor, your 'ands be fine! You never done much work, I knaw. You ca'ant miss the way. There's telegraph poasts all the way to St. Naot. Good-night."

Andrew's first impulse was to put his hands in his pocket to find some coppers, but he reflected that such a proceeding would not do. Accordingly he trudged along the quiet lane carrying his bag on his back.

Only two or three passed him on the way, and they took but little notice of him. It was not uncommon for young fellows to be seeking service, most of whom carried their scanty luggage with them.

Before he had gone half-way to St. Neot, night was upon him, but it was by no means dark. There was a strange charm in everything, too. The air was scented by a thousand flowers that grew on the hedgeside, while ever and anon sounds greeted his ear that made him think of fairyland. Sometimes a bird twittered in the branches of the trees, and again a nightcrow would tell out its mournful tale, seeming ever to be near him, yet all the time far away. Again the wind would play among the leafy boughs, while the little river rippled its music over its stony bed.

"Every prospect pleases," thought Andrew. "Surely the people who live here will be contented and happy! Still——"

He heard a sobbing noise, and then a sound of voices.

"You'll go 'way, Jack, an' never come 'ome no more," he heard a girl's voice say.

"No, Jaaney, I wan't. I onnly want to go somewhare, where I c'n git a pound a week. Then we'll git married."

"But Bill Teague hev got married on less than that. He've only got ten shillin'."

"I knaw that, but they'm starvin'. Her zaith to me onnly on Tuesday night, 'If I'd knaw'd, I wudd'n a got married,' her zaith. Why, they'm in debt to the Johnny Fortnight now, and what they'll do cum winter they doan knaw."

"But, Jack, I ca'ant bear't."

"'Twan't be long, Jaaney. Ther' now, doan't cry."

"But, but——"

Andrew felt that he ought not to hear any more, so he gave a slight cough, and passed by the couple, who stood by a gateway, evidently belonging to some farmhouse near. The evening was as beautiful as ever. The birds still gave an occasional chirp as they nestled on the twigs, the nightcrow still chattered, the wind still played with leaf and flower, the air was still laden with perfume, and yet all was different. The young girl's tears had made everything different. The old story of sadness and disappointment robbed the night of its beauty.

Still he tramped on until he saw a grey old tower lift its head into the sky, and presently two or three tiny lights flickered.

This will be St. Neot, I expect," he said; "and here I must manage to stay for the night."

His heart beat rather quickly, for everything was strange. He had never been in the country alone before, and now the sense of desolation was heavy upon him. Passing by the churchyard gates he caught sight of a group of youths lolling about, who, when they saw him, stood and gaped as though he were a curiosity.

"Who's that?" said one.

"Dunnaw," replied another; "never zeed 'ee avore. Tall chap, ed'na?"

"I'm goin' to zee wher' a's goin'," said a third, and then all the group started to follow Andrew. Evidently a new face was a wonder to them, especially if he were a little out of the common. Evidently they had nothing to do, and nowhere to go, so they had grouped themselves together in order to find something to interest them.

The young man turned around on them.

"There's a public-house here, is there not?"

"Ther's two."

"Which is the best?'

"Best! Why, ther's no difference in 'em. Lan'lord Tommus do kip wawn, and Bill Best th' other. There, tha's the Queen's 'Ead."

Open mouthed they followed him until he entered in, then two or three had the boldness to follow him. Probably the bold ones had a copper or two, and so could drink; the others, having no money, would not dare to enter.

He found his way into the tap-room, and saw the landlord.

"Can I have a bed here to night?" he said.

The landlord looked at him as if unable to make him out. The rough clothes which Andrew wore did not at all accord with his fine face and general appearance.

"Who be you?" he said.

"I am come here to look for work," replied Andrew, colouring, and I want to stay here for the night."

"But you ba'ant no farm sarvent, be 'ee?"

"No, but I want to be."

The landlord eyed him from head to foot, as though in

great doubt. Presently his face cleared, and his eyes brightened.

"Ah, you've been a sodger I spect, and yer time's up."

Andrew did not speak, but the landlord took his silence for assent.

"Thot so," continued the landlord, knowingly, as though he were proud of his penetration. "I cud see you wad'n a farm labbut. Where ded'ee cum from now?"

"London."

"Wha's yer name, un?"

"Andrew Fairfax."

He thought it best to give his true name, because thereby he would be able to claim a certain friendliness with the people; especially if people remembered his father.

"Andrew Fairfax! Be you from this way, then?"

"My father was."

"Ah!"

"He used to farm Trevadlock Farm. Did you know him?"

"Knaw'd un, I shud think I ded. But you'll want to go somewhere, want 'ee? I 'ardly knaw where to put 'ee. In with the farmers, in the palor, or with the men in the ketchen. You see, yer father was a farmer, and you bain't like the rest of the——"

"I'll go in the kitchen if you don't mind," said Andrew. "You see, I'll to have to work among them."

Meanwhile, the news that a "sodger" was come to stay the night had spread among those in the kitchen. The servant who had come to fetch beer had heard the landlord's question, and as a consequence they were on the tip toe of expectation.

A place was made for him on the settle when he entered, and he was greeted with becoming reverence.

In a purely agricultural district like St. Neot, where there is little or no intercourse with the great towns, a soldier is a great curiosity. On all physical feats he is an oracle, while for knowledge of the world he is better than a newspaper. A soldier can manufacture the most unlikely yarns, but the rustics will listen open mouthed, and the more wonderful the stories, the better are they pleased. A policeman occupies a very high position in their esteem,

and they eye his cudgel with wondrous reverence; but a soldier, a man who has handled a sword, he is several stages higher than a policeman, especially if he understands the dignity of his position.

"Whot'll 'ee 'ave to drink?" asked one, as Andrew took his seat.

"A bottle of ginger beer, thank you."

"Be'ant teetoateller, be 'ee?"

"For the present, yes."

"Oa, I thot you sodgers was beggars to drink. Where was 'ee last, now?"

"London."

"Tha's a long way?"

"Yes, it's a good way, but I wanted to come here to get work, because my father used to have a farm not far from here."

"Oa."

"Yes; the farm was called Trevadlock. My father's name was Andrew Fairfax."

"I knawd un," said an old labourer. "He farmed Trevadlock well, he ded. But he died early, poor chap. An' you'm the little boy 'ee left?"

"Yes."

"But people zed how that Squire Bernard ded take Andrew's cheeld, and 'dopted un."

"He did put me to school."

"Oa, I thot so much. And then when you got big enough you went for a sodger?"

Andrew did not reply, but asked a question instead.

"Who farms Trevadlock Farm now?"

"Sim Cundy; but tes purty farmin' ov it."

"How far is it from here?"

"Oa, two mile' and haalf, I spoase. Tes the nearest farm to Ashwater."

"What's Ashwater?"

"Ashwater! Why, that's the name of the mansion, ya knaw. Tha's where Mr. Bernard used to come some times. He oaned the estate when yer pore father was livin'.

"Ah; and has he sold it?"

"What, ded'na tell 'ee? Why, he sould it to a ter'ble

rich ould chap as cumed from India, or some sich place. This man bo't the mansion, an oal the land, and oal the farms in wi' it. And dreckly after he bo't it he died, and left it oal to a little maid. Tha's sev'l year agone now, and do you know she've never bin sid down 'ere."

"Indeed! Who lives at the mansion?"

"Nobody, 'cept the steward, an' ther's two or three sarvants to kip it clain."

"And who manages the estate?"

"Oa, th' oull Beans, the steward, da do everything. An he's a skin-flint, I tell 'ee. Allays risin' the rent he es, while es for repears, nobody can't git noan!"

"And what's this young lady's name?"

"Aw, she's called Miss Lezant, she es."

"You've never seen her, you say?"

"No; nobody ain't a seed her."

All this time the half-dozen youths and men sitting around had listened open-mouthed to the conversation. Only one spoke, and he, with a look of reverence towards the old labourer who had been talking with Andrew, said that "Th'oull Tommy wud be match fur'n if he *wur* a sodger."

Not long after Andrew went to bed. He remembered that he had made up his mind to be up betimes in the morning, when he must try and get work, if possible, at Trevadlock, the old farm where his father worked, and where his own babyhood had been passed.

He did not think then of the future that lay before him; he did not dream that country life would be such a revelation. Happily a knowledge of the future is kept from us all.

CHAPTER VII

"WHERE ALL WAS QUIET"

THE next morning Andrew went out to find Trevadlock Farm. He did not have very sentimental feelings towards it; but he was, nevertheless, interested in seeing the home of his childhood. Here his father had lived and worked, and although he had never seen him he

could not help being attracted towards the home he had never seen. He had but little difficulty in finding it. Trevadlock Farm was very well known, and the house did not lie far from the main road.

It was a beautiful morning. The sky was clear, save for a few light, fleecy clouds, which only added to its beauty, while all beneath looked like a Paradise. The hay crop had been gathered in, while the cornfields were fast ripening. Everywhere was there a sign of harvest. The country was remarkably pretty. All around were homesteads nestling among the trees, while here and there were cottages which looked comfortable and attractive. But one house more than any other caught his attention. No doubt it was Ashwater, the mansion which the old labourer had mentioned the night before. A large, rambling house it was, with a fine park surrounding it, while in the near distance ran a river, which was clear as crystal. On one side of the river was a wood, which sloped up to some tableland, while on the other was a grassy bank where one could walk for a mile without difficulty. Andrew was enchanted by what he saw, and he watched the gurgling stream and the flitting shadows which the old trees made as the wind played with their leaves, he felt that here there could be nothing but gladness. And then as he remembered the conversation between the lovers the night before, he wondered.

Presently he saw a stile in the hedge, and a footpath through a field which led to a farm. He was hesitating whether this might not lead to Trevadlock, when he heard a rumbling noise, and, turning, he saw a lad with a horse and cart. Both horse and lad were nearly asleep. The day was warm, and evidently work was not sufficiently pressing to make them hurry. The lad eyed Andrew curiously.

"Be you the sodger?" he said.

Andrew nodded. "Is yonder house Trevadlock farmhouse?" he rejoined.

The lad gave a sign of assent.

"Does this footpath lead there?"

The lad gave another nod of his head, and said, "I've heerd 'bout 'ee."

"Oh, indeed! when?"

"Jest now. Tommy Dain was up to 'Vadlock, and told Sim Cundy 'bout 'ee. You c'n have a job. I heerd 'im zay so. I live ther', too. You c'n slaip wi' me, you like."

Evidently the lad was ready for a chat, but Andrew did not feel disposed. He thanked him, and then walked towards the farmhouse, now and then looking at the river, which glistened brightly in the sunlight. This would be the river in which his father had saved Mr. Bernard from drowning.

Trevadlock farmhouse and cattle buildings looked wonderfully quiet and peaceful as he entered the yard. In the meadow near lay the cows, peacefully chewing their cud; in the yard itself were a dozen pigs, half buried in straw, fast asleep, while the poultry lazily picked grains from among the manure heaps.

"Who be you?" A gruff voice asked this question.

Andrew turned, and saw a hard-featured man, about forty-five or fifty. He had the air of a master. Evidently this was the farmer, Sim Cundy.

"Be you Andrew Fairfax's booy?" he continued.

"Yes."

"Tommy Dain tould me about 'ee. I doan't spoase you'm wuth much, but you can 'ave a job through the 'arvest. Can 'ee maw?"

"No."

"Bind, make moughs, pitch, build a load, or a rick?"

"I've never tried, but I can quickly learn, I daresay."

"Well, you look big enough and strong enough. But yer fingers be awful fine. You must expect lots ov bladders."

Andrew had only a vague idea as to what this meant, but he nodded cheerfully.

"What wages do 'ee want?"

Andrew didn't know.

"The last man I had—he lived in the house—had twelve pound a year."

"Yes," said Andrew, "twelve pounds."

"He had oal his mait, ya knaw, and he slaiped in tha house."

" But supposing I did the same work, and got lodgings; what would you give me then? "

" Ten shellen' a week for the first six months, if you was worth it. In 'arvest I would give that and yer mait, ef you was wuth anything."

Andrew was not anxious about wages; he had a few pounds in money, and would be able to manage. He was anxious to work on Trevadlock Farm, however; he was anxious to sleep in the room in which his father had slept.

" I'll not quarrel about my wages until I've been a week," he said at length; " you'll see then whether I pick up the work or no. When shall I begin? "

" You may as well begin after dinner."

" I've left my bag over at St. Neot. I may as well go over and fetch it."

" Oal right; then you c'n be back jist in time for dinner."

He was not long in getting to St. Neot, and throwing his bag over his shoulder, he found his way back to Trevadlock again. The sun was now high in the heavens, but a breeze had sprung up, and so the walk was pleasant. The clear river was open to his view, while the park which stretched down towards it did not in any way hide the great house which the villagers called Ashwater.

" And so Mr. Bernard used to live there," he murmured, " while my father lived up at the farm. It is strange that I should come back to these scenes under such peculiar circumstances. What's that? "

His eyes were directed to the main entrance of the house, and he saw two female figures. He sat on a stile and watched them. They came out of the house, and walked across the park towards the river. As they came nearer, he saw that they were young, and from their attire he knew they were not servants. They seemed to be chatting gaily, and the gentle breeze that was blowing carried the sound of their merry laughter to the place where he was.

" Who are they, I wonder? " he said. " Very likely the steward's daughters, as, according to the village talk, the lady of the manor has never put in an appearance."

It did not matter to him, and yet he felt interested. Somehow it seemed as though there was a link which held him to the place which his foster father once owned.

He reached the farm, and entered at the back door. He noticed that the house had been lately enlarged, and that the new wing was evidently far more conveniently built than the old. The farmer met him at the door.

"Denner's jist on the table," he said briefly; "there, laive yer bag here, and come on."

Andrew entered the kitchen. It was in the old part of the house—a long, low-ceiled room. In it was a long deal table, the top of which was reversible. On one side it was painted, on the other the white deal was left untouched. When used, the unpainted part was exposed; at other times the other side was seen. The paint occupied the place of a table-cloth. It was placed near the side of the kitchen, where, close by the wall, a long wooden bench was fixed. Opposite the window this bench was very much wider, and was made into a kind of sofa. On the other side a long form had been introduced to save the trouble of moving chairs.

On the one end of the table a cloth had been laid, and here sat the farmer, his wife, his sons, and three daughters. The other end had no cloth, and here the servants sat. There were four—two girls, fat-faced, and two youths, one of whom Andrew had seen in the morning.

Andrew felt awkward for a minute, and looked as if for an introduction; but none took place. He took his seat, however, while the three daughters, all grown to young women, looked at him with great interest. Evidently he was not like the other servants and they stared to their hearts' content.

A basin was placed before each of them in which thick pieces of bread had been placed. These the servants took, and carrying them to the great open fireplace, filled them from a great steaming receptacle, called a "crock," with what he found to be pork broth.

Andrew did not enjoy it much. To him it was altogether distasteful; but the whole family ate heartily, the young ladies especially making a great deal of noise as they put the spoons to their mouths and swallowed the warm liquid.

After the broth, a great piece of fat bacon was lifted on the table, with potatoes cabbage, and dumplings. Andrew

fared but little better than he had done with the broth. Boiled fat bacon was not to his taste; but still he ate it with the best grace he could. The two youths who sat near him, however, ate voraciously, especially of the cabbage and potatoes, with which they were plentifully supplied.

Whether Andrew's presence was preventive of conversation, I know not; at any rate, nothing was said for a good while. At length the farmer burst out,—

"'I'm settin' where your father used to set, An—Andrew."

Evidently something in the young man's presence hindered him from being familiar with his name.

Andrew looked interested. "And where did my father and mother sleep?" he asked; "that is, which room?"

"The one right ovver this. Ya see the house hav' bin builded to, and afore that time this room here," pointing to one over the end of the kitchen where he sat, "wur the farmer's slaipin' room. Ted'n used now, 'cept for a apple chamber."

Andrew's eyes lightened.

"Would it be possible for me to sleep there?" he said. "I should be glad if it were. The remembrance of my father's life has a strong hold on me, though I do not remember him."

"I spoase you cud," said the farmer, musing. "What do 'ee think?" turning to his wife and daughters.

Evidently Andrew's handsome appearance had made a great effect on these young ladies.

"Oh, very easy," they replied. Somehow it seemed right that this young man who stood so straight, moved his limbs so freely, and spoke so gracefully, should have a room to himself, and they almost felt like saying "sir" to him. Still, he was a servant, and that meant a very great deal.

"You'll go hawing turmuts this afternoon," said the farmer at length. "Bill Olver will go with 'ee."

Andrew walked out of the kitchen without a word, and Bill, delighted that he would have Andrew's company, led the way to the field. Bill was a youth about eighteen years of age, and was clumsily and loosely built, like most of the

youths who have followed purely agricultural pursuits.

They were just leaving the yard gate when Andrew, like Lot's wife, turned and looked back, and saw that the trio of young ladies were watching curiously. Andrew said nothing, but walked along with Bill.

"Do you always have your food with the family?" he said to that intelligent worthy.

"'Cipt when ther's comp'ny," replied Bill; "then we go into the back kitchen."

"And is your master kind to you?"

"Bravish; so be the maidens and missess. The chaps be uppish; I 'spect they'll want to cut ovver you."

On reaching the top of the hill, Andrew saw a tract of common land, perhaps a hundred acres or more.

"Who does that belong to?"

"Dunnaw; 'spects to the laady; she do own everything round here."

"Is it used at all?"

"Eaz; we do send the young bullocks there sometimes, and th'oull hosses."

Andrew thought of the thousands of men who tramp the streets of London with nothing to do, and wondered. The land was of the same kind as that of the cultivated farms, and as capable of crops. Evidently Bill was not capable of conversing on the subject, however, and so the two, walked on quietly, Bill burning to ask Andrew questions, but scarcely daring. They passed by a cottage. It looked comfortable in the sunshine, but Andrew thought of how it would be in the cold winter. He formed no opinion as yet, however. He had come into the country to see, to learn, and he must keep his eyes open.

They entered a field together, and Andrew took hold of the hoe, which Bill showed him, and then commenced hoeing turnips. The crop was poor, the plants had a starved look, as though they wanted manure. Andrew noticed, too, that large patches of land by the hedge side and in the corners of the fields were uncultivated. Bill looked at the young man curiously, as if wondering how he would get on. But hoeing turnips does not require much skill, and Bill soon found that his companion managed to hoe his row with far more ease than he could. He could

not understand the deftness of hand with which this stranger did his work.

The afternoon wore away—very slowly. Bill could tell of but little that Andrew was interested in; besides, the young man determined to find out the truth of things by actual contact. Thus they were mostly silent. Hour after hour dragged slowly by, and still the same work. Certainly it was not very interesting. Presently they heard a distant whistle.

"Ther', tha's five o'clock," said Bill; "we sh'll laive off in another 'our." They had started at one.

Just before six the farmer came into the field, and eyed the work which had been done.

"You've bin kippin Bill to work," he said to Andrew.

"Why, have we done well?"

"Fust rate. You can haw turmuts, 't any rate. There, when you've hawed three or four more raws, 't'll be time to go home to supper."

It only wanted a minute to six, but Andrew did not speak. They worked on for half an hour more, and then went back to the farm. There was a pump outside the back kitchen door. Under its spout was a huge stone trough. Into this trough they pumped some water, and then washed. A comb of very ancient appearance was placed on the back kitchen mantelpiece. This was used by the servants, men and maidens, who, taking it in turn, went outside, and looking in at the window, saw a faint reflection of themselves. This was their looking-glass, and here they dressed their hair. Andrew did not use the universal comb. He searched in his bag, and found one instead. For supper they had a dish of milk and bread, after which they used the fat bacon which had been left from dinner as butter; this they scraped over some bread, and ate heartily. This fare, although possibly distasteful to a townsman, is not so to a countryman. It is wholesome, and they like it. Even Andrew did not object to it.

Supper was over, and now their time was their own. It was just seven o'clock.

"What do you do during the evenings?" Andrew asked of Bill, who stood with him in the yard.

"Oa, nothin'," replied Bill. "There's nothin' to do."

"How do you pass your time?"

"Oa," said Bill, "I got a maid over to Tildew. I go there Saturday nights. Ther's two sarvents there, an' the other ain't got a shiner. Will 'ee go ovver weth me?"

Andrew shook his head.

"Then we'd chaff our two sarvent maids in the ev'nins'. Come on. They'm out 'ere milkin'. Will 'ee go?"

Again Andrew shook his head. He thought he heard a noise at the window, and turning his head, he saw the three Misses Cundy.

"What sort of young ladies are the Misses Cundy?" he asked, in a low voice.

"Oa, them' all right; but they'm too high for me."

Then Bill began to talk about his love affairs. It was the only thing he had in life to interest him, he said. Presently Zacky, the other lad, came up. He was a little younger than Bill, but he had also been initiated into the arts of courtship. Andrew soon found out that the lives of the youths were a little above those of the beasts they attended. In some respects, indeed, they were lower. Their thoughts were of a low nature, and would he have allowed it, their language would soon become obscene.

He led them away from their love affairs at length, but they could talk of but very little. He tried to lead them to think of physical feats. Yes, Bill became somewhat enthusiastic over that; he could throw a seven-score pounds bag of wheat over his chest, he said; but still Andrew saw that he did not know how to use the limbs God had given him.

"Do you ever read?" he asked at length. "Have you any books?"

"I've gone through *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*," said Bill. "I got it for a reward when I went to the Brianite Sunday-school."

"Nothing else?"

"I've reed the spellin' books I used to 'ave when I went to school, but I've forgot 'em. I don't reed now."

"And what shall you do now for the rest of the evening?"

" I dunnaw. Think I'll zet the rabbut gin, and then go to bed."

" And what time do you go to bed ? "

" 'Bout nine a'clock."

Andrew saw that the young Cundys were coming. Evidently they wanted to talk with him, but he was not inclined, so he went away alone.

The sun was now sinking low in the sky, and it made everything reflect its brightness. Certainly everything was beautiful, and yet it was terribly lonely.

CHAPTER VIII

HARVEST EXPERIENCES

ANDREW slowly returned to Trevadlock Farm, and went to bed. He was rather tired, and so did not feel it a great hardship to retire. He found that the Misses Cundy had treated him to a strip of thin carpet, and had placed a comfortable bed in his father's old room. This led him to the conclusion that there was a desire to treat him far better than the others. He did not wish this. His idea in living among the poor agricultural labourers was to know their exact conditions of life, and to feel as they felt. He wanted to be one with them, to share their burdens, and to really understand their wants.

The following morning he was up at six o'clock, and went out into the fields to hoe turnips with Bill Olver. He felt rather sore, but he soon worked it off, and although the occupation was purely mechanical, he dug away with good will. At twelve they went to dinner, and were allowed an hour. The dinner was similar to that of the day before. At one they were in the field again, and worked on until six ; after that the time was nearly their own. And all the days were like this. There was nothing to stir their sluggish pulses, nothing to interest them. During the day it was work ; in the evening the youths of the neighbourhood lolled around with nothing to interest them, nothing to do, except a few you went to see their lady loves, whose feelings and enjoyments were nearly the same as their own.

Andrew had arrived at St. Neot on Tuesday night, and had started to work on the Wednesday; by the following Saturday he had got a glimpse of the farm labourer's, indeed, of country life generally as far as it could be known at that time of the year.

He found that Sunday was gladly thought of. They had but little change, and Sunday promised it. There was rest, and there was an opportunity of getting out of life's beaten track. He asked Bill what they did on Sundays.

"Oa, we lop about 'till denner time, then we go to Sn. Noat," replied Bill.

"And what goes on at St. Neot?"

"Oa, ther's chapel, and ther's church."

"And where do you go?"

"Moasly to chepel. There's a new praicher there every Sunday, ya knaw, while to church the same passon do preach allays."

"What is the name of the clergyman?"

"Passon Childs. He ed'n much of a praicher. He do read it oal, and then he ca'an't holla a bit; the praichers at the chapel praich wi'out a book, and they *do* holla. After chapel, we git a maid and go home wi' her. We have to git in by nine o'clock, 'cipt at special times."

"And is that all?"

"Tha's oal."

It was not an attractive programme to Andrew, and yet there was still a novelty about the country life. Besides, the weather was beautifully fine. The country was dressed in "living green," and so to the nature-loving young man there was much to enjoy. Still, he could not help a feeling of utter loneliness; he could not help feeling that the life was stagnant.

"We sh'll start harvestin' to-morra, Andra," said Mr. Cundy to him on the Sunday morning after breakfast; "an' I've got a zye"—scythe—"set up for 'ee."

"Thank you," replied Andrew, "I'll do my best." At the same time he wondered what his experiences would be.

He walked among the fields for an hour, and then, hearing the church bells at St. Neot, he determined to make his way thither. Accordingly, he returned to the

house, and put on a suit of clothes such as he had worn when living in the West End of London. As he left the house, he passed by the Misses Cundy, who, with their brothers, were also bound for church. He lifted his hat to them, which act caused a titter. A farm servant lifting his hat was certainly out of the common.

"I do'an't bleeve he's what he do make out he es," said one of the young Cundys enviously. "I bleeve he've done summin' wrong, I do, and es come down 'ere out of the way."

"But his cloas es purty," said another, "and he do car' hisself stylish."

"Well, anybody can car' hisself stylish, if he'll be a sodjer," responded the third, "and anybody can be a sodjer."

The young ladies said nothing, but they looked longingly towards him, as though they would willingly forgive anything and everything if he would only pay them attention.

By the time Andrew reached the church, the bells had ceased to ring, and the service had commenced.

It was an old church, and the seats were high-backed and worm-eaten. One part of it was entirely disused. About forty people had congregated, which number was afterwards augmented by about twenty more. Almost every one turned their head to see Andrew as he came in. He was a stranger, and strangers were uncommon especially such strangers as he. Admiring glances were cast upon his stalwart form and handsome face from every part of the church, and the old clergyman wondered who he could be.

The service was what is called "low." There was but little chanting, and everything was conducted on the most barren principle. A crazy box of whistles, called an organ, was operated on by the vicar's wife, while half a dozen children formed the choir. As the service proceeded, Andrew looked around on the people's faces, and saw how phlegmatic and unresponsive they appeared. There was no expectancy, no eagerness, neither, on the other hand, did there appear any anxiety, any doubt. The reading from the Book of Numbers was as impressive as that from

the Gospel according to St. John, as far as he could see. Just before the sermon an amount of interest was shown, for the clergyman announced the banns of marriage between William Fluter and Elizabeth Ann Crowle, both of that parish, and then after a few giggles and whispers which followed, they again settled down to a state of apathy. The clergyman soon after this commenced his sermon. He was undoubtedly an educated man. Perchance when at Oxford or Cambridge long years before, he had been an eager, keen debater, and it was said by the older inhabitants, that when he came first to St. Neot he had shown a desire for doing strange things. That, however, had all gone now. The apathy of his parishioners had crushed all his enthusiasm, while their lack of appreciation had hindered him from giving much time to the preparation of his sermons. Religion to the people was a settled thing, which they in a mechanical way were supposed to accept. And while going to church was not interesting, it gave them a change, and gave them a chance of seeing their neighbours. They repudiated the idea of being heathens, and so, of course, went either to church or chapel. Modern criticism they never heard of, and doubts never troubled them. They hoped to get to heaven some day; and although many were constantly putting off the day of repentance, they hoped to have time to cry for mercy before they died, so as to get, as they termed it, " the right side of the gate."

I am not exaggerating or colouring anything. I have lived in a purely agricultural neighbourhood in Loamshire myself for several years, and have studied the life closely. And I can assure the reader that what follows will be strictly true, for not only have I perfect confidence in what my friend Andrew has told me, but I can corroborate his description of country life by actual experience.

Passon Childs, to use Bill Olver's designation, had not been preaching five minutes before a quarter of his congregation was asleep. There was not so much wonder at this, for certainly there was not much to interest. He droned out his usual seventeen minutes, however, and then concluded, at which time the sleepers regained consciousness. A few minutes after the congregation dispersed, some of

them to study the names and epitaphs on the grave stones, and others to stand and gossip.

One thing struck him very keenly, and that was the absence of young men. Nearly every man in the church was grey-headed; the women, on the other hand, were of varying ages.

On their way home the young Cundys were asked whether they knew who the handsome young gentleman was who had been to church that morning, and the questioners were much astonished on being told by the said Cundys that he was their servant. At the same time they rose in the estimation of others, on account of having such a man living with them.

That day Andrew had his dinner in the back kitchen. The Misses Cundy protested against it, especially Sarah, the eldest, but the Masters Cundy prevailed, as they wanted to show their spite towards him, and to reveal their superiority. Of course Bill Olver, together with Zacky and the two servant girls, went with him, but Andrew saw through the movement, and laughed.

After dinner Mrs. Cundy went to sleep indoors, while Sim Cundy, the farmer, laid down on the straw in the barn, and also became unconscious for a few hours. The young ladies likewise retired to their rooms, for what purpose I cannot say, while the young Masters Cundy paid a visit to their young ladies. Andrew talked a few minutes to the two servants, and then went away among the woods to think.

In the evening he went to St. Neot again, and this time he made his way to the little chapel. When he arrived there, he was again stared at and freely commented on. He found that he was a few minutes before the time for service, as it was only ten minutes before six; but a good number had gathered around the chapel door. They were mostly youths under twenty, and of the servant class. A sprinkling of older men was there, and a very few young men. Andrew went to the door of the chapel and looked in. About a score of people had seated themselves. With one or two exceptions, they were all women. No one offered him a seat, but he saw that at the back of the chapel there were half a dozen forms, which were free. On the one side they were for males, on the other for females.

The women occasionally whispered to each other. He went out again, and then two or three came to him, evidently desiring to be friendly. They asked him questions with great eagerness, and looked at him admiringly. Evidently his coming would be a subject of conversation for days to come.

Presently attention was diverted from him and given to a man who trudged along the road.

" 'Tes the praicher," was the whisper that went around.

The preacher on this occasion was a farm servant who had walked five miles to deliver his message. When he came up a general " good evenin' " was said, and then most of them followed the man into the chapel. Again no one offered Andrew a seat, so he found his way to one of the free forms allotted to males. In the front of the rostrum was a square pew, seated all around, called the " singing seat." Here several musicians and singers gathered together. There were five instrumentalists. They played, to use their own terms, a " clarnet," a " baze vile," a " flute," and " two viddles." The others sang very heartily.

It is true the musical part of the service was not very artistic, as the instruments were out of tune; but it was hearty. The preaching was a revelation to Andrew. I will not try to reproduce it, or perchance I shall be accused of irreverence; and yet it had but little effect. Terrible doctrines were enunciated, but they had not the slightest effect upon the congregation. The same stolid look was maintained to the end, when they again joined in singing a longmetre tune.

After the service was over the congregation separated, the young people to go " a-courtin'," as they called it, and the older folks to go quietly home. The event of the week was now a thing of the past, and nothing more would happen to break the monotony of life until the following Sunday, when they would again enjoy a similar experience.

As Andrew walked behind two old men who trudged along quietly together, he heard them talking, evidently about the preacher.

" How ded 'ee like Tommy? " said one.

" Bravish; how ded you? "

" Oa, bravish, onnly I thot he had a tight jacket ; dedn' you think so ? "

" I thot 'ee dedn' have much leburty, but then he was ter'ble 'ot. Ya see, he'd walked several miles. 'Owever 'ee's a bra' slepper-tongued fella, Tommy es. Who be us goin' to 'ave nex' Sunday ? "

" Oa, the new travellin' praicher es comin' nex' Sunday. afternoon and night. He's goin' to tay wi' me."

" Aw ! Have 'ee beginned 'arvest it ? "

" No ; I be to-morra."

The roads divided here, and Andrew heard no more. On his way back to Trevadlock he met two youths with their lady-loves. They were talking to them most lovingly. Evidently they seemed to see perfection in each other, and for the time they were in paradise. He also saw a middle-aged man, his wife, and three children. The woman was poorly dressed, and looked sad and weary. In her arms she carried a baby, and by her side toddled another. The husband, seeming to find no pleasure in his wife's company, walked on ahead, leading a boy a few years old.

" What be 'ee goin' so fast for ? ' asked the woman. " Can't 'ee zee I'm carrin' the cheeld, and ca'ant git on sa fast ? "

But the man took no notice—he did not seem to care that his wife was hot and tired : he had forgotten his vows at the marriage altar.

" I suppose," thought Andrew, when they had gone by, " that a few years ago, when they were sweethearts, they were as loving as the couples I have just met. Then they both hoped wonderful things ; but life has turned out differently from what they expected. And yet surely it ought not to be ! Life should be a glad thing. Why, then, do they look so discontented ? "

He wandered slowly back through the fields. He had nothing to do, and no one expected him. Not that he needed be lonely. The villagers would gladly have welcomed him, and entered into conversation with him. Tommy Dain had told of their talk at the Queen's Head, and while they wondered at his coming there, and some shook their heads, their curiosity was aroused.

A few minutes after Andrew found his way to the farmhouse, and then, taking a book from his trunk, read until bedtime, in spite of the fact that the two Misses Cundy, who possessed no sweethearts—Miss Sarah in particular—tried hard to attract his attention.

Thus passed Andrew's first Sunday in the country. I am afraid the description of it has been somewhat wearisome, but then it is matter of great difficulty to relate that which is uninteresting in an interesting way.

For the next three weeks Andrew had but little time on his hands. He soon found that harvesting was not playing. As his master had said, a scythe had been set up for him and he had to take his place among the mowers. At first he was very awkward and unsuccessful, but it was not long before he became master of his work. As usual, Mr. Cundy had secured two or three fresh hands for the harvest, and these eyed Andrew rather curiously. They saw at once that he was not of their ilk, and consequently did not feel over-friendly. Andrew said nothing to them, however, and did not mind much when they laughed at his awkwardness. They had heard that more than twenty years before his father had farmed Trevadlock, and that he, since he had grown up, had been a soldier, but, like all the rest, knew nothing more.

One of the men the farmer had hired was a strong bully by the name of Jimmer. What his surname was I do not know; he was everywhere spoken of as "Jimmer," and was by no means the most prepossessing of characters. He was a short, bull-necked man, clumsy, but possessing wonderful strength.

When Andrew had entered the field on Monday morning, Jimmer eyed him somewhat critically. He would like, if he had dared, to have felt his arms and legs; but Andrew did not invite familiarity. He was amongst those who laughed loudest at the young man's awkwardness, and possessing a dry humour, constantly raised a guffaw at Andrew's expense.

"He ought to be leadin' zye," he would say, "cause he'd d' kip stroke so purty; he'd only give two sweeps for wawn crookful."

Then again he would say,—

" You do kip yer heel down beautiful, Mr. Vine Vingers, and yer coose 'es casted, purty and suent."

Once Andrew, like most beginners do, drove the point of his scythe into the ground, and the steel striking against a stone caused a spark to fly.

" There now," said Jimmer, " he's goin' to chait th'oull Seccomb, and dig a grave vur hisself. Be careful now, or you'll catch the field avire, and the barley es wurth more'n you be, I knaw."

No one seemed to enjoy these jokes more than young Sim Cundy, who had conceived a spite against Andrew and who constantly tried to lead Jimmer to tease the " cut-up swell," as he called him.

Andrew was perfectly cool, however, and in spite of Jimmer's prognostication that there would be a funeral before the day was over, he worked through the long hours with comparative ease, and that, too, without drinking large quantities of beer as Jimmer had done.

The next day, however, was not so uneventful. Instead of cutting barley, they cut wheat. This requires a different process from barley. Wheat is cut and bound on the same day, while barley is thrown out in straight rows to lie for six or seven days. Thus it came about that to follow the mowers came several women, each of whom took away from the standing corn what the mowers cut and swept towards it. Each mower had his swath, or course, to cut, and consequently a certain distance was allowed between them, or the woman who gathered between them would be in danger of being cut by the following scythe. Disappointed at not arousing Andrew's ire on the previous day, Jimmer had arranged to be the mower next behind him, and the young man saw that a girl was to be his gatherer. One of the binders was an old man, close upon seventy, whom he found out to be this girl's grandfather.

For a few hours all went on quietly enough, Jimmer evidently doing his utmost to tire out the young man, who was new to the work. Of course the bully could use the scythe far better than Andrew, and found no difficulty in coming up close to him. This he often did, to the danger of Kitty Crews. Besides this, Andrew was

close to the gatherer before him, and so dared not work faster, even if he could.

Presently the old man, her grandfather, who went by the name of Amos Crews, spoke to Jimmer.

"Be careful now, Jimmer," he said, "or thee'lt cut the maid's feet."

Jimmer's answer was only an oath, and then he worked more savagely than before. Andrew heard the girl panting behind him, and he was beginning to feel angry. For himself he did not care a fig, but that a poor girl should suffer was to him cruel.

The course, however, was cut without accident, and they walked backwards to begin again. Turning to young Sim, who was one of the binders, Andrew said in a low voice,—

"I should think that you would see that the girl you court should not be in danger."

"Mind yer own bisness," said the young man, "and see that you don't interfere with the affairs of your betters."

Andrew did not reply, but, turning to Jimmer, asked him to be careful.

"Oa, you've come on that line, be 'ee?" said Jimmer, with a sneer. "I thought you'd soon shaw the stuff you are made ov. Aw, aw."

Again there was a laugh at Andrew's expense, and the young man bit his lip savagely. They had not mowed halfway across the field again when the girl gave a cry and limped away. In his anxiety to "breathe" Andrew, he had done what he had been warned against.

All stopped while Andrew turned to Jimmer.

"You are a great coward," he said hotly, "and a brute into the bargain!"

"Be I a coward?" said Jimmer. "Well, we'll just prove it. Stan' round, chaps, and see fair play."

"You *be* a brute," said her grandfather, "and ef I wer forty year younger, I would give 'ee the lerrickin' you deserve; but you, sir, doan't 'ee try to tich un, or he may make it bad for 'ee. Jimmer es a strong fighter, and he doan't fight fair."

Kitty also came up, and begged him not to get into trouble for her. Evidently Jimmer was greatly feared.

"Look 'ere, ould man," said Jimmer, "you're waik and shaky, so I caan't tich 'ee. I'm sorry I cut your maid's base cheeld's fut, but I'm not goin' to be called a coward by a whipper-snipper like that, with his fine ways," and he rushed at Andrew like a mad bull.

Andrew detested the brawl, but he felt the best thing he could do would be to conquer the brute by brute force. He easily avoided Jimmer's rush, therefore, and exerting himself, and using the skill he had gathered during the past years, he so punished the bully that he was not able to work next day.

"Thank 'ee," said old Amos Crews; "you've done a good thing. I'm a local praicher 'mong the Brianites, and I doan't bleeve in fightin', but you've done a good thing, and ef ever you want a friend, th'oull Amos 'll be one."

Andrew shook the old man's hand with a smile.

"They zay you'm Andrew Fairfax's booy," continued Amos. "I dunnaw ef it's trew, but you'm made of jist the same sort of stuff. I doan't bleeve in fightin', nor you doan't neither, or you wudd'n stand what you have; but you've done right, and thank'ee. Es for the pore maid, I'm 'fraid she woan't work no more for the 'arvest."

Andrew turned, and saw that while Jimmer sat against a corn shock, stunned and bleeding, the poor girl lay on the ground white and helpless.

"Help me to take her home," he said to one of the men and a minute later she was carried from the field.

CHAPTER IX

ARCADIA (?)

DURING the remainder of the harvest Andrew had nothing to contend with of which he could complain. His treatment of Jimmer had established his reputation as a boxer, while his kindness to Kitty Crews had won the respect of the older people. He got to enjoy his work, too, and as a good number were together, it was usually made pleasant. The weather was fine, and this, added to plain yet wholesome food, free fresh air, and constant

exercise, purified his blood and strengthened his sinews. By the end of the harvest he could mow, bind, or build a mow with the best. And Cundy, the farmer, while wondering at his being there, secretly hoped that he would be able to keep him.

He got friendly with the men, too, and they grew communicative, and before long he learnt the conditions of their life, and the hardship they had to endure. He soon found, too, that they were not so unintelligent as he had thought them, and while farm labourers were as a rule churlish and ignorant, there were some in the parish, notably a young shoemaker and a young miller, who both read and thought on sound principles. He found, moreover, that the people enjoyed harvest time. It was true they worked harder, and more hours, but there was interest in it—they saw strange faces, and besides, they worked in gangs, instead of singly and alone.

The harvest came to an end at length, however, and then the rainy weather set in. Every one again settled down to the humdrum life, wherein weariness and loneliness formed the chief elements.

The trees soon began to lose their green, and the country its beauty. The clouds were often leaden, and for days together driving mists swept over the country side.

Andrew soon found, however, that it must be very bad weather for a farmer to allow his servants to be idle. It is true, in pouring rain they did not work out of doors, yet the young man knew what it was to plough throughout a whole day in wet clothes, until he was chilled to the very bone. Once or twice he almost made up his mind to leave, or at least cease to work on the farm, but bravely resolved to plod on. He knew that if he would realize their position, the iron which entered into their souls must also enter into his. Besides, he grew to be interested in their life, and schemes began to form themselves in his mind.

Winter and summer on a farm he found to be marked by a very great difference. Except during the harvest, the work was not nearly so hard in summer as in winter; besides which it was a thousand times more pleasant. Winter work on a farm he found to be briefly this: They

rose in the morning at six, and found their way to the yard, and fed the cattle with turnips, straw, and hay; then they groomed the horses, and fed them, ready for work at eight o'clock. After this they cleared out the cattle houses. This was done while it was yet dark by the aid of a lantern, and done, too, before breakfast by the men-servants. The women servants were up at the same time, their duty being to milk the cows, feed the pigs, and to cook the breakfast. At half-past seven breakfast was usually ready, for which half an hour was allowed. At eight o'clock the men went into the fields to work, only exceptionally bad weather hindering them from doing so. There they worked, ploughing, carting earth from the ditches into the middle of the fields to form manure heaps, carting manure from the yards, and so on. This went on until twelve, when they went to dinner. After dinner they continued working until five, when they returned and brought the cows to the house, and fed them, the girls milking them while the men attended to the young bullocks and horses. This usually took until after six, when they went to supper. After supper they sat around a huge fire until eight o'clock, when they went to the cattle houses again, and fed and bedded the beasts for the night. This done, they came in and went to bed, and slept till from between five and six the following morning, and then again the same round. Andrew found the life to be almost unbearable. There were but few books in the house, and they were not attractive.

Sometimes Andrew went to visit the houses of the labourers, and he found that in a vast majority of cases they were unhealthy and uncomfortable. He had formed ideas of rural comfort, and painted pictures of rural happiness. He found he had made great mistakes, however. In summer the nature of the cottages did not matter so much, but in the winter all was different. He found the floors cold and wet, streams of water ran down the walls, while dishes had to be placed in various parts of the bedrooms in order to catch the drops which fell from the roofs. The sanitary arrangements, too, were anything but what they should be, while general discomfort prevailed.

One day Andrew found his way into the cottage of Amos Crews. The old man was bent almost double by rheumatism, and was wheezing terribly. He was sitting in the great open chimney by the side of a smoky fire. It was raining hard when he entered—so hard that even Cundy did not ask the servants to work.

"Very wet, Amos," said Andrew.

"It's bit wet," replied the old man; "but I hope it'll clear off by midday, so as I can git sixpence or so."

"How old are you, Amos?"

"Le's me see," said the old man. "How many 'ear es et since the Crimean War?"

Andrew told him.

"Then I'm seventy-two," said Amos.

"But surely an old man of your age ought not to work! You ought to be able to sit down quietly and rest now."

"I spoase I sh'll ev to go soon, but I waan't as long as I can help it."

"Go where?"

"To the Union," and the old man's voice trembled.

"I suppose you haven't been able to save?"

"Saave!" replied the old man; "how could I saave? I never got more'n 'bout twelve or thirteen shlllin' a week, and I've had a family to bring up. I ded hope, I ded for sure, that I should be able to hav' 'nough to settle down, but I caan't. But I c'n work yet! And I will work too! I'll drap down in the rooad afore I'll go to the great 'ouse."

"But did you never have a chance of joining a club or benefit society?"

"Never eerd ov waun afore I wur too ould to join."

All this time his wife sat listening. She was not so old as Amos, but looked older and weaker.

"And your children?" said Andrew. "Where are they?"

"We've 'ad nine," said the old woman. "Fower ev died, and th' other five, well, they'm gone. Ya zee, the other booys wudden stay 'ome. There was nothin' fur 'em 'ere, they zaid, and more ther wadn't, so we cudden kip 'em. They immigraated to 'Merica. One o' the maidens got married to a hind over to Cailwick, and they caan't 'elp we. As fur t'other maid," and the old woman's

'voice trembled, "she went wrong, and we doan' knaw where she es. Kitty es 'er cheeld."

"And Kitty lives with you?"

"Iss. She's a good maid. I hop' she mayn't be deceived." And tears trickled down the old woman's face.

"She do help us a bit," she went on. "She can git tenpence a day and her mait, and she do give we the tenpence. While the weather es fine we doan't mind, that's ef Amos's as'ma and screwmatics bean't very bad, for then he can work. There, Amos, 'tes clearin' up; you can turn dressin' up by the lew hadge."

Amos got up and looked out. He rubbed his stiff joints, and tried to stand up straight.

"I spoase I mus' go," he murmured wearily, and then the old man, seventy-two years of age, hobbled off to the field to save himself from the workhouse.

"I bleeve we should boath be better ef the 'ouse was dry," said the old woman, as Amos tottered away; "but we darn't complain, or we should be turned out. Th' oull Beans do allays sarve us a trick ef we complain."

"But the young lady to whom it all belongs, what of her?"

"I doan' knaw. I spoase she doan't care so long as she can git three pound a year, which we do pay. Besides, oal the 'ouses round be the same, and Beans do zay it would cost more than they'm wuth to do 'em up. And they zay, there's plenty ov room in the great 'ouse."

Andrew went away with a sad heart. "What is the life of these people worth?" he thought. "They are born, they eat, they sleep, they grow old, they die. They don't really live,—they only exist."

A labourer of about forty passed by him on his way to the field.

"There," he thought, "that fellow will be able to drag out a weary life, and have just enough to live while he's strong and can work. In twenty years more he'll be an old man; then, when he can't work, he'll have to go to the Workhouse.

He walked on a few steps in deep thought. "I'll do something, though," he muttered. "Now I'm here, I'll try and make things different."

He worked through the remainder of the day without speaking to Zacky, who wondered what was the matter with him. As soon as he had supper, he went to his room and changed his clothes, after which he gave Zacky a few coppers to do his evening work for him. Then he went away by himself.

Near the mansion house of Ashwater, and on the estate, stood the steward's villa. For a long time past the steward lived mostly at the great house, but according to report the lady who owned the Ashwater estate had come to stay, and therefore Mr. Beans had taken up his residence at his own house. It was to the steward's residence that Andrew made his way. He went up to the front door, and knocked. A servant quickly came, and told him that her master was at home. He told her his name, and waited at the door. In a few seconds she returned.

"You are one of the men-servants who live up at Trevadlock, are you not?" she said, eyeing him curiously.

"Yes."

"Then master says you must go around to the back door."

With a laugh, Andrew did as he was bid. He was not surprised, for he had found that the feeling of caste was as strong as he would be likely to find it in India. The carpenter held himself aloof from the labourer; the small farmer thought himself a stage above the carpenter or any of the tradesmen; the large farmer did not fraternize with the small one; the man who farmed his own land looked down on the one who rented his; the parson looked down on them all; while the squire, as a rule, patronized the parson.

Thus when Andrew was told to go to the back door, he knew he had broken the law of caste, and what he had to say would not be received very graciously.

Admitted at the back door, Andrew was conducted to Mr. Beans's office. He found that gentleman seated before a good fire, evidently enjoying himself.

"Ah, you are Fairfax," said he, as Andrew entered. "You have been a soldier, and are now living at Trevadlock."

Andrew was silent.

"And what is your business, young fellow?"

"I am afraid you will regard my business as somewhat strange," replied Andrew.

"Very likely; but what is it?" asked Mr. Beans, looking at him keenly, and wondering at his gentlemanly appearance.

"It is this," replied Andrew. "Since I have been living in this neighbourhood, I have found that the cottages on the Ashwater estate are in a disreputable condition. They are neither wind-tight nor water-tight. The roofs and walls let in water, while neither doors nor windows are a sufficient prevention from the bad weather. Whether you know it or no, they are engendering sickness and disease. I should not be at all surprised if both at the labourers' cottages, at the farms, and in the village, there is an outbreak of diphtheria. The houses are not fit to live in, and I have come to you as the steward of the estate to see if something cannot be done."

He spoke without hesitation or nervousness. He had reckoned up his man the moment he entered the room, and knew what to do.

Mr. Beans stared at him in astonishment.

"Who—who the——are you?" he exclaimed.

"I don't know that it matters who I am," replied Andrew; "the question is not myself at all. It is the miserable conditions under which the people have to live."

"Didn't I hear that you are Andrew Fairfax's son, and that you are a servant on the place, a part of which your father used to farm?"

"You have heard correctly."

"Then," said the steward loftily, "don't trouble about the business of your betters. You don't know what you are talking about."

"I think you will find I do know what I am talking about," said Andrew quietly; "and I think this, too, that if the authorities examine the cottages on the Ashwater estate, revelations will be made not very creditable either to steward or landlord."

Again Mr. Beans stared at Andrew in astonishment. Surely this young fellow could not be a farm servant!

And then he reflected that he had been a soldier, and had therefore picked up a little knowledge, so he said scornfully,—

"Authorities, my lad! why, the authorities do as I tell them! What authority would dare to oppose me?" And then, as if fearing he had said too much, he continued, "But there is nothing wrong. The people have lived in the same kind of cottages for generations. Go back to the barrack-room again, young Fairfax,—that's your place. You will be better off there than here."

"You will do nothing, then?"

"Nothing; of course I shall do nothing."

"Then I shall be obliged to resort to other means."

"You—*you* resort to other means! And what, pray?"

"Oh, you will know in good time."

Mr. Beans then revealed the stuff of which he was made.

"Go out," he cried, his face red with passion. "How dare you, a low-bred rascal, to come and talk so to a gentleman? Get out, I say, and if ever you show your nose here again, I'll set the dogs on you, and have you horsewhipped."

"Thank you for your gentlemanly treatment," replied Andrew, with a laugh, as he went out.

As for Mr. Beans, he swore and fumed for a long time.

"That's what a little schooling does for these rascals," he muttered. "Actually he's had the impudence to think about the bad condition of the cottages! I wish I knew if any of the cottagers put him up to it. If they did, I'd have them chucked out neck and crop, I would, by——. But there, they would not dare to do it!" And Mr. Beans prepared a stiff glass of toddy in order to comfort himself.

As for Andrew, he went back to Trevadlock with a determined look upon his face.

"No," he muttered, "I will not let this thing rest because I've received one rebuff. I have failed once, but I'll try another method."

He got back to the house, and found his way into his bedroom. Miss Sarah Cundy looked at him longingly, and wondered where he'd been.

"I wonder what father would say if I went out for a

walk with him?" she said to herself; "'cause of course he's not like other servants, and he's so nice. I wonder how I could let him know, because of course he would never think that I have any thoughts about him, seeing I'm so much above him." And Miss Sarah sighed deeply.

As for Andrew, he sat down by a rickety table that was placed near the bed, and began to write. It was a letter, which ran as follows:—

"MADAM,—

"I have discovered since I have been living in the parish of St. Neot that the cottages on your estate are in a disreputable condition. The thatch is broken, the windows are without glass, the doors are rotten, and their general condition is so dilapidated, so comfortless, so unhealthy, that they are unfit for the residence of human beings. Indeed, I am sure that did you see them, you would not allow a dog of yours to be kenneled in such places. So bad are they that I very much fear that if they do not receive attention, and that speedily, before the winter is over the poor people will be visited by diphtheria.

"I have laid these facts before your steward, who indignantly refused to pay any attention to my statements. I therefore appeal to you. For your own sake, and for the sake of humanity, I beseech you to investigate this matter, and see whether I have not told you the truth. If you will do this, I shall have no fear as to results.

"Your obedient servant,

"ANDREW FAIRFAX."

This letter he folded up, and forwarded to Miss Lezant, Ashwater, St. Neot.

Two days afterwards he received the following reply:—

"Miss Lezant begs to inform Andrew Fairfax that such matters as those mentioned in his letter are entrusted to her steward, in whom she has the fullest confidence."

The letter was prettily written on scented paper, which brought back to the young man's mind the old days in the West End of London.

"Evidently she has submitted my letter to Beans, and he has poisoned her mind against me; else she is one of

those ladies who care nothing about the comfort or life of her tenants, provided she can get their money. But I'll not give up yet; I'll let light in upon this question, or I'll know why." And he clenched his hand savagely.

Andrew was very much excited, and as soon as his work was over he paid a visit to two or three cottages to see how the poor people fared; then he came home, and went to his room again. He took from his trunk several sheets of paper, and then, cutting them in slips, began to write. His words came easily, and he wrote with precision and vigour. When he had written a dozen pages, he stopped.

"There is material for a dozen articles," he muttered. "This one is only an introduction. I'll send it, however, and tell the editor what I have in my mind."

Three days afterwards the Misses Cundy, who had been watching eagerly for the postman, held in their dainty hands a letter addressed to "Andrew Fairfax, Esq." They saw, moreover, that it had a London postmark, and on the back of the envelope was the name of a great London newspaper.

When he came in to dinner, Miss Sarah handed him the letter, with a smile. It had caused him to rise in their estimation, and they wondered more and more who he could be.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised if he wasn't a gentleman in disguise," said Miss Sarah to her sisters.

Andrew put the letter in his pocket, and then after dinner went out alone and read it.

He found it to be written by the editor of the paper to whom he had sent the article. It contained a cheque for a good sum, and a request for further contributions of a similar nature.

When he had read this, he felt that he had at last gained a possible footing in the world of letters.

CHAPTER X

A CHANCE MEETING

ANDREW was greatly pleased at his success, and more pleased because he felt he had written something worth the writing. He had voiced a great want; he had expressed an urgent need. At first came the temptation

to give up the drudgery at the farm, and take rooms in the village, thus obtaining an opportunity to give his whole time to literary work. He quickly dispelled it, however. As it was, he could not write *altogether* as the country people felt. He had hopes of the future, and bright prospects. They had none of these things. Many of them had no idea of being anything but the miserable drudges they were. He could at any time go back to the city, but for them there were no such chances. They were chained there for life. They had no power to go away and take their families with them, and even if they had, they would be no better off. Thus he could not feel the drudgery of life as they did, and if he gave up the work, he would be apart from them ; they would cease to trust him, and he would not be able to do what he wanted. And so he decided to stay with them for awhile longer, as one of them. He would share their burdens, work as they worked until he knew their real needs, and then he would try and help them.

He had made an attempt to have their houses altered, and he had failed ; but he would not give up. He could not do harm, and he might be able to do good.

As yet, while there had been a great deal of rain, the cold had not been intense. The weather had been dirty, and what the people called " misruble," rather than severe. It only wanted a fortnight to Christmas, and there had been no frost worth speaking of.

It was Saturday afternoon, and Andrew had been ordered to go to a neighbouring farm, the other servants having to do his work for that evening. It was about three o'clock, and the day was beginning to decline. In another hour darkness would be upon them. Ordinarily it was not dark quite so soon, but it was a misty day, and great masses of clouds hid the sun. In order to get to the farm he had been ordered to visit, he had to go up a dirty road. The road bordered on some fields, and thus several gateways had to be made in order to keep the cattle from going from one field to another. He had passed through two of these gateways, when he heard the sound of horse's hoofs. He did not pay much attention, as he thought it was probably the farmer's son riding to St. Lerrick market, or perhaps a servant taking a horse to be shod. He found to his surprise,

however, that it was a young lady in a fashionable riding habit, who had evidently been visiting the farm to which he was going.

She rode up to the closed gate, and hesitated; then, lifting her head, she saw Andrew.

"Here, young man," she cried, "come and open the gate."

Andrew came up quickly, and did as she requested. He only caught one glimpse of her face, but it struck him as familiar. She rode by him without a word, and then, while he was closing it again, she had taken sixpence from her purse. This coin she flung to him, saying—

"Thank you, young man."

Andrew took up the coin rather grimly, and then held it in his hand as if hesitating, when his attention was drawn to her again.

Whether the sudden movement of her hand in throwing the coin to Andrew frightened her horse or no, I will not say; certain it is he began to plunge violently, and by the look in his eye Andrew concluded him to be in no playful mood. She was by no means deficient in courage, however, and coolly tried to bring him to his senses. This was in vain, however, and Andrew, seeing that he became more and more unmanageable, caught him by the bridle, and in a few seconds succeeded in mastering him. He still looked wild and restive, however, while the young lady showed signs of anxiety.

"If you will allow me," said Andrew, "I will lead him through the fields. There are two other gateways, and they will cause you trouble."

She looked at him keenly, as if trying to estimate his social status. Evidently his mode of speech did not correspond with his coarse attire.

"Thank you," she said; "I shall be glad if you will."

While going through the first field he caught himself glancing cautiously at her face, and his fancy became confirmed. It was no wonder he had remembered her, for hers was a face that once seen was not easily forgotten. I am not going to try and describe it, for I should miserably fail. No words of mine could give any true idea of that proud, handsome girl; and flushed as she was with excitement, her great brown eyes flashing, and her auburn hair,

having escaped its confinement, hanging in heavy masses down her back, Andrew thought he had never seen any one so perfect.

They went through the first field in silence. Evidently she was in doubt as to how she should address this handsome fellow, who, in spite of his coarse attire, carried himself so proudly. When he had opened the next gate, and got into the second field, she said abruptly,—

"Do you live in this neighbourhood, young man?"

"Yes, I am living here at present," he replied.

His answer did not give any opening for further conversation, but she seemed to have a desire to find out who he was.

"Do you know the clergyman here?"

"Not personally. I have heard him preach, but I have not the honour of being personally acquainted with him."

Again she looked at him with wonder. Certainly this could not be a country-bred youth.

"It is a quaint old church, I suppose?"

"Yes, very. I believe it is one of the Elizabethan churches. It wants restoring badly, but I am given to understand that the people have not sufficient interest in it to spend the necessary money."

She was certain now that the young man who led her horse was by no means a common farm labourer. Indeed, he was far superior to any of the farmers' sons. Who could he be? Perhaps there was some farmer in the neighbourhood rich enough to give his son a superior education, but——

Her conjectures were again disturbed. They came to the next gate, which Andrew with deft fingers opened.

"I will lead the horse to the parish road, and then you will be all right, I've no doubt," he said, and then he walked on quietly.

"I am extremely obliged to you," she said at length. "I hardly know what I should have done, for Prince was getting very restive and unmanageable. I hope I have not detained you?"

She looked at him as though she wished him to make some statement concerning himself, but Andrew did not satisfy her.

"I am glad to have been of service," he said; and then, taking the sixpence she had thrown to him, and handing it to her, he said, "I should be glad if you would take back this coin. I thank you for your kindness, but I would rather have no reward."

He dropped the bridle then, and she, muttering a kind of excuse, held out her hand, but the horse, feeling himself free, started off at a trot, leaving the young man with the sixpence in his hand.

Andrew listened until the sound of the horse's hoofs died away, and then looked at the sixpence curiously.

"Very well, then," he muttered, "I'll keep it. It is, the first sixpence I ever earned for leading a lady's horse. Who is she, I wonder?"

He walked back rapidly to the farm, and for the first time felt that winter in the country was not so bad after all. This little incident had been a break in the dull monotony; it was but a little thing, but it had set his blood tingling, and had made his mind active. Who the girl was he made no conjectures, beyond the fact that she was some one paying a visit to a family near, or had come out for a ride.

He delivered his message to the farmer, and then came back in time for supper. He took no notice of Miss Sarah's smiles, or of young Sim Cundy's sneers. He evidently saw that one disliked him as much as the other liked him; but he was indifferent to either. After supper he went to St. Neot, where he found that a large number of the labourers of the parish had congregated.

It was a dreary evening, and Andrew wondered what enjoyment they could find. He passed by the old parish church. It was dark and silent. The great building was only opened one day in the week, and then no efforts were made to make it light and cheery. He came to the Methodist chapel. That likewise was empty and forbidding. Neither church nor chapel sought to provide any pleasure for the poor rustics to whom pleasure is such a rare thing. He looked at the village school-house. Here, too, quietness and darkness reigned. It was closed the night before, and would not be opened until the following Monday morning.

He found his way into the cottages of some of the people he had learned to know. He found the women busy mending clothes, while the children were sprawling around the house. They had no toys, and, with the exception of two families, no books. Many of the children, too, were pale-faced and hollow-eyed; they did not look healthy and strong like country children should look, and as he looked around the houses, he did not wonder at it. The floors were cold and wet, and the walls were green with damp. The air, too, was foul, while the ceilings were scarcely high enough to enable the young man to stand up straight. He found that in many cases there was only one bedroom, and in this room seven or eight people had to sleep.

No doubt St. Neot was anything but a model village, but it was nevertheless the picture of many an agricultural village in Loamshire. And what was worse about it, the people dared not complain about the houses. If they did, they might be turned out at the will of Mr. Beans, and then they would be entirely homeless, unless they could induce the guardians to take them into the workhouse.

He went out into the village lanes again. The rain had ceased to fall, but the atmosphere was damp and clammy. On his way he looked in at the village smithy. Here half a dozen men had gathered, who looked longingly at the roaring fire; but soon they were to be deprived of that, for it was Saturday, and the smith wanted to go home to his cottage. As Andrew entered, they gave him a respectful greeting, for, although he was a labourer like themselves, they felt he was somehow different.

Andrew listened to their conversation, and was much interested in the talk of an old man who read *Reynolds' Newspaper*.

"What we want," said the old man, "es to have the Church disestablished, and a Republican Guv'ment. Here we be a-payin' our passon seven hunderd a ere, while th'oull Queen 'ev got more'n a thousan' pound a day. Think ef oal that money was distrebuted 'mong the people!"

The men nodded their heads approvingly. The old man's idea was pleasant, and promised well.

"How much would it affect you if it were done?" asked Andrew.

"Why, a lot, to be sure."

"Not a bit of it," replied the young man. "The disestablishment of the Church and the dethronement of the Queen wouldn't put a single penny-piece in your pockets. Supposing your parson's seven hundred a year were taken away. You wouldn't see the colour of the money."

"Where would et go then?"

"Probably to the lady who owns the living, or the Government would devote it to some other purpose not more beneficial to you."

Most of them who had gathered looked helplessly at Andrew, but Nath Bently, who was a kind of village oracle, quickly responded.

"Then 'tes a big shame," he said. "Here be I now seventy 'ere ould, and I've got to work, or go to the union. T'other day I was awful poorly, zo I went to Jimmy Yelland. 'Jimmy,' I zed, 'caan't 'ee give me a little 'elp from the parish?' 'Ef I do,' ses 'ee, 'you mus'n' work, and you'd only 'ave haalf a crown a week. Or,' ses 'ee, 'you c'n go to the 'ouse.' Well, th'oull woman an' me do hate the thot ov goin' to the union, and es fur livin' 'pon haalf a crown a week, we caan't do ut. So I spoase I must work 'till I do drap. Thews chaps 'ere who can git twelve shellen' a week now they'm young, think 'tes oal right, but wait till they git bad, and caan't work. I wur talkin' the other day to th' passon. 'You shud have saved, Nathaniel,' says 'ee. 'Look 'ere, Mr. Childs,' says I, 'how could you save if you only had ten shellen' a week? Look to our houses; I'm blowed if they'm fit to live in, and 'ere we go on like this.'"

Nath stopped literally out of breath, while the blacksmith began to close the shop door.

"Look 'ere, young feller," said Nath, when they got outside, "I shud think weth oal yer larnin', you could 'elp us a bit."

"I must think," said Andrew; "but can't you help yourselves? Why don't you unite and demand better houses to live in?"

"We'm 'fraid," said the men, "ef we do anything, th'oull Beans 'll sarve us out."

"But won't the clergyman help you?"

"What, the passen? Tell 'ee nearly oal of we poor people do go to chapel, and th'oull passen 'll do nothin' for they that doan't go to church."

The group began to break up.

"Where be 'ee goin'?" said one.

"I'm goin' home to cheer up th'oull woman," said Nath, "and you ought to do the same."

Nearly all thought otherwise. "'Tis so miserable and cold," they said, "and we'm goin' up to the *Queen's 'Ead*."

Saturday was pay-day with them, and most of them had a few shillings; so those who were not teetotalers found their way to the inn. Andrew looked after them with a sigh. He knew that it was a wrong step for them to take, yet where could they go? The public-house was the only place in the whole village which was bright and open for companionship. It is true they ought to have thought of their wives and little ones, but in many the sense of duty was not high, and certainly there was but little to attract them there.

Moreover, they did not seem to want to go to the public-house. There are but few in the country who are drink-sodden and chained by the habit like those who frequent the gin palaces of London. A large number of the country people go to the public-house because they are lonely, and because the human heart longs for society.

Andrew went towards the churchyard gates. A group of youths were hulking about. They had nothing to do, and there was nothing to attract them. They had no money, so they were not wanted at the public-house. Where should they go? There was no place so attractive, and so the lads, who, to use their own phraseology, "had'n' got a maid to go a-courtin' wi'," slouched around the roads trying to find something to interest them.

Andrew tried to enter into conversation with them, and found that the staple subjects were "physical strength" and "goin' a-courtin'."

Who could blame them? There was little interest taken in their lives, and no provision was made for them. From year's end to year's end little happened to stir their sluggish pulses or arouse them to energy. They had no prospects, no future. As far as they could see, their

future might be summed up thus: Get married; have a cottage of their own. A struggle for bread all their lives, and then, if they did not fall sick and die while they were yet comparatively young, they would spend their last days in the workhouse.

I am not writing in an exaggerated way. I have seen, and I know. Of course this does not usually apply to the farmers, or to those who have learnt a trade; but to the rural labourers it does apply.

Andrew felt downhearted and almost hopeless. What could be done? He left the group of youths and went towards the *Queen's Head*. He looked in at the bar-parlour, but he was prohibited from going there, for labourers did not mix with the farmers. They were well dressed there, and seemingly had plenty of money. Their staple conversation was the price of cattle, corn, etc., and each expressed the opinion that the discontent among the labourers was unreasonable and absurd, and must not be tolerated.

He entered the kitchen. A dozen or more men sat around on the forms, and they, to use their own terms, were beginning to enjoy themselves. They had already been regaled with a song telling of the fly who got into the treacle-jug, and were now waiting for the "Death of Cock Robin." Two lads were there. They had evidently received their wage, and were now in a position to spend it. Besides these there were two young men between twenty and thirty; all the rest were middle-aged or old. Andrew found that young, strong men were very scarce in St. Neot, and when he thought about it he did not wonder.

What attraction did they find at the public-house? Some doubtless were fond of drink, but for the most part they were drawn there because they were lonely, and because they wanted brightness, warmth, and, most of all, company.

He went to the other public-house. It told the same story, it presented the same appearance. Here were these two publicans who lived and throve mostly on the money earned by those whose week's wage was not enough to keep one in comfort, much less a family.

After this he went back to Trevadlock. The great

kitchen was dimly lighted, but a good fire burned in the great open chimney. One of the servant girls had gone to see her mother, the other sat sewing beside the fire. The Cundys had company, and they were sitting in the parlour. The two lads were not yet come home. What should he do? There was not a book in the house that he had not read; there was no one to whom he could speak. He did not want to go to bed.

He went to his bedroom and got some paper; this he brought down, and began writing another article. He called it "The Dreariness of Country Life." He wrote rapidly while the girl snored and while the great clock ticked solemnly. He had just finished it when Miss Sarah came in.

"Writing?" she said. Andrew nodded.

"Don't you feel lonely?"

"Very, sometimes."

"Well, you can have company if you want"; and Miss Sarah looked exceedingly loving.

"You ain't like a common servant," Miss Sarah went on, "and I don't believe father would say anything if we went out together."

Andrew looked up at her laughingly. For a moment he was inclined to commence a flirtation with the buxom country girl who so plainly asked him. He felt like saying, "Let us go out for a walk." He thought it would break the monotony of life. Besides, he was young, and always had been fond of society.

Before the words escaped his lips, however, he thought of his experience that very afternoon. The picture of the handsome maiden, with great brown eyes, "half bold, half shy," rose before him; he heard her voice again, and he was silent. The thought of walking with the farmer's daughter was repugnant to him. His heart beat strangely, his blood rushed madly to his head.

He did not have the pain of refusing Miss Sarah, however, for the door opened, and the two men-servants came in, accompanied by young Sim Cundy, whereupon she hastily left the room.

Shortly afterwards Andrew went to bed, but he did not sleep. He thought of the condition of the poor country

people who lived around him, but he thought more of the young lady whom he had met, and he wondered how and when he might meet her again.

CHAPTER XI

ANDREW GOES TO CHURCH

THE next day was Sunday. What should he do? The church was by no means an attraction. He had been a few times since the first Sunday he had spent in St. Neot, but the service became less interesting than otherwise. He found, too, that on the morning he first went a larger number than usual had congregated to hear the banns of marriage called between a certain couple. Still, he thought he would go. There was nothing to keep him in the house, and the weather was too cold and wet to allow him to stay in the fields. During breakfast Miss Sarah looked at him longingly, and was seemingly grieved that he should have to sit at the opposite end of the table without a cloth on it, while young Sim was evidently pleased that there was such a great gulf between them. It is true his surroundings did not aid his appetite. Both Bill and Zacky, who wore their working clothes, smelt very strongly of the cowhouse. They breathed heavily while they ate, too, as though they were in great labour, while the servant-girls made a tremendous noise as they sucked at their spoons. One of them had a cold in her head too, and was minus a handkerchief. Still, Andrew's appetite was good and he swallowed his bread and milk with a certain amount of relish.

"What are you going to do?" asked Andrew of Bill and Zacky after breakfast.

"Drive the cows to field."

"And after that?"

"Think I shall look after my rabbut gin," replied Zacky.

"Nothing else?"

"Why, there's nothing else to do. You caan't go courtin' ov a mornin'."

Andrew turned away and sighed. Country people were often accused of being dull and stupid. What wonder was there? He went to his room and dressed for church. Since

the winter had come on he had gone to the nearest town and got an overcoat. It was of good material and well made. He had bought a silk hat, too, and a new pair of winter gloves. These he put on, and a few minutes later stood in the kitchen ready to start. As we have hinted, Andrew was tall, well-built, and a handsome fellow. Brought up at a good school, he had been taught how to use his limbs. He had, moreover, the unmistakable look of a gentleman. Had a stranger seen him, and been told that he was the owner of the parish, that stranger would not have doubted.

Young Sim Cundy entered the room at the same time and looked at Andrew angrily.

"What do you mean by dressing like that?" he asked.

"Why, is there any law to regulate my clothing?" asked Andrew, with a laugh.

"Do you know you are our servant? How dare you come out as though you were better than your betters?"

"Why, would you have me dress like you?" said Andrew, looking at young Sim's flaring necktie.

"Look here," said young Sim angrily, "I'm master, and you're servant. You mustn't go to church this morning. Pull those clothes off, and take the horses to the off farm."

"No," said Andrew, "I shall not do it."

"That's right," said a voice; and turning round they both saw Miss Sarah.

"Look here, Mr. Fine Fingers," said young Sim, "you want to be taken down a button-hole, you do, and——"

Andrew laughed and walked away, while young Sim fumed with rage. For a servant to dare to act like Andrew had done was something terrible in the eyes of the young farmer. On every hand the young stranger had been admired, while he, his master, had been ignored. But he would pay him out for it, he was determined on that, and he fancied his plans would be easily carried out. His two brothers did not live much at home, as they had both gone to the nearest town to learn a trade, and so he would be able to have everything his own way.

There were very few people at church—less than usual, in fact. The place was miserably cold, too, and Andrew was glad when the service was over. No banns were "called," and consequently church was not attractive.

Just before the service concluded, however, Andrew looked around the building, and in doing so he saw the young lady he had seen the day before. His heart gave a great bound. Did she see him? He was not sure, and yet he fancied he saw a look of recognition.

He went out of the church and walked up the path very slowly. He hoped she would pass by him. He hardly knew his reason for this hope, but he had it, nevertheless, and he was gratified. Just before he reached the churchyard gates two ladies passed him. One was young, the other was old. The first was the lady he had helped the preceding day.

Did she recognize him? She looked up, and he was on the point of raising his hat, but before he could do so her eyes dropped again, and the two passed on. He longed to ask the villagers who she was, but he could not.

On his way home young Sim passed him with his three sisters. The young man held his head high, but the girls looked inclined to be friendly. Presently Miss Sarah stopped.

"I am sorry Sim spoke to you so—Mr. Andrew." She was going to say "Andrew" without the prefix, but it seemed impossible to treat this young man as a servant.

"I assure you I don't mind in the least, Miss Sarah."

"I don't look on you as a servant."

"But you ought, Miss Sarah, for I am."

"Not like the others."

"Pardon me, I do the same work, and, although the time for receiving my wages is not come yet, I suppose I shall be paid just as they are."

"But I don't look on you like that. Can't you see that I don't?" Evidently Miss Sarah was in love.

"I should like you to be like one of the family, and I hope you and me'll be friends, or more than that if you like," she continued.

She was a fine, handsome girl. Rather heavy, it is true, and inclined to stoutness. She had told him as plainly as she could do that she wanted to make him her lover. Poor girl! She had been taught that the great object of life was to get married, and there was very little that interested her besides.

As for Andrew, he felt exceedingly uncomfortable; and

yet why should he not be friendly with this farmer's young daughter? He had come down into the country for a purpose. Why could he not make his life pleasant? Why not vary the monotony by playing on the heart of the girl who seemed so anxious to be in his society? There seemed but little chance of other enjoyment, and it would not hinder him in the object he had in view.

Miss Sarah looked up at him with an eager, expectant face. Her eyes were honest, her cheeks were rosy. After all, walking out with a sweetheart was the staple enjoyment of country life, and Andrew was a young man. Then he thought of a pair of great brown eyes which he had seen in the churchyard, and again he knew that Miss Sarah had spoken in vain.

"I hope we shall be friends, Miss Sarah, and I thank you for your kindness. It will help me during the little while I stay here."

"You are not going away, are you?"

"I expect so in a few months."

"Look here," she said—and she clung to his arm—"you haven't run away, have you?"

"Run away! What do you mean?"

"Sim says he believes you've run away from the army—that you are a deserter. He says you wouldn't live here else. And he's going to speak to the policeman about it. Did you run away? I'll never tell any one; never, never!"

Andrew laughed.

"Let them take you," she continued; "and then, when your punishment is over, buy yourself out. I will send you the money. I've heard it's twenty pounds, and I've saved more than that from poultry money."

"I have no need to accept your kindness," replied Andrew.

"You haven't run away?"

"I was never a soldier."

"Why, you said you were."

"Never. The landlord at the *Queen's Head* suggested it, and I never contradicted him; that is all. I was never a soldier."

"Jimmer said you must have been trained to fight, or you could never have beaten him so easily."

Andrew laughed again.

The girl looked eagerly into his face again. There was a mystery about him, and that increased his value in her eyes.

"But your father did farm Trevadlock?"

"That is true."

They had come up to the farmyard gates by this time, where they found Bill and Zacky staring at them in wonder. For Miss Sarah to walk home with a servant as though he were a sweetheart was wonderful.

The two youths watched them until they came up close to the door; then they stopped.

"We are going to be——." She hesitated, not being able to speak the word in her heart.

"Yes, we will be friends, Miss Sarah," said Andrew; "thank you for your kindness."

Miss Sarah entered the kitchen with a doubtful, yet hopeful, look on her face. Andrew had not said what she wanted, and yet she did not see his repulse.

When they sat down to dinner the servants all stared. A tablecloth had been laid for them, while Andrew, wonder of wonders, had a silver-plated fork put before him in place of the usual servant's fork with the two long rusty iron prongs.

Poor Miss Sarah!

In the evening Andrew resolved to visit Miss Lezant.

"Yes, I'll go," he said to himself; "I will. She paid but little attention to my letter, but if I can see her, surely she will listen, even although she thinks I am perforce a farm servant."

"Is that you, Mr. Fairfax?"

A man had overtaken him and spoken thus to him.

"I've bin wantin' to speak to you oal day," he went on. "My two children be very bad; they're chucked up in the throat, and old Beans ev gived me noatice to laive. What I'm to do I doan' knaw."

CHAPTER XII

FACE TO FACE

ANDREW recognized the man. He was a poor fellow whose house was in a miserable condition and whose family, seven in number, had to sleep in the same room.

He had sought to befriend him in many ways, and so, no doubt, Mr. Beans had singled him out for special dealing.

"Have you paid the rent regular?" asked the young man.

"Iss, sur, I have."

"Then why is he turning you out?"

"Aw, I'm 'fraid he do knaw as 'ow you've bin kind to me. Better you'd left me alone; 'cause if you had, I shud still ev bin able to stay on, and bad as 'tes, tes' better than the side of the hadge."

"I don't know. Your children are ill, you say?"

"I'm 'fraid they've got that 'theria."

"And no doubt it's the house that has given it to them. Do you know of another house empty?"

"Iss, sur, ther's wawn; but that's a high rent, and do belong to the lady, so 'tes no good."

"And that's the only house?"

"Ther's another 'bout a mile away; but the house is a big one. I cuddn't pay the rent."

"Well, we'll see. When are you supposed to leave?"

"Christmas."

"Well, don't trouble about that. Have you had the doctor for your children?"

"No, I caan't. I hain't got a penny more'n what'll buy a bit of summin to ait. Besides, he do live five mile away."

"Go and fetch him. I'll see that he's paid."

"Oa, the Loard bless 'ee, sur; but th'oull Bains 'll serve you out somehow."

"Well, let him. But stay, here's a sovereign. If the doctor will not come otherwise, pay him on the spot."

The man hurried away with tears in his eyes, while Andrew walked on, thinking deeply.

"Thank God that editor has sent me those cheques," he muttered. "I shall certainly be able to do something; but—what I can do is nothing compared with what Miss Lezant ought to do. Shall I go to-night? It's Sunday. but——"

He hesitated a second, and then turned his face towards the great house.

He was not long in reaching it, and was quickly admitted. Once inside the great house, Andrew forgot social distinctions—forgot that it was Sunday. The agonized voice

of poor Bill Watts rang in his ears, while the picture of the miserable cottages of the poor farm labourers appeared before him.

"Andrew Fairfax, did you say?" said the servant, as he gave his name.

"Andrew Fairfax," repeated the young man.

The servant stared at him, but took his message to her mistress, and returned a few seconds later, saying that Miss Lezant would see him.

He followed the servant in a somewhat critical mood. He had never seen Miss Lezant to his knowledge, and expected to find a grim, hard-featured woman. Certainly the letter she had sent him did not promise anything very favourable, and when the door opened, and he was ushered into a finely-furnished room, he wondered how the owner of such a house could be so indifferent to the welfare of the poor cottagers on the estate.

By the side of the fireplace sat two ladies, who both turned at Andrew's entrance, and then his heart gave a great bound. The younger of the two ladies was the one whose horse he had guided through the fields not long before, and whom he had seen at church that very morning. Their eyes met, and a rosy flush mantled the young lady's cheeks.

"Andrew Fairfax?" she said, as if in doubt.

"My name is Andrew Fairfax," replied the young man.

"I saw you yesterday?"

"And this morning," replied he.

He had altogether forgotten that he was a farm labourer, and spoke as an equal—spoke, too, as one who did not intend being trifled with.

"I had scarcely time to thank you," she said, "my horse bounded away so quickly."

Andrew felt himself fascinated by her influence. It was long since he had been in such a room and met with such a lady. He knew that he had already begun to find excuses for her, and to accuse himself of rudeness. Of course she would not trouble about the cottages on her estate; of course it was the steward's work to attend to all these things, and he was very presumptuous—rude to dare to come there in such a way.

Only for a minute, however, did he entertain these feelings. Perhaps it was the cool stare of the older lady who sat beside Miss Lezant that touched his pride; perhaps for a second he remembered that the young lady looked very coldly on him.

"I did not come because of that," he said coldly.

"Might I ask why you came?" she said. "Surely your business must be of importance to bring you on a Sunday night!"

"You are right; it is of importance, otherwise I would not have troubled you. Perhaps you remember the letter I wrote you, Miss Lezant."

"Perfectly well. It was answered."

"Pardon me, I do not think so. It is true I received a note saying you referred all these matters to your steward, but I do not think such an answer is sufficient."

"I cannot talk with you to-night on business. I must ask that the matter be postponed. Is there anything else about which you wish to see me?"

"There are many things about which I would like to speak to you, but to-night I must press the question you would dismiss."

The elder lady looked at him haughtily.

"Young man, do you know to whom you are speaking?" she said.

"I am speaking to Miss Lezant, owner of the Ashwater Estate," replied Andrew, with a touch of passion in his voice. "On that estate are dozens of houses not fit to kennel dogs. In one of these houses are two children lying ill with diphtheria. The diphtheria has been brought on by the unhealthy condition of the house. The roof is thatch; it lets in water. The walls are green with damp. The floor is as wet as mud, while scattered over the room are basins placed to catch the water which drops from the roof. The house has but one bedroom, and in it nine people have to sleep; seven children—two of whom are ill with diphtheria—and their parents. That house is a picture of several others. Miss Lezant receives rent for those houses, but I do not believe she is acquainted with the true state of affairs."

The great brown eyes of Miss Lezant flashed strangely.

"Is what you have said true?" she asked huskily.

"I have visited the cottages myself, and can vouch for the truth of my words. Besides, the man whose children are ill came to me this very morning and told me that Mr. Beans, in whom you have such confidence, has given him notice that he must leave at Christmas. The man has no money, and he knows of no house to which he can go."

"Impossible!"

"I have told you the truth."

"But I have heard nothing of these things. No complaints have reached me."

"Very likely. The cottagers are afraid of your steward, because they know what power he has. He has your full consent to do as he likes, and he has the reputation of being a cruel, vindictive man. When I went to him, he ordered me out of his house. Hence my letter to you."

Miss Lezant looked keenly at Andrew. Certainly he had every appearance of a gentleman—he spoke as one, too. She was in a dilemma as to how she should treat him.

"And you have no fear of Mr. Beans?"

"I know no reason why I should fear him."

"Pardon me, but you are——"

"I am Andrew Fairfax. My father used to farm Trevadlock, but he died when I was a child. I am a servant on the farm at present."

He spoke proudly, as though he had a grim satisfaction in telling the proud lady, whose horse he had led, what he was. He might have told her that he was reared as tenderly and educated as carefully as she; he might have claimed equality with her, but such was not his humour.

"You were a soldier, were you not?" asked the old lady.

"No, madam, I was never a soldier."

"Mr. Beans said you were."

"I was never a soldier, madam. Still, I do not see what my trade or profession has to do with my purpose in coming here."

"But what can I do?" asked Miss Lezant.

"I think the least you can do is to inquire into the life of the people who are so dependent on you," he said. "It could do no harm if you were to look into their houses and see how they live."

"But Mr. Beans tells me the cottagers are well off, and to interfere with them would only breed discontent."

"And you prefer to listen to Mr. Beans?"

A quick flash from her eyes was her only answer to him.

"I wish to know," continued Andrew, "because the poor fellow who spoke to me was nearly mad. It will mean the death of his children if they are turned out at such a time, especially if they have no place to which they can go."

"I must speak to Mr. Beans."

"And be guided by him?"

Her eyes flashed angrily again; evidently she did not wish to tell him her intentions.

"I shall do what I deem best," she said, in no very encouraging voice.

"You will investigate the statements I have made?"

"I shall make no promises as to what I shall do. Probably I shall not see fit to do anything at all." Evidently she was angry at this young man, who was so dangerously persistent.

"Pardon me," said Andrew, "but something must be done."

"Must?"

"Yes, must."

"Indeed, I would like to know by what authority you can give such a command?"

"I forget politeness in remembering the poor people's necessity. The people on your estate—I mean the labourers—are simply dragging out an existence of poverty and pain, and if something is not done, I will proclaim their condition in a hundred newspapers. Everybody shall know that this parish of St. Neot is cruelly neglected, and that while the rich live in luxury, the poor who give them their riches lie diseased and dying without ever receiving a particle of help."

Miss Lezant did not reply, but the elder lady started to her feet, and said haughtily—

"Who are you, young man? You are not what you seem."

"I am a working man," replied Andrew proudly; "my father was a working farmer, and I am not ashamed of my antecedents. It is natural for me to speak up for my class.

I have entered into their lives, and I know the colourless, wearisome drudgery which makes up their existence. All I want is that they shall be treated as human beings, and I mean that they shall be."

Evidently Miss Lezant was talking with herself. Her first impulse was to ring for a servant and have the presumptuous young man shown out of the house; but somehow she could not bring herself to do this. He looked like a gentleman, and spoke like one. He was not at all awkward because of his surroundings. An ordinary country clown would not have known what to do, or how to act when shown into the presence of two ladies, especially when those ladies were in a handsomely-furnished room; but this young man was perfectly at ease, as though he were accustomed to talk with educated people. Moreover, he had rendered her a service, and she was grateful. Still, she could not help being angry at his confident way of speaking, and she certainly felt no inclination to make him any promises.

"Is that all you have to say?" she said at length.

"There is a great deal more," replied Andrew, "but it can wait for a little while. The matters I have mentioned are pressing."

She touched the bell at her side and rang it, shortly after which a servant entered.

"Will you show this man out," she said. "Or stay," she continued, turning to Andrew; "if you like you can go into the kitchen and have a jug of beer."

Was it a desire to remind the young man of his social status that she did this? He could not tell, but he fancied that such was her intention.

"Thank you, you are very kind," was his reply, and bowing politely he left the room.

On looking at his watch, he found that he had been out far later than was the rule for servants at Trevadlock Farm. But he was comparatively careless now. He was sure Cundy would think twice before reprimanding him. Thus he walked home slowly, and saw with gladness that the sky was clearing and the heavy mist rolling away.

"Things *are* turning out strangely," he thought. "Who would have fancied that the lady I assisted was Miss

Lezant, the wealthy owner of Ashwater Estates? I'm afraid I've overstepped the bounds of politeness; but I fancy I've made her think, and aroused her to the fact that she has duties as well as pleasures. Isn't she beautiful, though? It was awfully hard to speak the truth to her, but I am glad I did."

Thus the young man mused as he wended his way back to the farm. The moon had now appeared, and the night was becoming pleasant.

"My visit to the country is turning out differently from what I expected," he went on. "Things do not appear nearly as monotonous as they did. No doubt I have made an enemy of Mr. Beans, while his mistress is angry at a farm labourer's daring. It was kind of her to offer me a jug of beer, though."

It was now late, and he knew that the back door of the farm was locked early. Young Sim carried the key of the front door, and so had no need to trouble about the time. When he came to the house, therefore, he was not surprised at finding the door locked. For a minute he hesitated what to do, and had just determined to try and wake either Zacky or Bill, when he heard a movement at the door, which a minute later was opened, and he saw Miss Sarah.

"You know father's rule," she said. "I determined not to go to sleep till I knew you were in. I haven't seen you for the night; where in the world have you been?"

"I went from the little chapel to Ashwater," he said.

"You surely don't know the housemaid there!"

"No, I don't know any of them."

Miss Sarah looked relieved. "Have you had supper?" she asked.

"No."

"I'll get some rabbit pie for you. I'd stay with you if I could, only I should be found out, and father wouldn't like it—at any rate, not yet. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Soon afterwards Andrew adjourned to the room which used to be his father's, but for a long time could not sleep.

He fell asleep at length, however, and awoke in the morning with his mind clear. When he left the farmhouse for the cattle shed, he found that the rain was falling heavily,

and that there was ever prospect of a wet day. So much the worse for the inmates of the wretched, leaky cottages. Still, for some reasons he was not sorry. He could do nothing on the farm while it rained so heavily. He would be able to get to the village again.

After breakfast Farmer Cundy asked him to take a horse to be shod, a request which he quickly obeyed. He jumped nimbly on the back of the patient animal, and trotted slowly towards St. Neot, with several plans revolving in his mind.

For some time he met no one, but as he neared the village he saw the miller's cart, which was slowly drawn from the valley beneath. He stopped until the cart came up, for he saw beneath the tarpaulin covering the athletic form of the young miller, who, wonderful for a Loamshire rustic, was reading a daily paper.

" Kernick, I should like to speak to you."

Martin Kernick immediately folded his paper and turned towards Andrew, as if waiting for him to proceed.

" I am given to understand that you are a politician."

Kernick smiled and proudly assented.

" What are your politics worth ? "

" A good deal. I am a staunch Liberal. I am in favour of Disestablishment, Home Rule for Ireland, and a reform in the Land Laws."

" Very good, but are your opinions of sufficient force to lead you to try and remedy the state of things at St. Neot ? "

" Explain."

Andrew explained. He went further than he had done with either the clergyman or with Henry Yelland. His club and his lectures, etc., were good, but they did not go far enough. Clubs would not build proper houses, clubs would not give the people a bit of land, clubs would not give home comforts. He mentioned a scheme for sending a memorial to the Guardians for better dwellings for the poor, and a better system of outdoor relief. He dropped a hint in respect to encouraging the cottagers to cultivate the common land, which would so richly pay for a little labour, and which might lead to the proverbial " three acres and a cow " becoming an established fact as far as St. Neot was concerned.

Meanwhile Martin Kernick stared. This young man

was possessed of more than ordinary ability and a fair education, but his reading of the daily papers had led him to regard politics as something in the far distance—a something which consisted in passing measures and nothing resulting from them. A good many politicians who have a seat at St. Stephen's do not differ much from him.

"I am anxious for the Liberals to come into power again," said Martin at length, "ar'n't you?"

"I don't bother," answered Andrew. "I cannot see that either party are much to be preferred. Let us try and apply the laws already existing, and we shall do something."

"I am with you a great way," answered the young miller.

"Will you help me to do something?"

"Yes, and Phillips will too."

"Good. I should like us to meet and talk it over."

"To-night at the mill; will that do?"

"Very well. Good-morning."

Andrew rode on in a better humour. Both church and chapel had refused him; but there were hopes of doing something if these young fellows would help him.

He took the horse to the smithy and had him shod. Half a dozen men stood shivering around the forge, grateful for the warmth of the fire. The rain kept them from working, and there was no comfort at their cottages. Some of them had gone into the fields and had tried to work, but the rain had driven them away, and they came to the forge wet to the skin, but watched with satisfaction their steaming garments, not realizing that they were inviting rheumatism and bronchitis. But, then, what could they do? They had no clothes to change, excepting their Sunday attire; besides, they hoped for the rain to cease.

His horse was shod at length and he rode towards Trevadlock Farm again. On his way he passed the post office. He stopped and asked for letters. Yes, there were two for him. He could not read them then, however, it rained too heavily; so he hurried back and found his way to the barn.

The first he opened was from the editor of the great London daily, who had already printed his articles on country life. It contained a cheque for the last he had sent, with a short note to the effect that his communica-

tions had elicited some amount of controversy. The editor also expressed a desire for further articles, at the same time hinting at certain phases of the life of poor Hodge which he should like brought before the public.

The second was from Ezra Pinns. It was characteristic, and ran as follows :—

"My dear Boy,—

"I told you that you were not a fool. I am right. I have read your articles in the *Daily* ——. If you had not written me about them, I should have detected your work. They are not badly written at all. It is true in some places you have been sentimental, and a bit inclined to be hysterical; but then, you are young, and must have your fling. They are causing a talk, and there is some question as to who wrote them. Thus you have caught your chance, and will make your reputation by a fluke after all.

"Take a bit of advice. Don't try and bring remedies. You are a done man if you do. Stick to facts, with a dash of the Adelphi drama to make them spicy. You must have stuff for half a dozen more yet.

"Make your editor pay you well. Others will if he won't. You see you've caught the public ear, and can make your own terms. Don't sign your name. It is better to retain your *incog.* for a little while, and then burst out with a sensation-making novel.

"By the way let the novel wait a bit. I should say until spring. By that time you will be ready to begin, and see that you make a good thing of it. You ought to do.

"Keep away from women. It is true your position will have something to do in keeping you right, but a handsome fellow like you will be sure to attract silly women. Avoid them. Remember our first parents, and beware.

"Mr. Adolphus Vellum often asks for you. He says he will give you eightpence-halfpenny a page for any contribution of yours. He can do this now, as he is gone into the world of threepennys. He is constantly mourning over your condition, and regrets that he isn't privileged with the joy of bringing you into fame.

"I am forwarding you the papers in which you will be interested. Don't be vain. They are not good enough for

that. Besides, if you are, you will show you are a fool after all.

"Again I tell you to avoid women in every way. If you don't, you are lost. But there, I am doubtless a fool for spending so much time in writing you.

"EZRA PINNS."

Andrew read this letter through twice, and then placed it in his pocket. He went out into the yard. The rain had ceased to fall, but the air was cold and wet. He could not go to work before dinner now—it was close on twelve o'clock. He stood in the yard a few seconds as if hesitating, then he jumped over the hedge and walked towards the eminence from which he had first seen the great house at Ashwater.

All things were different from what they were when he had seen them first. Then the river gurgled musically down the valley—now it rushed along with a monotonous roar; then the trees in the park were laden with verdure —now they stood disconsolate and bare. The great house beyond, however, was still imposing and inviting. Wherever else there might be squalor and want, comfort reigned at Ashwater.

He looked for a few minutes in silence, then his eye kindled. He saw a carriage drawn up to the front door by a pair of handsome horses, then he saw two servants bring out a huge parcel and lift it on to the top of the conveyance, while a minute later a lady came out and entered, immediately after which the proud horses pranced down the drive towards the park gates.

"Where is she going?" thought Andrew. "Leaving her starving tenants for London, most likely. And yet she looks too good—too kind for that. Her face is a grand, noble one. Those eyes of hers are——"

He stopped, and the words of Ezra Pinns' letter came into his mind—

"Again I tell you to avoid women in every way. If you don't, you are lost."

"Ha!" exclaimed Andrew, as if frightened.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FACE OF A RIVAL

WHEN evening came Andrew made his way to St. Neot again. He was anxious to inquire into the case of the poor labourer who had complained to him the night before, as well as to see the miller and the shoemaker. The work at the farm was not heavy at this time of the year, and so, when he had arranged for the cattle, he had his evening pretty much to himself. He found Watts in far better spirits than he had expected. The truth was that a man had been sent to repair the roofs, doors and windows, besides which a good many delicacies had been sent from Ashwater for the invalids.

"It's got to the young lady's ears," said he, jubilantly, "and the doctor says as how, with care, we shall be able to car' the dear children through."

"Has Miss Lezant been here, then?" asked Andrew.

"Her very self. She comed right into the 'ouse, and as she looked round, she turned oal white and scared. I've heard as 'ow she've bin in several other 'ouses too. P'raps she's goin' to take the reins in 'er oan hands a bit. Ef she do, th'oull Bains will be mad."

Andrew went to the miller with a good heart. At last he had done something. He had sufficiently influenced Miss Lezant for her to take some little interest in her tenants. Perhaps—perhaps she might——; but no, he must not expect too much.

I will not try and describe Andrew's interview with the miller and the shoemaker. I should only have to go over old ground and adduce old objections. The upshot of this conversation, however, was that Andrew was asked to go to Mr. Beans, the steward, on what seemed a reasonable errand.

He could not go for two or three days; but when, at length, he found his opportunity, he found his way for a second time to that gentleman's house.

Mr. Beans met him in the same room as on his previous visit, but did not receive him very graciously.

"What do you want?" he said gruffly.

"I see that you have a house empty over in St. Neot."

"Well, what of that?"

"I came to you about letting it."

"You?"

"I."

"Do you know what you are saying? Why, the rent of the house is fourteen pounds. It's the best house in the parish almost."

"Yes, I wanted the best I could get."

"Where's the rent to come from?"

"I am willing to pay you a quarter in advance."

"You! Where can you get the rent from?"

"I do not see what that has to do with the question."

"Are you going to get married?"

"I have not thought of doing so."

"But—but Mr. Snell, a retired farmer, lived there. Why, all your wages at Trevadlock will not come to the rent of such a house."

"No."

"Then what——?"

"I see the house is to let. I wish to rent it, and will give what your previous tenant gave."

"Are you going to leave Trevadlock, then?"

"Not at present."

"Oh, I see; you are taking the house for some one else."

"No."

Mr. Beans looked at Andrew curiously. Surely this young man was not what he seemed to be. What farm servant was there who could give fourteen pounds a year for a house, and then not live in it.

"Then I must ask for what purpose you wish it."

"I wish to take it as a library and clubroom for the villagers. They have no such place, and I should like to rent this house and fit it up for them."

An angry light flashed into the eyes of Mr. Beans.

"Ah, you are come on that game again, are you? No, young man, no. You are not going to get your way if I know it. I expect, if the truth is known, it is through you the cottages on the estate have to be repaired. And now—no—I tell you no."

Andrew kept his temper. He knew his man, and felt sure that he would be able to find out some weak point in time.

"I can assure you I have no wish to injure the property, or in any way——"

"You want to make the people discontented; you want to make them think themselves as good as their betters. No, there shall be no radical levelling in *this* parish while I am steward to the lady as owns it."

"Very well," replied Andrew, "you refuse to let me the house?"

"Absolutely."

"Of course you will have no objection to my informing Miss Lezant of your decision?"

"You inform Miss Lezant! What do you mean?"

"Just that. Good evening."

After Andrew had left, Mr. Beans was very uncomfortable. He did not like the look on the young man's face. There was evidently a reserve strength, which the steward felt sure would be used if occasion should occur.

"I must get him out of the parish," he muttered. "I must get him out at once. But how? I cannot frighten him, and I am afraid I cannot bribe him. I must think." And Mr. Beans called for a glass of spirits to help him in his meditations.

Meanwhile, Andrew went back to the farm. His course now was to go direct to Miss Lezant and state his case to her. But he did not go. Why? He had discovered the secret of his heart. Now, he knew that he loved her. He had loved her when he had spoken almost rudely to her in her own house, only a few days before. All the time he was with her his heart had throbbed with a passion unknown to him before; and now, as he walked away from the steward's villa, he knew that the strength of his life was given to her. Not that he had any hope of winning her. The idea was absurd. What! he, the farmer's son, he who worked on Trevadlock Farm, in love with the owner of the parish? It was absurd! Not that he need remain what he was. But that would not alter the case. She had known him as a farm servant; she had told him to go to her kitchen among her servants, who would give him beer. The very thought of such a thing rankled in his mind, and made him laugh bitterly. But he would not change his vocation—at least, not yet. He must have more time at his disposal,

and he would speak to Cundy at once. The farmer could lessen his wages if he would. There was no need for him to stay on the farm any longer at all. He had pretty well seen the drudgery, the loneliness, and the drear existence of poor Hodge; he had entered into his actual experience, but he would stay the winter through. When the spring came he would sit down and write the thoughts which were burning in his mind; but at present he would remain a drudge. It was his purpose so to do.

The days passed wearily by until Christmas. Things looked better in St. Neot village, and in many of the cottages throughout the parish. Several thatchers, masons and carpenters had been at work, and so when Christmas Day came, things were comparatively comfortable. Not that the peasants had anything whereof to boast. Their cottages were simply dry, while those who were sick had been attended to. In previous winters nothing had been done, and as a consequence the weaker people had died; this winter the probabilities were that most of the weak ones would pull through. Most of them, too, had been able to save up a little towards Christmas, or rather by working overtime they had been enabled to get a little corn to feed a pig. Consequently when Christmas Day came, they were able to enjoy what they called "piggie vaist" (pig feast). It was no great luxury, but it was better than they had been accustomed to. To most, however, there was but little brightness on Christmas Day. The children of the farm labourers knew nothing of parties, and but little of Christmas games. Santa Claus had never been heard of, while all the glad merriments known to neighbourhoods more thickly inhabited were unknown here. It is true some of the farmers sometimes had a party during the festive season, but they would not think of inviting a labourer, the feeling of caste was too strong. The most that could be expected—and that was done only on very rare occasions—was to allow the servants and labourers to meet in the barn, and allow them to enjoy themselves as best they could.

It may be said that I am drawing a dark picture, and I reply that the picture is true. Knowing agricultural districts as I know them, I can speak with assurance. The life

of the few is not devoid of pleasures, but the life of the many is a weary drudgery, a monotonous existence, in many cases unrelieved from year's end to year's end. Of course during the summer life is more enjoyable, but during the winter no pen can describe its dreariness.

On Christmas morning Andrew left Trevadlock and walked through the fields towards St. Neot. A rimy frost stood on the grass, while the trees, draped in their icy vestures, were exceedingly beautiful. Andrew trudged along with a sense of freedom at having nothing to do, and yet with a strange feeling at his heart.

If Providence had led him to St. Neot, the home of his fathers, to help the poor and needy there, it had also made his life desolate by leading him to love a lady who would never think of returning the feeling he bore for her. But Andrew was not the one to repine. His was a strong nature, and so, although he had no definite hope of realizing the desires of his heart, he did not despond.

On reaching the village, he went to a few of the houses. He found the poor souls trying to make believe that it was a festive season. They had placed sprigs of holly and box, which they called "beck," around the room, and had also got logs of wood and placed them in the fireplaces. Thanks to Andrew, these people had each received a joint of meat, although they did not know from whom it came.

The place was exceedingly quiet. A few youths lolled around as usual, with nothing to do and no place in particular to go. There had been a prayer meeting at six o'clock in the morning at the chapel, but the building was not to be opened any more for the day. The day school was closed, and would not be opened until the Christmas holidays were over. The church was open for service, at which about twenty attended. When one o'clock came, the people would have the choice of three places. One would be their homes, which in most cases would mean one uncomfortable room, with either a mud or a lime-ash floor, in which there would be six or seven people. Another place would be the lanes, and the third would be the public-house. The church provided no place for Hodge to go to, the chapel provided no place. Thus it would come about that the public-house, offering most attractions, would be most popular.

After Andrew had been to the houses of some who stood in most need of help, he walked up to the schoolroom. Ah! if he could only get the use of that building, he might be able to give these poor rustics a few hours of enjoyment. But there was little chance of such an arrangement being made. The responsible people of the parish had begun to talk about him, saying that he was an infidel and an enemy to the truth. Still, he would try and——

The church bells began to ring. Evidently the service was over. He had not gone that morning. He felt that he could receive but little good from the words of a clergyman who did not seek to enter into the life of the people among whom he was supposed to labour. Still, curiosity led him to go to the church gates to see who had been present. Just as he came down, he saw a carriage standing. His heart gave a bound. It came from Ashwater. Evidently Miss Lezant had been at the service; perhaps he might see her. He stood back a little and waited.

Yes, there she was, smiling, and beautiful as ever. But who was that with her? For a moment his pulses seemed to stop. He recognized the faces of her companions. Miss Lezant's companions were Isabel and Wilton Bernard.

The two loves stood side by side—the old and the new. Isabel Bernard, beautiful, seductive, and haughty as ever, with her face close to Miss Lezant's. He cared nothing for the former now, however. The boyish feeling which possessed his heart back in the days when his life was without care had gone. She had no power over him now. He could look at her without any desire for intimacy or relation of any sort. But Miss Lezant—he was scarcely master of himself as he watched her.

Wilton Bernard had altered but little. He was still heavy looking and florid. Indeed, his whole appearance gave evidence of over-feeding.

"Shall we ride?" asked Isabel Bernard, as they stood by the carriage. "It would be far more pleasant to walk."

"I do not mind at all," replied Miss Lezant.

"Then let us walk, by all means. Noah can take back the carriage without us," rejoined Wilton.

Miss Lezant looked up at his face. Andrew thought he saw a look of gladness in her eyes.

"Very well, we will walk then," she replied. "It will be fine on such a day as this."

The three went away together, leaving Andrew standing by the churchyard wall, as though fastened to the ground. His blood ran madly through his veins, his brain reeled. He had seen a look in Wilton Bernard's dull eyes which made him almost mad.

The carriage drove away towards the inn. Evidently Noah was going to take advantage of his freedom.

"A glass of gin and water," Andrew heard him say to the landlord. "It's a cold day."

"What, be'ee drivin' home alone?"

"Yes, the gentry be walkin'."

"Aw, visitors for the Christmas, I spoase?"

"Yes."

"Who be um, then?"

"The Bernard family. They used to own Ashwater, you know, before Miss Lezant's father bought it."

"Ah. That young fella is the young Squire Bernard, then?"

"Yes."

"Miss Lezant and he bean't going to make a match, be um?"

Noah looked wise and important. He was an old servant, and considered himself indispensable to the Ashwater estate.

"I can't say for certain," he replied suddenly, as he sipped his gin, "but I may say—well, there's more unlikely things that do happen every day."

"Oh, I see; then we should have a squire again?"

"I don't say as 'twill be so," said Noah, "and I shall call any man my enemy if he were to spread such a report. At the same time, young Bernard's mother is up at Ashwater, and the young people don't seem averse to each other, Young people will be young people, you see."

The landlord laughed heartily, while Noah gave expression to a dignified chuckle; indeed, he relaxed as much as a man of such importance could be expected tc do.

"I must go now," continued Noah, touching up his horses. "Good mornin', landlord."

"A happy Christmas to you, Mr. Noah."

"The compliments of the season, landlord," repeated that dignitary.

As the landlord entered his house he repeated Noah's words.

"'Compliments of the season!'" he muttered; "how livin' with thews great folks do help a man's langwage."

Andrew walked away like a man in a dream. For a while he could not think clearly; he could scarcely realize what had happened, By the time he had gone half-way to Trevadlock, however, he began to see how things stood.

"I love her," he muttered, "and Wilton Bernard loves her. I saw that by the look in his piggish eyes. He is rich and well connected. His wily mother is with him to plead his cause. He is a visitor at the house; he will be much with her. I, on the other hand, am——"

He hurried on through two fields, with his hands clenched and his teeth set.

CHAPTER XIV

DISTRESS

ANDREW did not enjoy the Christmas cheer that day. His mind was too full of other things, his heart ached strangely. As if to mock him, too, the farmer's wife had ordered the servants to have their dinner in the back kitchen. It is true Miss Sarah had objected, but she was over-ruled by the others. For the time it almost made him give up his project, and go and take lodgings somewhere in the village, but after a while he was able to take the whole matter as a joke. All the family had come home, and as one or two friends had dropped in, the Cundys were fairly merry. Young Sim, however, looked thoughtful, and did not seem to enjoy the jokes that were made.

After dinner Miss Sarah came to Andrew.

"I think you are very proud," she said.

"Yes?'

"You needn't have had your dinner in the back kitchen, if you hadn't been."

"Indeed."

"No; you know you needn't. I told you so the other day."

Andrew did not reply. He was not in the humour to talk to this buxom girl.

" Father said you could come in the parlour and have some fun with us if you like. He knows you are not like the rest of them."

" No, thank you, Miss Sarah."

" Why do you call me ' Miss ' ? "

" I'm a servant, you see," he said laughing.

" You are not. I b'lieve you are actin' a part for something. Everybody says you are. Ar'n't you ? I'll never tell anybody."

Andrew laughed.

" But you will come with us into the parlour. I don't mind what any one says."

" No thank you. I'm sure your brother would not like it—and I've other things to think about."

" You are nasty," said Miss Sarah, seeking to be familiar ; then she added, " you would if you knew how much I wanted."

But Andrew did not reply. He took his hat and went out into the fields. He wanted to be alone.

In the near distance, less than a mile away, he could see the home of Miss Lezant. Most likely she would be talking with Wilton Bernard, while he——

He wandered around the fields during the afternoon. There was little else he could do. It is true there would be a good fire at Trevadlock, and he would have the company of Zacky and the maid-servants. Perhaps too their lovers would be present, and thus merriment would abound, but he did not enjoy the thought of it. As for the village, there was no place there but the public-house. Yes he would go to the village again. He would see how the people spent their Christmas Day there, then he would write an article on it.

Three days after there was a report at the farm that Miss Lezant had left Ashwater for London, and that she had gone to the home of the Bernards. Poor Andrew, his hopes were all blighted now. What could he do ? Everything was against him, and he was left alone. Why should he stay at Trevadlock any longer ? Why need he bear the weary burdens of these farm rustics ? He would go back to London again, he would somehow push his way into the society he once enjoyed, and then he would meet Miss

Lezant and tell her of his love. He could easily explain his appearance in the country, and laugh at the ideas he had entertained.

This thought did not possess him long, however. It would seem like cowardice to go away from the poor labourers after having once espoused their cause. Besides, he was somehow chained to this home of his fathers, and he would undergo a great deal for the privilege of sleeping in the room where he was born, and where his father and mother had died, a little longer. No, he would stay. Wilton Bernard might win her, but he felt sure he could not do so in a few short weeks. She was not that sort of girl. If she were, then—but never mind, it could not be. Anyhow, he would try and do what he had made up his mind to do.

As the weeks passed by the weather became colder and colder. Before Christmas it had been bleak and rainy. Now, however, frost had set in, while snow had fallen in great quantites. People had hoped it would pass away in a few days, but as week after week passed by without any thaw worth speaking of, the distress became terrible. To the farmers it did not matter so much. Their corn and hay was stacked, they had large quantities of turnips and mangolds safely gathered. It was true the sheep might fare hard, but the rest of the cattle would be all right. It was the labourer who suffered. He, poor fellow, had nothing to do. In the old days, before machinery became known, work was found for the labourers in the barn during the winter. They could thresh corn with a flail, and winnow it with a sieve, but since machinery had become known all this was done in a day or two.

Consequently it came to pass that when February had come many of the families had only bread and potatoes to eat, and towards the end of the month many were starving.

Poor simple folks, they bore up as long as they could without grumbling. They were accustomed to hardship, and they had never known luxurious fare. But they gave way at length. At first they began to moan, then they cried, and at last they grew desperate. Andrew had seen the poverty of London, but to him it was not so terrible as this. There, soup kitchens abounded, institutions were numerous, while both church and chapel sought to relieve

the necessitous. Besides, in most cases their distress was of their own bringing. Drink and laziness had made these people what they were, and thus pity was often out of the question. But with these country people all was different. Many of them were sober and industrious, and they could not have helped their distress. Their scanty wage had not enabled them to save. Moreover, there were no soup kitchens, no free meals, while neither church nor chapel seemed to think it necessary to take any step. Indeed, the poverty, except among the larger farmers, became pretty general, although, of course, the labourer suffered most of all.

One thing there was in their favour. They managed to get fire. There were lying around roots of trees, branches, and the like, while on the common large quantities of furze grew. So, while they had bread they could live. Hot water and bread was not very inviting, but while they had that they managed. But that gave out at length. The miller and grocer both refused credit, and they had nothing to eat.

Andrew helped all he could, but there were eight hundred people in the parish, and his funds soon gave out. His help, however, made him greatly beloved, and they clung around him as though he was their only hope.

One night he met a large group of them in the village.

"What be us to do, Mr. Fairfax?" they said. They recognized that he was somehow different to themselves. Besides, although he had worked as a servant, he had helped them largely.

"I hardly know," said Andrew. "I'm sorry too that I'm not in a position to do anything more at present."

You've bin very kind, sir. Besides, we bean't no beggars; I've never begged in my life; but what be we to do? We've had nothin' but boiled turmuts all this day and the children, poor dears, be starvin,' for they caan't ait 'em."

"Won't your masters trust you until the weather breaks up?" asked Andrew. "This terrible frost and snow can't last much longer."

"We have asked 'em, and some of us do owe 'em a goodish bit now. They do zay they can't lev us have no more. Besides, some of the small farmers bean't so well

off. Th'oall Beans have sticked on the rent zo that they hain't a bin able to save a ha'p'ny."

"My lads," said Andrew, "go to Mr. Beans. Let half a dozen of you walk quietly to his house, and tell him how things are with you. Perhaps he'll communicate with the lady who owns all the land, and thus bring relief."

"Couldn' you go with us, Mr. Fairfax? You can spaik so well; we should git awful muddley."

"I would gladly," replied the young man, "but I am afraid I should only do your cause harm. Mr. Beans does not like me. He says it is through me that the houses were repaired."

"But why should he care 'bout the houses bein' repaired?" asked one of the men. "It doan't make no difference to he."

"Iss it do," said another, "he do have so much in the pound on the profit of what the rents and things do bring and zo he's allays for stoppin' repairs."

"At any rate," rejoined Andrew, "I should do no good by going. You tell your own story. You can do so far better than I."

They took Andrew at his word, and went over that very evening. Four of them were chosen as the deputation, and they went quietly and sadly on their errand.

It was eight o'clock when they arrived at the steward's house, whom they found at home.

"Four men to see me," he said, when the servant announced them. "What do they want?"

"I don't know," replied the girl; "they said they wanted to see you personally."

"Well, show them in, and see that they wipe the snow off their shoes."

The four came in and stood before the steward.

"What do you want?" he asked.

The men looked nervously around, and waited for each other to speak.

"Come, what's the matter with you?" asked the steward. "Tell me what you want, and if you don't want anything be off."

"We do want summin'," said Nath Bentley, to whom the others generally looked as a spokesman. 'Ef you plaise,

sur, we'm starvin'. Some ov us ain't ad' nothin' but boiled turmuts for days, and there's scores in the parish that ain't a got that."

"Well," said Mr. Beans, "what have I to do with that?"

"We thought as how we'd worked on the estate for nearly oal our lives, and that as we'm so poor, you might be able to git the young lady to—to——"

"Miss Lezant pays heavy rates, my man. I can do nothing for you. There's the union for you."

"But we caan't work, and we'em honest people as wants to work. We could pay 'ee back when the fine weather do come, but we caan't——"

"What have I to do with all this?" repeated Mr. Beans. "I'm not a relieving officer."

"But," said Nath Bentley, "we've worked on the estate, and the young laady have benefited 'cause we've worked. Cudden she, now——?"

"The young lady!" said the steward angrily. "Why, the land belongs to her, and you've been paid by the farmers for all you've done. What right have you to talk about what the lady should do? The land belongs to her!"

"Iss; but we thought it was a paart of her duty to——"

"Who has been putting these thoughts into your head?" asked the steward.

"Well sur, the poor must live, and the rich *be* rich 'cause of we that do work and——"

"Who sent you here?" said the steward; "who has put these things into your minds?"

The men were silent.

"Who sent you here?" roared Mr. Beans again.

"Please we be starvin' at home," stammered one.

"Did that young villain Fairfax tell you to come; did he put these things in your mind?"

"He's not a villain." said Nath stoutly, "a nicer chap never stepped in shoe leather, and——"

"Go, I say, and let's have no more of this. If you won't go to the parish, then you must starve. Get out at once, and see there is no more of this."

They went gloomily enough. Their mission had failed.

The next evening Farmer Cundy came to Andrew with a downcast look.

"You must pack up your things and be gone at once."

"Why?" asked Andrew.

"Never mind. You must be off. I can't have anybody here as do encourage impudence and riotin'."

"Oh, I see," said Andrew, with a laugh. "Very well, I'll go. But, Farmer Cundy, you'll be sorry for this some day."

CHAPTER XV

MAVIS LEZANT AT BAY

ANDREW did not trouble so much at having to leave the farm. It is true he was sorry to leave the house in which his father had died, and in which he had been born, but he was glad to get away from the monotonous drudgery to which he had given himself. Besides, he had by this time pretty well learnt all that could be taught him, and he would now be free to carry his plans into practice. When he tried to get lodgings at the village, however, he found a difficulty. As nearly every house in the parish belonged to Miss Lezant, Beans could impose whatever conditions he liked upon the tenants, and Andrew found that the cottagers had been instructed to refuse him admittance. For a time he was at loss what to do, but, by-and-by, he found a house not under the steward's control, and here he was able to rent a couple of rooms. A further cheque from the editor for whose paper he had been writing relieved him from financial difficulties, and he was at length enabled to devote his attention to the condition of the cottagers.

The weather continued terribly severe, and each day the state of the people grew more desperate. To make matters worse two youths had got into trouble.

It came about in this way. Not far from the village stood a plantation. It belonged to Miss Lezant, but was not carefully enclosed, and was regarded by the villagers as common property. Thither these two youths went on the night after Mr. Beans had refused help to the men who had visited him. Lying around in the plantation were rotten limbs of trees, together with a good deal of scattered brushwood, and this they gathered into a bundle to take to their homes in order to get a fire. They had not left the

plantation, however, before they were seized by two of Mr. Beans satellites, and on the morrow were charged at the police-court with stealing, and sentenced to seven days' imprisonment.

From this time the people began to lose the law abiding feeling which had hitherto possessed them. Poor they might be, but they respected themselves highly, nevertheless. It is true, they had no right to the wood in the plantation, but no notice had ever been taken of similar actions in the past, and they felt sure it was owing to the ill-feeling either of Mr. Beans or of Miss Lezant that this had been done. Day by day food became more scarce, and while the relieving officer had rendered some little help, it was as nothing compared to what was really needed.

Presently the men gathered together in groups, and spoke in low tones. Evidently something was working in their minds. They became excited, and unreasoning too. When people are starving they are not apt to reason.

"Be us dogs?" one would mutter. "We've bin' livin' on pig's mait for weeks, and now we shan't be able to git that,"

"Iss, and to think that Jim Basset and Harry Stethridge should be sent to quod for pickin' a vew sticks," another would say. "W'em all starvin' weth could and hunger, and now et's come to this."

"It's th'oull Bains,——him."

"Or it's the young lady. She've got 'er thousands, and could aisy help us all."

"What be us to do? There's no signs of a thaw, and the Union is chucked full."

"Lev us ax Mr. Fairfax!"

"What's the use ov that? Th'oull Bains ev got un turned off from Trevadlock, and he caan't do nothin'."

"Lev us go ovver in a body to Ashwater, and demand somethin' to ait, and ef they waan't give it to us, catch the plaace on vire."

"No, no."

"Why not? They caan't more'n kill us, and we caan't live much longer this way."

"Let us ax Mr. Fairfax afore we do that."

"No, no. He'll zay don't do it. He don't believe in sich ways. Let us go."

And so they talked, now suggesting one thing, now another, their faces each day revealing more and more clearly the condition of their life. It became terrible to see them. The little children crawled around, their faces drawn and haggard, while mothers cried when they saw that they could not give their babies any nourishment. The men grew more stern and haggard, while their loose clothes revealed the fact that they were slowly dying.

One day soon after he left Trevadlock, Andrew walked over to St. Lerrick to cash a cheque in order that he might be able to render a little more assistance, when arriving at St. Neot soon after dark, he was impressed with the idea that something was wrong.

He went into the cottages, but he noticed that the men had gone, while on the faces of the women was a look of savage fear. He looked in at the public-houses, but they were empty. Surely something strange was in the air.

He questioned the women, but they answered evasively. Evidently they desired to tell him, but feared. At length one woman, less able to contain her feeling than others, blurted out:

"What caan't be got by fair means must be got by foul, Mr. Fairfax?"

"What do you mean?" asked Andrew.

"What do I main? Well, our Jim zaid we wurn't to zay nothin', but you've bin so kind that you bean't like the rest. The men be gone to git summin to ait!"

"What? How?"

The woman did not speak, but looked curiously towards the great house.

Meanwhile Miss Lezant sat in the Ashwater drawing-room. Beside her was Mrs. Melville, the lady whom Andrew had seen with her on the previous occasion. A large fire was glowing in the grate, the blinds were drawn, and an air of comfort everywhere prevailed.

Mrs. Melville, however, was not in a good humour.

"I think it foolish of you to come down here so soon, Mavis," she said.

"Why, Mrs. Melville?"

"Why, because one might as well be out of the world as here. But if you stay here, invite some people."

"I don't feel like having visitors."

"But what induced you to come?"

"I wanted to get away from London, and I wanted to be here."

"I suppose so; but why?"

"For various reasons. It is terribly cold, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Melville.

"There seems a good deal of distress among the people," said Miss Lezant at length.

"Indeed."

"Well, Mr. Beans told me that the people were discontented, and had come to him, making insolent requests."

"Well, you can leave those matters to him."

"Yes; I suppose so. I wish I had come home sooner, though. I find he has sent two youths to prison for taking wood from the plantation. I am sorry for that. I must try and investigate the matter."

"Now, Mavis, don't be foolish. No good will come of your interfering with your steward. The people are surly and discontented—all that class of people are. Mr. Beans knows best how to deal with them."

"But I'm afraid he's a hard man. You remember what that young man said when he was here?"

"I should think I do. I wonder how you allowed his insolence."

Miss Lezant was silent.

"I'm afraid the people must be badly off," she said at length; "to-morrow I will inquire more closely. I will go to St. Neot."

"Mavis, you must not be so——"

She did not finish the sentence, for at that moment a servant rushed in looking pale and frightened.

"Please, Mr. Beans wants to see you at once."

The words were scarcely uttered when the steward entered.

"Get your windows and doors barricaded at once, Miss Lezant," he cried; they'll soon be here."

"Who'll soon be here? What do you mean?"

"A crowd of men."

"'What men?"

"The villagers. They say they are starving. They've

been to my house, and demanded food. I wouldn't give it them. I told them I wasn't a relieving officer. For a time I thought they would break down the doors. But one of them hinted that they would do better by going to the Hall. They are on their way here now, a hundred strong. I've come very quickly by the short path."

Evidently Mr. Beans was much frightened, his hands trembled, his mouth twitched nervously. He had had no thought that these patient, plodding people would grow desperate.

Mrs. Melville shrieked, and suggested sending for soldiers.

"Soldiers, ma'am!" said the steward. "There are no soldiers within fifty miles."

"Policemen, then."

"There ain't above a dozen policemen within a radius of as many miles," replied Mr. Beans.

"Then what can we do?"

"Nothing but barricade the doors and windows. There I hear them now, roaring like so many bulls."

All listened. Certainly there was a sound of voices in the near distance.

"It's terrible," said Mrs. Melville. "Oh, that I were back in London."

Meanwhile Miss Lezant had stood listening to the dialogue between the steward and her companion. Certainly no fear was expressed on her face, yet her hands trembled with suppressed excitement, her eyes flashed, her nostrils dilated.

"What am I to do?" said the steward. "I have always acted in your interests, Miss Lezant. It has been my object to see that you should not be robbed. They complained of you. They said you ought to help them. They boasted that they helped to make your wealth. But you needn't mind that; what are we to do now?"

"We can do nothing but wait," she said quietly.

"Hark, they are getting quite near. Ah! what is that?"

For reply they heard a clamour of voices.

"Open the door," they said, "give us bread. You've a plenty. Give we some."

Neither of them moved. The servants had meanwhile closed doors and shutters, but these would be of little use

if the crowd used force. Hunger and disappointment had made them strong and desperate.

Miss Lezant walked towards the door.

"Where are you going, Mavis?" asked Mrs. Melville.

"I am going to the men. I am going to speak to them."

"You shall not! You must be mad!"

"Yes, I am going. Listen, what are they saying?"

"Lev us come in. Give us bread. We will have it. We've bin starvin' for weeks, so've the cheldren," they heard them saying.

"Lev us git the steward. Where've the oul Beans got to? He's at the bottom of it."

"Iss, lev us git to th'oull Beans. We do knaw he's inside there somewhere."

"We'll kill un if we can get to un," said another voice.

"Do you hear that?" said Beans, the perspiration standing out on his forehead. "They'll kill me. All I've done is for you. Where can I get, Miss Lezant?"

Mavis Lezant walked towards the hall. Mrs. Meville and the steward beseeching her to come back.

By this time the crowd were hammering at the front door, threatening to break it down if it were not opened at once. In the hall half a dozen servants stood pale and trembling, each fearing to move.

"Will you unbolt the door?" she said to one.

"Surely, Miss," said the fearful groom. "you will not open it. They'll murder you, they'll murder us all."

"Yes, don't," shouted Mr. Beans; "they'll be at me first of all. I've looked after your interests too closely, Miss Lezant. Ah, if I can once live through this!"

Miss Lezant minded the words of neither steward nor servants, but, going to the door, she said:

"Wait; I will unbolt the door; I will come out."

"It's her, it's the young lady herself," said one on the outside.

"So tes. I dedn't knaw she'd come home."

"She only come yesterday."

"Well, lev her show herself. We bean't 'fraid. Lev her come out. We've got a few things to tell her. She'll soon know who's master now."

Mavis Lezant heard every word, but she did not desist

from unbolting the door. Her hand had ceased to tremble, her eyes burned steadily.

"Come, make haste," they shouted again. "We want somethin'. You've grinded us fur years. You've starved us. It's you who've charged the farmers high rents, so that they caan't give us enough to keep us alive. You work us to death, you git our money, and then you go to London to spend it. Come, make haste out."

"Very well," she said, "I'm coming."

She opened the door and stood before them.

It was a cloudless night. Overhead the moon sailed in a clear sky, while all around the ice crystals hung. Mavis Lezant even then noticed the rimy frost shining in the light of the moon. She saw the crowd that had gathered too. Harmless men they would be if they had food and warmth. Never in their lives had they taken such a step as this, and nothing but black despair led them to do it now. Some were getting old, many were middle-aged, but very few young men were there, the remainder being made up of youths. Pinched and haggard were their faces, thin and scanty were their clothes. She recognized some of them; when she saw them last they were patient, sad-eyed men, with no indication of vice in their natures.

They saw her, too, standing alone in the open doorway. They, rough, desperate, starving, realized her beauty too. They saw her crown of chestnut hair, they saw the flash of her great eyes, the queenly poise of her head.

She did not flinch, she did not tremble. She stood straight as an arrow, the clear light revealing her finely moulded form.

Her appearance silenced the men, and they shrunk back. They were howling and shouting until she opened the door, then they became quiet. There is ever a power in the presence of a true lady. I have known men who have been rough and rude to other men, no matter what their position may have been; I have seen them refuse to cloak in the slighest degree their most pronounced vulgarity and repellent words while in the presence of other men educated and refined; but when a woman has appeared, one of nature's ladies, they have doffed their caps and become gentle.

Mavis Lezant's presence was almost magical.

"What do you want?" she said, clearly and steadily.

"We want somethin' to ait, Miss. We'm starvin', our wives be starvin', the cheldren be starvin'."

"Why didn't you come in a proper way, then? I would not have sent you away empty. I only came here yesterday. My purpose in coming was to help you."

They looked ashamed. Yes, they had done the wrong thing, and they knew it.

"We went to Beans," said one bolder than the rest. "He ordered us to doors. We axed him civil, and he threatened to send the dogs after us. He took two as quiet chaps as you can find and put 'em to quod for takin' a few sticks from the plantation, too."

These words made them feel their wrongs again, and they began to mutter ominously.

"If Mr. Beans has done other than his duty I'm sorry. I will inquire into the matter. Now go home quietly, and I will see that you have food."

The men became undecided. Their anger was not deep. The promise of food comforted them. Still there were some who were not so easily satisfied.

"I can say no more," she continued quietly. "You can get nothing by staying here. I will see you are treated fairly."

"You go home," shouted Mr. Beans from the hall. "Go home, you vagabonds, and be thankful you are not going to be transported, every one of you."

The steward's words acted like a match on gunpowder.

"Vagabonds, be us?" they cried. "Here, lev me git to 'un. He, the grinding rascal, callin' we vagabonds! Here mates, he's in the passage!"

They came up to where Mavis Lezant stood.

"Git out ov the way, miss. Lev us git to 'un," they said hoarsely.

"No," she said firmly, "I shall not stand out of the way neither must you come in. Mr. Beans is in my house, and you enter at your peril."

She spoke very quietly as she stood alone against a crowd of angry, desperate men. The power of her beauty, her moral courage, and her maidenhood had so far conquered, but now the steward's words had weakened her position.

For a few seconds they stood undecided. It was against their natures to rudely push aside a lady, for, unpolished and uneducated as the Loamshire peasant may be, he has still a good deal of the man in him. But they were angry now, and for the moment they had forgotten that the lady wanted to be their friend.

"We don't want to hurt you," they said; "we want to get at th'oull Beans."

"You must not go inside the house," she said. "If you do, I will have you punished."

She was beginning to get excited, and as a consequence her power became less.

"That's right," shouted Beans again. "They'll murder me if they can get at me, the drunken villains."

Evidently he had lost control of himself and knew not what to do, and Mavis Lezant knew now that her power was gone.

The crowd gave a savage yell.

"We will git in," they said, "we'll have his life."

"Down with the gentry," said another voice: "they only live by suckin our life's blood."

They crept nearer towards the door. If only one would be bold enough to take a decided step the rest would follow.

"You enter here at your peril," said Miss Lezant again, "and you must not touch Mr. Beans. He has only done his duty."

She had uttered the wrong words now. She had indicated that she was on the steward's side, and so, with trembling limbs and glittering eyes, they drew nearer to her.

Mr. Beans heard them coming, and in a hoarse whisper he said to one of the servants, "Hide me; tell me where I can go. I've been a friend to you all."

"After him," shouted a voice in the crowd, "and some of us will go and catch the corn-stacks a-fire. Ef we caan't have bread, they shan't."

Then half a dozen men made a rush towards the hall door, and one of them seized Mavis Lezant by the arm.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW IT ENDED

"NO!" It was a clear, strong voice that was heard speaking thus. A voice full of authority, of command. For an instant they stopped and looked around.

"Who said 'no?" they asked, hoarsely.

"I said it," was the reply.

"It's Mr. Fairfax," muttered the men. 'We dedn' main for he to knaw."

Andrew came up panting, excited. The men, recognizing a superior power, hesitated, and then made way for him. He came up to the Hall door, where a man, haggard and wan, Richard Treloar by name, held Mavis Lezant's arm.

"Richard," said Andrew; "Richard Treloar, I didn't think you would do this."

"I doan't want to hurt she," said the man sullenly; "it's th' oull Bains we'm after."

"I don't think you'll proceed farther, Richard. I think you'll let go that lady's arm."

"Why should 'a?" said a voice in the crowd. "She ain't a done we no good. She's the blood-sucker of the parish, she is. Everything do go to she."

"I think you'll let go her arm, Richard Treloar," repeated Andrew, looking straight in the man's face and speaking in clear steady tones.

The man dropped Mavis Lezant's arm, but looked sullenly among his mates.

"Now, Mavis, come in," said Mrs. Melville, from the hall; "and you, young man, whoever you may be, send this crowd away and you shall be rewarded."

Andrew's heart gave a great bound. It was the first time he ever heard her name. Mavis, Mavis, it was music in his ears, as sweet as the voice of the bird after which she was named.

"I shall not come in—yet," she said.

"Men, comrades," said Andrew, raising his voice, "I didn't think you would have done this I didn't indeed."

Mavis Lezant realized then that a stronger personality than hers had come among them. When he spoke they were obliged to listen. And yet they were by no means conquered. They felt their wrongs keenly, and the anger aroused by the steward's words was not cooled.

"What be us to do?" said one bolder than the rest. "You do knaw, Maaster Fairfax, how things be wi' we. We've had nothin' better'n pig's mait fur weeks, and now we caan't get that. We axed for 'elp, proper we ded, an' th' ould Bains called us vagabons, and threatened us, and as for the fine maid theer, she took up for un, she ded. Ef she wan't give, we'll take. Iss, and we'll 'ave th' oull Bains's blood we will, and we'll pay un all out. We'm the strongest now."

"Fire the corn mows," cried another, "burn 'em oal out!"

"Comrades," said Andrew, "what good will you do by all this?

"We doan't care 'bout good now. We'm starvin." Ther's plenty indoors, I knaw."

"But, comrades, supposing you do all you want. Supposing you come in here and maltreat Mr. Beans, eat as much as you want, and burn down the cornstacks, what will you be the better? To-morrow you'll be as badly off. Your children will not be fed, while you will not escape punishment."

"What do we care 'bout punishment? Spoase they do send we to Botany Bay or Dartmoor, we sh'll be better off than we be now."

"And your wives and children, who will take care of them?"

They were silent, but their anger was not gone. Besides, they heard the voice of the steward shouting at them, and it maddened them.

"I tell you to go home," he shouted, "or you shall all suffer; while as for that villain Fairfax, who's at the bottom of all this, he shall swing, if there's any law in the land."

"Hear that!" they yelled, "we *will* have un," and again they surged towards the door.

"Comrades," said Andrew, "have I tried to be a friend to you?"

"Iss, we do knaw that; but th' oull Bains es threatenin you. Lev us git un!"

"Listen," said Andrew, again making his voice heard above the mutterings of the crowd. "You say I've been your friend. Well, it's true; I make no boast, and I would never have mentioned it under other circumstances. But I've tried to be your friend. I've earned money by ways unknown to you, and I've spent it for you. Didn't I pay your rent, Richard Treloar? When your little one was like to die, Tom Smith, didn't I get a doctor, and provided her nourishment till she was out of danger? And you, Nath Bentley, when the bailiffs came to take your things, didn't I pay the little debt you owed?"

The men mentioned looked at him with tears in their eyes.

"We knaw you ded," said Nath; "a kinder chap never breathed; but ded you ought to 'ave to do it? Wadn' it th' oull Bains's work that made it so hard? But fur he, who do grind we to put money in that fine-fingered maid's pocket and in his own, twudden have bin so."

Mavis Lezant looked at the man strangely, while the crowd again muttered ominously.

"I'll admit things have not been as they should have been," said Andrew, "but we don't know everything. You shall not starve yet. I've just received five pounds for work I've done, and every penny shall be spent to buy you bread. Besides, I can get more."

"God bless 'ee, Maaster Fairfax," said several, subdued by his words; "you be good to us, you *be* a friend."

"Then if I'm your friend, will you do something for my sake?"

"Anything for you, Maaster Fairfax."

"Then go home quietly at once, and let me go with you."

They hesitated for a moment, as if his request were too great.

"You have promised," said Andrew. "And look here, comrades, you shall never want while I can earn a penny."

All this while Mavis Lezant stood watching the battle between Andrew and the men. Sometimes her eyes grew luminous, and again they flashed dangerously. But when Andrew had ceased she stepped forward and said:

"And I promise that no one in the parish shall want bread while I have any. I have not helped you as I should because I have not known how things have been with you. But go home now, and what there is in the house shall be sent to you at once, and more shall be obtained to-morrow."

The battle was won now. Their passion had been conquered by kind words, and what might have been tragedy had passed away.

Slowly they walked back to their homes, most of them glad that no serious steps had been taken, and all feeling that Miss Lezant would treat them fairly.

When they were gone she turned towards Andrew.

"I have to thank you, sir," she said, "for the peaceable ending to this matter."

"I am sorry you should be thus annoyed," replied Andrew; "had I known of their intention before, I think I could have stopped them from coming; but I have been away all day, and only found out half an hour since what they had done."

"I am glad they have come," she said; "they have shown me what I was ignorant of. But I, none the less thank you."

"There is no need," said Andrew, "and I am glad things are no worse."

He spoke quietly, and yet his heart beat loudly, and he trembled with excitement. At last he was face to face, with the woman he loved, realizing that he did love her. He longed to tell her his story, and let her decide his fate.

"Mavis, are they gone? You can surely come in now?" It was Mrs. Melville, who spoke in a complaining tone.

"Yes, they are gone," she replied; "I will soon come in."

The steward came staggering up the hall.

"Ah, they are gone, are they, the vagabonds. How did you get rid of them?"

"It was this gentleman who persuaded them to go."

The steward looked at Andrew keenly, and there was no pleasant look in his eyes as he did so.

"This *gentleman*, Miss Lezant; he is no gentleman. This is the fellow who has caused so much trouble. But for him we should not have heard of such conduct. He's responsible for everything."

"But for him," said Miss Lezant, "you would not be

here now. But for him those men would have killed you. I saw it in their eyes."

"No, miss," said the steward, brave now the danger was over, "they wouldn't have dared to have hurt me."

"I would have you be careful, anyhow," said Andrew. "Their anger has been conquered by kindness, but if you arouse them again I would not like to answer for consequences."

"Arouse them again, young fellow, I've nothing to do with that. I only do my duty. A faithful steward is always hated."

Andrew did not reply.

"I believe," went on the steward, "that we owe all this row to you. I believe you incited them to come here."

"Mr. Beans!" said Miss Lezant.

"Yes, I mean it. I believe he's at the bottom of it. Nothing is too bad for such fellows as he. I thought I'd got him out of the parish. I tried to, and I expect this is done in revenge."

Evidently the steward had been drinking. In order to keep up his courage he had fled to the bottle, and the effect was that he was vulgar and boisterous.

"I must wish you good-night," said Andrew, turning to Mavis Lezant.

"Need you go?" she said. "It seems as though you have had only insults for your kindness. Besides, I wanted to speak to you about the best way of helping the people."

"I am satisfied with your treatment, Miss Lezant," replied Andrew; "still, I do not think it best to stay here to hear Mr. Beans talk further. As to helping the people, I leave that to your good judgment and kindness of heart."

She held out her hand towards him.

"Good-night, and—and——"

Andrew grasped her hand, and held it closely, but before she could finish her sentence he was gone.

CHAPTER XVII

A WOMAN'S PLEA

THE next day Andrew went to London. The editor of the paper for which he had been writing had expressed a desire to see him, and the young man, desiring

to see and feel the life and activity of London after so many months in the country, had acceded to his request. Besides he wanted to see Ezra Pinns, who had been continually telling him that if he grew out of touch with modern Babylon, he would be a lost man. I fancy, however, that Ezra had written more for his own sake than for Andrew's. The truth was the old man wanted to see him. He longed to come into contact again with the young man whom he had learnt to love.

Andrew stayed in London a little more than a week, during which time he had innumerable conversations with Ezra, and one interview with the editor of the great daily. When time came for Andrew to announce his intention of going back Ezra opposed him.

"Why are you going back again?" he objected. "You have learnt all you can learn. You have seen the people under the various conditions of their life. Don't be a fool. Now you are in London stay here."

"No," said Andrew. "I'm going back!"

"But why?"

"Well, I shall be able to work better in the quiet of the country, and under the influence of my father's home.'

"Stuff. There's a woman in the question. Isn't there now?"

Andrew was silent.

"I thought so. Andrew Fairfax, you are ruined. You are a fool like the rest, and if I were your father, I'd flog you. Oh, you blockhead!"

But Andrew laughed at Ezra's anger, and the old man condescended to be agreeable when shortly afterwards they parted.

"But you'll come up again soon?" he said, as they shook hands at the station.

"When I've finished my book."

"Not before?"

"No."

"Well, don't be a bigger fool than you can help. As for the woman—don't resist her, flee from her. Um, but you won't, I know."

When Andrew arrived at St. Neot, he found that a great sorrow had befallen old Amos Crews. The day

before he was called upon to pay certain little debts that he owed, and when he declared his inability to do so, what the people called the "baillies" (bailiffs) entered the house, and the few little things which the old people had were to be sold.

Andrew had left Paddington by the nine o'clock evening express, and thus had arrived at St. Neot in the early morning of the day when Amos's goods were to be sold. He immediately put on his overcoat, when his landlady had told him the news, so as to go and help his old friend in his distress. Before starting out, however, he looked at his purse. Eagerly he counted the few coins it contained, and then he realized that he was powerless. Little as was the sum which Amos owed he was unable to pay it. True, in a few days he would have more sent to him, but that would not satisfy the people, who wanted their money at once. He did not know what to do. The weather had at last broken, and the people had started to work, but money was cruelly scarce, and he knew not to whom he could go. Probably, too, old Amos had tried to get temporary help, and was unsuccessful.

"Do you know what is to become of Amos and his wife if their little bits of furniture are sold?" asked Andrew of his landlady.

"I hear they'm going to the Union," replied the woman. "You see no one will trust 'em now 'cause Amos is past work. He's rheumaticky, too, so there's nothing else for 'em."

Andrew left the house undecided what to do. Had he a few pounds by him he would not have minded so much, but at present he was powerless.

"And this is to be the end of the old man's life, I suppose," he mused. "He has slaved for a miserable pittance all his days. He has toiled long after his physical strength allowed him to do so properly, he has reared his family, and suffered hardship for this. And yet we are in a Christian country, supposed to be governed by just laws! As far as I can see there's nothing else than this for a great number of these labourers. Slave while they have strength, and then go to the workhouse when their strength is gone!"

He walked through the little village almost heedless of the kind greetings which the people gave him, and was wending his way towards Amos's cottage when he heard the sound of horses' hoofs. He looked up, and his heart gave a great bound. Before him was Mavis Lezant.

She stopped her horse as he came up as if to speak to him, but a flush mantled her face, and she seemed confused. He lifted his hat, and his heart throbbed violently.

For a minute neither spoke. Something seemed to tie their tongues, and yet each had something to say to the other.

She was the first to master herself, the first to know what to do. She held out her hand.

"Good-morning, Mr. Fairfax," she said, speaking quickly. "I have for a long time been wanting to see you. and to thank you. You are very good.

"I am so glad the poor people are better off at length," he said. "It is good to think that some of the distress is over. I have just come back from London, and I find that nearly all the men have started to work."

"Yes," she said, "I am glad too, very glad. Mr. Fairfax, I have never before had the opportunity of telling you how much I realize the service you rendered me—on that terrible night, and how grateful I am that——"

"Would you mind letting that drop?" said Andrew somewhat abruptly. "You see it's over now."

"Yes, it's over, but I can't help remembering. Neither can I help remembering that I treated you rudely when you called on me that night—months ago. I was told you were a farm servant; I did not realize that you were a gentleman."

"And do you now?" asked Andrew.

Her face flushed again. "How can I help it?" she said.

"My father farmed Trevadlock years ago. I have been a servant there," he replied.

"That does not matter," was her answer.

Andrew's face flushed with pleasure. It was heaven for him to stand and talk with this maiden. Mavis Lezant, Mavis Lezant; the very name was music to him. For a time he forgot the purpose for which he had started out, forgot the trouble which was eating out the heart of the old man up at the cottage yonder. It was scarce any wonder,

Words of kindness from a young man's only love are very dear, very precious. And Andrew felt them so. He would gladly have stayed and talked indefinitely with her, so happy was he at her side. A footstep behind the fence, however, brought him face to face with the true condition of things.

"I hope I am worthy of your good opinion," he said at length, "even although I have been a farm servant; for I have to come to you as a beggar."

She looked at him questioningly.

"You remember old Amos Crews, Miss Lezant?"

"Remember him! How can I help doing so? He must be a good old man."

"He is indeed, Miss Lezant. An ideal gentleman at heart; the noblest specimen of a Christian I ever saw. But he is in great trouble now. His goods are to be sold to-day to pay his debts, while he and his wife are to be taken to the workhouse."

"No!"

"Yes, Miss Lezant. Had I thought of such a thing I would have arranged to have helped him, but now—well, I have no money, and shall not have for a week or more."

"But such a thing is impossible. Surely a good old man who has been working all his life should not at last come to this."

"He has been working on your estate, too, Miss Lezant."

The shot told. Her eyes flashed, and her lips quivered.

"Will you," pulling out her purse, "tell me how much he needs?"

"It is only a few pounds—about seven, I think; but excuse me, Miss Lezant, I would rather not take it; could you not arrange it?"

"I will send my steward. I will ride to his house at once."

"Nay, do not, Miss Lezant. It would come badly from him. I do not think that would be right."

"What shall I do, then?"

"Can you not go yourself? Your presence would cheer the lonely old souls. You have no idea what good you would do."

"Yes," she said, "I will go, but I must ride back to Ashwater first. I have not enough money with me. Mean-

while, will you, without mentioning my name, go and tell them that they need fret no longer?"

"Gladly," replied Andrew. "Good-morning, Miss Lezant; thank you so much."

"It is I who must thank you," she said. "Good-morning."

She rode away, while Andrew, after watching her until she was out of sight, hurried towards Amos's cottage with a strange feeling at his heart.

Neither knew that a third person had listened to their conversation, yet so it was. A buxom country girl had stood in a footpath behind the hedge, and through the leafless bushes that grew there had watched them both, and had heard every word they uttered. When they were gone the girl's face was drawn and pale, while a strange light shone in her eyes.

"It was no wonder he cared for she," she muttered. "And yet, why should he think about she? I wonder, now, I wonder——" And then with a stealthy look on her face, which was unlike the usual expression of Miss Sarah Cundy, she hurried back towards Trevadlock.

I will not try to describe Amos and Sally Crews's joy at seeing Andrew, or of the effect of the news upon them. Poor old souls, small and uncomfortable as their little thatched tenement was, they had learnt to love it, and added to their other sorrows they would not have lived long had they to leave it. Thus when Miss Lezant came and paid the little money they owed, and told Amos that she had arranged for him to work in her garden at Ashwater as soon as he was well enough, it was pathetic to look at the old folks' faces.

"Thank the Loard," exclaimed the old man; "I believe my sun will go down in a clear sky after all."

Mavis Lezant had walked from the Hall, and stayed nearly an hour with them, and so it was getting late in the afternoon when she turned her face towards her home. She chose the footpath route, and was just nearing the footbridge which crossed the river and led to her park when she heard a voice asking her to stop. She turned and saw a respectably-dressed young woman.

"Do you wish to speak to me?" she asked.

"Yes, if you please, I do."

Mavis Lezant looked at her.

"I have seen you before—' she said; "what is your name?"

"I heard you talking to him this morning," said the girl hastily, "and I thought I would speak to you.

"Talking to him! What do you mean?"

"People say you are a nice lady," went on the girl; "they say, too, that you are engaged to a young gentleman from London, and so you wouldn't want him, ef he was a gentleman, although I b'leeve he es a gentleman."

"I do not understand you," said Miss Lezant somewhat angrily. "What right have you or any one to speak about my being engaged?"

"No, I know—that is—well, I saw you talkin' with —Mr. Fairfax, this mornin'."

"Certainly. Well, what then?"

"Miss Lezant, you can't want him. There's scores you can have. And—and he's all the world to me! he is! he is!"

Mavis Lezant thought a minute. Evidently this young girl was sincere. Was Andrew Fairfax her lover? Why this agitation else?

"Will you explain more clearly?"

"There's nothing to explain; only, Miss Lezant, don't take him away from me."

"Certainly I shall not take him away from you. Is he your—your lover?"

"No—that is, I don't know. You will *never* tell any one, will you? But I—I should *so* like to have him."

"Still I do not understand why you should tell me this."

"I—I saw you this morning—with him. There was a look in his eyes which he never had when he talked to me, and you are so handsome, so grand, that he couldn't think 'bout me after talkin' with you. Don't let him see you—will you? Go away, and don't let him know where you are gone."

Poor Miss Sarah, she was doing the best she knew. She had been thinking over this plan ever since she had seen Andrew and Miss Lezant together in the morning, and now she was trying to carry it out, but she had told her story badly, and yet she did not know its consequences.

"Who are you?" asked Mavis Lezant at length.

"I'm Miss Sarah Cundy. I live up at Trevadlock."

"Oh, I see. That is where Mr. Fairfax used to be?"

"He was there as a servant. But he wasn't like one, you know. We all knew he was something out of the common."

To say the least of it, Mavis Lezant became curious. In spite of herself she could not help being interested in the young man who had rendered her such a signal service, and he wanted to know what his relations were to this buxom girl.

"Did he pay you any special attention?" she asked.

"No—I don't know. He was a gentleman, you know, and though he had his meals with the servants, we all felt he was above we. He was so handsome, so clever, he knowed such a lot—that I—I wanted him. And I hoped he liked me. I believe he would now ef *you* don't——"

"*I*, Miss Cundy! how dare you?"

"I don't mean that you would care 'bout he, you'm used to grand people; but I'm 'fraid he'll care about *you*. Couldn' you go away?" sobbed the girl, "and then ef he do never see you, I hope—I believe he will—care for me. I'll do anything for 'ee ef you will. Anything."

"But you say he has never encouraged you—never showed you any attention?"

"No, he was always friendly till he went over to Ashwater one Sunday night, and after that I thought he was different. Did he see you? Oh, I am sure if he couldn't see you I could make him love me. Don't never tell anybody, will 'ee?"

"I think you are very foolish," said Mavis Lezant at length. "As though what you were afraid of were possible. But you may set your mind at rest. I shall be leaving Ashwater in a few weeks, and it is not likely that what you fear will happen in the meanwhile—that is, I do not expect he will see me."

"Oh, thank you," said Miss Sarah; "and you'll *never* tell any one, will you? You see, you're a lady, and——"

Miss Lezant had walked away.

Why have I related this incident? Why have I told about this poor simple girl's foolishness? Not to laugh at her, certainly. Uninteresting as it may be, it was almost of tragic importance in my friend's life.

BOOK III

DOING HIS WORK

CHAPTER XVIII

TELLS HOW THE WRITER AND ANDREW FAIRFAX BECAME ACQUAINTED

TWO days after the events narrated in the last chapter Andrew commenced writing his novel. He had been carefully arranging his plans and collecting his materials all through the winter, so that when he found leisure to start writing nothing hindered him from executing his work rapidly. As may be imagined, it was a story of country life. All the world knows of it, so I shall not try and describe it. But there is a great deal of which the world knows nothing.

No sooner had Andrew fairly begun his story than he realized the meaning of old Ezra Pinns's words, "A true novelist should be a prophet, a preacher, a reformer," and soon he began to feel a delight in his work for which he had never hoped. He knew now that he had a message to tell as surely as the old prophets had, that his work was as sacred as that of any preacher who ascended the pulpit. Not that he attempted to preach. He had a story to tell, and whatever lesson he might have to teach must be seen in it. He had felt drawn to come into the country by a deep longing which he could not explain. He had seen the people as they were, he had entered into their lives, he had done the work they had done, he had felt as far as possible as they had felt, he had heard their stories, seen their sorrows, realized their condition. More than this,

he understood their needs, and, coming into contact with their real life, he was enabled to see the actual application of the laws and customs of our country. Land laws and landlordism were no mere names to him about which he had read a few political speeches. Labourers' dwellings and labourers' wages were not matters that he had to speculate about,—he knew. The application of the poor laws, the necessity for Village Councils, and a hundred other things were not to him something viewed from afar, or viewed only from the well-to-do man's standpoint, but as things into which he had entered. Some people sitting in well-lighted drawing-rooms, with every means of amusement within their reach, talk about what should be done for poor Hodge, living far away in the country without society, books, and a thousand other things which he needs. Andrew did not do that. He had become one of them, and thus was able to tell their story really.

But it is not my purpose to trace Andrew's experiences during the time in which he wrote his first great novel. Nay, there is but little to tell. The events of his life during that time existed mostly in his own brain, the romance of his life he told in his book. During the time he was writing, he thought little or nothing about the success he might have with publishers, or with the public. He thought too much about his story, a story which grew more real every day.

As the summer came on, he got up early in the mornings and wandered among the fields, and listened to the birds as they sang, or watched the lambs playing. These morning walks, he has since told me, were always an inspiration to him, the singing of the river, the sparkle of the dewdrops, the sloping cornfields, and the fresh morning air, always brought him nearer to the heart of things. They made him feel more sensitive, too ; they led him to see the finer phases of life.

He saw Mavis Lezant only once during the whole time he was writing his book, and he was unable to work with any comfort for two or three days afterwards.

She had left St. Neot soon after her meeting with Miss Sarah Cundy, and did not return again for some months.

Andrew, unaware that she was in the district, was rambling one evening through the fields, and in following the course of the footpath had entered a part of Ashwater Park, which time and custom had made public. The path followed the windings of the river, and Andrew, feeling somewhat weary, sat down under the shade of a broad spreading, leafy tree, and watched while the sun went down and waited while the twilight gathered.

The great house was within sight, and although Andrew would not allow himself to indulge often in useless dreams, he could not help thinking of the beautiful girl whose home lay near by, and whom he loved so hopelessly.

Hearing a sound behind him he started up, and then with fast beating heart he realized that Mavis Lezant was near. At first he thought she was going to pass on without speaking, but she held out her hand frankly as if he were an ordinary acquaintance.

"I am afraid I am trespassing," he said, "but the shade of this old oak looked so refreshing that I could scarce resist."

"This part of the park is almost common property," she said; "at any rate I will not have you punished this time."

"You have been away from Ashwater some time," he said, after a short silence.

"Yes, I came here only a week ago. I have been on the Continent, but it is too hot there now. I am glad to come back."

"I should think so," replied Andrew; "the country is very beautiful in the summer. Even the poor drudges who work on the farms can't be robbed of the bright sunshine and the green fields."

For a few seconds she looked annoyed; then she said:

"But you don't work on the farm now, do you?"

"Oh no. You see, your steward threatened all sorts of things to poor Cundy if he kept me. I was sorry for that. Not that I wanted to work longer on the farm, but I was sorry to leave the old house in which my father and mother lived."

"But Mr. Beans had no right—that is, Trevadlock belongs to me."

"Yes, Miss Lezant; but then, you see, a steward has

great power, especially when the owner is absent. But it does not matter, I found lodgings at the village yonder."

"But you do not work on the farm?"

"No, Miss Lezant, I do not work on the farm now. I am doing other things."

She looked at him keenly, as though she would read his thoughts. Then she said thoughtfully:

"But you go to Trevadlock often?"

"No; I have not been there for many months."

"And you find the country very attractive?"

"Yes and no. It is very lonely, but then I need the quiet just now. The——matter I have in hand requires it."

For a little while she seemed to hesitate, then she said,—

"The people in the village regard you as a sort of mystery, Mr. Fairfax. You have chosen a strange existence."

"In what way?"

"Well, first of all it seems very strange that one of your evident education should care to become a farm labourer and the associate of rustics. While now that you have ceased to be a labourer they wonder why you should remain here."

"Ah, well, tastes differ," was his reply.

"Pardon me for asking, but you have rendered me such service that I take the liberty of doing so. Do you stay here long?"

"For some time, yes. I have learnt to love the people here, and I should like to do something for them before I leave, but I shall run up to London in the autumn."

"You know London?"

"Very well.

"You like living there?"

"I think there is no place in the world like it."

"Then why stay here?"

He did not tell her why, although he felt tempted to do so. He longed to tell her that although he would not own it to himself, he stayed in St. Neot because there he would have the best opportunity of seeing her, and speaking to her, little as was the time she spent there. He answered nothing, however, but the blood rushed to his face, and he looked confused.

Evidently she noticed his confusion, for she seemed to alter in her tone towards him.

"There are several reasons why I stay here," he said at length. "And you, Miss Lezant, I know I am rude to ask, but do you stay here long?"

"Only for a few weeks, perhaps only a few days. I go to London soon, but I shall come back in September or October, and a good number of friends will come with me I expect."

She murmured the last part of her answer to herself rather than to him.

"Will the—the Bernard family come with you?" he stammered.

She looked at him keenly. Evidently she felt her position as a young lady standing talking with a young man, who acted strangely, and of whom she knew nothing. Still she was not an ordinary society girl, nor was she troubled much by conventional methods of living and speaking. Besides, he had helped her; he had, in spite of everything, won her confidence. A young man of evident good breeding and education, of whom every one spoke well, could not be treated as an entire stranger. Still she said abruptly as if astonished,—

"What do you know of the Bernard family?"

"Only—that—that—I—was—that is, you see, I heard the family was here some time ago."

"Are you known to the Bernard family?"

"I am sure the Bernard family would not know me," he said grimly.

Again she looked at him keenly, as though she detected something significant in his answer, but she replied quietly,

"Yes, I expect the family will come with other friends."

A look of pain crossed his face, but she could not tell why. What could he care about the Bernard family?

They were both startled by the sound of voices, and she looking eagerly around said she must go home.

"It would be folly for me to ask to be allowed to escort you home?" said Andrew anxiously.

"I am so near that there is no need," she said quickly.

"Just so," replied the young man. "Besides—well, never mind, but you will not object to my staying in your

park a little longer? The singing of the river helps me to think—and—I have need of thinking."

"Have you very important work to do, then?"

"More important than a farm labourer can be expected to do well," he replied. "Thank you for speaking to me, Miss Lezant. It encourages my class, you know. It is not often such as I can speak to the lady of the Manor. I'll try and prove worthy of my privileges."

She left him then, Andrew watching her as she sped across the park, until she was lost amidst the shades of the evening.

"That last speech of mine was brutal," he muttered, "nothing but a rank outsider would have said such a thing; but I could not help it. I don't think I betrayed my weakness though. My God help me!"

He had seemed apparently cool and collected during the conversation; but it had only been a mighty effort on his part. Every nerve in his body tingled, and his hands trembled with excitement. He wiped the perspiration that had gathered on his brow, and walked by the riverside, at first slowly, but afterwards rapidly. Now that she was gone he was not master of himself. Never until now did he realize what a hold she had upon him; their meeting had stirred his heart to the very depths, and he was unable to control his great passion.

"Madness! madness!" he cried. "What right have I—to—to—? There I must fight this out somehow!"

That night his landlady wondered why Mr. Fairfax was so late, for it was not until early morning that he found his way back to his lodgings.

For the next two days he could not write a word of his story, but wandered restlessly through the fields and lanes.

A few days after he heard that Miss Lezant and Mrs. Melville had gone to London— and then he seemed eager to atone for the time he had lost by working night and day.

And now the time has come for me to tell how I, Jethro Haynes, became acquainted with Andrew Fairfax; and in order to do so, uninteresting though it may be, I must say a few words about myself.

As I said at the beginning of this narrative, I would not

trouble the reader about myself, only in so far as it was neccessary to tell the story of my friend's life. That promise shall be faithfully adhered to, as it has been in the past.

I had come to London long years before I knew Andrew and by dint of much work, and after many disappointments, I obtained the post of reader in a large publishing house.

My position in the publishing house of Messrs. Quill & Steel was one of considerable trust. My decisions were generally considered as final, and it often fell to my lot to meet authors face to face in arranging as to terms, etc.

One morning, it was early in September, I had just entered my office, when Mr. Quill came in and threw me a letter.

"It's a well-written letter, Mr. Haynes," he said quietly.

Mr. Quill is by far a more capable judge in matters of this sort than Mr. Steel; indeed, back in the early days of the firm he read all the manuscripts submitted to the firm, and largely through his keen insight and sound judgment the house became a prosperous one.

I took the letter and read it. It was purely a business note, and yet I felt sure it was not the work of an ordinary man. It stated that the writer had been for some considerable time living in the country, had entered into every phase of the country people's life, and that for some months he had been engaged in writing a novel. With the permission of Messrs. Quill & Steel he would call in the afternoon, and submit his work for their inspection. The letter was written in a bold manly hand, and signed "Andrew Fairfax."

"Not a bad idea either, Mr. Haynes."

"Not at all," I replied; "there's scarcely a good novel representative of purely agricultural life in all its phases. Still this may be nothing."

"True. But you know the country well, and thus can judge correctly."

I nodded.

"Do you know, Mr. Haynes, that this note reminds me of some articles written in the *Daily*——?"

I started. Mr. Quill's quick perception had revealed to me something which my mind was slowly feeling after. I with thousands of others had read some stirring articles on country life in the paper he had mentioned, and there was something in the letter suggestive of them.

"I am going to find out, Mr. Haynes. I know the editor well."

I sat down and started to work. I was not long in forgetting the letter written by Andrew Fairfax. It so happened that I had something worth reading that morning and I became interested. No one greets the advent ot a promising author with more gladness than does a publisher's reader, and the work I had in hand that morning was the work of a writer then unknown to fame, but who promised great things. So interested did I get that I spent but a very few minutes over my lunch, so that by about three o'clock I had finished it, and was just writing a short report concerning the work when a man entered, bearing a card.

I took it, and read the name and address.

Andrew Fairfax,

ST. NEOT,
LOAMSHIRE.

"Show Mr. Fairfax in," I said to the man, who immediately retired.

"Come this way," I heard the man say; "that is the door."

"The one marked private," said a deep manly voice.

"Ah," I thought, "that voice has a clear ring about it."

"Yes, sir," replied the man.

A second later the door opened, and Andrew Fairfax and I stood face to face.

CHAPTER XIX

ANDREW AND HIS PUBLISHERS

I SEE him now as I saw him then. A handsome manly young man. His eyes clear and grey, his forehead broad and high; his hair thrown carelessly back over it. Both eyes and forehead said as plainly as possible, "We belong to a man of brains." The nose was straight and finely chiselled, the mouth was tender and sensitive, the chin large and square. These features told their story too. They said, "We belong to a man who feels, to a man who is a true poet, and a man who is daringly resolute."

A glow of health was upon his cheek, although his eyes looked somewhat anxious.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Fairfax?" I said.

"You can read this story if you will," he said, looking at me keenly, and yet with a smile.

Somehow I caught his humour, and although, as a rule I never become in the slightest degree familiar with any who pay me visits, I said without thinking,—

"Why, have you anything worth the reading?"

"Certainly I have!" was the reply.

He spoke in a tone of confidence. There was no foolish conceit implied in his words; he felt he had written something worth reading, and was not ashamed to say so. From some men his answer would have been vain and foolish, but from him it was otherwise. I felt that he was a strong man and a brave man.

"Then I will read it," I replied.

"When?" he asked. Then, as if he thought he had been rude, he said quickly, "Pardon me if I seem abrupt, but I have come up to London on purpose to get this book published, and I don't want to stay longer than I can help."

"There is a great deal I have to read," I replied. "I have to take the manuscripts in order. I should say I could let you know in a week."

"Not before?" eagerly.

"We regard that as a quick decision," I said; "but sometimes we take things out of their order. I will see."

"Thank you," he said; "then may I call a week to-day?

Had he been an ordinary man, I should have said that there was no neccessity, and that I would communicate with him through the post. But I wanted to see him again. He seemed to bring the breezes of the country with him, and made me think of my old home amidst the cornfields So I said,—

"Yes, you can call on me in a week from to-day; but you had better give me your town address in case there is need to write."

He gave me his address, a little private hotel, in a street off the Strand. I discovered afterwards that this was the hotel in which he first met Ezra Pinns. He left immediately afterwards, and I felt a strange sort of interest in him. Indeed I sat back in my chair, and forgetting my report on the work I mentioned a little while ago, I began to muse about this Andrew Fairfax, and thought what a splendid looking fellow he was.

Not long afterwards Mr. Quill came in.

"Has Fairfax been here?" he said.

I pointed to a parcel lying on the table before me.

He took it up, as if to untie the string by which it was bound, but dropped it again.

"He is the man, Mr Haynes!"

"What man?"

"The man who wrote those articles. He has so pleased the editor that he has engaged him for other work. His descriptions of the condition of the farm labourers have caused a great deal of talk. Can you read this at once?"

"Certainly if you wish," I replied; "but there's a big pile of stuff lying there."

"Let it stand over for a few days," he replied.

I had not seen Mr. Quill so interested about a new writer before, but I found out afterwards that he had been again reading the articles just referred to that very afternoon, and felt sure that the man who could write such vigorous sketches, could also, if needs be, write a novel that would be more than ordinary good. Moreover, Andrew Fairfax had interested me, so I determined to take the MS to my rooms and read it quietly there. Of course, I might not have the patience to get to the end, but I

would see. So I told Mr. Quill, who had not only good literary judgment, but a keen scent of a good bargain, that it should be attended to at once.

That night, after dinner, instead of going to any place of amusement, I started to read the story.

As may be imagined, it takes a good deal to move a publisher's reader. Novel reading as a profession becomes a very unemotional affair. The paid novel reader sees the tricks of the trade; he can see the working of the machinery, and generally indulges in grim satire, where the unsophistocated reader bursts into tears. I had not read ten pages of Andrew Fairfax's novel before I forgot to criticize. There was a freshness in every sentence which charmed me. Every line breathed conviction, earnestness. There was little or no padding. Evidently his story was definitely in his mind; his every character was real to him. Everything he touched was made to live. The social and mental condition of the people, their general life—the pathos, the humour—everything was unconventional; everything pulsated with true feeling. I read on and on, forgetting time and circumstance, greedily devouring every page until I came to the last line.

When I had finished I looked at my watch. It had stopped. I went to the window and looked out. I saw the first streak of dawn in the Eastern sky.

"Andrew Fairfax," I said to myself, "I want to know you. I want you to be my friend. You are a man worth knowing; you have a heart, and you have brains."

I threw myself on my bed, and after a while dropped into a sleep, but soon began to dream, about the characters in the story I had just read, which, before long, became connected with the man who had conceived or portrayed them.

When I found my way to my office again, I found that Mr. Quill had already arrived.

"Well?" he said abruptly.

"Good-morning, Mr. Quill," I said.

He looked at me keenly.

"You have read Fairfax's story?"

"You seem very interested, Mr. Quill," I said; "you seldom take such interest in an unknown writer."

"When I read those articles yesterday I felt sure I had discovered a novelist," he replied. "Was I correct?"

"Yes."

"You have read his novel?"

"I have read it."

"When?"

"Almost ever since I left the office, last night."

"Ah!"

Evidently he was pleased. He knew that I should not sit reading anything after office hours, unless it was out of the common.

"Well, what is your verdict?" he went on.

"The finest thing of the kind I ever read."

"Ah!"

Some young writers think that publishers and editors are very unfeeling men; that they are careless about what is sent to them. It is a great mistake. They are always on the look out for something worth the having. No one is so delighted as they, when they find a good thing. It is true the quantity of chaff they get makes them suspicious but they fasten on a grain of wheat as eagerly as a child clutches at a new toy.

"What do you suggest?"

"Make him an offer," I said.

"What is the length of the thing?"

I told him.

"How would you have it got up?"

I told him my opinion. I am ashamed of what followed then. I am ashamed of the sum he mentioned as a remuneration for the work done. I feebly protested. I suggested that he had given ten, twenty times the amount for work not half so good, but Mr Quill stuck to his proposition.

"Fairfax is unknown," he said; "beside the work may be a failure."

"Then give him a royalty," I suggested.

Suffice to say I did not succeed. Mr. Quill was an old business hand, and knew what he was about. I know that of late years a great deal has been said about the tricks of the publishing trade, far too much I am inclined to think. Nevertheless, there are some men who, in whatever line

of business they may be engaged, will, if possible, outdo the one with whom they deal. Mr. Quill was one of them. He studied his own pocket, and was always prepared to drive the hardest bargain possible. Other publishers again are fair and honest, acting justly with all.

That evening I wrote a letter to Andrew Fairfax.

"I am instructed by Messrs. Quill & Steel to offer you £——for the copyright of 'Nature's Children.' They will be pleased to hear from you in relation to this proposal."

I submitted the letter to Mr. Quill, and as Mr. Steel was in the room at the same time he took it and read it.

"'Nature's Children,'" said Mr. Steel, "is not a bad title. Is it a decent thing?"

"Very fine," I said, not heeding Mr. Quill's look.

"Then surely it is worth more than that?" he said mildly.

Whereupon Mr. Quill took Mr. Steel in hand, and talked to him as only Mr. Quill can talk. Let me say here that Mr. Steel belied his name altogether. He was mild and yielding, and although he had a considerable knowledge of publishing affairs, he yielded up to Mr. Quill the general management of the concern.

The letter was posted, and I awaited Andrew Fairfax's answer with some little curiosity. Somehow the young fellow had deeply interested me, and I constantly caught myself picturing him as I had seen him the day before. His fine handsome face, his well poised head, his broad shoulders, his splendid physique. What would he say to it? I had stated in my letter that I had at his request given him an early answer. This was done at Mr Quill's suggestion. "He might think we were anxious to have it otherwise," the little man suggested.

At length his reply came. In a courteous letter he thanked Messrs. Quill & Steel for so promptly letting him know their decision, and felt gratified at their willingness to publish 'Nature's Children.' With regard to the terms offered he would call that afternoon in relation thereto.

"Ah," I thought, "I do not think Andrew Fairfax will be so easily caught as Mr. Quill imagines. I hope not anyhow."

About three o'clock in the afternoon he came, and we immediately began to talk business.

"Do you accept the terms we offer?" I asked.

I thought I saw his eyes flash indignantly.

"Do you know," he said, "that I have been more than a year gathering materials for and writing that novel? Do you know that I have undergone all sorts of pain and discomfort, so that I might depict the life truly? Do you know that I have been a drudge, and ofttimes a great deal worse, in order that I might tell the truth? Why, think of the mere labour of writing! Think of all the thought and arrangement it required! And then you offer me the same rate of payment as is given to poor Hodge, whose condition I have tried to portray."

He spoke quietly, and there was only a touch of passion in his voice. Yet I knew he felt deeply.

"But you are a new writer," I said. "Many new writers would be glad to pay such a firm as ours to have their works published."

"I do not belong to that class," he said. "Writing this novel had been no mere fancy of mine. I have lived every bit of it. I am not anxious to make a fortune, but I want fair remuneration for what I have done."

"But," I replied, "think of the risk a publisher runs. Supposing we printed a few thousand volumes of your book, and they failed to sell."

"I cannot argue with you," he replied— "because I do not know the ins and outs of a publisher's business. I do not ask you to pay me a farthing as a price, I ask for the usual royalty."

"What royalty?"

He mentioned the percentage he thought fair, and which I knew to be given by many publishing houses.

"I will speak to my employers," I said, "and let you know."

"I should like to know soon," he replied. "I am anxious to get back to Loamshire."

I felt more and more the decision of this young man's character. He seemed to care nothing for ordinary customs. He had an idea of what was right, and would have nothing else. Some young writers I have known have felt

awed in coming to a publishing house, and catch at everything like encouragement without considering their own value in the least. Andrew Fairfax had evidently been living with realities and he saw what things were worth. He knew he had written something real, and he wanted what was right in return. If the firm of Messrs. Quill & Steel would not take his work another publisher would. If they would not deal fairly by him, another firm would.

"Wait here," I said. "I will speak to Mr. Quill."

I need not describe my conversation with that gentleman. It ended in Fairfax being asked to come into his office, and at length a bargain was made. Of course, Mr. Quill had the best of it, and I am sure that some publishers would have offered him far better terms, but Fairfax was to have a royalty, and that was the point he was chiefly anxious about.

When he left I put my card in his hand.

"Come and see me any evening between six and eight." I said to him; "I shall be very glad to see you."

He looked at me straight in the eyes.

"Thank you, I will surely come," he said, and this was the beginning of our friendship.

Shortly after Mr. Quill came into my office.

"That young fellow has not lived in the country all his life," he said.

"No; I don't think he has."

"I never saw a young author so obstinate," he said. "Hadn't I seen those articles I would have let him go out of sheer spite, even though I had been sorry afterwards. It is simply abominable for the young fellow to hold out so. But he's a good catch. We must get it out at once and have it boomed."

"It will be the book of the year," I said.

When Andrew got back he found Ezra Pinns waiting anxiously for him, to whom he told his experiences.

"He's done you. I know him. One of the cleverest fellows in London. He finds out everything. Mind, he knows about those articles in the *Daily*——"

"Does he? I never told him; and 'pon my word I forgot all about them."

"If I were a betting man I'd wager all I've got," he

replied. "Still, my boy, you are no fool. I was afraid you were, but you are not. You've written a good thing, and it'll tell, or my name's not Ezra Pinns."

"If I do anything I shall owe it to you," replied Andrew.

"Nonsense. You owe everything to that old woman who turned you out of doors, and to the girl who jilted you. After that you were bound to get on. I happened to fall in with you, and start you; but you'd have got on anywhere. You've got the stuff in you. Um, Ezra Pinns, don't make the boy silly."

"Anyhow, the bargain is struck, and I shall sign the agreement in a day or two. I hope it'll be a success."

"Like as not it won't," said Ezra, "like as not it won't. It's neither a theological novel nor a detective blood curdler. Those are the only things that go nowadays, unless a writer is willing to wallow in ditchwater."

"Now you are looking on the dark side of things again."

"Boy," said Ezra, "some of the best stuff isn't known, and never will be—and yet, and yet—well—well I won't discourage you."

"Quill & Steel are good publishers?"

"They are near and grinding, but they know how to drive a thing. They can make a thing known as well as any firm."

For a long time after that neither spoke. Andrew sat in an armchair, with a paper before him, but he did not read a word. Evidently he was thinking deeply, and Ezra watched him closely. Presently a look of tenderness swept over the old man's face, and his lips trembled.

"He is a good lad," he muttered, "and I love him. Ah, if she had only been true I might have had such a lad of my own, but—— What is he thinking about, I wonder? Not about the book I know, his face is too anxious—too sad."

But Andrew did not heed him.

"Andrew."

The young man started up, "Yes, Mr. Pinns."

"What were you thinking about? Um! tell me!"

Andrew did not speak.

"It was a woman," grumbled Ezra, "a woman. Lad,

live for your work, and not for women. Shun women, shun 'em!"

"Were you ever young?" asked Andrew.

"God help me, I was!"

"And you have not married the woman you loved?"

"No! no!"

"Is life worth the living when you don't realize such a desire?"

Ezra Pinns stalked out of the room angrily, but presently he came back again, and let his hands rest on Andrew's head. He fondled his dark locks while his eyes beamed with tenderness.

"I'm a rough, crotchety old man," he said, "don't mind me. But I love thee, lad, I love thee."

Andrew took his hand in his, and held it fast.

A day or two after a paragraph was placed in nearly all the leading papers to the effect that Messrs. Quill & Steel had discovered a new novelist of remarkable ability. That the articles he had written for the *Daily*—— on life in the country had caused a great deal of controversy, and that it was confidently expected that his first novel would have an unprecedented run. It stated that he had been living with the people as one of them in order to describe their life in every particular, which he had done with wonderful intensity and realistic power. The notice concluded with the statement that the writer's name was Andrew Fairfax.

CHAPTER XX

THE BEGINNING OF THE STRIKE

MAVIS LEZANT sat in a tastefully furnished room in a house situated in the West End of London. Near her were Isabel and Beryl Bernard. Each of them was reading. The two Miss Bernards seemed engrossed in the latest novel, while Mavis Lezant carelessly scanned some magazines which lay near her. Time seemed to hang heavily on her hands. Evidently the papers contained nothing to interest her, while her companions were too deep in the mysteries of their novels to pay her any attention.

At length Beryl lifted her head.

"You are dull, Mavis, are you not?" she said.

"I am not very excited just now," she replied.

"London is awfully dull just now," went on Beryl; "for my own part I prefer the country."

Mavis did not reply, but a far away look came into her eyes as though she were picturing her own quiet old house far away from noise and strife.

Beryl looked at her keenly. "I don't think she wants to talk," muttered the girl to herself, and she quietly resumed her book.

Beryl was fast becoming a beautiful girl. The unhealthy look which so marred her beauty a year before was gradually disappearing, and as the glow of health came upon her cheek so did her beauty increase.

After a few moments Mavis turned towards her papers again, and had not read long before a startled look came into her eyes.

"Surely it can't be he!" she exclaimed aloud, "and yet it must be."

Both girls turned and looked at her.

"Anything the matter, Mavis?" asked Isabel Bernard languidly.

"Yes—no. I was only surprised that's all."

"What about? Anything in the paper."

"Yes."

"What are you reading? Oh, I see, *The Academy*. Any new novels worth reading?"

"No; it mentions something about a writer I think I know."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. Do you know some time ago a young fellow came to St. Neot and became a servant at a farm near Ashwater? He immediately became conspicuous, for he had the appearance of a gentleman. You see new-comers are so rare down there that every one is noted. Well, this young man began to take an interest in the condition of the people. He went to my steward, and afterwards came to me, relative to some cottages on the estate. He also visited the clergyman and some of the guardians of

the poor, and introduced some novel schemes for bettering the condition of the labourers."

"Ah, some political meddler, I suppose?"

"He did not seem so. Anyhow, the people got to love him very much, and last winter during that terribly cold time, the starving people, enraged by the words of my steward, and, I am afraid, by my neglect, they came to Ashwater demanding food. They were almost wild with anger, and I believe would have burnt down the house but for this young man, who came up in time to stop them."

"Oh, I see, quite a hero. Well anything more about him?"

While she had been speaking Wilton Bernard had entered the room, and had carefully listened.

"Yes, I found, on talking with him, that he was quite a gentleman, well educated, and evidently accustomed to good society. I often wondered what he was doing down there, for, although he said his father used to farm some land which belongs to my estate, I could not see why he should care to remain there."

Her three listeners had become very interested.

"What was his name?" asked Beryl eagerly.

"He called himself Andrew Fairfax," replied Mavis, looking at the paragraph which had excited her attention.

The three exchanged glances, while Wilton's eyes flashed angrily.

"Is there anything about him there?" asked Isabel.

"Yes, here's a paragraph about him. At any rate, it is about some one who bears the same name, and it seems to explain his strange conduct."

"What is it? Let us hear."

Mavis read the paragraph which had been inserted in the papers :—

"Messrs. Quill & Steel, the well known publishers state that they have discovered a novelist of real power. It will be remembered that some months ago a series of remarkable articles on life in the country appeared in one of our great dailies. These were by an unknown writer, who has since submitted a novel to the above mentioned firm, and from what we can gather it is expected to create a sensation. The writer has been living for more than a

year among the people of whom he writes, but, more than that, has become one of them, doing their work, and as far as possible living their life. In fact, he has become a farm labourer and general drudge. This is not common among literary men, who too often write about that of which they know nothing, and hence we look forward with pleasure to reading the work, which will be published in a few weeks. The author's name is Andrew Fairfax."

When she had finished reading there were a few seconds of silence, then Wilton Bernard said:

"You say you have spoken to this—fellow?"

"Several times I am not at all surprised, for he's such a splendid man."

"It can't be he?"

"I am sure it must be. Everything tallies so exactly."

"Andrew Fairfax—Andrew Fairfax—is he good looking?"

"Exceedingly fine looking. I am very glad. I want to see him again and congratulate him."

Wilton Bernard left the room in search of his mother.

"He crosses me again," he muttered; "well, it may be a good thing. It will bring matters to a speedy issue. I must talk with mother."

He was not long in finding her, and quickly he told her what he had heard from Mavis Lezant.

Mrs. Bernard looked startled. "Surely," she said, "that fellow was born to be your evil genius. He did nothing but baulk you in the old days, and now he has turned up again. I thought we had effectually rid ourselves of him, but I am mistaken."

"She admires him," grumbled Wilton. "I could see that as she spoke about him."

"After all, it may not be he."

"It must be. The name is the same, and she mentioned something about his being a servant at the place where his father used to be a farmer. We can have nothing more conclusive."

"But who would have thought he would have written such a novel?"

"He was always clever. At school I was always the

dunce, and he the paragon of cleverness. What's to be done, that's the point?"

"I don't think there is any danger."

"I don't know. If she goes down to this hole in the country and feels sad and lonely, and then this fellow comes to her with all his honours upon him, she will be glad of his company, and he will fascinate her."

"Of course she has no knowledge of our former relations with him?"

"Evidently not, although I thought that Beryl seemed to want to tell her."

"She may want, but she will not. Every one in the house has promised never to mention his name in connection with our family. If he has not told her, there is no danger. His old friends will not dream that Andrew Fairfax and Andrew Bernard are the same."

"Anyhow, I mean to have her."

"And I mean that you shall. If you don't, or if you don't marry some one rich, your prospects are bad. I have been unfortunate in some of my speculations, thanks to you, and now if you do not retrieve our fortunes somehow, I hardly know what course we shall have to take. You see, the world thinks we are rich, and we have lived as though we were. As for you—I need say no more on that head, but you know you have run through a fortune in two years. Now you must atone for the past by marrying a rich wife."

"I've no objection to that. I am a bit afraid of Miss Lezant, she is so blessedly clever; but she fascinates me, and is always interesting. Besides, she had a fine rent-roll."

"Very respectable indeed; anyhow, enough to make you comfortable for life. Let me think."

Mrs. Bernard sat back in her chair and began to muse, and as she did so a hard, bitter expression came on her face, as though she were angry and disappointed. Presently she looked up and said,—

"How do you and Mavis get on together? You have had a great deal of opportunity to make an impression."

"I don't know. She doesn't let a fellow know in the slightest."

"Well, what is done must be done quickly."

"How?"

"In this way. There are two things that must be done at once."

"How? What do you mean?"

"I mean this. You must let Mavis Lezant think that you love her, and want her for your wife. Then you must do something to kill this book of—of this fellow."

Wilton walked to and fro the room.

"After all," he muttered. "Andrew may not have a single thought about Miss Lezant. If he has been there as a servant, how dare he think of any one in her position?"

"He has been brought up as a gentleman, that would lead him to dare. I don't say there's any danger, but it is well to be ready for anything. Anyhow, your plan of action is plain. First you must let Miss Lezant think that you love her. If she seems to take your confession kindly, press your suit, and a definite arrangement can be made. If not, don't let her have the opportunity to give you a denial, but in that case be sure and leave her as though she had given you encouragement. I have my reasons for this. This will make her think about you, and I shall be able to do a great deal for you when we go down to Ashwater."

"But about Andrew? I am sure she is interested in him. She confessed to having talked with him, and her eyes flashed with pleasure as she read the paragraph."

"I don't think—I can't see how there can be any real danger there. Still, it is well to be prepared. Anyhow, he could not dare to approach her without name or position."

"No; but if he blossoms out as a popular author? You know how she admires these clever literary people."

"Well, he must not blossom out as a popular author."

"Who in the world is to hinder him?"

"You must."

"But how can I?"

"Easily. The success of a book depends on several things. It depends on the push and enterprise of the publishers; it depends on advertising; it depends a great deal on the reviewer. In fact, in the first novel almost

everything depends on the way the reviewers take it up. At least, so a popular author told me."

"Well, what has this to do with me?"

"A great deal. You know several literary critics, don't you?"

"I've met them at the clubs, but they are not in my line. They take but little notice of me. I'm not clever enough for 'em."

"Still you know them, and are friendly with them?"

"In a way, yes."

"Well, you must get them to kill this book."

"But I don't suppose they would listen to me. Some of them think themselves very high and mighty, I can tell you."

"Look here, Wilton. You must not be a child. This is no jesting matter. If you are to win Mavis Lezant, you must be willing to be daring and bold. I don't fancy that you relish the thought of being poor—well, if you don't marry money you will be poor."

"Well, I'm willing to do anything that I can. But suppose I succeed in getting his book killed, what then?"

"Why, this. If there is any danger of his caring for Mavis Lezant, he would never dare to speak to her while his book was a failure. I know him well enough for that. On the other hand, Mavis Lezant is not the girl who likes failures, and when it becomes known that his book was so poor that it died in its birth she will think but little about him."

"But supposing we fail to kill this book? Supposing it becomes popular, and is talked about a great deal? Andrew would become lionized then, and would naturally be bold in speaking to her."

"If we fail, we shall be with her at her own home, and we must try another scheme. Of course, there may be no danger, but if there is we can surely find out something about him which will hinder him from becoming your rival. Be thankful you have a mother, Wilton, a mother who is determined on your success. Now leave me and do as I tell you."

He looked at his watch. "I'll go and dine at my club," he muttered, "I shall be sure to meet with some of those

literary scrubs there. Some I know are poor, and it may be that—well, anyhow, I'll try."

Wilton Bernard took a cab and drove down Piccadilly.

A few minutes later he entered the smoking-room of the club, and saw seated in an easy chair a man whom he knew was on the staff of an important literary paper.

"I'm in luck's way," he said to himself; "he's the very man I need. I know he's trying to climb up, and is as poor as a church mouse. He'll do anything for a consideration."

He went up to him, and shook him by the hand.

"Hulloa, Brett," he said cordially, "you are just the fellow I wanted to see. Come and have some dinner with me, will you?"

"I don't mind if I do," said Brett, rising lazily, at the same time he wondered at the wondrous cordiality of the man who had treated him with scant grace in the past.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SECOND STEP

"WELL, Brett," said Wilton, after they had been sitting together a few minutes, "how goes the literary world?"

Brett stared at him in astonishment.

"Oh, there's nothing on; but you take no interest in that kind of thing, do you?"

"Yes, sometimes."

"Ah, well, I know of nothing special."

"You generally review novels, don't you?"

"Mostly. You see, it requires a jolly lot of knowledge, and takes an awful time to do a heavy book decently. I have done it, you know, but I don't like it."

"Do you think that reviews have such an influence as people make out?"

"Influence! I should think they have. Not that they are worth a hang. But the people think they are, so it's all the same."

"Look here, now. Supposing a promising author writes a book. Supposing the book is a good one, and gets

published by a good firm. Supposing, too, that good preliminary announcements appear concerning it—would it be possible for you to strangle it at its birth?"

"Well—all depends. First, is the author known?"

"Not the slightest."

"Next, who are the publishers?"

"Well, say Quill & Steel."

"Respectable, but not first-rate; that is, their name is not always a guarantee as to the quality of their publications. I think such a book could be killed. Of course it would mean a—a—consideration. Things of that sort can't be done for nothing."

"Come, tell me how."

"Well, as a rule, novels by new writers are taken but little notice of, and are generally delegated to some of the younger men."

"Such as——"

"Myself, yes. Anyhow, I could by arrangement get hold of a particular book and review it for two or three papers—say, the *Lynx*, the *Jungle*, and then *Saturn*. Then I know half a dozen fellows who could manage to do the same for papers they write for, and thus pretty nearly box the compass."

"Ah, I see. But that would not touch such papers as the *Athenæum* and the *Spectator?*

"No, but you need not fear them. They seldom trouble to review an unknown man."

"Then, again, there are the dailies and the provincial papers."

"The dailies cannot be reckoned on; as for the provincial papers, they don't count."

"How is that?"

"Well, this way. Booksellers are influenced not by the provincial Press, but by the London. If twenty of the London papers which I could mention boycott a book I wouldn't give much for its chances."

"It seems to me, then, that reviews are often worthless?"

"Reviews in a great number of papers are often worthless; that is, regarded as an index to the value of the books, but as I said, they have immense weight."

"It seems a jolly shame after all," said Wilton, as if musing.

"Well, as it was, is now, you know; one thing, it gets a lot of us bread and cheese. But come, do you wish me to do anything for you?"

"Yes, I do."

Wilton pulled the *Academy* out of his pocket, and pointed to the paragraph which had given Mavis Lezant so much pleasure. "Read that," he said.

Brett read it quickly. "It's in all the papers," he said; "but things are constantly appearing like that. It's a good dodge, but it often fails."

"But it will make people be on the look out?"

"Doubtful. Such paragraphs are common."

"Anyhow, I want the book killed."

"Why? do you know Fairfax? I never heard the name."

"I used to know him. He is one of these pattern young men. Clever, I'll admit, but a canting moralist."

"Ah, just the fellow one likes to keep back. Still, his idea is a good one. A real jolly romance of country life on its social side has not been given. It ought to have a place."

"But it mustn't."

"Very well, my boy. I daresay I could manage—for a consideration, of course."

"Well, when this book comes out, I want it to be abused and kicked and maltreated shamefully. Don't let it have a chance to live."

"My dear fellow, if what you suggest were done, the book would be made."

"I don't understand."

"Well, let me tell you this then. A real, downright abusing review is almost as good as a favourable one. It creates an interest, and people begin to talk. There is something in human nature which leads people to take up cudgels on the side of the suffering party, and so the thing gets on."

"What do you suggest then?"

"I would suggest an entirely different method from yours. If an unknown writer wants to get on, the first

thing he needs is light. That is, he wants his book to be talked about. Silence means death. There is a fairly well-authenticated story of an author going to a publisher not a thousand miles from Paternoster Row, and asking him to give him an estimate of the cost of publishing a book, and giving it a fair chance in the market. On this being done the author looked at the items, and found the sum of thirty pounds mentioned for *abuse*. He could not understand this, but the publisher assured him that this was as needful as the expenditure for paper and ink."

"Ah, I see."

"Just so. Well then, if this book is to die, nobody must hear of it."

"But you can't keep the publishers from advertising."

"Perhaps not, but an advertisement announcing a book by an unknown author, without cuttings from reviews, counts for but little, and booksellers won't take such things on spec."

"What would you do then?"

"Simply ignore it, or write such a milk-and-water notice that nobody will read it."

"Just so, that will be a good plan. But do you think that arrangement will succeed?"

"Of course I can't promise. If the book is one of merit, it will be the only way to keep it back—if it can be kept back."

For a long time the two men talked, until Wilton seemed satisfied that the fate of Andrew's first book was decided, and that he would not gain a position with Mavis Lezant through being a successful author; and he hoped, before he had time to write another book, that the woman whose money he wanted would be his wife.

After dinner he drove back home again. He knew that Miss Lezant did not intend going out that night, for he had heard her say so. Perhaps he would find her alone, and if so, he determined to take the second step in carrying out his scheme. It required some amount of sacrifice to spend his evening away from his ordinary companions, but he determined to make up for it when his affairs were settled. Besides, in spite of himself, Mavis, either by her beauty or her wealth, fascinated him, and made him

desire her company. He felt sure, too, that his mother would do her best to favour his suit, and he knew her powers of persuasion.

On entering the drawing-room, he found his mother with Mrs. Melville and Mavis Lezant. He felt sure his mother had been talking about him, there was a visible flutter at his entrance, while Miss Lezant looked anything but comfortable.

"Do you know," he said, "I am looking forward to our visit to your house in the country with great interest?"

"It is very kind of you," she said, and then looking around realized that they were alone.

"Everything is attractive there. You see it used to belong to my father, many years ago; so on that account it is like home to me."

"Naturally."

"There is such an air of rest there," he went on. "Somehow, lately I have grown tired of London, with its eternal round of exciting pleasure. I have almost ceased to take interest in the things which used to be the essence of enjoyment. I would a great deal rather be alone with nature, where there is quiet and rest, than be in London with all its gaiety."

He was playing his part well. His voice became sympathetic, and a look of earnestness came into his eyes.

"I love London," she said, "that is, occasionally; but I, too, love the country. I shall be glad to get back to Ashwater."

"Since I was there last Christmas," said Wilton, "I have been almost grieved that father sold the old place. I am sure that had its owner been any woman but yourself, I should have hated her."

"Thank you," she said, with a laugh.

"Still, I am glad the old place belongs to you," he said. "Perhaps we should not have become so friendly otherwise. You see, the fact of your owning the place which my father had, cemented your friendship with our family at once; and believe me, Miss Lezant, that friendship is very dear to me."

She did not reply.

"Do you know," he went on, "when it was arranged

that a number of people should pay you a visit to Ashwater, and I was included in that number, that I almost made up my mind to refuse ? I cannot make up my mind to go now."

"Indeed!"

"Do you know why ?"

"No, I've no idea."

"It was because I love you," he said earnestly, "and because I was afraid you could not care for such as I."

"Mr. Bernard—I——"

"I am not a taking fellow," he went on. "I am not handsome and clever. I am blunt and rude,— not the kind of man that women like. And so I knew that by going down there I should be giving myself entirely to your influence over me. You have been here only two days, Miss Lezant, and you have upset me, I—I love you so. If I go down to Ashwater, and see you every day, I shall go mad, unless I have some hope that —that you may in time deign to—to—— But let me come, Miss Lezant; you will,—say you will."

"Mr. Bernard, come to Ashwater by all means, but let there be no misunderstanding. I am not insensible to—to what you have said. I believe you have spoken honestly, but I hope that——"

'Nay, do not speak further. You do not bid me hope, and I cannot bear for you to tell me there is none. I should go mad."

For a moment he meant what he said. The beauty of Miss Lezant had fascinated him; he felt himself chained by her; the indescribable pleasure of being alone with her had fired his imagination. This he spoke earnestly. His heavy face became more manly, his eyes shone.

"You do not dislike me?" he went on.

"Certainly not. You have been very kind to me; but I am sure, Mr. Bernard, it will be better if you will try and think no more about me."

"You do not dislike me, but you do not love me—yet. But bid me hope, Miss Lezant—let me call you Mavis. I feel I cannot go down to Ashwater else."

"It would be wrong for me to bid you hope," she said, "for that would be—a—promise."

"But you do not love any one else?"

"No, I love no one else. That is, I do not love any one. I never did—in that way."

"But I love you with all my heart. Will you let me go down to Ashwater now?"

She hesitated a second. Mavis Lezant cared not a fig for conventional laws or society's fashions. What she thought right she would do. Wilton Bernard had told her he loved her. She was a young girl with a warm, ardent nature. It is true he was by no means her ideal; indeed, she had scarcely ever given him a thought, but when he told her of his love she could not help feeling an interest in him. What should she do? He had been invited to come down with the rest of the family as a guest. Others were to be there, including the old lawyer to whom her father had entrusted her affairs. To tell him not to come seemed cruel—seemed, in fact, as though she spurned an honest man's love; to tell him to come seemed to imply a promise. She did not love him, but there, in the excitement of the moment, she felt she might in time.

"Mr. Bernard," she said, "I hope we shall be friendly as before. I can promise you nothing, but I hope you will come to Ashwater as arranged. You will pardon me if I leave the room."

He lifted her hand to his mouth and kissed it.

"It's as good as arranged," said his mother, when he told her his experiences. "In spite of herself you have a hold upon her honour, and if you are careful you will win her affection. You have done very well, Wilton. After all, there was no danger about Andrew. Still, you must be on the watch. When we go down, you must keep your eyes open, and if he is there, you must see all he does without being seen. You know how he always gets himself liked."

"I'll be careful, but there can be no danger. We have been fighting a phantom. Still, I am glad to do him a bad turn again, and my gentleman will feel small when his book is quietly laughed at, and killed. I wish I had asked her something more about him."

"Don't mention him, or, in spite of everything, her interest may be aroused."

"I have no fear," said Wilton confidently.

CHAPTER XXII

ANDREW'S BOOK

IN due time Andrew's book appeared. It was issued in one volume, and I saw that it was tastefully and neatly got up. We decided that we had not better get it out in the usual three-volume edition, as the author being unknown, this method might hinder its success. Besides, Andrew desired it to be published at a popular price. It was a book for the people, he said, and he wanted them to read it.

We managed to do pretty well in the trade, but nothing special; still we were not surprised at this. Many a good book hangs fire at first. We expected, however, that as soon as the critiques appeared we should have a run on it. Accordingly it was sent out, and in a few days the reviews began to come in. To my surprise the London Press took but little notice of it. Just half a dozen words of mild ridicule were given to it, and nothing more. Paper after paper gave the same opinion.

"This is the work," ran one paper, "of a tyro who evidently knows but little of what he is writing. It is dull and uninteresting. In time the writer may be able to give us something worth reading, but at present we can give him no encouragement."

That opinion might be given as a sample of nearly all the others, as far as the so-called literary world was concerned. The work which had chained my attention so much that it kept me out of bed was regarded as valueless. For the first time since I had been in his employ Mr. Quill seemed to doubt my judgment and to wonder how I could be deceived.

"Have you read the book yourself?" I asked

"No."

"Then I wish you would," I replied "perhaps the conduct of the critics may set you wondering when you have done so."

"I certainly will," he replied, and took a copy of the book home with him that night.

When he came to the office next morning, he said hur-

riedly: "Mr. Haynes, surely there must be something wrong!"

"I am sure there is," I replied; "but I cannot see what can be done."

With religious papers the book fared better. Each and all spoke highly of it; but then, with one or two exceptions, the religious Press has not so much influence on the book world. Besides, most of their reviews are mere notices which the general reader often passes by unnoticed. Still they were helpful, especially as one or two of the most influential spoke in eulogistic terms. The daily Press devoted very little space, and thus, as far as this method of advertising was concerned, my friend Andrew had at that stage nothing to be thankful for.

He had gone to Loamshire shortly after arrangements about the book were completed.

"Send me all the particulars you can—" he said; "I shall be exceedingly anxious about my first-born." And I, looking forward to a great success, readily promised that he should be informed of everything that would interest him. I almost regretted afterwards that I had done so, but still I kept my promise, and so I enclosed in my letter a number of the most favourable reviews.

"I will admit," I said, "that the critics haven't dealt as well by you as I should have liked; still, many a book lives down adverse criticism,—many, in fact, have become known without ordinary reviewing or advertisement. Do not fear, my friend; the best judge of a book, after all, is the public, and the public has not yet had a chance of giving its opinion. Wait a year, at any rate— before you give up hope."

"It is no use denying," he wrote in reply to me, "that I am disappointed. Still, perhaps this rebuff is good for me. Evidently I have not rightly measured my powers; at any rate, I have been mistaken in my estimate of the value of my work. Still, I cannot understand. It is true I did not seek to gain popularity by inventing exciting situations for the sake of exciting. The story was in my mind and heart, and I told it. I allowed my characters to do what they wanted, as I felt that to be a truer way of doing my work than to be guided by conventional

feeling. But I do not despair. I know little or nothing of literary cliques, but I am in hopes that my little book will live in spite of everything.

"I shall not come back to town for a time. I have enough work to do to keep me in bread and cheese; besides, my simple mode of living is very inexpensive. The country is very beautiful just now. The voice of nature all around is one of joy and triumph. Still, winter will soon be upon us, and I want to do something for Hodge in St. Neot."

I did not know then, although I know it now, that Andrew was held to the country by the hope of seeing and winning the maiden he so much loved.

Ezra Pinns wrote to Andrew respecting his book, and expressed himself in his usual characteristic way.

There was another person who anxiously scanned the papers, and that was Mavis Lezant. She had gone down to Ashwater with no companions save Mrs. Melville, as she wanted to be alone for some little time before her visitors appeared. Mavis Lezant, however, was but little influenced by reviews. As soon as Andrew's book was out, she got a copy and read it. Whatever the critics might say, she did not regard it as a work of a tyro. It was full of interest, full of power, and when she had finished it, she felt sure that it was written by the young man whom she had seen, and never had her opinion of him been so high as then.

Soon after her visitors came to the hall, it became the subject of conversation.

Wilton Bernard introduced it. He was able to do it without exciting any suspicion, and as a large number of people were present, he felt a delight in spitting out his venom.

"Have you seen the reviews of the book you were speaking about, Miss Lezant?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I shouldn't have taken any notice hadn't you been interested in the writer. Of course nobody knows anything about it, and I hear the booksellers refuse to look at it. The papers didn't seem to think it even worth a solitary kick."

"It seems not."

"What are you talking about?" asked some one near.

"Miss Lezant has some fellow living on her estate who has written a novel. It was a bit puffed up before it was published, but the thing has died in its birth."

"What's the title of it?"

"I've forgotten. I tried to read it, but couldn't. Let me see it's *A Child of Nature*, or *Nature's Child*, or something of that sort."

"Ah, I never heard of it," said the gentleman who had asked the question.

"No, I suppose not. I shouldn't have seen it, or known of it, but for Miss Lezant. I am afraid your estate does not produce novelists," he said, turning to Miss Lezant and laughing as though he had made a joke.

"I don't know as to the estate," she said decisively, "but certainly, whoever wrote *Nature's Children* is a novelist."

"Why, have you read it?"

"Indeed I have. I should be sorry to have missed it."

"And you don't agree with the critics and the general public, either?"

"As to critics, I know but little about them. Evidently the men who reviewed the book in question either did not understand it, or else they never read it. As for the public, it has not a chance of judging yet."

"Do you think it ever will?"

"Certainly I do. A book like that may be checked by the unfairness of the Press; but it will live through it all."

"Then you think highly of it?"

"I think it a magnificent work. I think that had some well-known novelist written it, it would have been the talk of every reading household, and of every literary circle in England."

Mavis spoke warmly. Evidently she felt what she said, and was not ashamed of her opinion.

Wilton was nonplussed. He did not think the conversation would take such a course, and he was sorry he had spoken. He looked at his mother, who was sitting near and knew, from the expression of her face, that she had not missed a word. Evidently, too, she had been drawing

conclusions which, as far as he could judge, were unfavourable to himself.

"I certainly shall read it," said the gentleman who had joined in the conversation. "I am always on the look out for the work of new writers. I am inclined to think that with the exception of a very few, the old novelists are played out."

After this, the conversation drifted into other channels, and Andrew was no longer discussed. By-and-by Wilton found his way to his mother, who took his arm and led him away alone.

"Wilton, you are in danger," she said. "I watched her face while you were talking. She cares far more about Andrew than she does about you."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. I can see that the killing of the book is a trifle. Other means will have to be adopted if you are to get her."

"What means? I don't see what can be done. Besides, there's no danger. She hasn't seen him."

"But what's to hinder her? What's to hinder her from inviting him here. If she does that, she'll get more interested in him and—well, you know Andrew."

"But can't you get her to decide for me at once? I am sure I've done all I can short of getting a definite promise. Can't you plead for me? can't you tell her that I shall die if she does not fulfil the desires of my heart, and all that kind of thing?"

"I must be careful. So must you, Wilton. She can see through sham and deceit in a minute. I will do what I can; meanwhile, you must find out everything about Andrew. It may be that you can discover something important."

"Yes, I see."

"She likes him," went on Mrs. Bernard, "I am sure of it; and when such a girl as she is likes a fellow, she will not act as ordinary girls do. She doesn't care a fig for what the world says. Mark you, I don't think she's gone to the extent of losing her heart over him; if she had, she wouldn't speak so frankly; but she has a feeling for him which, if encouraged, will lead to her doing so."

"But she was jolly nice to me when I spoke to her."

"I find that Mr. Beans, Mavis's steward, doesn't like Andrew," said Mrs. Bernard, without heeding her son's remark. "Make the acquaintance of Mr. Beans — perhaps he may tell you something; then inquire among the villagers. Gossip will be rife here as elsewhere. Some one will have connected his name with some village girl long before this. Find out everything; then come and tell me, and I will tell you how to act."

"Mother, you are a brick," said Wilton; "you know exactly what to do. I never saw any one as clever as you.

"If I know Andrew aright, and if I know Mavis Lezant aright," said Mrs. Bernard, "it will need all my cleverness to get you to be squire here."

"By George, it is a fine old place!" said Wilton, looking around; "lonely in winter, of course, but then I can get a lot of fellows here for shooting and hunting, and when I'm tired of it, I can go up to town. What is her income worth, do you suppose?"

"I can scarcely tell, but I'll find out. I know that she has bought a great many farms, beside what was purchased from your father. She must be one of the richest girls in the county."

From that time Wilton Bernard was very busy. He made himself thoroughly acquainted with St. Neot parish, and with many of its inhabitants. He talked freely with Mr. Beans, and was afterwards introduced to young Sim Cundy, with whom he had several conversations. The purport of all this the reader will be able to understand. As for Andrew, he was not long in finding out the names of Miss Lezant's visitors. One or two of them he knew slightly. He had met them in the old days, and was anxious to speak to them. While, when he knew that Wilton had come with the Bernard family, he felt more than ever a desire to be welcomed at the Hall.

For the first week after the advent of the family, Andrew's life was one of continual misery. It had become a piece of current gossip among the people of the parish that Wilton Bernard was Miss Lezant's accepted suitor, and when, once or twice, unnoticed by them, he had seen

the two together, he had become nearly mad with disappointment and fear.

He had been building a great deal on his novel. Had it been a success, he would have boldly spoken to her, and claimed her acquaintance as an equal; but everything had turned out badly. Keenly sensitive, he felt the sneers of the Press more than he dared to say, while the non success of his work was terribly trying. He could not bear to be spoken of as a failure. Probably she had seen the flattering notices of his novel prior to its publication; no doubt, too, she had seen and known of the way in which it had been received. It was true the editor of the paper for whom he had been writing had engaged him for further contributions, but these articles were things of a day, only born to die. And now for his novel, his very life, to be received in such a way hurt him terribly. He could not bear the idea of meeting her, much less telling her he loved her; and thus when he saw her walking and riding with Wilton Bernard, and heard her spoken of as his affianced wife, everything was a hundred-fold harder to bear.

He had met Wilton Bernard in the village one day, and he knew that he had been recognized; but they had passed each other without speaking. Each looked in the other's eyes, and read the other's secret. Each knew that the other regarded him as a foe, and prepared for the coming fight.

For Andrew had determined to win Mavis Lezant for his wife, in spite of seemingly insurmountable difficulties, and, as we know, Wilton was trying his utmost to bring about the consummation he most devoutly wished.

Poor Andrew! his chances seemed small. He had no recognized position in society; he had no chance of claiming the right to speak. Wilton, on the other hand, seemed to have everything his own way, for, besides the advantage of being a visitor at the Hall, he had his mother ever near to advise him with a thousand well devised schemes in her mind.

Andrew had not yet spoken to Mavis since the publication of his book. He had only seen her at a distance and then she was either accompanied by Wilton or some one else staying at Ashwater. He had formed a hundred

schemes whereby he might be able to meet her, but either want of opportunity or want of courage had made it impossible for any of these schemes to be carried into effect.

It happened one morning, however, that, without any effort on his part, he met her face to face. He had wandered away alone along the footpath which skirted Ashwater Park, the footpath near which he lay when he spoke to her long months before. Although October was at an end, and the November winds began to blow, many of the trees still kept their leaves, while many more fluttered helplessly to the ground. Away in the distance he heard the guns of a shooting party which had left the Hall, and he was wondering where Mavis was, when, to his surprise, he saw her close by him standing alone, and looking into the river. When he came up to her, she turned towards him with a look of pleased surprise: her cheeks flushed crimson, but she held out her hand to him, and he clasped it eagerly.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE WOOD

FOR a few seconds she walked along the banks of the river without speaking. Each had much to say, but knew not how to say it. At length she broke the silence,—

"Let me congratulate you, Mr. Fairfax," she said.

"Upon what, Miss Lezant?"

"Upon your novel."

"You have heard of that, then?"

"Oh, yes; when I saw the preliminary announcement, I knew it was you, and I was very glad."

"I meant to have sent you a copy, but I dared not."

"Dared not; why?"

"I was afraid lest you should regard it as an unwarrantable liberty."

"I should have been glad had you sent it me," she said simply.

"It is not too late," he said eagerly; "you shall have it this very night."

"You are very kind," she replied; "but I have already read it."

"Ah, and have you read the reviews as well?"

"A good many, yes. You see, when I knew there was an author on the estate, I wanted to see how he fared."

"My work has not been a success, Miss Lezant."

"No? I am very sorry."

"I don't know why it is," he went on, in an eager, boyish way. "I told my story earnestly and truly, and I thought I was writing something that would live. All young writers do, I suppose. The reader at Quill & Steel's liked it too; in fact, he told me it kept him out of his bed all one night. But the Press—in many cases has laughed at it."

"I suppose so."

"It's no use saying I don't mind, because I do. Naturally, I wanted my book to be a success. I had built so much upon it—in many ways." He looked longingly at her bright, bonny face, and went on, "Still, I don't quite despair. I've done my best, and I mean to try again."

"I should think you would," she said decidedly. "I hope you will."

"It is very kind of you to say so," he said. "I know I had no right to think or wonder, and yet I kept on thinking and wondering whether you had seen it, and if you had, how you would like it. But then," he went on, a little bitterly, "you have your guests to look after, and you will have no time to think about a book which is a failure."

"I do not think it is a failure," she said. "I think it will be a success, in spite of everything."

"Thank you," he said gladly; "you are very kind."

Again there was a silence, and not seeming to think what they were doing, they followed the course of the river until they came to a wood, which looked strangely beautiful as the golden leaves dropped one by one from the tall trees. The stile to which they came, however, made them realize what they were doing, and Mavis Lezant knew that, to say the least of it, it was not common for the lady of a manor to be walking alone with a young man of whom so little was known as was known of Andrew Fairfax.

"I think I had better go no further," she said quietly; my guests will wonder at my absence."

"Must you go back?" he said beseechingly. "The wood looks wondrously grand to-day, and the trees will soon be bare. See how the path is strewn with leaves, and listen to the river. How beautiful it sounds in the still air."

She looked wistfully at the scene, and then turned towards her house, which stood out clear and bold in the grey November sky.

"Forgive me for asking you," said Andrew; "I ought not, I know. It is very presumptuous of me to seek such a privilege, especially when I remember our relative positions. You have known me as a farm servant, and now as an unsuccessful scribbler, and—that is all."

"I have known you as a gentleman," she said. "I have known you to help the needy; I have known you as my friend in a time of great danger to me. Come let us go into the woods."

And now Andrew was in Arcadia, where all was song and gladness. Her words were music to him, and her presence was full of joy and beauty. How he longed to tell her of his love, how that from the first moment he had seen her, her presence had haunted him, and that, when he felt her to be unkind, unjust even, to the poor and needy, he had loved her! Had his book been a great success, had there been a great run on it, and his name mentioned in a hundred papers as a coming writer of fame, he would have spoken. He would have told her his story, told her how he had been thrown out from the house he had called his home, to sink or swim as he might; how he had struggled in the city and failed, and how he had felt drawn to come into the country; how he had lived the life of a servant, and entered into their lives so that he might tell their story, and thus arouse attention and sympathy on their behalf. But he had failed, and dared not speak. Ah Wilton Bernard had succeeded far beyond his thoughts. This first frost of failure had chilled the young fellow's hopes and his courage.

At length they came back to the stile again, and looking at her watch, she said she must hurry back if she would be in time for lunch.

"Thank you for staying with me so long," he said. "For two years and more I have never spoken to a lady of education and refinement save yourself, and the privilege is great. Besides, I suppose it will be a long time before I shall see you again. I dare not expect it."

"And two years ago—you went into society then?"

"Very little; but occasionally I met with cultured people. Up to that time I was at school, and at Cambridge."

"At the University?"

"Yes."

"Then what led you to—take the step you have taken?"

"I should like to tell you—some day—if I may. I could not help the turn matters took, and yet I am glad I was cast out on the world."

"But you say your father used to farm Trevadlock?"

"Quite true, Miss Lezant; he died when I was a child. I never remembered my father or mother. Shall I walk with you up to the house?"

She flushed, and for a moment was undecided; then she seemed to overcome her hesitation, and she said,—

"If you will, yes."

They walked across the park together, almost without speaking. When they had come near to the house, Andrew said abruptly,—

"You have helped me a great deal this morning, Miss Lezant. If you had thought my novel a failure, I should have given up hope."

Evidently she was pleased. What young girl would not be when she felt that her opinion had weight with such a man as Andrew.

"I think it one of the finest novels I ever read," she said eagerly. "I am going through it a second time."

Had she told Andrew this in the woods, had she looked at him there as she looked at him now, I think this history would have been altered; but they had come close to the hall door, and she held out her hand as if to say good-morning. No doubt, too, half a dozen servants would be peering around.

"Thank you so much," he said, seizing her hand. "You don't know how much you cheer me. Good morning."

He strode down the path like a conqueror. His eyes shone brightly, his head was erect, and his great chest heaved with joy. His feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground, his heart was throbbing with a great happiness. "God help me—God help me to win her," he cried.

Mavis came into the house smiling and happy. Her morning's walk had made her very gladsome. In spite of herself, she could not help feeling joyful that a brave, strong man like Andrew thought so much of her. She remembered how he stood before the hungry, desperate mob, too, and how by his inborn strength and grand courage he had conquered them, and sent them home. It was not often that she met with such a man and influenced as she was by conventional laws, she felt proud that he wanted to be her friend.

Mrs. Bernard met her with a smile, but behind the smile was a sting.

"That was a big fellow from whom you parted just now," she said. "I suppose he belongs to one of the county families, although his bearing was not quite that of a gentleman."

"No he does not belong to any county family as far as I know," she said quietly. "But he is a gentleman. He is the author of that book about which we have been talking."

"And you have met him and walked with him alone? Oh, fie, Mavis!"

She said this in a tone of banter, but she was sorry she had spoken, and she felt she had made a wrong move.

The young girl turned quickly around, and her great brown eyes flashed fire, while her lips moved nervously as if she were going to speak. Evidently she regarded the words as a liberty, but she did not speak. She walked quietly up the hall stairs without making any reply whatever.

During that afternoon Mrs. Bernard was wonderfully gracious to Mavis, but no allusion was made to her morning's walk.

About five o'clock Wilton returned from his day's shooting, and it was not long before his mother found an opportunity of speaking to him.

"Wilton," she said, "you must be quick now, or you will lose your bird," and rapidly she told him what she had seen and heard that very day. She taunted him, too, with allowing Andrew to supplant him, when he, Wilton, had everything in his favour. And Wilton soon became aroused. An ugly look came into his small eyes, while his florid face became replusive.

"It is not so bad as you think," he said at length. "You accuse me of being a laggard, and of allowing Andrew to forestall me. First of all, there may be no danger with Andrew. All the time we have been preparing for a suppositionary case. I do not say there is no danger,—I am afraid there is; still, we are not sure. However, I have not been idle. I have found out what I believe we can turn to good account."

"What? Tell me quickly."

"Well, I have found out that young Cundy, the son of the man who farms Trevadlock, hates Andrew. Well, Cundy would do anything to spite Andrew. I have found out, moreover, that one of the daughters of Cundy is madly in love with Andrew. You know he lived there some months. I do not know if there is any engagement between them or no; but this is certain, he and this Miss Cundy have been seen together. It is a known fact that she is in love with him, while the gossips have had their usual say about them."

"Are you sure of this?" said Mrs. Bernard eagerly.

"Perfectly certain."

"Is the girl good looking?"

"Yes; she has that look of rosy health peculiar to country girls. She is better educated than the ordinary run, too."

"Then I think all is safe. It is for us to keep our eyes and ears open. Our visit must come to an end before long; but before we go, this matter must be satisfactorily settled. Remember your position. She invited you here, knowing that you loved her, and you are regarded by many as her accepted suitor."

"I'll remember," said Wilton grimly.

"By the way, is it true that the Graftons and Mrs. May are leaving to-morrow?"

"Yes, they are. Why?"

"I am very glad. They are the only people who know Andrew. They might see him if they stayed, and it might lead to unpleasant revelations. Not but what I would make a satisfactory explanation, still I think it better for the affair to be left quiet for a little while."

"But may not Andrew have told Miss Lezant?"

"Not if I know him. He's too proud. Besides, I should have known by looking at Mavis."

The two separated then, Wilton vowing vengeance on Andrew, and Mrs. Bernard revolving scheme after scheme in her fertile mind, to blight Andrew's hopes for ever.

That night a boy from the village came to Ashwater with a small parcel for Miss Lezant. It contained Andrew's novel and just inside the cover she read the words,—

"To Miss Mavis Lezant, with deepest gratitude from Andrew Fairfax."

For a few minutes she sat looking steadily into the fire.

"How does he know my name, I wonder?" she murmured. Then she placed the book in a private drawer, and began to prepare to go to dinner.

The conversation turned that very night upon books, and the gentleman who had expressed his determination to read Andrew's book said:—

"Well, Miss Lezant, I have read that story which your St. Neot novelist has written. I picked it up from your library table."

"Indeed!" said Mavis quietly. "And what is your opinion?"

"My opinion is yours," he said heartily. "It is the finest thing I have read for years. If I am not mistaken, it will be the talk of the country within twelve months. I should like to know this Andrew Fairfax."

"So should I," said a young lady who had been listening eagerly. "I am reading it now, and it is fine. It was a delightful idea of the author becoming a farm servant in order to be realistic in his descriptions."

"But he is not a gentleman," said Isabel Bernard contemptuously.

"Indeed he is," replied Mavis, "I do not know his

history or his antecedents, but certainly he is a gentleman."

"Then you know him?"

"I have seen him several times. Indeed, last winter he saved this house from being burnt down."

Of course this statement led to many explanations, in which Andrew's conduct was praised and otherwise commented on, and, as may be imagined, the end of it all was a general desire to see such a prodigy of courage.

During the conversation Mrs. Bernard watched Mavis's face closely, eager to read what her feelings were, and, by-and-by, when she met Wilton alone, she said to him,—

"There is less danger than I thought, Wilton."

"Indeed, I think the real danger is now commencing," replied the young man sullenly.

"You are mistaken," replied Mrs. Bernard. "If Mavis Lezant had loved him, or had any special interest in him, she would not have spoken so freely."

"I don't know," replied Wilton; "she's not like other girls."

"Ah, well, I'm not so much alarmed as I was; still, I think I am ready for any emergency. I shall be able to judge when I see them together."

"But if Andrew comes here, how are we to meet him? Everything will have to come out, and then my chances will go like the wind."

"You need not fear. I will see that such a danger is averted. Meanwhile, you make the best of your chances."

The next day Andrew received a communication which set his heart throbbing and his blood tingling. It was not a formal card of invitation either, but a friendly note asking him if he could come to the Hall on a certain date.

Andrew wrote his acceptance with gladness, little dreaming of what was to follow.

CHAPTER XXIV

AT LAST

A FEW days later Andrew Fairfax entered the home of Mavis Lezant as a guest. It was a long time since he had been encased in the evening dress of a society man,

and he felt strange, but what made his heart beat loudly and his blood to course madly through his veins was the thought of meeting the only woman he had ever really loved, in her own house, and among her own friends. He was excited, too, at the thought of meeting the Bernard family again.

Somehow he had changed since he had been a member of their home years before. He felt that to all intents and purposes Andrew Bernard and Andrew Fairfax were two different men. They had different thoughts, they lived different lives. Those old days seemed but as a dream to him now. His fondness for Isabel Bernard was something which existed only in the realm of dim fancy. He, Andrew Fairfax, never loved her. And yet the idea of meeting them all again awakened memories which had been lying dormant. He thought of Beryl, and of her endeavour to be kind to him on the night they parted, and he wondered at the kind of greeting the family would give him. Would they recognzse him at all, or would they simply ignore all previous knowledge of him?

How Andrew got through the introductions he scarcely knew, but he remembered afterwards that he was received kindly, and he thought he saw a desire on the part of those present to be very polite to him.

During dinner nothing of importance transpired. The talk was general. Presently the ladies retired, while the men sat a few minutes longer at the table. From that time the conversation became less constrained, and two or three of them freely commented upon Andrew's book. In the midst of the conversation some one came in from the library with a copy of that day's *Times*, which had arrived that afternoon.

"I say," he cried, "have any of you seen this?"

"Seen what?"

"Why, this article in to-day's *Times?*"

"Why no. You know it does not arrive at this far-off spot until five o'clock. What is there in it?"

"Mr. Fairfax's fortune, or I'm much mistaken. Look here, there's a special and eulogistic article on his book. It's enough to turn his brain. He's called a second Victor Hugo. Fancy the *Times* doing such a thing!"

"Read up," cried one; "let's hear what's said."

All this time Andrew had not spoken. But his eyes burned like coals, his hands were hot and trembling, and he eagerly waited for the young man to read.

Then Wilton Bernard looked up angrily.

"Let us join the ladies," he said. "What's an article in the *Times* to us?"

"Yes, let us join the ladies. I'm sure they will be interested in hearing it. Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Fairfax," cried the man who had openly expressed his admiration for the book.

"Are you sure it's mine?" said Andrew anxiously. "Perhaps there is a mistake. The papers have been against me in the past."

"*Nature's Children*, by Andrew Fairfax. That's your name and that's your book, isn't it? Let us go into the drawing-room: the ladies ought to hear it."

Andrew followed the men like one in a dream, and then listened while the article was read. It was, indeed, enough to make a man vain, for that paper seldom gave any writer such unqualified praise. True, it recognized the blemishes of his work, stated its objections to his theories, and gave as its opinion that the author was an enthusiast who often got away from solid earth. On the other hand, however, his freshness, his vigour, his earnestness, and his masterly grasp of difficult situations were recognized, and applauded in no sparing terms.

The young man was right when he said he thought he saw fame and future in such a review. On the next day a hundred other papers would quote it, while the attention of the reading world would be drawn towards a work which bade fair to die at its birth.

For a long time Andrew listened without realizing where he was, when, towards the close of the article, he turned and looked at Mavis Lezant, and then his joy became multiplied tenfold. He could not help seeing a great joy flashing from her eyes; he could not help seeing that she was more than ordinarily interested.

What wonder that to him the barriers between them seemed to melt away; what wonder that he forgot that she was rich and he was poor, that she was the lady who

owned the parish, while he was almost homeless? To him boundless possibilities appeared, wondrous hopes were aroused,—nothing seemed too good or too great for him to attain.

The rest of the evening passed away like a dream. Andrew could never tell exactly what was said or done, at any rate, until the guests who had been especially invited were on the point of departing. He remembered, however, that during the whole time he found no opportunity of speaking with Miss Lezant, neither had she spoken to him, and congratulated him as the others had done. But he felt no grief because of this. She had given him a look when the man who discovered the article finished reading it, and he was content.

He did not care so much about this praise for himself. He was glad because it drew attention to the people whose cause he had tried to advocate, and gladder still because she, the queenly maiden whom he had learnt to love like his life, might think well of him. Andrew's one thought now was how he might offer his possessions to her, and to tell her that he cared nothing for fame or praise, only in so far as they might increase his value in her eyes.

At length the last carriage rolled away, while the few guests who were staying at the house prepared to retire, and still Andrew did not depart. He felt he wanted one word alone with Mavis. That look of hers had made him bold, and his eyes flashed with determination. He had seen the dark looks which both Wilton and Mrs. Bernard had given him, he had heard the sneers of Isabel; but they did not hurt him; one look alone remained with him, and but one voice rang in his ears. Beryl had seemingly tried to enter into conversation with him, but he had not encouraged this proceeding, much as he would have liked to have talked with the only one of the family who had given him a kind "Good-bye."

He had put on his overcoat, and stood alone in the hall, keeping his eyes on a door that opened into a conservatory. He evidently did this for a purpose. In a few minutes Beryl Bernard and Mavis Lezant appeared arm in arm, and together they came into the hall.

"I was wondering whether you had gone, Mr. Fairfax?"

she said. "I knew I had not wished you good-night."

Andrew thought her voice seemed constrained and cold, and his heart became heavy at the thought of it. His courage seemed to evaporate for a moment, but it strengthened again when she said to Beryl,—

"You are tired, Beryl; you had better go to bed. I'll call at your room directly, and say good-night."

Beryl looked doubtfully, as though she ought to stay; but she held out her hand to Andrew, and went upstairs alone.

They stood in the hall together, but Andrew could not say what he wanted to say. Servants were constantly flitting around, and he knew that Wilton was in the billiard-room, and that to go to his room he must come into the hall. He opened the door and looked out.

"It is a glorious night, Miss Lezant," he said; "just like that night when——" He stopped, because he thought his words might remind her of her obligation to him. "Wouldn't you like to go out and breathe the fresh air? he continued.

She looked doubtful for a moment, cast a timid look towards him, and then took a shawl and cast it over her shoulders. In a minute more they stood outside the great house, and listened while the November winds told of the dark winter that was fast hastening on.

For a few seconds neither spoke. He found it hard to begin to say what was in his heart, while she looked to him as if for a reason for asking her to speak to him alone.

"Thank you for asking me to your house to-night," he said at length. "It has been a very joyous time for me."

"I am very glad," she said. "I always like my guests to be happy."

She spoke constrainedly. Her voice was different from what it had been when they had walked together in the wood; different from the time when she told him she was reading his book a second time; different, in fact, from her greeting when he had come that very evening.

"How could I help being happy?" he said.

"Scarcely," replied she, in the same tone of voice. "You see, you were made the lion of the evening. A

flattering article about you was read, and choice paragraphs from your book talked about. How could you help being happy? But there, I've been out long enough; I must go in."

His heart chilled. "Are you cold?" he said anxiously "I am afraid you are thinly clad."

"Oh, no, not at all. I am quite warm.".

"Then why go in for a few minutes?"

Andrew was excited. He forgot that he was making an unusual request, forgot that the hour was late.

"I had better," she said; "I forgot the time when I came out."

She seemed excited, too. She spoke quickly and nervously.

"Were you pleased at that review in the *Times* to-day?" he said, changing the subject.

"Yes, I was very pleased," she said quietly. "I hope it may do for your book all you hope. You are glad too, of course?" she added, after hesitating a few seconds.

"Glad, yes, very glad. Gladder than you can imagine. Not so much for myself. Do you know what my great hope was? Do you know why I built so much upon my poor little book?"

"How should I? I must hasten in. Hark! what is that?"

"It is only the cry of a night bird. I will tell you. My greatest hope was that you might think well of me. When I first conceived it, my great desire was to help the poor people I have described, but by-and-by that feeling became secondary. My thought was to win your esteem. The bitterest thought, and the greatest pain of heart I had when the book was mildly laughed at, was because I was afraid you would not think well of me. Do you know why? do you know why?"

She did not speak.

"I will tell you. It was because I became daring in my hopes, because I forgot everything which perhaps I ought to have remembered, and yet which are nothing but thistle-down to me. I forgot that a great gulf had been dug between us, forgot that I had worked in the field as a servant while you lived in that great house, forgot that I

hadn't a penny more than I worked for—forgot everything because of——"

He took her hand and held it firmly.

"No, don't draw away your hand. It is heaven to me to hold it. Do you know why? You must know. I love you. I have loved you almost since the first time I saw you in your own house. My great desire has been to win a position that I might claim a right to speak to you as a man might speak to a woman. I was mad with joy to-day when that article was read, because I thought I might win another smile from you. There, I've told my secret now; forgive me, but I could not help it. I know that according to all rules of society I ought not so to dare. Do you repel me?"

Still she did not speak, but she let her hand lie in his.

"Now you know all," he went on. "You have all, I have nothing. You are everything, I am nobody. By your kindness I have been admitted into your house to-night but I can claim no such privilege. Even if I climb, as in my wildest dreams I hope to climb, I'm only a poor-scribbler, son of a poor farmer—nay, not that—a man who writes what is in his heart is not a poor scribbler—but still he is none the more worthy of you. I offend you, do I not?"

"No," she answered. Her voice was changed, her fear seemed gone. He was quick to detect the change.

"Oh," he cried, "I have nothing; but will you say something to me that shall help me in the dark days; may I call you by your name? may I call you Mavis?"

She looked up in his face, her lustrous eyes beaming with joy, and she seemed about to speak. Then she gave a start, and drew her hand from his, for both of them heard footsteps near.

"We wondered where you had gone," said Wilton Bernard, as he and Isabel came up. "Beryl said you had gone out, and so we came to find you."

"I am coming back to the house," she said, while Andrew's eyes gleamed darkly with disappointment and anger. "Good-night, Mr. Fairfax," she continued, holding out her hand to him. "I am so glad that your book has

been so favourably reviewed ; glad, too, that you have had a pleasant evening."

He grasped it eagerly, and gave it a warm pressure, and he thought that she let her fingers lie in his longer than seemed necessary, but he was not sure. Then lifting his hat to the others, he turned and walked away, feeling that Wilton Bernard had dashed the cup of happiness from his lips.

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH MRS. BERNARD'S PLANS ARE BEING CARRIED OUT

THE following morning Wilton Bernard made his way across the park, went over the bridge that spanned the river, and then struck into the footpath which led to Trevadlock Farm. Presently he stopped. Looking across some fields, he saw some one ploughing.

" That's young Cundy, right enough," he said to himself, and leaping over the fence he made his way towards the field where the strong, patient horses dragged along the plough which was guided by the young farmer.

Wilton Bernard gave him a hearty greeting, and then the two walked on side by side, Wilton on the grass, young Sim skilfully managing the horses and the plough with but little difficulty or exertion.

" You did not succeed in driving away Fairfax ? " said Wilton, after they had talked on several subjects.

" No. I wanted to at the time. I don't know that I care so much now."

" Why, I thought that you and he weren't friendly ? "

" Well, I don't like him, I know."

" He was at Ashwater last night."

" Fairfax at Ashwater ? Ah, he *is* a gentleman, then."

After this the two talked together in low tones for a long time, Wilton persuading, young Sim expostulating, until at length he had promised what Bernard had evidently been asking him. After this they parted, the young farmer looking very gloomy, the would-be squire pleased and hopeful.

That evening Miss Sarah Cundy stated her intention to

walk to St. Neot, and young Sim, much to her surprise, offered to accompany her.

"It is kind of you," she said, as they walked along together. "Somehow I don't like going along here after dark."

"You look pale and unwell, Sarah," said young Sim. "You are not grieving about anything, are you?"

To this Sarah did not reply.

"Because," went on Sim, "you used to be ever so much more gay and jolly when Andrew Fairfax was livin' at our house."

"And you drove him away, Sim."

"Well, 'tes no use talkin' 'bout that," replied Sim, "that's over. But weren't you and Andrew in love with each other, Sarah?"

Sarah did not reply.

"Because", went on Sim, "it was the talk of the parish, and lately you've seemed awful down in the mouth. Have you gived up likin' him?"

"No," replied Sarah, with a sob.

"He ain't a treated you shabby, have 'ee?" said Sim eagerly."

"No. I don't know," replied Sarah huskily. "He never told me he liked me, though I thought he did. He was always so friendly with me, and I thought we should get on to keepin' company till—till——"

"Till what?"

"Well, till he saw Miss Lezant. You know, Sim, he is a gentleman, there's no doubt about that. Everybody saw it, and everybody wondered why he's done as he has. He may be Andrew Fairfax's son, but he was brought up a gentleman. The parson told father that he could talk both French and German, and that he'd been to college. Well, he didn't seem to care to talk to me after he'd seen she."

"Do you know he've write a book?" asked Sim.

"No; has he?"

"He have that, and they've been readin' it at Ashwater among the gentry, and one of the big papers had a long piece about it yesterday, praisin' it up. Besides, he was over to Ashwater last night mixin' with the gentry."

Miss Sarah sighed; he seemed farther than ever removed from her now.

"Should you like to have Andrew, Sarah?"

Miss Sarah burst into tears.

"Why do you tease me, Sim?" she said. "You know I should."

"Then," said Sim, "you must strike while the iron is hot."

"How?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Do you know," said Sim, looking away from her, "that he likes Miss Lezant?"

"I was afraid he did."

"He likes you, too."

"How do you know? How do you know?" cried the girl eagerly.

"Never mind how I know," replied Sim darkly. "I do know, and that's enough. He'll make piles of money, too. I expect he'll go to London to live, and have a fine house. Lots of these writers do. Sarah, would you be willing to strain a point to get him?"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing wrong, just a bit of scheming, that's all."

"Tell me more," said the girl. "You know I would like to have him, Sim. I'd die for him any day."

"I believe he'd make a good husband, too," said Sim, more to himself than to her. "I believe if you could get him, he'd make you happy."

Sarah trembling sighed. "I'm sure he would," she said. "Miss Lezant likes him," said Sim.

"I thought she did," cried Sarah; "I was sure she did." Poor girl, she was jealous of every one. She thought every one was in love with Andrew. "But how do you know, Sim?" she went on.

"I do know, and that's enough," said Sim, still keeping away his head from her, as if ashamed, "that's why I'm speaking to you."

Poor Sim was not wholly bad. He liked his sister after a fashion, and he was ashamed of himself for consenting that his sister should act her part in the scheme which Wilton Bernard had invented. Moreover, although he knew but little of Wilton's motives, he disliked Andrew while he admired him, and he tried to excuse himself with

the thought that he would really be fulfilling his sister's desires, and making her happy. Ofttimes during the conversation he had felt like giving it up and going back home, but his promise to Wilton, and his dislike to Andrew, had prompted him forward.

"Miss Lezant is very proud," went on Sim, "and I've heard she's got a very high temper."

"I'm sure she has," said Sarah, a little spitefully.

"She knows that Andrew likes you."

"How do you know? Who told you?" cried the girl.

"Never mind, I do know," went on Sim gloomily, "and if she once was sure that something was between you, she would never speak to Andrew again."

"I don't like her," said Sarah; "I think she's proud and unkind."

"If you want Andrew," went on Sim, thinking of Wilton's promises, "you will have to get her out of the way."

"Yes; but how can I?"

"Could you not tell her that Andrew was your young man?"

"But he isn't. He's never asked me to keep company with him. Besides, he'd find out that I'd deceived him, and then he'd hate me."

"Yes, that would hardly do," mused Sim.

"And can't you see?" went on the girl, "she might ask him, and then every chance would be destroyed."

"Yes, I see that. Can't we think of something else?"

"I wish we could," cried Miss Sarah, quite carried away with the desire to obtain the young man she had loved for such a long time.

"If Miss Lezant could only see you together arm in arm, and hear you talkin' lovin' like," suggested Sim.

Sarah sighed.

"That could be arranged if you liked," said Sim.

"How?"

"Well, if you were to write him a letter, and ask him to meet you at such a place, at such a time, telling him you had something you would like to say to him, that would do it."

"But how would Miss Lezant see us?"

"Oh, that could be arranged."

"But how? You never spoke to Miss Lezant, and so you could not tell her, Besides if you did, she would see that it was arranged."

"Well, there's a young gentleman at Ashwater, who—'

"I know—the young man who wants to have Miss Lezant. Can't you see, Sim, he's jealous of Andrew, and is trying to get him out of the way?"

"Well, what if he is? What do you need to care if you can get the man you want? You will be a lady then."

Miss Sarah was not long in being persuaded. She could not clearly see that the action was very wrong, and that very night, after she returned from the village, she carefully composed a letter to him, thinking but little as to how it might affect Mavis Lezant, but hoping a great deal with regard to herself.

As for Andrew, he lived partly in bliss and partly in terrible suspense. What was the answer Miss Lezant was about to give? In what way did she regard his confession of love? What would have been the upshot of their meeting had not Wilton Bernard and his sister appeared? These and a score of similar questions suggested themselves to him, leaving him sometimes in blissful hope, at others in despair. What should he do? Should he go to Ashwater and press his claims again? Surely it was right that he should do so. And yet something held him back. Dare he go boldly to her home, and thus openly court whatever criticism might follow upon his actions? Much as he wanted to do so, he was afraid that this course of conduct would displease her, and he refrained.

It was but little writing Andrew did. Somehow his mind would not work, and whenever he took his pen in hand, he found his thoughts reverting to the scene outside the Hall door, before a word was submitted to paper. Somehow the praise of his book in the *Times* lost its power. Everything became swallowed up in his love for Mavis Lezant, and he longed to see her again more than words could tell.

The whole of the day following his visit at the Hall he was in this frame of mind, and when on the succeeding day a letter came to him addressed in the handwriting of a lady, he madly hoped that the writer was Mavis Lezant.

On looking at the signature, however, he was grievously disappointed. What did he care about a letter written by Sarah Cundy? He had seen the girl's marked preference for him, and had taken care to give her no encouragement. He read it through, however, and could not help being interested.

"DEAR MR. ANDREW,—I want to see you very much. Why do you never come to Trevadlock now? It is such a long time since you have been there. I shall be at the corner of Ashwater Lane, under the great ash-tree, to-morrow—Friday—night, at half-past seven o'clock. Will you meet me there, and then I can tell you what I can't write, and something which you ought to know? Don't fail to come, or you'll be sorry afterwards. Forgive me for writing, but I felt I ought to do so, and I am sure that you must know that nothing but kind feeling for you has made me write. Hoping to see you to-morrow night is the anxious desire of

"SARAH CUNDY."

When he had finished it, he threw the letter on the table, almost impatiently.

"No," he thought. "I will do no such thing. What can she have to say to me? Only some foolish nonsense, I expect. Poor girl, I am afraid she cares for me too much for her happiness, but I ought not to meet her, I'm sure. Besides——" and he sighed wearily.

He hastily scribbled a note stating that he regretted his inability to meet her as she desired. If he could do anything for her, he would be pleased to do so; in which case she had better communicate her wishes in writing.

Placing this communication in an envelope, and addressing it, he took it to the door expecting to find the lad who had brought the letter to him, but, to his annoyance, he found that he had gone. Miss Sarah had not instructed him to wait for a reply, and he, not being accustomed to message-bearing, had returned to his home without delay. A London lad would have naturally waited in the hopes of a few coppers, but country lads are not so brought up.

On what little things do the issues of life rest! Had the lad waited, Andrew's life would have been altered, and the

story I am writing would have been different. Not thinking of this, however, Andrew went back to his room, tore the note he had written in pieces, threw it into the scrap-paper basket, and then tried to work. In vain, however. In spite of himself he began thinking of Miss Sarah's letter, and afterwards of Miss Sarah herself. He remembered her kindness to him, and wondered why she wanted to see him. Was it kind of him to refuse her? Ought he not to go? She had done many things to make his life more pleasant while he had been a servant at her father's house, and if he could be of any service to her, or if there was anything she wanted to tell him, ought he not to go? He was almost glad he had not sent the note. Yes, he thought he would go. At any rate, he would think about it during the day, and then in the evening—well, he would see.

And so the day passed away, and evening came on. The weather as yet had been remarkably fine. It had been a glorious autumn, and the country, in spite of the fact that the trees had divested themselves of foliage, looked pleasant and inviting. The roads were clean and dry, and Andrew noticed as night came on that the clouds lifted, and the sky became clear as the full moon showed itself.

After tea, although Andrew had not made up his mind to grant Miss Sarah the interview she desired, he put on his overcoat, and went out alone. He had been in the house during the whole of the day, and explained to himself that a walk would do him good. He walked in the direction of Ashwater Lane, however, and looked at his watch to see what time he had at his disposal.

It was a glorious night. The sky was clear save for a few light fleecy clouds, which, when they were swept over the face ot the moon, scarcely hid its brilliant light. The air was chilly, but it was clear and bracing, and Andrew felt that the country, with all its loneliness and poverty, was yet much to be desired.

There was a touch of romance in his walk, too. True, he deeply loved Mavis Lezant, and yet his curiosity was aroused concerning what this buxom farmer's daughter would say to him. Andrew was young, and after all there was something alluring to him in meeting this young girl.

Perhaps, he scarcely dared to hope it, but perhaps she might have something to tell about Miss Lezant. Of course there was no reason why she should, but somehow he associated everything with her, and so, in spite of its unreasonableness, he encouraged the thought.

He stood underneath the great tree and waited. The moon shone brightly, revealing every object almost as clearly as if it were day. He had not the slightest difficulty in seeing the time, and then, prompted by a feeling of curiosity, he took Miss Sarah's letter from his pocket to see if he could read. Yes, the light was good enough for that, and he read it through again.

Just as he had finished, he gave a start. The great clock at Ashwater struck the half-hour, and instinctively he pulled out his watch again.

"Just two minutes fast," he muttered; then hearing a sound, he turned and saw the form of a young girl climbing over a stile that stood in the fence. Andrew knew that this stile opened up the way to a footpath which led to Trevadlock Farm.

A few seconds later Miss Sarah Cundy stood by his side, trembling and excited.

"I am come, you see," he said kindly. "Will you tell me why you wished to see me?"

For an answer Miss Sarah clutched his arm convulsively.

CHAPTER XXVI

HALF-PAST SEVEN

WHEN Wilton Bernard and his sister interrupted the conversation between Andrew Fairfax and herself, Mavis Lezant was almost as disappointed as Andrew. For months she had been interested in him, without being able to explain to herself why her interest was so strong. She had eagerly read his book, realizing that her heart was strangely moved while she did so, and she had been led to defend him when she knew not why she should do so. When she had seen him by the river side, she had gladly walked by his side, and while following the footpath which led through the wood, she felt a strange joy at being with

him. And yet at the time she would be indignant if any one had told her she loved him; neither did she dream that he cared for her. Wholly unsophisticated and unconventional she had spoken frankly to him, and gladly invited him to her house, and was delighted when she saw how true a gentleman he was, and how well he was received.

During the dinner she had thought but little about him, but when after dinner she had found her way to the drawing-room, she was reminded of him by the flattering remarks which some of the ladies passed about him. When the man entered the room bearing that day's *Times*, and read the article, she was much overjoyed, but even then she did not know why she was so interested in him. She had seen him enter the room, seen him turn eagerly towards the reader, and then her attention was devoted to the review. When it was ended, however, she looked at him, and their eyes met. Then she knew the reason of everything. Then she knew she had given all the love of her fresh young heart to him; knew that he was dearer to her than ought else on earth.

During the evening she was shy and restrained. Her great fear was that he should guess her secret. She was afraid that he should think her bold; she wondered if he cared for her. Now she almost felt sorry because of his success. She begun to depreciate herself. What was she that this man should care for her? She remembered him as he visited her that Sunday night—months before—and demanded her attention towards the condition of the poor. He was masterful then, almost rude. But since then he had changed. Was this change because of any change of feeling on his part? He was strong, fascinating then, even when she regarded him as a farm-servant; while now, as she remembered his reason for becoming so, the uses he had made of his experiences, and the way his work was beginning to be received, she felt herself infinitely beneath him. What were lands or money when compared with such a man, and why should he care for her? And yet she was proud. He should see no weakness on her part, and so she tried to shut her heart towards him. As we have seen, during the evening she was by no means friendly, like she had been before; but when Andrew had asked her to go

out with him, she could not refuse. Gladly she listened to his story, every fibre of her being trembled with delicious joy as he told her of his love, and her heart swelled with a joyous pride as he related to her how she had been the great hope of his life. She had let her hand lie in his gladly when he took it. There was no need for reserve now. She would tell him plainly what he wanted to know, and her great brown eyes became tearful as she realized the love that she gave him. She was glad that her heart was all his. Love to her was a sacred thing, not something to be frittered away in flirtations, and so when, in the midst of her great joy, she heard Wilton Bernard's voice, she was disappointed beyond measure, and although she calmly bade Andrew good-night, and went into the house, her heart followed him, and during the night she was tossed on a wild sea of joy.

Would he come soon ? she wondered ; surely he must have seen her love for him, and so all the next day she watched and waited for his coming, and when night came, and she did not see him, she went to bed with a heavy heart.

Still she did not doubt his love. She did not know of his longing to come to her, and of the fear that kept him back. She fancied rather that something had detained him. Once she thought of writing and asking him to come to the house again. But she was proud, and much as she loved him, she could not bring her mind to this.

During the afternoon of the day following Andrew's visit, Wilton Bernard was very attentive. He made several references to their conversation in London, and seemed anxious to press his claims.

On the Friday Wilton did not leave the house. He watched every comer anxiously, as though in great fear. His mother, too, seemed fearful, and at every opportunity entered into conversation with Mavis, when she skilfully insinuated that Wilton's only hope was in her, and that life without her would be a blank. She told Mavis that her son had ceased to take any real interest in life since her last visit to London, and that now, although his pride told him to go away, his great love kept him at Ashwater. And Mavis, constantly thinking of Andrew, and wondering if she had given Wilton any tangible encouragement, could

not help feeling sorry for the man whom she could not love, and determined to treat him as kindly as possible.

All through the day she hoped for Andrew to come. "Surely," she thought, "after saying so much, he cannot help coming to-day;" and so she watched and waited in vain.

After dinner was over he went to Mavis, and asked her to go for a walk with him. He wanted to speak to her, he said; he felt that he must leave Ashwater, but before going he had something he felt he must say. At first Mavis demurred, but presently she felt she ought to grant him his desire, and so put on her hat and cloak, and walked down the drive with him.

Thus it came about that at the time Andrew wended his way towards the great ash tree in the corner of Ashwater Lane, Wilton and Mavis wended their way towards the same spot.

As they sauntered down the drive, Wilton's heart began to beat rapidly.

He wondered if Andrew would meet the farmer's daughter. He knew that she had written him, and knew that she would keep her appointment, but he was not so sure as to the result. So much seemed to depend on chance. What if Andrew were detained? What if, instead of coming to meet her, he had gone straight to Trevadlock? What if he should refuse to come at all? Still he hoped. He knew of Andrew's kindness of heart; knew that he was chivalrous to any woman, and was not likely to refuse the request of one who had been kind to him.

He looked eagerly at his watch, and with fear and trembling began his story. For, to do Wilton justice, he loved Mavis Lezant all he was capable of loving. His greatest desire was to become squire of the parish, but to become Mavis's husband was a thought that was very dear to him. Besides, he hated Andrew, and he was anxious to foil him.

"I am glad you have consented to come out with me this evening," he said. "It is kind of you, and I wanted to speak to you so much."

His voice trembled as he said this, and Mavis could not help realizing that, from whatever motive, he was in earnest.

She did not speak, however, but walked quietly by his side.

"You remember our talk in London?" he went on. "You knew then that I loved you. I know you did not give me a word of encouragement, but knowing that I loved you, you asked me to come down here with my mother and sisters. I have only been here a few days, but I feel I cannot stay any longer. I heard that lawyer—that is, the old gentleman who has been a sort of guardian to you,—say that he must return to-morrow, and I feel I must go with him. I feel it is no use my staying longer. Every day I see you I love you more. And I cannot endure this kind of life any longer."

"I am sorry, very sorry," said Mavis kindly, "if you are unhappy."

"But you know I cannot help being unhappy. And yet I have my happy hours. I am happy when you speak kindly like that; it gives me a ray of hope. I know there is nothing in me that one like you is likely to love, and yet I do sometimes hope. You see I love you so much, that I expect I become unreasonable, and then I remember that you still asked me to come here, when you knew of my love."

"But I told you——"

"Yes, yes, I know you did; but I hoped that—well,—never mind. You know I love you with all my life—my being. Can't you give me a word of comfort, of hope? Just one word?"

"Mr. Bernard," said Mavis kindly.

"Call me Wilton," he said, eagerly.

"Mr. Bernard," she repeated, "I think you must know that I respect you very much, and that I esteem it a great honour that you should so care for me, but——"

"No, don't say but."

"Yes, I must say it. When I asked you to come down here, knowing that you cared for me, while I did not feel towards you in the way you desire, I was influenced by your evident devotion."

"Yes," said Wilton eagerly, "yes, and then?"

"I made up my mind that if I could care for you, I would, and then——"

"And you do; say you do."

"No; I cannot say I do."

"But how, why? have you altered since then?"

"Yes—I have—altered since then."

They walked down the lane towards the great ash tree, where there was a sharp corner in the high fences, so that those who might be standing on one side of the bend, could not see those on the other until they came close to them.

They came near the corner.

"Hark," Wilton whispered, "surely that is some one sobbing. It sounds like a girl."

They drew near, and saw without being observed. The clear moonlight revealed everything. They saw a young girl with her head on a young man's breast.

"Oh, Andrew," sobbed the girl, "don't you know? I love you with all my heart. You can't doubt it now, can you?"

Andrew uttered an incoherent reply, and then put his arm around the girl as if to caress her.

"Come away," whispered Wilton, who feared that Andrew might say something which might open Mavis's eyes to the true condition of affairs; "come away, such a scene is not for you."

Then they turned and walked back to the house, Wilton with a savage joy in his heart, Mavis, half stunned, yet conscious of terrible shame, bitter regret, and a heart bleeding with wounded pride and rejected love.

"This is pure melodrama" says the reader. "Such a thing never happens in real life."

Nevertheless it did happen just as I have set it down.

CHAPTER XXVII

AFTERWARDS

HOW Mavis got back to the house she hardly knew, but she remembered entering the hall door, and, without speaking to Wilton, hurried up to her own room. Here her maid met her, but she quickly sent her away, and then sat before the fire and tried to think. But this was almost

impossible. She had been cruelly treated—insulted. She felt mad with herself for having acted so thoughtlessly. She had made friends with this man, who had acted so vilely. She had allowed her name to be coupled with his, she had invited him to her house, she had walked with him alone, she had allowed him to tell her that he loved her, while she, Mavis Lezant, who had never before allowed such a thing, had let her hand remain in his, and would have told him she loved him, had she not been interrupted.

She pictured Andrew and the girl together, and it maddened her. She walked up and down the room like one almost bereft of her senses. Her eyes became like burning coals, her hands were dry and parched, and her nails cut the tender flesh as she clenched them together.

As for Wilton, he had gone directly to his mother, and told her his experiences. Mrs. Bernard had watched the two go out together, and had waited with almost breathless interest while they were away. She had a great fear in her heart lest matters should not turn out right, and she gave a sigh of intense relief, and of almost fiendish joy, when Wilton related his success.

"Did she see them together, Wilton?" she asked, "and did they appear like lovers?"

"The girl was intensely in earnest," he answered, "and so it was plain sailing. She was evidently making love to him, when we were there, and as far as I could see, pretended to faint. Anyhow, Andrew caught hold of her."

"Nothing could have been better," she said eagerly; "let us be wary now, and you shall have her, Wilton. Evidently her head has been a little bit turned by the romance which has surrounded Andrew's life. But that will soon be all right. Let me think."

She sat quietly for two or three minutes, cogitating deeply.

"I think I know her," she said at length; "I think I know how this will affect her. For the first hour she will be mad. After that she will become more calm, and seek some explanation, unless she can be influenced otherwise. I must see her before that time comes. I think I can manage. I must make her refuse to listen to Andrew if he should come with any explanations. She is young

and impetuous; that is in our favour. Her very love for Andrew will now work for us and not against us, for she will be the more angry at fancying herself deceived. Thanks to my plans, we have all the strings in our own hands. I will go and see her at once, and mind, Wilton, you remain within call."

When she arrived at Mavis's room, she found her sitting in an armchair resting her head in her hands. There was a look of great despondency on the girl's face, although her eyes still gleamed with anger.

"Forgive me, my child," said Mrs. Bernard, in dulcet tones, as she entered the room, "but I know you are in trouble, and I feel I cannot stay away from you."

Mavis did not speak.

"I know all," went on the wily woman, "I know how vilely you have been deceived, and how great your disappointment must be. Had you told me a day or so ago. I could have saved you from everything. However, it is no use speaking about that now. It is no use moaning—we must act."

Mavis looked at her in a dazed kind of way. There was a great pain at her heart, and she felt too keenly to understand what Mrs. Bernard was driving at.

"Wilton is almost broken-hearted," she continued. "Not so much for his sake as yours. The poor boy loves you so tenderly that he shudders at the thought of a breath of scandal resting upon you."

"Scandal," replied Mavis; "scandal?"

"Is that the wrong word, darling? I slipped it out unthinkingly, I—I am so grieved, so excited. But I am afraid that villain has you in his power. I am afraid—he—he could circulate painful reports. He could tell how you went out alone with him late at night—and it would not be pleasant, you know."

"Do you think he would—dare?" she asked hoarsely.

"I think he would dare to do anything," replied Mrs. Bernard. "Pardon us, my child, but Wilton and I have been talking about it, and he said you told him that this—this fellow had expressed his—what he called love for you. At the same time, he is in duty bound to marry this

girl Cundy. The man who could act such a part could do anything."

Mavis's dying anger was fanned into a passion again by this. Her eyes gleamed with a ruddy glare, her hands were clasped nervously again. Mrs Bernard watched her with satisfaction.

"Something must be done, my dear," she continued.

"Done!" cried Mavis. "What? Tell me, I will do anything. I am mad with myself—with everything."

"We must do this," replied the wily woman, still watching her keenly; "we must first of all deny that you care for this fellow."

"But how?"

Mrs. Bernard drew a chair close to the one on which Mavis had been sitting, and placing the girl in it again, she sat by her side. With all the cunning of a serpent she played upon the girl's feelings, she stirred her pride, aroused her jealousy, stung her most sensitive feelings, until poor Mavis almost lost control of herself. Had she been in a normal condition, had she not been maddened by the scene of that night, her healthful mind and heart would not have yielded in the slightest degree to her tempter's pleading. Now, however, she was comparatively helpless. Step by step the older woman drew the younger, little by little she unfolded her plans, cleverly and cunningly she showed that her reputation and happiness depended on their being carried out, until Mavis, mad with grief and passion, was bewildered.

"And what would you advise?" she asked at length.

"This, my dear. I would advise you to let Wilton, if needs be, have the power to repudiate with scorn anything that may be said. I do not say you should marry Wilton, but you can consent to an engagement—for the time, you can let it be known, and then if this fellow dare to boast, Wilton will know how to deal with him. Besides, would you let such a fellow think you cared for him? By accepting Wilton, you show your scorn for him—nay, not scorn, he is not worthy of that—but you will show that he is beneath your notice. Besides, perhaps he may dare to come and speak to you, and if you do this, you will be in

a position to tell him what you could not otherwise do."

Poor Mavis, her innermost soul revolted against this. In spite of everything, her heart was hungering for Andrew, and had she been allowed time to think, she would have been able to weigh matters. But Mrs. Bernard would not allow this. She knew that the matter demanded immediate settlement, and so she pressed her case.

"Give me time to think," said Mavis at length; "my brain is all of a whirl; my head burns like fire. I am not myself. I will go to bed,—perhaps in the morning I shall be able to tell you."

"Why not act now, my dear? Indeed, you ought, so that any evil word may be stopped; besides, poor Wilton goes to London in the morning. He cannot, dare not stay any longer, he says. There, my dear, let me be your mother. I love you like one of my own children; let me ask Wilton,—that is, why not meet Wilton? I know he is in the library alone. Come, my dear, come."

Pale to the lips, her eyes burning with an unearthly lustre, her hands dry and burning, she allowed Mrs. Bernard to lead her into the library. She scarcely knew what she was doing, only she knew that she was as surely in this woman's power as a bird in the power of a serpent when the reptile has fixed his eye upon it. Besides, she cared but little what she did. Everything seemed blank and dreary to her, and her only feeling was that which had been fostered by Mrs. Bernard—how she might show her scorn for the one whom she believed to have been unfaithful.

They found Wilton in the library where, according to his mother's instructions, he had waited, and towards him his mother dragged her victim.

Shall I try and describe what followed? Shall I tell how, with the cunning of a fox, the scheming woman worked out her plans? Shall I tell how, with shrinking and repugnance, yet goaded by Mrs. Bernard's words, she gave her hand to Wilton Bernard and consented to an engagement? Shall I tell how the young man tried to stutter out his gladness, and how, when he sought to seal their engagement with a kiss, she, as if stung by a deadly serpent, sprang from him, and fled to her room before he could carry his des res into effect? It would be too painful, and I would rather

let this part of the story in its fulness remain untold.

The next morning Mavis stood at the hall door, her eyes dull and heavy, her face ashy pale, and bade good-bye to Wilton and the old lawyer who had acted as her guardian, as they started for London. When they were gone she heaved a sigh of relief, and even Wilton seemed glad to get away from the girl to whom he had become engaged.

Mrs. Bernard, however, was gay and smiling, while Isabel seemed to enter into her mother's feelings, but Beryl looked on wonderingly, as if unable to understand the true state of things.

As for Andrew, he knew nothing of all this. He had, as we know, met Miss Sarah Cundy, as she had desired, and had listened while the poor girl told him how her heart was breaking for him ; but he gave the girl no encouragement, and although she acted in a hysterical way, he left her as soon as possible, angry with himself for having come to meet her.

All through the evening, while Mavis thought of him, or tried to think of him, as an object of contempt, he sat thinking of her. He accused himself of cowardliness in not going to see her, for perhaps, although he hardly dared to hope it could be so, yet it was possible that she might want to see him again. She had not scorned him, she did not seem angry with him when he told her of his love, and he blamed himself again and again for not being more bold. He never dreamed of any plotting ; the idea that Sarah Cundy had written to him to carry out her part of a cowardly scheme never occurred to him, and the thought that Mavis Lezant might have watched him as he stood with the farmer's daughter never entered his brain.

Before he went to bed he determined that he would go to Ashwater the following morning, and see the girl he loved like his own life. He owed it to her, he owed it to himself, and then comforting himself with the happy thought of the next day's interview, he retired to rest.

Early the next morning he started. He knew the breakfast hour at Ashwater, and when once his mind was made up he was not one to lose time. On his way he met Wilton and the old lawyer, driving to Morgan Cross railway station.

The lawyer nodded to him kindly, but Wilton turned away his head.

"He doesn't look happy," thought Andrew; "evidently he's off to town. I fancy he's been disappointed in his hopes;" and the young man laughed joyously as he thought of his own prospects.

When he arrived at the house he was shown into the library, and there waited with beating heart for the coming of Mavis. Presently he heard footsteps outside the door, and a moment later Mavis entered. She was evidently under the influence of strong excitement, and seemed to control her feelings with difficulty.

Andrew, wondering at her haggard face, rushed towards her with outstretched hands. She did not appear to see his action, however, but coolly pointed to a chair.

"If you will be seated," she said, in a strange, hoarse voice, "you will perhaps tell me why you have come here."

Wonderingly Andrew obeyed, and for a time was unable to speak. He saw, however, that her lips were pale, and quivered with suppressed emotion.

"May I know to what I am indebted for this visit?" she asked, in the same tone of voice.

Her words staggered the young man. He remembered the way she had treated him in the past, remembered the kind words she had spoken, and could not understand the change.

"I came," he said at length, "because—I could not help it. Surely—surely you need not ask such a question. You, to whom I have told the dearest desires of my heart, you, for whom I live, need not speak to me thus!"

"You credit me with a great deal of penetration," she went on, like one who was trying to play a difficult part. "But I remember you once did me a kindness, and now if I can do anything for you I shall be pleased to do so, especially when I remember that your father, according to your statement, was once a farmer on the Ashwater estate."

Andrew stared at her in grief and astonishment. What had come over her? This was no longer the beautiful, sunny-faced, laughing-eyed girl, whose voice was music, and whose presence was gladness, but a hard-looking

vindictive woman, from whose eyes tenderness had fled, and whose voice was hoarse and bitter. There was a touch of scorn in her words too, which rankled in the young man's heart.

He rose to his feet.

"I do not understand you," he said. "Only a day or two ago you received me into your house as a guest, as a friend. Nay, more, you seemed glad to see me, and I, my heart yearning for you, forgot our relative positions, and dared to tell you that I loved you more than life. Ever since then I have longed yet feared to come and see you, but to-day I felt I could wait no longer, so I have come. You have received me more as an enemy than a friend."

"You are mistaken," she said. "You once did me a kindness, and I tried to repay you. I cannot receive you as a friend. I am not accustomed to treat men in your station as friends. You forget our different positions. I remember, if you do not."

"But surely," cried Andrew, "you do not forget——"

Mavis interrupted him, but she still spoke like one who was trying to remember a difficult part, a part that seemed to rob her of joy and life, but one which she was determined to act to the end.

"I remember some foolishness you spoke to me," she said hoarsely; "I remember I felt rather sorry for you at the time; since, I have seen that it was foolishness, and so, of course, have ceased to pay heed."

"It was not foolishness," cried Andrew; "it was the truest life of a——"

"I know that I am breaking away from the customs of the class to which I belong in making any explanation to such as you," she went on, without heeding his words, but still in the same hoarse, constrained voice, "but in this case I will do so. That you may see how utterly absurd your fancy is, and how far we are removed from each other, I may tell you that last night I became engaged to Mr. Wilton Bernard."

For a few seconds Andrew's eyes burned with a great anger; he seemed hardly able to comprehend the purport of her words. Then he turned and looked at her steadily. He seemed to see that something wrong lay at the root

of all this. He felt sure that somehow Mavis had been deceived by something or some one. He took a step nearer to her, and spoke rapidly.

"Mavis," he said, "what you have been saying is a lie. There is something wrong; tell me what it is. You marry Wilton Bernard! You loathe the thought. As sure as there is a God above, you and I were made for each other. You know it, I know it; I see it now as I never saw it before. I love you, and you love me. Some one has been poisoning your mind; tell me about it Mavis. I love you; my heart is yours, and your heart responds to my love; you know it does. You are playing a part now. What do you care for my being a farmer's son? Nothing · but you do care for me—Andrew Fairfax. You must tell me everything, everything!"

He caught her hand, and she, carried away by the tide of his passion, let it stay there. She forgot the cruel shame to which she had been put, forgot her sham engagement, forgot everything but that Andrew was there by her side, telling her that he loved her, and that all her heart went bounding out towards him.

"Tell me all, Mavis," he cried. "I am poor, I am unworthy, I know, but I love you. Neither your love nor mine is so poor that a little thing shall turn it aside. Tell me, tell me, my darling."

He spoke half tenderly, half masterful. Mavis could not help realizing how strong he was, and withal how he loved her. There was a delicious sense of joyful rest in being thus spoken to. She felt that she was undergoing a great change; somehow everything could be explained, and all this misery should come to an end.

She looked up at him, and as her eyes met his they became tender again. She opened her mouth to speak, when the door opened, and Mrs. Bernard entered the room.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ANDREW'S PROSPECTS

"I HEARD an angry voice here," said Mrs. Bernard, "and I thought I should come and protect you, my child. I have the right now, you know."

Neither spoke in reply to her. Her entrance had been sudden and unexpected. She seemed to carry an evil influence with her, too. Andrew saw that the hard, cruel look came into Mavis's face again; she drew away her hand from his, and seemed ashamed. Although they had not known it, Mrs. Bernard had stood at the door and listened to their conversation. She had hoped at first that there would have been no need for her interference, but by-and-by she saw that all her schemes were in danger of being destroyed, and so she entered the room at the moment we have mentioned.

"May I ask what you mean by intruding here?" she continued, turning to Andrew. "Surely you should know that this house is not for such as you. Miss Lezant has seen that a supposed act of kindness and a novel are not sufficient reason to——"

"I have nothing to say to you, Mrs. Bernard," interrupted Andrew, "neither do I think there is any need. I have yet to learn that you have a right to speak here as one having authority. Certainly you have no right to control Miss Lezant's actions."

"Miss Lezant is to be my daughter, young man," she said, "and in my son's name I have a right to interfere when such as you force your way into the house."

"Miss Lezant—Mavis," cried Andrew, turning towards her, "will you tell me if it is your wish that this woman should speak to me like this?"

Mrs. Bernard interrupted him. She saw that she must speak, and that quickly. She saw that Mavis's eyes were softening again, and that she was eagerly drinking in every word that Andrew spoke; she knew, too, that if Andrew were not quickly disposed of he would make revelations which she did not want made.

"I will speak, Mavis," she said, seeing her about to answer. "It is not for you to talk with such as he. He talks as though he were your equal, and your affianced husband, whereas he is but a farm servant, and has promised—if report says truly—to marry a farm girl by the name of Cundy."

At these words all Mavis's anger came back to her. She seemed to see the girl fondly clinging to him, while he,

Andrew, had put his arm around her as if to caress her. She remembered the girl's confession to her, too, how that she, the farmer's daughter, had besought her, Mavis Lezant, to go away that she might have her lover. These thoughts, added to the influence Mrs. Bernard seemed to carry with her, aroused the demon of jealousy again, made her forget Andrew's words.

Mrs Bernard looked at her, and knew that her battle was won; knew that Mavis's pride had come to her aid, knew that jealousy had stolen away her reason.

The young girl walked towards the door, then, turning with an effort, she said to Andrew:

"There is nothing more I need to say to you, I think. Good-morning."

"But there is more that you need say to me," cried Andrew. Either you or I, or both, are the victims of a vile plot. "Tell me the meaning of this."

She looked at him keenly, and again her eyes seemed to soften. Then Mrs. Bernard caught her hand, and the old look of despair and anger came back again.

"You must be labouring under a mistake," she said. "How could you and I be so connected that a plot could be made about us? You forget yourself. A servant will show you to the door."

Then she left the room and went upstairs like one in a dream; Mrs. Bernard, without looking at Andrew, immediately followed her, leaving the young man alone.

He did not wait for a servant to come, but taking his hat rushed out of the house like a madman. This, then, was the end of all his love, all his hopes, all his plans. He was despised, scorned, told to leave the house as though he were unworthy of her notice. For hours he remained out in the woods, forgetful of time or place, remained there until night came on, and then went back to St. Neot, haggard and wan, with a great pain at his heart. For days after he did not leave the house, and took no interest in anything save once, and that was when his landlady told him that the great house at Ashwater was empty, that Miss Lezant had gone to London, and that when she returned it would be on the eve of her wedding with Wilton Bernard.

* * * * *

As may be imagined the article in the *Times* drew attention to Andrew's book; indeed, a fortnight after its appearance I had the pleasure of writing to him to give the pleasing information that the first edition (a large one) had been sold, and that a second was being eagerly bought. I found, too, that the opinions of the Press immediately changed, and that had Andrew been in a frame of mind to be flattered by reviews, he must have been very happy. But, best of all, attention was directed to the people of whom he wrote, the condition of the rustic labourer was considered, resolutions were passed in official circles, and great conventions were arranged for. Indeed, I claim that Andrew had a great deal to do with the improved conditions which have since come about. Not that all is done. Their state is still deplorable, but the attention of the country is directed to them, and that means the promise of a better time coming.

Of course the popularity of his book brought my friend an amount of money which freed him from any anxiety as to pecuniary matters, and when the novel had been out three months, and the necessary calculations made, I arranged to pay him a visit, under the pretext of taking his money to him.

It was a bad time to visit Loamshire if my intention had been to see the country in its beauty, but I cared little about that. My great desire was to see Andrew, to hear about his difficulties, and to render him what help I might be able. I arrived at St. Neot some time after Mavis Lezant had left her home for London, and found Andrew somewhat quiet and gloomy, but with a look of determination on his face.

It was quite dark when I reached his lodgings, but he gave me a cordial welcome, and had made his rooms as inviting as possible. After a hearty dinner on my part, and a poor one on his, we drew up our chairs by the cheerful fire and commenced talking.

"Do you smoke, my friend?" I asked.

"You can, if you like."

"I have been in rooms for many years," I said; "a pipe is often good company. It soothes one after a lot of irritation."

"Fire away then," he said.

He spoke rather sharply, and I saw that he was greatly changed since his last visit to London. I wondered at this, for his novel promised to be a greater success than even I had predicted, in spite of its incipient dangers.

"You are not well, Fairfax," I said.

Quite well, thank you."

"Your looks and your actions belie you, then. Your face is haggard and wan, your every movement betrays that you are not right."

He looked at me steadily. I was several years his senior, and had seen more of the world than he, but I knew that in reality he had lived longer than I. As he looked, however, I felt more and more drawn towards him; I knew that our natures were akin.

"We have not met many times, Haynes," he said.

"No, but often enough to make me desire to be your friend," I replied.

"Do you mean that truly?" he asked earnestly.

"Indeed I do."

"Because," he went on, "friendship means so much. Women's friendship I think nothing of, they are so easily knocked out of their beaten track, but a true friendship between men is grand. It is beyond all words. A friendship like that of David and Jonathan, or Damon and Pythias, is to me divine. Such a friendship makes one think of Jesus Christ."

"I would like to be such a friend to you," I said.

He held out his hand, and I saw tears in his eyes. Soon after he told me the story of his life. Not in such detail as I have told it in the story I have written—those details have been told me since—but enough to reveal to me the true state of things. He told me, too, of his meeting with Mavis Lezant, and how he learnt to love her, told me what he said to her on the night he was invited to the Hall, and how he was disturbed by Wilton Bernard. Then followed the scene of their next meeting.

When he had finished the hand of the little clock on the mantlepiece pointed to eleven; we had sat talking several hours, but neither of us was sleepy or inclined to retire.

"What do you think?" he said, when he had told his story.

I asked him several questions, close, searching questions, which he answered readily; then I said as gently as I could:

"I would think no more about her, Fairfax."

"Why?"

"'Frailty, thy name is woman,'" I replied.

"Ah, you have never seen her, Haynes."

"I have seen a great many women," I said. "I, like other men, have had my experience. I know what it is to have loved. Ay, and lost too! That was years ago. I can look back and laugh now."

"Truly?' he said curiously. "Can you make light of those days?"

"The woman I loved has married a moneyed puppy, and she has several children of the same breed," I said. "But then she drives a carriage, she wears family diamonds, she has her house in town, and her place in the country; so that compensates, I suppose. I can do no other than laugh, but then the laugh has a bit of bitterness."

"But you are young yet," he said.

"Thirty-seven," I replied; "but let us talk of your affairs."

"Well, what do you think? Give me your explanation."

"Judging as an outsider," I replied, "my belief is this. Miss Lezant was attracted by you in some way. You have the manners and appearance of a gentleman, hence she would wonder at your being a farm servant. By-and-by, she would hear people talking, and forming conjectures about you. This would surround you with a kind of romance. Presently you came and quelled the mob, and as a consequence she was led to think and dream about you, which ended in a kind of foolish fancy. Many girls fancy for a time that they care nothing about conventional notions, and she, like others, defied society notions, and became friendly. I daresay, too, she was pleased to see you getting in love with her; you were not an ordianry man, and your novel had pleased her. How old is she, by the way?"

"About nineteen or twenty."

"Rather young for scheming, but still she is a woman," I said, thinking of my own experiences. "Well, I think she encouraged you up to the point of declaration, and then cared to go no farther. She suddenly remembered her position. She thought of what the world would say, and the comment which society papers would make, and decided to get married in the conventional way, caring little or nothing about what you might suffer."

I saw that my words hurt him; I knew that every fibre of his being resented them. But I had never seen her, and I had been disappointed in love. Hence my harsh explanations. He started to his feet, and walked up and down the room, while I went on smoking.

"No, Haynes, no," he said at last. "You are wrong, as wrong as you can be. You will, of course, say that I am blinded, prejudiced, and all that kind of thing, but she is not capable of what you say. I have lost her, I know. I cannot see one ray of hope, but she is as free from deceit as the angels in heaven. Passionate she may be, wilful I am sure she is, unreasonable sometimes—what woman isn't? but a deceiver, a flippant thing—no, by the great good God, no! I could never love her as I do if she were. She will be married to Bernard soon, I suppose, and my life will be one long disappointment, but I'll never doubt her while I live. On the other side of the grave I shall know that I am right, if not here."

I loved him, admired him more than ever as I saw him thus. So healthful was his nature that the thought of deceit would not remain with him, and in my heart I determined that I, too, would see and know Mavis Lezant, and that I would find out the truth.

But it was useless to talk of that any longer, and so I turned the conversation towards his literary work, and his desires and hopes about the poor labourers in St. Neot.

"I have done something," he said after a while. "I have hired a disused barn; I have had windows made, and fire-places built. I have arranged a library, a reading-room, and materials for several games. I know it is very little, but it is a beginning."

"How long has this been done?"

"About three weeks."

"And have you had any success?"

"Success, man! You have no idea how hungry these people are for a little innocent amusement, and how eagerly some of them turn to the books and papers. The village landlords have begun to curse me already, for since my barn has been opened their trade has nearly gone."

"Has it cost you much money?"

"Very little. Twenty pounds, about. You see I could not afford more. It is true that the *Daily*——still employs me, but my articles are only occasional. Still, I am glad I have been able to do so much."

Twenty pounds. I thought of the cheque I had for him in my pocket-book, but I said nothing about it just then.

"It seems very little indeed," I said.

"Very little indeed. I tell you, Haynes, it is a great black sin to let these people go on as they have been going. Their life has been altogether uncared for. What wonder that they have lived the lives of animals, and very little more. From week end to week end, all through the winter, it is a matter of work, eat and sleep. There is no place for them to go but these miserable public-houses, and hence the standard of morality, in spite of the talk about rustic innocence, is lower than that of the big towns."

"But the churches?" I said.

"The churches! It all lies with them. It is true the Dissenting Church cannot do much. The minister lives several miles away, and has many other little places to care for; but the Episcopal minister here, why, if he had been true to his opportunities, it would have been a different place, the whole character of the people would have been different. He is all powerful in the parish, he has a good income, and has every means in his power for the people's welfare. I tell you, Haynes, the clergymen of these country parishes will have much to answer for. I have visited a great many, and they are nearly all alike. The only means the chapels put forward to save the people, besides the ordinary Sunday services, is a revival in the winter, while the parish clergyman does nothing, but drone out two sermons on a Sunday. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is done for poor Hodge in the way of interesting him, elevating him, and caring for his social life. Had the

clergy done their duty these beershops would long since have been closed, while institutions helpful and uplifting would exist in every parish. As it is, there is no place of resort but these beershops, while the parson is sneered at as the 'biggest pauper in the parish.' I believe a change is coming, but it has not reached such parishes as St. Neot yet. Meanwhile, I am doing what I can. My barn is filled every night. Mothers are thanking me for keeping their boys from mischief, wives are thanking me for keeping their husbands from the public-houses. Had I more money I would do more, but perhaps that will come."

"What would you do?" I asked.

"Well, I would have good concerts and lectures all through the winter. I would have first-class men and women here, who would arouse them to the fact that there was a life truer and higher than that of which they conceived."

"What you suggest is a great deal," I said.

"It is the first step. It will lead them to think, it will excite interest, and arouse their intelligence. It will be a practical application of the religion of Jesus Christ; it will reform men and women, and other needful reforms will follow."

"It is a wonder the clergy have not thought of this."

"Why, the rector here is saying all sorts of evil things about me. He seems to be jealous because it is not the work of the Church, although he has never offered to do anything, and he complains that my plans alienate the people from, rather than attract them to the church. The religious folk, Haynes, seem to care far more about church and chapel than they do about the souls and bodies of the people."

"But your work will not touch another phase of their lives. It will not touch the poverty, the bad dwellings, and the other things you mentioned in your book!"

"Not directly, but indirectly it will. I have already given three lectures myself, and they have aroused an amount of interest. I am hoping before the winter is over to have established an intelligent village council, who, united, will appeal to the guardians for improved dwellings for the poor, and, it may be, to more representative bodies

for other things. Local Government, thank God, is being realized, and now the great thing is to teach these people that these bad conditions *need* not be, and *should* not be. The people have been taught to be content to live in that station in which they believe God has placed them. That means that they must be content to be worse ofttimes than slaves, for sixty or seventy years, and then die in the workhouse. Such teaching is blasphemy. Many of them are already beginning to understand, and in time I hope for great things."

"But it seems to me that landlordism stands in the way of anything like a true change taking place."

"Landlordism as at present understood is undoubtedly the curse of the country, but if the people can be aroused, that, too, will be altered. Meantime, I am doing a little. I am giving them enjoyment, amusement. I am teaching them to think. I am giving them some place to go during the long winter evenings. They are having new interests, new hopes, new joys. The change cannot be wrought in a minute, but it will be wrought. If I had more money I would do more."

I gave him the cheque I had brought with me. "That is your share in the profits of *Nature's Children*, so far," I said.

His eyes gleamed with pleasure. "So much!" he cried. "This is a suprrise. Ah, St. Neot shall be a changed parish yet!"

BOOK IV

THE REWARD OF HIS WORK

CHAPTER XXIX

CALLING THE BANNS

I STAYED with my friend several days. It was not often I had a holiday, and so Messrs. Quill & Steel made no demur at my absence. During that time I made the acquaintance of many of the people I have mentioned in this story. I studied the condition of things in the parish, I entered fully into the book that Andrew tried to do. He made me give a lecture to the people, too, and certainly I never had a more appreciative audience in my life.

"Where would these people be if not here?" I asked Andrew, when the meeting was over.

"A great many of the men would be at the public-houses," he replied, "a few would be at the blacksmith's shop, while the lads would be skulking around the roads. Some of the men might stay at home with their wives, but only a few; as for the girls, they would be sitting in a dreary farm kitchen, or else walking the lanes with the lads. You see, in the winter time there is nothing for them. In the summer there is no need to trouble; everything is changed then. In some cases these farm servants meet in groups, but for want of any refining influences the effect of their meeting is anything but helpful. Thus it is that they know nothing. While they are young and strong, their chief delights are merely animal, while by-and-by, when this fails, their life becomes a wearisome existence, which too

frequently ends within the dreary walls of the nearest workhouse."

I made a survey of his premises. I found that for a few pounds he had made an attractive and educational meeting place, while immediately after I had paid him the money owed to him by Messrs. Quill & Steel, he made arrangements for a refreshment room (at which no intoxicants should be sold), and began to prepare plans for the building of a gymnasium.

"Do you intend to go on spending money in this way?" I asked.

"I don't think I shall have to spend much," he replied. "These people are independent, and don't like having everything gratis. I have no doubt that they will want to contribute an item towards the work. Moreover, two intelligent young fellows, a miller and a shoemaker, have agreed to act as secretaries, so that I shall not have all the work to do. A young curate, living in a town a few miles away, has heard of my work, and offered his services in the way of giving lectures; a similar offer has been made by a Nonconformist minister. The people will soon begin to think; after that matters will become easier."

"It seems to me the problems of the country are to be solved in a different way from those of the towns."

"Altogether. The conditions are different, and thus our remedies must be different. Still the same root principles lie beneath them."

"And they?"

"The recognition that all men are the children of God, and thus that all are brothers. That the gifts of life are not for the few, but the many. That we all have inalienable rights, and that no man, be he king or peer, has the right to take them away. But more than all these, we need to recognize the fact that we must live not for self-seeking, but for service. 'Let him that will be greatest among you be the servant of all.'"

All through the winter Andrew remained at St. Neot, superintending the village mission and writing his second novel. During that time he did not see Mavis Lezant, neither did he know anything of her whereabouts. He noticed that Mr. Beans was exceedingly civil to him, and

seemed anxious to atone for his past behaviour. For a time Andrew wondered at this, but not being able to arrive at a satisfactory explanation, gave it up.

For a week or two a report that he was engaged to Miss Sarah Cundy was circulated, but it quickly died out, as Andrew was never seen in her company. It is true that several times she sought to enter into a conversation with him, but Andrew refused to encourage this. He remembered their previous interview, when the girl made love to him, and he had the pain of telling her that she could never be anything to him. Still Miss Sarah continued to hope. She knew that Miss Lezant had become engaged to Wilton Bernard, and so thought that in time her devotion would be rewarded.

When spring returned Andrew came up to London again, this time spending some weeks there. He found that London was ready to do him honour too. He was interviewed by representatives of leading papers, and invited to select circles. Large sums of money were also offered him for literary contributions, while publishers vied with each other to get the novel on which he was engaged.

"He's ruined now," grumbled Ezra Pinns. "He'll never do work worth talking about after all this. He'll see a cheque at the end of his pen, and thus what he writes will not be worth the paper."

But we knew that Ezra was as pleased as any one at Andrew's success, and we laughed at him accordingly.

While in London, Andrew discovered that Miss Lezant had spent the greater part of the winter in Italy. Not with any of the Bernard family, however; Mrs. Melville alone had accompanied her, and it was reported that her health had been anything but good.

"I tell you," said Andrew to me, when he heard of this, "there is some scheming at the bottom of it all. Something is wrong, and I mean to find it out."

All his searching and inquiring was in vain, however. At all events, in this direction. One thing he discovered in connection with the Bernard family which startled him, but it need not be told here. A proper place for that will come before I finish.

In May, Mavis Lezant's return from Italy was duly

recorded, while shortly after it was given out that she was to be married to Wilton Bernard in July.

Poor Andrew, I saw his face turn pale, and his lips tremble when he heard the news, but he conquered his feelings, and soon after prepared for a journey to St. Neot.

"But what is the use of your going there?" I asked.

"I mean to be on the spot," he replied; "it may be that she will need help."

"Why, what help can she need? Andrew, my boy, let her go; remain in London, and drink the sweets of life. She is unworthy of you."

"You have never seen her, Haynes," he replied quietly. "There is something wrong somewhere. I have no hope for myself. She cannot love me. I used to think that she did, but I've given up that thought now. But I don't believe she can care for Bernard. I know her, and I know him. I am sure that the thought of marrying him must be loathsome to her."

"She is a woman," I suggested. "There is no accounting for taste. Besides, he has a clever mother."

"That may explain a great deal," he said, replying to my last remark; "but even that is not sufficient to explain all. You have never seen her, Haynes; you have never spoken to her; if you had, your opinion would change."

"Let him go," said Ezra Pinns, who stood by while we talked, "let him go. The boy's heart is right. Never mind, Andrew—boy,—hum, if you don't get her, well,—women—but there, what am I making a fool of myself for?"

When Andrew left he promised to write regularly, letting us know how matters progressed, but I had a heavy heart when he left. I saw that in spite of all the young fellow's literary success, in spite of the way the people had poured adulation upon him, despair was written upon his face; I felt sure that for many years, if not for life, he would be a sad, disappointed man, if indeed he ever got over his sorrow.

Three days after he left London, I saw Mavis Lezant for the first time. It happened that I received an invita-

tion from a friend whose tastes and mine were similar, and at his house I met her.

I did not wonder at Andrew's love when I saw her, spoke to her. A more perfect face I never saw, a more delightful lady I never spoke to. And yet she lacked the joyousness, the buoyancy which I expected to see. Andrew had told me of her bright girlish spirits, her merry laugh, her natural unconventional ways. But she was pale and almost fragile. A far-away look was in her great brown eyes too, as though something she had desired and loved was gone for ever.

She seemed pleased to talk with me, however, and as the evening passed on, I wondered more and more at her consenting to marry Wilton Bernard. I did not know then of the plot which had been laid. I did not fancy that Mrs. Bernard was surely wrecking lives that were worth a thousand of that of her spendthrift son. During our conversation I mentioned the fact that I had seen her home at Ashwater, and was delighted with the beautiful scenery around it.

"What led you to go there?" she said, as she flushed painfully. "It is true the country is very lovely, but it is an out-of-the-way place. A stranger scarcely ever comes there, except to visit some of the families."

"I have a friend there," I said, "a true friend; you must have heard of him, and seen him—Andrew Fairfax."

Her flush passed away, and she turned white to the lips, but she composed herself after a time. She changed the subject of our conversation, however, and in spite of every attempt on my part I could not get her to speak of him.

"There *is* something wrong," I said to myself, after she had made an excuse for leaving me; "that girl is not a trifler. There is something eating out her heart now. But what? As far as I can see, all is hopeless."

In vain I racked my brain, but I could think of nothing that threw light on the difficulty. I could not speak to her about it, I was not sufficiently acquainted with her; besides, she would resent such a liberty on my part. It is true it might be all fancy on my part. I knew nothing, and out of desire to serve Andrew I had probably con-

jured up what never existed in reality at all. Anyhow, I saw no alternative but that the thing must go to the bitter end, and that this beautiful girl must be sacrificed to a man whom I knew to be in every way unworthy.

However, it is not for me to speculate. I must tell the story as it really happened. Although I did not know at the time, information was given to me in after years whereby I am able to place matters before the reader in their true order.

In July, Mavis Lezant went to Ashwater, with only Mrs. Melville as her companion. Wilton Bernard sadly wished to accompany her, but she refused him; indeed, she had scarcely spent an hour alone with him since their engagement.

Those were dreary days to Mavis. She felt that all the hope and joy of her young life was crushed out of her. The thought of marrying Wilton was altogether distasteful to her, and yet she did not see any way to avoid it. Somehow she had been led to promise to marry him, led against her best judgment, but she would be faithful to her promise. It is true she respected the young man, and the more so because he had never pressed his attentions on her Had he done so she would have disliked him, but his mother had advised him as to his behaviour.

Towards Andrew her feelings had become more bitter. It is true she felt drawn towards him by some strange power, nevertheless she hated herself for her interest in him. During the time she had been in Italy she had received a newspaper, with the Morgan Cross post-mark on the wrapper, with the announcement of his marriage with Miss Sarah Cundy, and then she felt glad that Wilton Bernard had saved her from what seemed a terrible fate. For some time, indeed, she almost felt resigned to her marriage; and she wrote to him in a far more friendly way than she hitherto had done. She knew nothing of Andrew's popularity as an author, and seldom seeing an English paper, did not know that his name was in almost every literary journal and review; but she wondered if he would live in St. Neot parish, and if she would ever see him.

Thus, when she came to England, she fully believed

that he was married, and as she spoke to no one about him, her belief was not contradicted. It is true that during the few weeks she was in London she saw his name frequently mentioned as a genius, but nothing was said of his private life, and thus when she arrived at Ashwater, although she spoke no word about him, she dreaded seeing him.

Once in the old house, however, a thousand things reminded her of him. She caught herself thinking of the night when he saved her from the angry mob. Nay, farther back, when she saw him first, and he had led her horse through the fields. She thought of him, too, as she had been told by villagers, how he had gone away with an old farm labourer to search for his lost child, and then Wilton Bernard became abhorrent to her, and her marriage to him oppressed her like a ghastly nightmare. Again and again she made up her mind to tell him that she could never wed him, but with her high sense of honour she could never bring herself to do so. She had promised him, and she would abide by her promise. Besides, Wilton had a good friend in Mrs. Melville. She, instructed by her old friend Mrs. Bernard, had woven her more closely in the meshes of their cruel designs, until escape seemed impossible. She had instructed the servants how to act, and what to say ; she had seen that all necessary arrangements were made.

And so the days passed by, and she dreaded more and more the coming time, when she would be bound for ever to a man whom, to say the least, she did not love, and yet from whom she saw no way of escape. She knew that Mrs. Melville and Mrs. Bernard corresponded regularly ; she knew, too, that the former watched her very closely, but she thought of no foul play, although she wondered sometimes why her old companion seemed so anxious never to lose sight of her.

The banns had been "called" twice in the old parish church at St. Neot, and still the villagers had heard nothing of the wedding day. It was said that some dressmakers had arrived from London to fit on the bridal robes, and that Miss Lezant had refused to see any of her friends until the eve of the marriage. It was also whispered abroad that

Miss Lezant was not well, and desired the wedding to be quiet.

On the day following the third "calling" of the banns, however, it was announced that the wedding would take place on the following Friday; that all the young lady's friends had protested, and persuaded her against being married on such a day, but that she had been obdurate.

Of course the villagers shook their heads terribly at such an arrangement. "Tedn' nothin' but flyin' in the face of Providence to be married on a Friday," they said, "and she's such a dear maid, too."

For the people had learnt to love her. Before she had left them in the previous autumn, she had made every provision for the poor. Thus it came about that while Andrew had plenty of work in the way I have related, he had no need to trouble about finding bread for the sick and the aged.

What these reports cost Andrew I need not relate. His life became one constant agony. Every day he heard reports concerning her marriage, and he could do nothing. Again and again he tried to find out the change in her behaviour, but in vain. Nothing was before him but blackness and despair. He determined to stay to the end, however, and then—well, he dared not think what then.

As for Mavis, in spite of her sorrow, the days passed too swiftly away. She looked forward to the future with a weight on her heart, and longed to be free.

On the Tuesday before the day fixed for the wedding she sat alone. Mrs. Melville had seen her with a book, and so thought her safe. She had some letters to write, she said, and so found her way to her own room. For a long time the young girl looked out of the window, and watched the glow of the western sky, as it became paler and paler. Away in the distance, too, she could see the grey tower of the old parish church, while nearer to her was the wood in which she and Andrew had walked.

Presently a knock came to the door, and a servant entered.

"If you please, miss, a young woman wants to see you."

"Who is it?" asked Mavis wearily.

"Don't know, miss," said the servant, who had lately come to the house. "She didn't tell her name, but said she wanted to see you particular."

"Show her in," said Mavis, wondering who it could be.

A minute later Miss Sarah Cundy stood in the room.

CHAPTER XXX

THE TWO GIRLS

THE farmer's daughter wore a veil which partially hid her features, thus Mavis, who only gave her a careless glance, did not at first recognize her.

"Will you sit down?" she said, wearily.

Miss Sarah sat down.

Mavis looked at the girl again, but the light was dim, and she did not as yet see who it was.

"What can I do for you? Are you in trouble?"

"Yes, miss."

Mavis started. She thought she recognized the voice, but was not sure.

"Can I help you in any way? Come, tell me what you want."

Her attention was aroused now, and she eagerly awaited the girl's reply.

"I do not know that I want anything, except to tell you something which you ought to know. You are going to be married soon, people say; is it true?"

Mavis started from her seat. "Who are you?" she said quickly.

"Perhaps you hardly remember me by sight, but you've seen me before."

"Lift your veil; let me see your face."

The girl lifted her veil, and revealed a face pale and wan.

Mavis gave a gasp as if for breath, and then, conquering her emotions, sat down again. Her eyes became hard and angry, however, and she clenched her hands eagerly. At first she reached her hand towards the bell to ring for a servant to show the girl out of the house, but a sort of dread curiosity hindered her. She wanted to hear more

from the woman who was married to the man she had loved.

"I am at a loss to understand why you should ask me such a question," she said, "but I will tell you. I am to be married on Friday."

"To that gentleman called Bernard?"

"To Mr. Wilton Bernard; yes."

Miss Sarah looked towards Mavis with hollow but eager eyes.

"Do you love him?" she asked hoarsely; "does it give you joy to marry him?—you know what I mean. I thought you might know the reason," went on the girl wearily; "perhaps I am mistaken after all. Am I?"

"Tell me what you mean. I don't understand riddles."

She wanted to say more to the girl. Wanted to say something that might hurt her. It stung her pride to think that Andrew's attention had been divided between herself and this country girl, who, as far as she could see, had no attractions; it maddened her, when she remembered that the girl was successful and had got him for her husband. But she would say nothing. Not for worlds would she let her know that she was suffering from disappointed love.

"If you love the young gentleman," said Miss Sarah, "and if you are happy at the thought of marrying him, I shall be so glad. I shall have no need to tell you anything."

"I do not know what you mean," said Mavis. "What can it be to you—whether—what can anything about me be to—to you?"

"Don't you remember that evening a long time ago? You know I asked you to go away. I did it because my heart was breaking. Oh, I loved him so much—I do still. You made him love you, I know you did—how could he help it?"

Mavis's heart fluttered strangely, her head burned as though she were in a fever. What could this girl mean by talking in such a way? There must be some purpose in all this; what could it be?

"I wish you would tell me what you mean more plainly," said Mavis; "I remember your asking me to go away from

Ashwater. I thought it was very foolish of you, but I went away. Not because you wished me to, but because I had arranged to pay some visits. Well, you have had your way. You got the man you—you said you loved."

"No, no, how could I when you—that is—that's why I've come here. You see, things have turned out wrong. And I wanted to know—if you—you were happy at the thought of marrying that young gentleman."

"But you are married to—this—this man?"

"I—I married—no—no."

"How dare you say so? I got the paper with the announcement in it."

"What announcement?"

"That you, Sarah Cundy, were married to—to—this—Mr. Fairfax."

"I, oh no, it was all wrong!"

"But I saw—it was rumoured before I went to Italy that you were to marry him."

"It's all wrong; that's why I've come. It was so hard. I couldn't make up my mind for days. I've been fighting it out ever since you've come back. One day I've said I would, and then, when I've started to do it, I couldn't go on. It was like pulling my heart out. You see I love him so. I don't know why—he never courted me. But he was so kind, and—and a gentleman, and I couldn't help it."

Mavis began to see now. Little by little the girl was letting out the truth. There was something behind all this. Perhaps—perhaps——

"Do you mean to say, then," she cried eagerly, "that you are not married to—to him?"

"To—to—Andrew, that is, Mr. Fairfax, no no—how could I? I'm afraid he don't care for me, you see."

"But the notice in the paper, the *Western Advertiser*, I saw it myself."

"The *Western Advertiser*, I never see that paper. We get the *St. Lerrick Mercury*. I didn't know anything about that. Only the other. I'll admit that. You see, I was nearly mad. I expect the rest put that in the paper without me."

"What do you mean by only 'the other.' Tell me all about it at once."

"I promised never to tell, and I won't now if—I want to know if you are happy at the thoughts of marrying Mr. Bernard."

"Why—what if I am? tell me—tell me all."

"If you are I shall be glad, because then he'll get over it in time. I shall hope on; do tell me if you are happy. I know you are a lady, but you can tell me. He's all the world to me. I never cease thinking about him. Oh, if he'd never seen you, I could make him *so* happy, I'm *sure* I could."

In spite of her own trouble, Mavis could see how the poor girl was suffering. She had become thin and pale. The brightness was gone from her eyes, and she was trembling seemingly with fear. It must have cost her much to come to her in this way, she was sure, and she pitied her. At the same time her own heart was aching, and she was excited beyond measure. She began to realize that she had somehow made a terrible mistake. It seemed as though a great gulf was before her, and that this girl came to give her warning.

"You have been doing something against me," she said. "You have deceived me in some way, is it not so?"

"Deceived you—yes—I don't know."

"Tell me, I have a right to know."

"I can't unless you tell me if——"

"Tell me," cried Mavis. "How dare you keep such a thing from me in this way? My life, my happiness, may be at stake."

"And isn't mine? Isn't my heart breaking now? Haven't I suffered, and despaired a thousand times more than you? You have everything, and I have nothing."

The girl became desperate, and her words came out rapidly now. She was no longer fearful, hesitating. She was a woman, too, with fears, and hopes, and longings. An intensity of nature, which no one would have suspected, revealed itself, a passion deep and strong shone from her eyes.

"Ah, you love him," she went on. "I know you do, but your love is as nothing to mine. Why, I would die for him. I worship the ground on which he walks. Look, look!"

She took a glove from the bosom of her dress, a man's glove. "It is his," she cried. "He accidentally dropped it at our house one day, and I have kept it, treasured it ever since." She lifted the glove to her mouth and covered it with kisses.

"You love him!" she went on scornfully. "You love him, and are willing to marry another man! That isn't love at all. Do you think I could marry any one else? I would die rather. I tried to get him, I know I did. So would you if you loved him as I do; but then—I thought of—everything, and it didn't seem right, and I heard you were very miserable, and I came to know if it was true, and so I said——"

"What?"

"Said that you were not worthy of him," went on the girl, "but to make him happy, I'd give him up, even if I died."

"Tell me what you mean—tell me everything."

"You tell me, then, if you are happy at the thought of marrying Mr. Bernard."

Mavis turned sharply upon her as if to speak angrily, then she stopped. The love for Andrew, which she thought she had killed, asserted itself. The thought of her wedding Wilton became hideous. She felt that through the wiles of a clever woman she had been entrapped into it, and it became more and more hateful.

"No, I am not happy at the thought of it," she cried; "it is terrible to me, hateful—tell me."

A terrible spasm of pain crossed Sarah Cundy's face as Mavis spoke. She looked as though her last hope was gone, as though nothing could keep her from a terrible future. She waited, mute, for two or three minutes, then she seemed to catch at something else.

"Tell me," she said, "if you ever cared for—for—*him*; I want to hear from your own lips before I tell you."

All social distinctions, all differences of education, were forgotten now. The lady of the manor and the farmer's daughter stood on equal footing.

Mavis opened her mouth to speak. To confess the secret of her heart was terrible, and yet she longed to know what the girl had to tell her.

"I do not tell such things lightly," she said at length, "what if——"

"Do I look like a woman to whom you can speak lightly?" cried the girl. "My heart is breaking, breaking. I have not slept for two days. No, as surely as I hope in God and heaven, whatever you tell me is safe. Ah! you do not love him really. You cannot. You are ashamed to speak of it. I will leave you."

"I am not ashamed. I did love him—I do love him with all my heart, with all my life. Tell me!"

"He loves you, you—like—his life."

"No, no, why I saw him—with—you—that terrible Friday night at half-past seven, and——"

"Yes, yes, I know,—it was all agreed. Ha, ha, for once he was with me; I had him, but his heart was with you!"

"All agreed? What do you mean?"

"Why, Mr. Bernard thought you liked Andrew, although you had half promised yourself to him, so he told my brother Sim. Then we made a plan. Sim hated Andrew, and I—loved him. We all know'd how proud you was, and we arranged for you to see me with Andrew."

"I don't understand. Tell me more plainly still."

Rapidly Sarah told of the plan they had made, and of the way it was carried out. She related what Wilton had said to her brother, and of the arguments that had been used. She told how she wrote a letter to Andrew, to meet her at such a time, and of what had passed between them.

"And do you mean to say that he told you that night that he could never love you?"

"God help me, he did."

"But I saw him put his arm around you."

"You don't know how much I wanted him," cried the girl savagely. "I love him, and I am not ashamed to tell you what I did. He tried to put me away from him, and I grasped his hand, and made him seem to caress me. I knew you were looking—I hated you. I wanted you to do as you have done. I would have let everything go on, but for him. I know he's eating his heart out for you now. That's why I'm telling you."

The tears started to Mavis's eyes. She realized now the sacrifice this girl was making. She read the girl's heart,

and understood her motives. This country maid, whom she had despised, possessed a heart as true as gold. She was willing to sacrifice her life's desire for the man she loved.

Mavis took her hand.

"Sarah Cundy," she said, "I am not worthy of what you have told me. I mistrusted you. You have a noble heart."

"No, no," cried the girl, "no. It was not good of me. I could not help telling you. I was so miserable. I did not like you, but I was sure you were miserable, and I knew I had made you so—do you forgive me?"

Mavis checked the bitter thoughts that rose in her heart. She could not help remembering her pain, and how that through this cruel plot her life had been blighted, but she crushed them all. The girl had made atonement; she had snapped every possibility of her own happiness asunder in telling the truth.

"You did it for me as well as him," said Mavis. "I know you did."

"Yes, but it was because he loved you—and yet—I cannot help loving you now I know you better. You can make him happy. You will never tell my secret, will you? I shall go away somewhere. You will tell him to come to you now, won't you?"

"No, no," cried Mavis, as if speaking to herself. "I can't do that. Why, I'm to be married on Friday; the dresses are all made, the marriage is arranged for. How can I tell him?"

"But——"

"Will you go now?" cried Mavis. She remembered the difficulties in her way now. While they had been talking she had forgotten them; now a blight fell on everything. "Go—go, I want to think."

She went to the door herself, and watched while Sarah went down the drive, then she came back, and, locking the door, she tried to understand the meaning of it all.

The first great feeling was that of joy. Andrew loved her, and had loved her all the time; then she accused herself for doubting him, accused herself of causing him pain. She had left him in scorn and anger, while he would wonder

at her change of conduct. Oh, why had she been so mad?

She started to her feet as if to go to him, and tell him all, and ask his forgiveness. Then she thought of all that had happened. Perhaps Andrew's feelings had undergone a change; it would be no wonder if they had. Besides, she remembered what followed. With scorn for herself she remembered that, maddened by disappointment and insulted pride, she had, under the influence of a clever woman, promised to marry another man. Oh! how, how he must scorn her! She who had received his attentions, and listened eagerly to his words of love, had, because of a plot, a poor, cheap, servant-girl plot, become unfaithful. What a poor, miserable thing she was! No, no, she could not bear for Andrew to know all this. He must scorn her. The marriage day had been fixed, the wedding guests would soon be on their way, the dresses were made, the clergyman had that very day sent a note relative to the ceremony.

What should she do? She had no one to advise her. Her father and mother were dead. Her companion, Mrs. Melville, was an ally of Mrs. Bernard; the old solicitor, who had been her guardian, favoured her marriage with Wilton Bernard; the clergyman was not a man to whom she could speak. Not a single friend did she possess in whom she could confide. The girls she had known, some of whom were coming to the wedding, did not understand her, and reproached her because of her unconventional ways.

"I almost wished she had not come," she murmured. "I think I was happier before. And yet it is sweet to know that he did love me. But what is the good? He can never know that I loved him all the time, for I can never tell him."

She lifted the window, and looked out upon the summer night. The perfume of a thousand flowers was wafted to her, the wind made sweet music as it played among the tree tops, the sound of the murmuring river found its way to her in the evening air, and, what was that? It was the sound of men's voices in a distant field. Ah, she remembered, the cricket club that Andrew had formed. Was he with these rough farm men? Never till now did she realize

how she loved him, and yet never did he seem so far away from her.

She turned back into the room again. The beauty of the summer night mocked her, everything was confused. She threw herself on a couch that stood near the window, and tried to solve the terrible problem that confronted her.

CHAPTER XXXI

ON THE EVE OF THE WEDDING

ANDREW FAIRFAX sat alone in his lodgings on the morning following the night on which Sarah Cundy had told her story to Mavis Lezant. But he knew nothing of it. As far as he knew, Mavis still regarded him with a feeling akin to scorn. The wedding-day drew near, and, although his heart was breaking, up to this morning he knew of no means of presenting an obstacle to it. Indeed, beyond his own love, he knew no reason why he should. Mavis had told him that she had chosen Wilton Bernard as her husband, and although the feeling that something was wrong remained with him, he knew of nothing why the marriage should not take place. Sometimes, he had been tempted to go boldly to the house again, but the news of the wedding forbad him, and so he had to bear his terrible heart-ache as best he could. As the days passed by, the suspense and the pain were almost more than he could bear, and when at last he had come within two or three days of the wedding, and there was no ray of light anywhere, his despair was beyond all words.

On this morning, however, he had received a letter which had turned his mind into other channels. Not that it had taken away his interest from Mavis; rather it had intensified it; nevertheless, his attention had been called to other subjects.

On receipt of the letter, he was at first at a loss to understand what it meant. He did not know William Jayne, solicitor, neither had he ever heard of him. As he read it, and mused over it, however, he began to realize its pur-

port. He found that Mr. Jayne was the successor to Mr. Say, who had been solicitor to Mr. Bernard, his foster father. He found, too, that Mr. Bernard's promise to him, that provision for his (Andrew's) future should be made, had, in spite of Mrs. Bernard's statement to him, been carried into effect. That the sum of £5,000 had been profitably invested for him, under the control of Mr. Say, and that the interest should have been paid to him. He saw, moreover, that, according to Mr. Bernard's wishes, that in the case of his (Andrew's) decease, this money was to revert to Wilton. Shortly before Mr. Say's death, which had happened a few months previous, Wilton had applied to him for the money, stating that Andrew Fairfax was dead, laying before the solicitor seeming proofs to that effect. Mr. Say, his business capacity being on the wane, and Andrew never having been heard of since Mr. Bernard's death, had acceded to his wishes, and accordingly the sum of £2,000 had been paid to Wilton. On Mr. Say's death, the management of affairs had fallen into the hands of Mr. Jayne, who, on Wilton's application for more money, had investigated the whole case, and had found that Andrew Fairfax was not dead, and that Wilton had no right to the money. Moreover, that the supposed proofs of Andrew's death were false, and probably forged. The letter concluded with the request from Mr. Jayne that Andrew should write, stating what steps he would like taken in the matter.

The letter came as a great surprise to Andrew. He had no idea that such deceit had been carried on during these years. He fully believed that Mr. Bernard had intended making provision for him, and that his death had hindered his carrying his intentions into effect. He thought that Mrs. Bernard had been asked to do this, and had refrained from doing so. But the idea that £5,000 had actually been set aside for him, and that these people had deliberately kept the knowledge of it from him, giving him a cheque for £50 instead, had never entered his mind.

The communication explained certain statements he had heard in London, however, to which I referred some time ago. He discovered then that the Bernard family were in financial difficulties, that Wilton and Mrs. Bernard to-

gether, the former through gambling and extravagance, the latter by unfortunate speculations, had run through nearly the whole of Mr. Bernard's fortune, and that Wilton's marriage with Mavis Lezant was regarded as the great means whereby the fortunes of the family were to be retrieved. But now he found that villainy of the first order had been practised. He remembered that while he had been in London struggling against the tide of difficulties, fearing lest he should starve, a large sum of money had been well invested for him. And worse than all this, this man who had robbed him of his money had also robbed him of the woman he loved, and their marriage would be consummated within a few hours.

What should he do? Was it right to allow Mavis Lezant to marry such a man? For Wilton Bernard was a criminal in the eyes of the law. A word from him now, and he would be apprehended. Should that word be given?

He seized his pen to write the lawyer, giving him his full authority to act immediately in the matter, when a thought came into his mind which caused the pen to drop from his hand.

This would mean scandal, and of necessity it would bring the name of Mavis Lezant into notoriety. Besides, perhaps she loved him, it might be that after all her heart was bound up in him, and that such a revelation would cause her untold pain. How could he find out? He knew of no means. Poor Andrew, he still loved Mavis hopelessly, and yet he was unwilling to do anything that should cause her a shadow of pain.

"No," he cried bitterly, "if she loves him, it is not for me to stand in her way; it is not for me to dash her cup of happiness to the ground! And yet should I not be saving her from a greater misery if I revealed this matter to her?"

It was a difficult point to settle, and he knew not what to do. For hours he sat poring over the letter, and trying to devise some means where by he might best do his duty to the woman he loved. For the money he cared nothing. His book was selling rapidly, while he received letters from editors and publishers daily, asking him to state his own terms for contributions they wanted him to send them, but for Mavis Lezant he cared everything, and he was willing

to sacrifice everything for her. But did she love him; That was the question that haunted him. He remembered their last interview. It is true that she had told him then that she had engaged herself to Wilton, but she had done so in an unnatural voice, as though it wrung her heart to do so. Still, she was evidently willing to marry him Her banns had been "called" at the old church for three Sundays, and the wedding was the talk of the village.

At length he got up and went out into the fields. All was joyful out there. The cornfields undulated at the gentle sway of the winds, and glistened in the sunlight. The river poured out its melody as it gurgled down the valley, while the boys who tried to catch the spotted trout often forgot the necessary quiet for fishing, and laughed in their joy. He saw the great tree, too, under which he had been lying when Mavis Lezant came near to him; he saw the great house in the distance, shaded by giant trees. Was she there, he wondered, and was she happy? Did her heart throb with joy at the thought that soon her husband would be master of the estate and of her? Did she cherish the thought of giving herself to this man as a wife gives herself to her husband? Did she? The question almost tore his heart asunder, it robbed everything of its beauty. And he had it in his power to stop the wedding. A telegram to Mr. Jayne, and before the marriage could take place, Wilton Bernard would be in the clutches of the law. But what would that mean? He did not know. He did not see how he could find out.

He strolled on through the fields, until he came to a shady hedge, where he lay down and tried to solve his problem. On the other side of the hedge two labourers were working. They were hoeing turnips, and talked as they worked.

"Be 'ee goin?" asked one.

"Aw iss, I'm goin'. I hear too, as 'ow she's goin' to give a faist to oal the workin' people in the parish in a week or two. I reckon 't'll be after the honeymoon."

"Well, she's a nice maid, and marryin' es a risky thing. 'Tedn' hoss jockeyin'."

"No. But then this chap 'es a nice chap. You knaw

he've stand trait at the publics a goodish bit. Besides, his father wur a nice man."

"I doan't believe she do care for 'un."

"Iss she do. My little maid do work there as a scullery maid, and she yeard Mrs. Melville tell the cook that though Miss Lezant was too proud to shaw 'er love, she fairly worshipped this young Bernard."

"Ah well, ther's lots o' things we doan' knaw. Oal' I hope es he waan't try to undo what Maaster Andrew hev done. I wish 'twas 'ee as was goin' to be squire."

"Iss, that would be grand. He's a gentleman, we oal knaw that, but then 'ee edn' big 'nough gentleman for she. He've got to git hes livin' by writin', while she's a rail lady."

Their voices became indistinct now. The rows of turnips which they hoed led them farther and farther away from the spot where Andrew lay.

What they had said, however, decided him what to do. If Mavis Lezant loved Wilton Bernard, it was not for him to destroy her happiness. Let her have him. He would do nothing to hinder the wedding. Let him have the money, it did not matter now, since Mavis loved the man who had played false. And yet, and yet could such a man make her happy? She loved him, she worshipped him, the girl said. Yes, that was enough.

How he passed the remainder of the day he scarcely knew, but it came to an end at length, and he retired to bed with his heart sore and his brain weary. After a restless night he woke to the fact that only one day would elapse now before the wedding would take place. The following morning at eleven o'clock Mavis Lezant would become Mavis Bernard, and the man who had robbed him of everything would reign in the parish. But she loved him and gave herself freely to him. After that he could say nothing.

All through the Thursday morning he tried to work but in vain. How could he work when his dearest hopes, his heart's desires were slipping from him minute by minute? How could he think, when the woman, the very thought of whom was sacred to him, and around whose name was associated everything chaste and beautiful, was soon to give herself, soul and body, to Wilton Bernard; while

he, because he believed she loved him, could do nothing to hinder the marriage?

His landlady brought his mid-day meal to him, which he only pretended to eat, and then, unable to remain indoors any longer, went out into the open air.

The day was not balmy and warm as it had been when he had gone out and heard the labourers talking. The wind blew cold, and as the leaves rustled they seemed to breathe forth sadness and woe. The birds only chirped to day, they did not seem to sing gladly, while the bees, which, the day before, had hummed merrily as they sucked the honey from the flowers, did not now appear.

Sadly he walked along the lonely lanes, unheeding both time and place, when he heard the sound of voices and the rumble of wheels. He turned, and saw some ladies and gentleman, who were driving in the direction of Ashwater. Not wishing to be seen he leaped the fence, and through its foliage watched the party.

His heart seemed to turn cold. In one of the carriages were strangers, in the other rode, Mrs Bernard, Wilton, and Isabel. They had, of course, come for the wedding. Wilton had come to claim his bride.

The carriages swept on, and Andrew returned to the village like one dazed. As he neared the churchyard he felt his arm touched.

"I've bin lookin' for 'ee a long time, Maaster Andrew, sur," said a voice.

He turned and saw old Amos Crews by his side.

"Amos, did you want to see me?"

"I ded, sur. I think ther's somethin' wrong, sur. You do knaw as 'ow I work up to Ashwater, and the head gardener es kind to me, sur, 'cause Miss Lezant, bless 'er, hev told un to be. And so I be allays 'lowed a goodish long bit for denner time, so I do come home to have it hot. Jist as I was goin' back to work, Maaster Andrew, Miss Sarah Cundy comed to the house, and she axed me to fetch you, as there was somethin' she wanted to tell 'ee, and she was 'fraid to come to your lodgin's. I've been loppin' 'bout all the arternoon tryin' to find 'ee, sur. Come back weth me, she's waitin' for 'ee. Come quick, it must be arter five o'clock."

"Miss Cundy?" said Andrew, remembering their meeting. "No, I don't think I'll go."

"Do, sur. I'm sure she've got somethin' on her mind. She do say she have, and she's cryin' like a cheeld. Her conscience es troublin' her, Maaster Andrew, and I believe 'tes somethin' 'bout the weddin' to-morrow. Come, Maaster Andrew, come."

Still Andrew did not move.

"You ought to come, Maaster Andrew," said Amos, looking at the young man, "'tes yer duty. Ther's things, sur, as you doan't knaw. She waan't tell me, but she'll tell you—and you must hear 'em."

Without a word Andrew walked along by the old man's side towards the cottage in the fields.

* * * * *

Thursday evening was naturally an anxious time at Ashwater. Each looked forward with peculiar interest towards the coming day, when that for which Mrs. Bernard had been planning should become an accomplished fact.

Mr. Bensome, Mavis's guardian, was there, and seemed to be pondering as to whether all was well. Wilton was all there, but he had arranged to sleep at the rectory that night. A few of Mavis's old school friends were there, but only a few. All the Bernard family had come down to witness the wedding—Isabel, haughty and scornful, Beryl and Edith seemingly puzzled, Mrs. Bernard with a smile on her lips, but as watchful as a cat.

Mavis had scarcely come out of her room for the day, and when once she appeared for a few minutes she startled everyone by her pallor, and the frightened look in her great dark eyes.

Ever since Sarah Cundy had visited her she had seemed, like one in a trance, and all wondered what had come over her. She seemed to be weighing issues, and knew not what to do. Mavis had been educated to believe a promise to be a sacred thing. Thus, having once arranged for an engagement between her and Wilton, Mrs. Bernard found no difficulty in leading her to believe it her duty to marry him. Besides, her heart was sore, and she did not care much what happened to her. After

Sarah had told her story, all the old battles had to be fought over again and for a long time she did not know what to do. She knew now that all were leagued against her, and she had come to fear Mrs. Bernard. She knew that the woman would leave no stone unturned to carry her plans through, and even although she should determine to refuse to marry Wilton, she dreaded the difficulty in carrying her determination into effect. Moreover she believed that Wilton loved her; she believed that if he had deceived her, he had done so through love of her. The thought that he wanted her money had not entered her mind, for she had heard nothing of financial difficulties, and besides all this she had promised him, and that promise, although it was won from her through deceit, was yet a sacred thing to her.

Still, every fibre of her being revolted against marrying him, especially now that she knew Andrew had been true to her. Were she sure he loved her still, and longed to be with her, she would have defied everything, and have refused to go to church on the following day. But she felt sure Andrew must have ceased to love her. How could it be otherwise? To him her conduct must have seemed disgraceful; nay, she had done her best to show him that she scorned him, and she knew that he was not the man to receive such insults kindly.

She constantly hoped, in spite of what she had said to Miss Sarah, that the true state of things might be told him, and when the days passed by, and he came not, she gave up hope, and settled down to a despairing kind of resignation. It is true, her heart cried out for Andrew, but she seemed to be held by a thousand chains and was unable to break one. Besides, her sorrow had caused her health to suffer, and she seemed to have lost all the strength necessary to opposition.

As the light began to fade away on the Thursday evening, Mrs. Bernard came to her room, and persuaded her to join the company.

"We shall think that you are troubled by your marriage, Mavis," she said; "come down and show your guests how happy you are, and that you are going to enter the marriage state with gladness. I can assure you,

Wilton feels your absence keenly. He will leave for the rectory in a little while, and he feels that you might come into the room where he is. Poor boy, had you not been willing to marry him he would have doubted your love, for he has never had the opportunity of being alone with you like other young men have with their promised brides."

Yielding to the strange influence which Mrs. Bernard exercised over her, Mavis accompanied her to the drawing-ing room, where nearly all the London guests had assembled.

Wilton immediately placed a chair for her by his side, to which she went, little caring what she did.

For the next half an hour she did her best to be cheerful, and entered with all the interest she could into the conversation of the evening; she tried to appear pleased at the handsome wedding presents which had been sent, at the same time shuddering at the thought that they bound her more closely to the marriage, which hour by hour was becoming more and more hateful.

Presently a noise in the hall arrested her attention, and conversation ceased among the rest.

"It is impossible, sir!" she heard a servant say. "She cannot be disturbed, and I have strict orders that you are not to be admitted."

"But I will be admitted," said a voice, which made her shake like an aspen leaf.

"No, sir, excuse me, I must obey orders, and will have to call for help if you insist."

"Call for help, then, only tell me where she is!"

"Who is that?" said a voice from within the drawing-room.

"Ah, she is there; stand aside! I will go."

There was a sound of a struggle in the hall, and the next minute Andrew Fairfax, pale to the lips, his hands nervous and trembling, but with a determined look on his mouth and a dangerous flash in his eyes, stood within the room.

CHAPTER XXXII

A WOMAN'S LOVE

AS Andrew entered, a look of astonishment, dismay and anger rested on the faces of most present. Some of the party had left for a walk in the grounds, and those that remained were the Bernard family, Mr. Bensome, Mrs. Melville, and Mavis.

Both Wilton and Mrs. Bernard started to their feet, as if to thrust him from the room; Isabel stared at him in astonishment; Beryl and Edith looked at him, half in wonder, half in gladness; while Mrs. Meville and Mr. Bensome regarded him as an impudent intruder.

As for Mavis, she never moved. Her eyes were fastened upon him as though he possessed some strange magnetic power, and she felt that her future life depended on the next few minutes.

"Who are you?" cried Wilton angrily, "and why are you here?"

"You know who I am," said Andrew quietly, closing the door behind him, "and you will quickly know why I am here."

"Leave the room at once, fellow!" cried Mrs. Bernard; "this house is not for such as you."

Andrew did not move, except to run his hand through his dark locks—a habit he had when deeply moved. The woman saw, too, that her son cowered before him, as if he were afraid, and it angered her.

"Wilton," she cried, "you should be master here. Do you allow that hulking knave to enter this room in such a way? Have you no more thought for your wife that is to be?"

"She shall never be his wife," said Andrew, "never!"

"At least you should say why you are here" said Mr. Bensome, the old lawyer. "To say the least of it, this is a strange proceeding."

"I am here to make it impossible for Miss Lezant to marry Wilton Bernard" replied Andrew.

"But how can you?"

"I can at least tell the truth" replied Andrew "after which, if Miss Lezant tells me to leave the house I will go."

He had a difficult task before him but he felt that he was fighting for what to him was dearer than life. He told his story rapidly, but in sufficient detail to make everything plain. He felt almost ashamed to be obliged to expose what after all was a cheap vulgar plot, especially when that exposure seemed likely holding up poor Miss Sarah Cundy to ridicule, but he was in no mood for trifling, and he spared no one.

"And now" he said, "it is for Miss Lezant to decide. If she bids me go, I will go."

Mavis gave him only one look, and then she took her place by his side.

"Stay Andrew" she said.

During the recital Mrs. Bernard had been thinking deeply. Evidently she had been considering what course to take.

"Mavis, my child," she said, "you have been cruelly deceived. All this is but the clever invention of this man. We have made no dishonourable plans. I can prove this if needs be. Somehow, this girl Cundy and this fellow have arranged to join issue in order to deceive you and gain their own ends. Think, Mavis. This blow will kill me. My family will be the by-word of every newspaper, my son's life will be ruined and his heart broken. Besides, you have promised, Mavis, you have given your sacred word. Morally, you are Wilton's wife; it only needed the sanction of the law to make you so in the eyes of the world. Surely, Mavis, you will not do this vile, this cruel thing! Nay, your heart is too pure, too good for that. I am a widow, Mavis; my hopes are in my children, especially in my only son. You promised, Mavis, you promised. Do not let this vile scheme deceive you. Let him go, and let us be happy.'

But Mavis did not speak a word; she gave Andrew a quick look, and then clasped the hand he held out to her.

"Am I to understand," said Wilton hoarsely, "that you discard me? That you cast me off like an old glove? That on the very eve of the wedding you tell me to go, making me the laughing stock of the world?

She felt her hand in Andrew's, and looked up into his eyes.

"I can never marry you," she said to Wilton.

"Then all the world shall know your story," he cried "all the world shall know about you, and this—this—Hodge. If I am laughed at, you shall be laughed at, despised by every one. I will tell your story, ay, and in my own way too."

"No, you will not," cried Andrew.

"Who will hinder me?"

"I will."

"You, you—a clown!"

"What is the use of talking like this?" said Andrew. "You know very well who I am. Why disguise the fact any longer? I was Andrew Bernard, brought up by your father as a son. You know that you all hated me, and on the day of my foster-father's funeral you threw me on the world, and discarded me. Now, mark me, if you breathe one breath of scandal, or anything that shall cause pain to the woman I love, I will tell the story of your treatment of me."

"Tell it," cried Wilton, "and who will believe you?"

"Can you not see?" said Mrs. Bernard to Mavis, "how this man is deceiving you?"

"Is this true?" asked Mavis of Andrew eagerly.

"It is true," said Andrew, rapidly telling his story.

"But," said Mavis, "I have heard that the young man who used to live at Mrs. Bernard's is dead—that he died shortly after he left the house."

"No, he did not die," said Andrew. "And now I want to say this: if Wilton Bernard takes unfair advantage of his relations with this house, if he makes one untrue statement, I shall ask him to explain what has become of the £5,000 left to me,"

"It's a lie," cried Wilton, with an oath; "that is, I know nothing about it. What do you mean by such inventions?"

As for Mrs. Bernard, she seemed to give up hope at Andrew's words; her hands hung loosely, her mouth twitched nervously.

"Here, sir," said Andrew, handing a letter to Mr.

Bensome, "this may tell you if it is an invention."

The old lawyer read it through carefully; when he had finished, he handed it back to Andrew, and said to Mavis,—"Be thankful, my child, for your escape!" Then turning to Wilton, he said, "You must excuse me if I refuse to have any further communications with you, young man."

"Do you mean to say that you turn your back on us?" cried Mrs. Bernard.

"I mean to say that Mr. Fairfax could send your son to a felon's cell for acting the part of a villain" said the old man solemnly. "I mean to say that I have been cruelly deceived, that Mavis has been cruelly deceived, and that it will be well for you to think of these things in your future proceedings."

"A felon's cell!" cried Mrs. Bernard; "what do you mean?"

"I mean this" said Andrew. "Before Mr. Bernard died he left £5 000 for my use. He arranged with you to tell me, so that together we might make settlements for the future. You knew of this, and you hid the knowledge from me. And you know, too that in the event of my death, this money was to revert to Wilton. What has happened? Wilton has gone to the lawyer who had this business in his hands and brought documents supposing to prove my death, knowing all the time that I was alive. He has also withdrawn a large sum of money."

Mrs Bernard rose to her feet. The old anger had returned to her eyes, the old vigour to her frame.

"Come," she said, "this is no place for us. There is a train to-night by which we can get to P——. Children every one of you, get ready to go."

She left the room as she spoke, but Mavis rushed into the hall after her.

"Mrs. Bernard," she said, "there is no need for this. You can stay the night at least."

"Not in this house," cried the angry woman; "I should choke now. I will go on to the rectory. If it is too late for the last train, we can stay there, perhaps; if not, I will rather sleep by the hedgeside than be here. Come, children, every one of you."

They dared not disobey her. Her imperious will was

paramount among all her children. She spoke to no one and unheeding the protestations of Beryl and Isabel, she walked away from the house a few minutes after.

And thus it came about that presently Andrew was left alone in the room with Mavis.

For a minute both seemed afraid to speak; at length Andrew spoke,—

"Forgive me for the way I came to-night," he said. "I had hard work to gain admission at all. I am afraid I frightened you, but I could not help it."

She looked up at him, and her eyes became luminous.

"I know I was rough and masterful," he went on, "but I could not help it. So much depended on it. I was almost mad with suspense. I did not know until to-night, and I am afraid that I made everything—very hard for you."

"Hard?" she said; "hard?"

"May I. Mavis?" he said, bending his head towards her.

"If, knowing all, you forgive all—" was her answer.

"Forgive! What have I to forgive?"

She looked into his face, as if to read his inmost thoughts; then the light of gladness flashed into her eyes again. He opened his arms, and in another second Andrew felt her heart beat against his, and he knew that for ever and ever they belonged to each other.

"Come, Mavis," he said, "I cannot stay within four walls let us go out into the open air. Only there can I feel to thank God all I want to thank Him."

Then together they walked beneath the broad elms which bordered the park, and as they looked upward they saw the stars shining through the dewy leaves.

CHAPTER XXXIII

"I WILL KNOW SOON"

I WILL not try and describe in full the scene in the village on the morning on which it was expected Mavis was to be married to Wilton Bernard. Many of the

people had a holiday, and long before the hour when the wedding was announced they appeared in their best attire, and talked sagely about the coming event.

"I doan't feel right 'bout it." said one.

"How's that?" was the query.

"Tedn' right. Laast night a 'ood duv" (a wood dove) "comed close to me, and ooed cloas in my ear. I kipt on axin' what it mained, then I thought 'bout this marryin' buisness takin' place on a Friday. Everybody do knaw that the devil do kip Friday for his oan jobs."

"The passen do say that 'tes oal nonsense."

"Passen! What do he knaw? He edn' a Loamshire man. Besides, the maid don't look fitty, I'm tould. She do seem oal white and milky. A maid that's goin' to be married shud be singin' like a bird. Besides, I doan't like the chap."

And so they went on talking until the hour had nearly fled for the wedding, but no one appeared. They looked towards Ashwater, but there was no sign of wedding favours. They looked towards the Rectory, but no answer came from that quarter. They inquired of the sexton, but he was too important a man on that day to talk with the common horde.

Presently the parson's servant appeared. He acted in the capacity of butler, footman, groom, coachman, and shoeblack. He had been with the rector for many years. He generally quarrelled with him about once a week, and threatened to leave. At the end of about every five years he *did* leave, and another servant occupied his place. But whether the rector could not do without him, or whether he could not do without the rector, I don't know. Certain it is, in a few weeks he was back in his old place again, and matters went on as before. Richard Shave, which was the servant's name, professed to know all his master's secrets, and patronized every one in the parish, and was at once an oracle, and a general butt. When he appeared, the villagers crowded around him.

"We're caught by the Russians!" was that gentleman's explanation.

"What's the matter?"

" I'm ready to fight the French army, by sea or by land," was Richard's relevant reply.

" How ? what do 'ee main ? "

" Main ? I was to have a suv'rin to day, and now the weddin' es gone to smash, gone off in smok', and young Bernard and his family have gone off to London, without giving me the worth of sixpence. Blow 'em all ! "

The news soon spread, and various were the rumours afloat. But no one knew the real truth. It was generally understood, however that Mavis had found out something about Wilton, and had refused to marry him.

About twelve o'clock another surprise awaited the villagers. News came to them that although the wedding was not to take place, they should not be deprived of the pleasure they had anticipated. A sumptuous repast was accordingly prepared, and while they wondered as to the meaning of it all, they did not the less enjoy themselves.

Away up at Ashwater, too, every one was excited. The servants had scarcely slept for the night ; but in spite of the excitement everything was quiet and orderly. Mr. Bensome had early in the morning sent notices to the invited guests to the effect that no wedding would take place ; consequently the roll of carriage wheels was not heard on the drive, neither was Mavis annoyed by any unpleasant occurrences.

All through the long night she had not slept, but not because of sorrow. Ofttimes she shuddered at the thought of how nearly her life had been lost ; but the great feeling at her heart was that of joy and thankfulness. She recalled again and again the blissful words which Andrew had spoken to her, and she waited with feverish joy for the morning when he should come again.

As it may be imagined, too, Andrew was no laggard. As soon as morning came he hurried across the fields to the great house, and soon forgot all worries and anxieties in the society of the young girl, who unable to contain herself when she saw him, ran eagerly down the park to meet him.

But it is not for me to speak of this now. I must confess, too, at a feeling of pain at my heart as I write of these things. But then I am not going to introduce my own

feelings and disappointments. I promised to tell Andrew Fairfax's story, and in the few words which I have yet to write I will be true to my promise.

The seven days' wonder came to an end at length, and the people ceased to interest themselves so much in Mavis's wedding, when it leaked out, I know not how, that she and Andrew were engaged. Then the people cheered in reality, for the thought of such a squire was full of promise and hope; and as if to give an earnest to the good time coming, the foundation-stone of a new club-room and library was laid amidst great rejoicings.

Before this building was anything like completed, a row, of cottages was seen to rise from the ground. And such cottages, too! Each was built on true sanitary principles. Each contained commodious rooms, each was fitted up with conveniences only known to rich men's dwellings, these, it was given out, were to be let at a rental which would enable the poorest labourer to reside in them. But more than this, each cottage was to be let on such terms that within a given number of years it might become the property of the tenant.

A little later a new surprise awaited the villagers. The Ashwater Common, or "Downs," as it was generally called, was offered to the villagers for cultivation at a nominal rent, and here also inducements were held out for the buying of the land at easy terms.

Of course the villagers saw the hand of Andrew in all these things; but they knew, too, that Mavis was his seconder in every true and useful scheme.

The neighbouring landlords remonstrated with her, and told her that such a course of action would take away the privileges which the gentry should naturally possess.

"Do you know," said one old squire to her, "if I were to do as you do, I should immediately reduce my income to such an extent that I should have to give up my racing horses and my hounds?"

"And what then?" asked Mavis.

"What then!" cried the old man; "why—why——"

"Because," said Mavis, "although years ago I did not think about these things, I fail to see now why we should have a thousand unnecessary luxuries, while the poor

people on our estates should be ground down by hopelessness, hardship, and poverty. They have a right to comfort as well as I, and I for one am going to try and give it them."

"But can't you see," urged the old man, "all this entertainment and knowledge which you will give them will make them cease to respect your position?"

"I want to be respected for what I am rather than for what I have," replied Mavis.

"But can't you see what all this will lead to?" again urged the old squire. "It means the thin edge of the wedge which will open up the way for a thousand newfangled reforms, and things will be changed altogether."

"Yes, I think, I hope they will," replied Mavis. "It will mean that the people will, instead of ruining their lives at the public-houses, have a place where they can be truly entertained, truly uplifted. It will mean that their minds will be enlightened, and we shall have brightness and intelligence, instead of servile ignorance. It will mean that instead of our young people being driven away to the overcrowded towns, they will remain at home, and till the land to advantage. It will mean that religion, instead of being a superstition, whereby they are frightened, will be a bright power in their lives, cheering and purifying their minds and hearts. It means that the old feud between rich and poor will be destroyed. It will mean that they will have a share in the proceeds of their toil, while the landlords will not have everything."

The old man went away from her angry and crestfallen and the work went on.

Before the winter was really come, cottages were ready for those who had been living in hovels, while the new club and reading-room was opened with great rejoicings.

"It makes a feller feel as though he'd a right to live," said one man to another, as he went from one room to another.

"Oh, but it's Mr. Fairfax," replied the other.

"Yes, bless him! but he'll be fust rate squire, waan't he?"

"Ah, iss, fust rate. I feel as 'ow I could do anything for a man like 'ee."

And thus Andrew and Mavis, because they thought of the people and trusted them, gained their love, and everywhere through the parish that day cheers were given and prayers were offered up for Andrew and his love.

There are some who say that the working class are ungrateful, dissatisfied, complaining. Perhaps if some of us were in their places, we should be less patient than they. This I know, the St. Neot people were not unthankful, and before long there was a higher, truer tone in the life of the whole country-side.

Before the winter was over another event took place. The publicans closed their houses. They could not get a living, they said, since the new club-room had been opened. They could not compete with the attractions which were held out there. Only a very few of the old topers continued to come, and as they had mostly drunk at the expense of others, it did not pay the publicans to keep their houses open for them.

It rejoiced Andrew's heart when this took place. It is true Mavis had it in her power to close them of her own accord; but he wanted them to be closed because even from the people's standpoint there was no need of them.

And now I may cause my readers to smile as I record the next incident that took place; but as I am narrating actual facts, this must not be left out. Before the winter was over, the St. Neot policeman was removed.

"There esn't nothin' for me to do now," said Nibbles, the policeman in question, to the sergeant, and the sergeant reported this to the inspector, and the inspector to the superintendent and accordingly Nibbles was removed.

All this time Andrew remained in his old lodgings. It is true that he spent more time than was absolutely necessary at Ashwater; but he nevertheless worked hard at the new novel he was writing, which was eagerly awaited by the reading public.

Nature's Children was eagerly discussed at debating societies and political clubs throughout the country, and because every lofty ideal of life is an unborn event, everything promised that the time of which Andrew wrote should be an accomplished fact. Meanwhile he tested the theories

he had advocated by applying them to the parish in which he had been born, with the assurance that if they were carried out on a larger scale throughout all the agricultural districts in the county they would bear the most satisfactory fruit.

Just after Christmas, Andrew and Mavis had been attending a meeting at the club-room, and were walking back to Ashwater together. First they talked of the good that had been done, of the work that had been accaccomplished; and then Andrew asked her when the desires of his heart were to be realized, and they were to become man and wife.

"Andrew," she said, "I have wanted to tell you for a long time, but I could not bring myself to think of it. Somehow I have not felt worthy of you, and the memory of that other wedding has always come back to me; but now——"

"Now you will let it be soon?" he begged eagerly.

"Let us wait till the summer comes," she said, "and then we will get the villagers into the park, and we will dine with them there, and we will have music and merriment; shall we?"

And so it was settled. Mavis loved the warmth and the sunshine, and would have her wedding festivities out in the park overlooking the woods, where the birds loved to sing, and where she and Andrew had walked together.

Soon after this was settled, Ezra Pinns and I paid a visit to Ashwater. When the invitation first came, Ezra refused, but he soon yielded. I knew he would.

It was February when we went down, and the countryside was ice-bound; but the welcome we received was enough to thaw any ice that ever existed.

I shall never forget Mavis's meeting with old Ezra. The old man started up as she entered the room, and looked at her keenly. She was, indeed, fair to look upon. Her great brown eyes shone with joy and gladness, her beautiful face beamed with happy smiles, and she welcomed the old man right cordially. For a minute he did not speak. Her face seemed to remind him of some one he had known and loved long years before. Then a tear

started to his eye. He seized her hands, and his lips trembled.

"And you are to be Andrew's wife?" he said.

"Yes, I am," she said gladly.

He kept looking at her lustrous eyes, which I saw were fast filling with tears.

"God bless you, my bonny, bonny maid," he said huskily; then he added, "yes, and He will bless you, too."

He lifted her hands to his lips, and kissed them with all the fervour of a boy; then he went back to his chair, and wiped his eyes vigorously.

Presently he looked up again, and I saw that Ezra was his old grim self again.

"What a fool you must think me! Um!" he grumbled.

But I noticed that however satirical he was to Andrew and to myself, to her he was always gentle and tender. I expect that somehow she reminded him of the love of his boyhood. Perhaps I think this because in my own heart is a hidden grave.

During the evening I related some news.

"Do you know that Isabel Bernard is to be married?" I said.

"No," said Andrew; "is she? And do you know what has become of the rest of the family?"

"Yes," I replied. "Mrs. Bernard is going to live with her. I hear she has rescued a small annuity out of the wreck of her fortune, and Isabel wishes her mother to live with her after her marriage."

"To whom is she to be married?" asked Mavis.

"To a rich old rake—a Colonel Benfield: a man old enough to be her grandfather."

"And what is to become of Beryl and Edith?"

"They refused to countenance this wedding, and are going into situations. Edith is quite strong now."

"Andrew," said Mavis, "they shall come here sometimes. shan't they?"

"As far as I am concerned, gladly," replied Andrew; then he was quiet, and I knew that both he and Mavis wanted to hear of the other member of the family, but did not care to ask.

"Wilton Bernard," I went on, "has gone to the bad; he has got into trouble, and has been obliged to leave the

country. It is not likely he will ever appear in England again."

For a time there was silence, but I fancied I heard them both give a sigh of relief. I knew there was perfect trust, perfect confidence between them, and yet doubtless Mavis still remembered, with bitterness, her jealousy and her weakness,—remembered how she, under the influence of a clever, scheming woman, had nearly wrecked her life.

However, we soon talked of more pleasant things, and the evening passed pleasantly away. One thing surprised me. Mrs. Melville still stayed with Mavis as her nominal companion. But I learned afterwards that she had no other home, and when she besought Mavis to forgive her, and let her stay, the young girl, remembering her long association with the family, consented, until such time as a master should come to Ashwater.

The months passed swiftly away until leafy June appeared. Everywhere the flowers bloomed, and the birds sang, and nowhere was the gladness of summer seen and heard more than around Mavis Lezant's home. Inside the great house, too, all was song and gladness. This time Mavis prepared for her wedding day with love-lit eyes and a happy heart, for now she was to be married to the man she loved,—the man who had won her in spite of herself, the man who was blessed everywhere, and who lived to help others.

The villagers had no gloomy forebodings as to the marriage; and when they heard that the wedding day was to be on a Saturday, and every one in the parish that could come was to be invited to partake of the wedding cheer, their joy knew no bounds.

Owing to Andrew's influence, a village band had been formed, and each member of it was to play at the wedding feast, when tables were placed in the park, which were to be laden with all that these villagers could desire.

Of course I was invited to the wedding; so was Ezra Pinns. I learnt, too, that Beryl Bernard was to be there with her sister Edith, besides a host of people that Mavis in her gladness wanted to be present.

I never saw Andrew more nervous than on the eve of the wedding. He did not like for Mavis to be out of his

sight. He seemed to be afraid that the joy in store for him was too great, as though any joy could be too great for him.

As the evening passed away, I, feeling sad at heart,— I am such a selfish fellow, and I saw nothing before me but a dreary, lonely life,—went into a room, and began to muse. I had not been there long when Andrew and Mavis entered, happy in each other's love. I sat in a kind of alcove, so that they could not see me, and as I did not wish to disturb them, I did not let them know of my presence.

They had not been there long when a servant entered, telling them that a young woman wanted to see them. Still I did not move; I did not think the visitor would be of importance. Still I looked towards the door, and saw a young woman enter.

Mavis immediately went towards her with out-stretched hands.

"No, Miss Lezant," she said, "do not let me trouble you, only I could not go away without telling you."

"Are you going away?" asked Mavis.

The girl's face, which was very pale when she entered, flushed at this; her eyes sparkled, too.

"Do you think I could stay," she said with a touch of passion in her voice, "stay when you are married, and when you know—what you do?".

"Forgive me," said Mavis; "I only——"

"No, do not make any explanations. I shall not see you to-morrow. I shall wait until the bells ring after the marriage, then I shall know that—but never mind. I've come to tell you that I shall pray for your joy, your happiness. You are not worthy of him, but you will make him happy. May God bless you, and help me!"

The girl turned to leave the room, when Andrew started up, and held out his hand.

"I wish you well, Miss Sarah," he said kindly. "If ever you need a friend, you have one in me. Where do you intend going?"

"I am going to a hospital to be trained as a nurse," she said; "perhaps in the midst of pain and suffering I shall forget. No, do not hold out your hand——"

Then I noticed that she seemed overcome, and caught it and held it fast.

"Oh, Mr. Andrew," she cried, "I gave you up to her. I told her all; it was very hard, it was like tearing my heart out, but I told her. You'll forgive me for causing you pain, won't you? I—I could not—help——"

She lifted his hand to her mouth and kissed it, and then, without looking at them again, she left the room.

For my own part, during the remainder of the evening I thought more of the slighted love of the farmer's daughter than I did of that of the happy couple. So it came to pass that even on the brightest day the clouds gather.

I shall not try to describe the wedding which took place the next day. Never within the memory of the oldest living man, so the villagers said, had St. Neot seen such a day.

Never, surely, were a bride and bridegroom more beloved. The old churchyard path was strewn with flowers, the dreary church was made bright and gay with them, while everywhere men, women, and children shouted with joy.

How beautiful the park looked, too, on the brightness of that June morning, and how the villagers enjoyed themselves!

Old Amos Crews was there, and his wife, their faces refined and softened by trouble, but with a joyous light in their eyes still; and a new steward was there, for Mr. Beans had found it wise to leave Ashwâter. Rough old farmers were there with their sons and daughters; labourers were there with their wives and children, and each and all prayed for the blessing of our Great Father to dwell on the man I loved as a brother, and on the blithesome maiden I had learnt to love as a sister.

Ah, it is easy to win the love of the rustic peasant, it is easy to help him too, if one will be willing to sacrifice a little. And I was proud to be the friend of the man who has done so much for poor Hodge who lives on the land.

Thus Andrew began his new life. Need I write on, and tell of the after days? Need I describe his life now? I think not. The world knows of him now. His books are read far and wide, and his best work is still to be done; for Andrew cannot eat the bread of idleness. Every one

knows, too, how he and his noble wife have worked for the poor and the dreary, and how the schemes he advanced have blessed thousands, and will bless many more. But the world does not know, as I know, the gladness of his home life, and of the love between him and his wife which grows day by day. The world does not know of the two bonny children which God has given them, and that now the walls of the old house echo with the patter of children's feet and children's laughter. After all, the real life of man is not known.

As may be expected, old Ezra Pinns is not a stranger to the house ; and grim and gloomy as he often is in London, he is never so when playing with the children at Ashwater. Indeed, Andrew declares that he shall get the old man to live there altogether.

Sometimes when there, he goes to the club in the evenings, and plays at games with the men, and listens while the villagers sound Andrew's praises, for no man could love a son more than he loves him.

Shall I write on ? Shall I describe in detail my friend's home life, and the work he is still doing ? Shall I tell of his wife, who seems to grow more winsome as the days go by ? Shall I tell of the influence the life of my friend and his wife are having upon the people ? I am tempted to, for it is hard to drop my pen. But I do not think he would wish it. Still I have a selfish consolation. Although you bid good-bye to him, I do not. He is my friend still and will be till death do us part, and then—we shall be friends still.

Why do I want to tell about myself ? I promised I would not when I commenced this story long months ago. My heart was sad then, and I thought I had nothing to tell ? Have I now ? I hardly know. I am forty years old, and a confirmed bachelor ; at least, so people say. And yet, why does my heart beat so at the thought of Beryl Bernard, and why do her eyes droop so, and her hands tremble when I take them in mine ? Is there any hope for me ? I will know soon.

THE END.