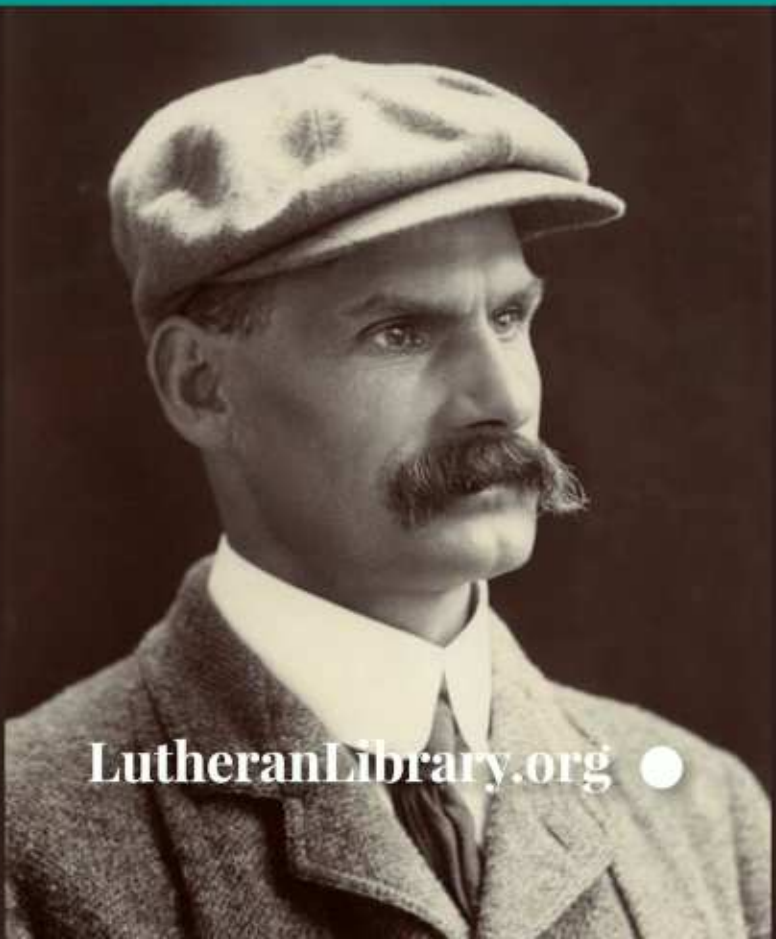
Joseph Hocking

The Bells of St. Ia



"The history of the Church confirms and illustrates the teachings of the Bible, that yielding little by little leads to yielding more and more, until all is in danger; and the tempter is never satisfied until all is lost. – Matthias Loy, *The Story of My Life*

THE BELLS OF ST. IA

JOSEPH HOCKING

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The Vision of St. Ia.

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HODDER AND STOUGHTON

TO MY WIFE

For although she never wrote
a line of it, this little story
is more hers than mine.

The Bells of St. Ia.

I.

ET it be understood at the very outset, that I make no claim that there is or was anything supernatural about the bells. I simply write what I have been told, and what is believed by many. Those who read this story may form whatever opinion they will; that is not my affair. As all in the West Country know, there are eight of them, and the people of St. Ia claim that there are no other bells to compare with them. Besides, they have a history, at least such is the claim of the oldest and wisest woman in the town, Betsy Pentraze, who is ninety if she is a day, has told me more than once, that all through the building of the church St. Ia herself guarded the workmen, and kept them from all harm, and that from the time the foundation stones were laid, to the hour when the topmost pinnacles of the great square tower were erected, no man suffered ailment nor harm. This of course one can believe, but when she declares that not only were the workmen specially safeguarded from harm, but that all the workmen's families were under the special protection of the Virgin Saint, so that no manner of sickness nor harm came to their dwellings for nearly ten years, one naturally begins to ask questions.

Still, St. Ia Church was not completed in all its details without a terrible battle between good and evil, and this battle was fought when the bells were placed in the great tower. At what foundry they were cast is a profound secret, but legend has it that the workmen found them at the base of the tower early one morning, and no man could tell who brought them there or from whence they came. Even the priest, who almost night and day watched the building operations, was at first

utterly ignorant, but he afterwards declared that it had been revealed to him in a dream that they were a special gift of St. Ia herself.

There were eight of them, the first small and light, silver toned, and perfectly shaped; the eighth ponderous and heavy as the eighth should be, while the gradations of the others were perfect, but there was neither mark nor sign to tell from whence they came.

The priest gave the order that the bells were to be placed in the belfry early in December, so that they might be rung at the Mass of Christ on the twenty-fifth of December. But on the day when the workmen began to put the bells in their place a great storm arose, and continued for seven days and seven nights. Still the work went on, and one by one the bells were hung in the great square tower, but when the musician of the town went to test their harmony, he declared that he was met by evil spirits, who thrust him back. And worse than this, when the ropes had been placed, and the most famous ringers of the West came to ring the bells of St. Ia, they were afraid to touch them, and declared that they were driven from the tower by creatures with evil-eyes and demon faces.

"This," said the priest, "is because holy water hath not been poured upon the bells, neither have they been consecrated with due ceremony."

So without delay the priest prepared to perform this sacred function, but although he armed himself with all the spiritual weapons of his office, the words of consecration were never uttered, neither was holy water sprinkled. Some say the priest was afraid, while others have it that the powers of darkness were present, and stopped the ceremony.

All through the night of December the twenty-fourth the storm continued to rage, while the sea hurled itself upon the base of the rocks whereon the church was built. Some had it that they saw black angels and white angels warring against each other; concerning that there is no proof, but towards eight o'clock on the evening of December

twenty-fourth there was a great calm, and the stars shone out.

"The angels of light have won the victory," said the people, and then they waited for a sign from St. Ia, the Virgin Saint, in whom they placed so much confidence.

In the little square outside the church the people waited and watched; then towards midnight, it is said that they saw a bright light, and in the midst of the light was St. Ia, fairest of all the angels.

And, wonder of wonders, the bells pealed out, clear, silvery, beautiful. But no man was in the belfry tower, no human hands touched the bell ropes.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight,
One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight."

Never before had such bells been heard. Their music was heard across the bay, on to St. Uny on the one side and to Zennor on the other, while there are those who say that the watchers on St. Michael's Mount heard them plainly. But that was not all, for above the silvery chime of the bells voices were heard, angels' voices, voices sweeter than thought or fancy, voices that thrilled sea and moorland with heavenly harmonies.

"Peace on the earth, good will to men,
Peace on the earth, good will to men."

And all that night angel forms were seen floating over the little town of St. Ia, and especially over the Church dedicated to the Virgin Saint, so that when at length the sun rose in a clear sky, all the people knew that the town was especially blessed.

Of the truth of this legend I say nothing. The thoughts of men widen with the process of the suns, and the faiths of yesterday become the fairy-stories of to-morrow; but this I know: ever since then the bells of St. Ia are always rung from ten o'clock up to midnight on Christmas Eve. In other churches the chimes are not heard until Christmas Day; but in St. Ia it is different. For more than

three hundred years, generation after generation of ringers have come on Christmas Eve, and for two hours the glad news of the birth of Christ has been pealed out.

The bells have never been sprinkled with holy water, neither have they been blessed according to ancient rites. Scarcely had they pealed out for the first time than the great movement called the Reformation freed the Church from its one time authority and ritual, and the sprinkling of holy water and the muttering of prayers in Latin became discontinued in Cornwall as elsewhere. But some have it that a miracle was worked all the same. For to-day, clearly engraven, are the words of the song which the angels sang on the fields of Boaz, on the plains of Bethlehem, more than nineteen hundred years ago. This is strange, for the day on which they were mysteriously placed at the base of the tower no words were upon them; thus it is believed that on the night when St. Ia fought with the powers of darkness, and vanquished them, she also caused to be engraved on the bells the words which have sweetened the life of the world:

"Peace on the earth, good will to men."

I can see the Bay of St. Ia as I write; on the sea, which reflects the perfect blue of a cloudless sky, the fishing boats are sailing, and close to the bay, so close that when the tide is high the waters lap its foundations, is the Church of St. Ia, the Virgin Saint of the West. There it stands, gray and grim, its square tower only slightly over-topping the dwelling houses of the people, and on Christmas Eve the bells will peal out from ten o'clock until twelve. People travel from afar to see the little town to-day, so quaint are its streets and houses, so health-giving is the air, so beautiful are its surroundings.

But what, asks the reader, has an old-time legend concerning the bells of St. Ia to do with the life of to-day?

Of that hereafter in the story I have to tell.

II.

The streets of St. Ia were crowded. Although the sea was calm not a boat was to be seen in the bay; all were safely harboured within the quay. The mines had stopped working, the cattle were all housed, and the people were dressed in holiday finery. The air was cold, but not cruelly cold, as was the case in the north of the country, for frost and snow are not common in St. Ia. It is too far south, and the bay is warm. It is true there was a touch of frost in the air, but that made the little town more pleasant, and it added just that element which a villager said "made et veel more like Chrismus."

For it was Christmas Eve, and not only the people who had come in from the country, but those who lived in St. Ia itself, were anxious to get all their shopping done, so that they might give themselves more completely to making a merry Christmas.

Threading their way through the narrow streets (so narrow were some of them that a full-grown man could, by stretching out his hands, touch the walls on either side) were two young men. One of them suggested prosperity, contentment, and a happy disposition. The other belonged to a different class. There was a look of eager longing in his eyes; impatience in his footstep.

"It 's all very well for you, Carthew," he was saying, "but not all have your hopeful disposition, neither for that matter have all your reason for being hopeful. You are the son of a prosperous man, and, as you have told me, you will in the New Year be taken into partnership with your father."

"Yes, that 's true, but you 've no room to complain. You love your profession, you work when you like, and play when you like, and you have for your friends some of the jolliest chaps I know."

"I think you are right there. The men who make up the Artists' Colony here at St. Ia are not only a good lot of fellows, but they are as happy as the day is long."

"Then why bemoan your fate? Of course your pictures haven't appeared in the Academy yet, but then, you are young."

"Young. I 'm twenty-seven, and if fish weren't cheap I should starve. As for——"

"As for what?"

"All told, I hardly made a hundred pounds last year."

"Well, what do you want more?"

"Fame."

"And fortune, I suppose."

"If I had fame I should have fortune. But it won't come. I have to sell my pictures to people who don't care a tinker's curse about Art, I am a sort of huckster of colours."

"Wind. Hosts of good people appreciate your work."

"I wish their appreciation would tangibly express itself."

"That 'll come all right. You 'll soon be the talk of the artistic world, and selling your pictures for a thousand pounds each. Well, I 'll be bidding you good-night for the present. I suppose I shall be seeing you at the Polsue's dance?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know! Why Miss Polsue said you had accepted. Personally, I wouldn't miss it for anything; it 's the function of the year."

Arthur Stanley turned down a little alley that led to the sea, and a minute later he was gazing on one of the fairest sights in England. The fishing boats lay almost motionless in the quay, to the right and to the left was a rock-bound coast, while far out on the moonlit waters the lights of Godrevy were flashing. But although no man revelled more in the beauties of St. Ia than Arthur Stanley, he was blind to them that evening.

"I know he 's in love with her," he said to him-

self. "And he's a right to love her too. He can offer her a home and a good position, while I——"

He looked long and steadily upon the shining sea, he heard the laughter of the people in the streets near by.

"Of course no one dreams that I love her," he went on; "thank heaven for that. Fancy me, who have to live on my earnings, and who can't sell a picture in a blue moon, daring to lift my eyes to the only daughter of the richest man in St. Ia. If——if only I were successful, if my prospects were bright, I'd——yes, I'd——"

He turned away from the sea, and walked up the alley again, communing with his own heart.

"I suppose Carthew has been sweet on her for years, and if report is true they were almost engaged at one time. He seemed in mighty high spirits as he spoke of going to the dance. He might have decided to——"

Stanley climbed some narrow stone steps, and a minute later he found himself in a large room overlooking the bay. Scattered all around him were the tools and materials of his craft. This was his studio, the room where he dreamt many of his dreams, and where he tried to translate those dreams into tangible reality.

A picture rested on an easel before him, on which he gazed lovingly.

"It's good, jolly good," he said as he looked, "although I daren't say so aloud if anyone but myself was listening. Why, Bilkin, who hasn't the imagination of a paving-stone, or the soul of a tom-tit, sold a daub with not a quarter of the merit of this for three hundred pounds. Aye, and he can sell all he does, easily as old Tomkins the pork-butcher sells hogs' puddings in the market place, while I, who can't pander to the popular taste——, but what's this?"

A letter, which had evidently come by that evening's post, lay on the table near the fire. He eagerly snatched it up and read. A minute later

he was wildly throwing up his arms, and rushing around the studio as though he were mad.

"It can't be!" he cried with a laugh. "It's too good to be true; the man is hoaxing me!"

He turned to the letter again. The paper was emblazoned by a crest, and he saw that the address was a fashionable part of London.

"Henry Vyvian, of course that must be Sir Henry Vyvian who was staying at St. Ia a little while ago. Let me read what he says again."

"Dear Sir," he read. "I am writing about those pictures of yours which I discussed with you a few days ago, and which I wish to purchase. The four I should especially like are 'The Fisherman and his Maid,' 'Sunset at St. Ia,' 'A Storm at Gurnards Head,' and 'The Spirit of the West.' Will you kindly forward these at once, and I will send cheque immediately on their arrival.

"By the way, I was speaking to Lord St. Godwin about your work this morning, and as he will be visiting St. Ia in the New Year, you may expect a visit from him. He was so delighted with the little thing I bought from you, that I imagine he will be greatly interested in your work.

"With the season's greetings.

"Yours faithfully,

"Henry Vyvian.

"P.S.—If you have finished the picture on which you were at work when I called on you, I should like to have another look at it. The subject appealed to me strongly at the time, although I was not sure you had seen its secret. I think you said you wanted 200 guineas for it? H. V."

Again the young man tramped around the room with flashing eyes.

"It seems like a fairy tale!" he cried. "Talk about Santa Claus, or fairy godmothers, never did they bring such a Christmas present as this! Why, Sir Henry Vyvian has one of the finest collections in London, and his house is visited by all the Art lovers. My work and my name will be brought before the notice of the very people I long to appeal to. To have a picture hung on his walls is worth———well heaven knows how much it's worth. Why, why———I can dare to speak now. I———I can show her this letter. Hooray!"

He laughed like a boy. He went around among the pictures and spoke to them as a fond mother might speak to her baby. He acted like a man bereft of his senses. The somewhat disconsolate and disappointed young man had become metamorphosed into a happy laughing youth.

"At least I shall have my chance!" he cried. "I believe she does care for me, although I have never dared to tell her of my love. But I'll tell her to-night. I'll know my fate. This letter will be my mascot. I shall begin to believe in the old story of St. Ia soon. I shall be willing to take my oath that the Virgin Saint of the parish comes on Christmas Eve, and gives them their heart's desire. Why, I'm a millionaire! Four pictures, just think of it, the four I've always loved but could never get a buyer for, all going to one of the best houses in London! He wants to see my *magnum opus* too! And then there's the visit of Lord St. Godwin! Why, all the world knows of him! As soon as it gets abroad that Sir Henry Vyvian and Lord St. Godwin buy my pictures my fortune is made, made!"

He threw himself in a chair beside the fire, and began to dream.

"If she says Yes, why I might afford to take Bentennick's cottage," he said to himself. "It's the prettiest place in all the West Country, and has a ripping studio. Betty and I would be like two turtle doves there. I envied Bentennick when he built it, although he little fancied he'd have to leave it so soon. Oh, if only Betty will have me I shall be the happiest man in England."

For a long time he sat dreaming his dream. It seemed to him as though dark midnight had changed suddenly into a cloudless morning. Everything seemed possible. An hour ago he was despairing, hopeless, while now the gates of heaven were opened.

He heard the church clock striking, and then he rushed into his bedroom.

"I must not be late," he cried. "Oh, if Betty

loves me, it will be the happiest Christmas I have ever known or dreamt of."

A little later he had donned his evening clothes, and was on his way to Tredyack, the home of Michael Polsue, and Michael Polsue was the father of Betty Polsue, the girl whom Arthur Stanley loved.

The narrow streets were still full of happy, shouting, laughing people, but none were so happy as Arthur Stanley. He seemed to be walking on air. More than once as he found his way along the quaint alleys, he placed his hand on his breast pocket, as if to assure himself that the letter which had given him so much happiness, and which seemed to him like a talisman, was safe.

Presently he came to the little square outside the Church of St. Ia, and almost instinctively he stood and looked at it. The great square tower stood out boldly against the clear moonlit sky, and he could plainly see the huge slabs of granite of which it was built. No lights were within the church, but acting on impulse he placed his hand on the great iron ring of the door. A moment later he stood within the silent building. Through the windows streamed the moonlight, so that he could see, not only the outline of the building, and the long lines of arches, but the Communion Table at the eastern end. Above this Table was a window, a window noted for miles around, for it had been designed by a famous artist, and painted to represent St. Ia vanquishing the spirits of darkness. In the light of the moon he saw her face plainly.

It was very silent in the church. No sound of voices reached him, but he could hear the chant of the sea, and the music of the waters affected his nerves strangely.

Of course it was all fancy, but he thought he saw the face of St. Ia change as he watched it. It was no longer lit up with a holy but stern light as she fought with the powers of darkness; the light in her eyes had become as caressing as the love-light of a young girl who plights her troth

to the man she has chosen. She seemed to smile on him too. At that moment St. Ia was not the great saint of the West, she was the tender-hearted virgin who loved with a love that was stronger than death.

* * * *

Tredyack, the home of Betty Polsue, was bright with many lights. Music floated through the many rooms, fair forms and laughing faces flitted hither and thither. No gayer scene was ever seen in the little town than was witnessed that night in the house of Michael Polsue. The beauty of the West Country was there, but it was agreed by all that the fairest maid who danced to merry music was Betty Polsue.

For a long time Arthur Stanley had watched her with mad jealousy gnawing at his heart, for she seemed to bestow her smiles, not on him, but on Geoffry Carthew. From time to time he placed his hand inside his breast pocket, where what he had called his mascot lay. One dance he had had with her, but he thought she appeared constrained and fearful. Besides, it seemed to the young man that no sooner had it commenced than it came to an end.

Still, he determined to know his fate that night, and awaited his opportunity. Presently it came.

"Can you spare me five minutes alone?" he said.

"Alone?"

"Alone."

Her face became deathly pale, then she blushed very red.

He led her away to a conservatory, where they were alone.

"Why do you wish to see me alone?" she asked.

Her voice seemed so cold, so repellent, that his heart was chilled within him.

"Surely you know," he cried.

She looked up at him proudly, angrily, he thought.

His courage ebbed away, and all he had hoped seemed impossible.

"I dare not tell her," he thought. "After all I was mistaken."

Just then the clock began to strike ten, and no sooner was the last note sounded, than the bells of St. Ia began to peal out upon the frosty air, just as they had pealed out for more than three hundred years.

"Peace on the earth, good will to men."

These were the words written on the bells of St. Ia, the Virgin Saint of the West; and as he heard them, courage came into his heart again. He remembered the look in her eyes, the smile upon her lips as he had seen them in the church that very night.

III.

"The bells of St. Ia," he cried.

It was not what he intended to say; the words escaped him unthinkingly; but somehow they seemed to dispel the air of restraint.

"Yes," she said, "they are ringing in Christmas. Just fancy, for more than three hundred years never has a Christmas Eve passed without their ringing."

"Betty, I want to ask you for something."

"I do not understand," she answered tremulously, for she could not control her voice.

"It is said in the old story of St. Ia, that she visits the town every Christmas Eve, and that to some one whom she selects she makes a present of surpassing value. It is a present above all price, it is precious beyond all thought. I am hoping that she will give it to me this year."

"I hope she will," laughed the girl, nervously.

The betrothal of Betty.

"Do you?" he cried. "Do you really?"

"Of course I do. Why do you ask?"

"Because it all depends on you, Betty. You can compel St. Ia to bestow upon me the blessing of blessings, the gift of gifts."

The fancy had seized him strongly; this part of the legend had made it easy for him to tell Betty Polsue what was in his heart.

"I have been longing for this gift for years," he went on. "It is all the world to me. Without it the world is dark, and even the story of Christmas seems a mockery; but having it the sun will be shining all the time, and I shall be the happiest man in the world. Last Christmas I longed for it, but I dared not ask for it; but to-night I am bolder. Only you have the power to give it. Will you, dear?"

He caught her hand as he spoke, and although she seemed to try and draw it away he held it fast.

"Will you?" he repeated, beseechingly.

The girl's lips became tremulous with emotion as she replied almost inaudibly, "How can I tell, unless I know what it is? Of course if I can give you anything that will make you so happy, I——I shall be very glad. But——how can I? I have nothing of value to give."

"Ah, there you are wrong. You can give me something of great value, infinite value," cried Arthur Stanley. "It is more to me than fame or riches. It means happiness—joy untold. You will not withhold it, will you?"

Of course she knew what he meant, although she still pretended ignorance. Besides, how could she give him a plainer answer until there could be no possibility of mistake.

"But you told me it was the gift of St. Ia," she laughed. "How then can it depend on me?"

"St. Ia's hands are closed until you speak some magic words," he cried. He had seen something in her dark eyes which made him bold and confident. "To-night, on my way here, I called in at the church and I saw her face in the window. She

smiled on me, too, and that was what the smile told me. She wants to give me her great Christmas gift, but she can do nothing without you. You must give before she can give. Will you? It means everything to me, Betty, everything."

Her heart burned with a joy she had never felt before, and so loudly did it beat that it seemed to silence the voices of the distant merry-makers. Nevertheless, she heard the bells of St. Ia, and it seemed to her that mingling with them were the voices of angels. For she was very happy.

"How can I tell you unless I know what it is?" and there was a sob in her voice.

"Your heart, your love, Betty," he said.

"Oh, Arthur,"—the name slipped out unawares,—"you call that a perfect gift, just that?"

"That is all, and it is everything."

"But you said I must speak some magic words," she said. Woman-like, she wanted, now she was sure what was in Arthur Stanley's heart, to keep him in suspense. "I know no magic words, I never learnt any."

"I can tell you them," he cried, "and after I have said them you must repeat them. But there is a condition."

"A condition!"

"Yes, it is very simple, but everything depends on it."

"Then it must be something very wonderful."

"It is wonderful. So wonderful, that even if St. Ia did not want to give me the Christmas present, she would be compelled to yield. Shall I tell you?"

"If you want the Christmas present I——I suppose you must."

"You must mean the words."

"Oh, is that all?"

"That's everything. And these are the words, 'I love you with all myself, Arthur, and I will be your wife.'"

"Must I use the exact words?" Her face was radiant now, and her heart leaped for joy.

"I don't know that the exact words matter," said Arthur, "but they must mean just that."

The bells of St. Ia rang out clearly in the frosty air, and so loud was their peal that Arthur had to lean his head very close to Betty's face in order to hear the words she spoke. What they were I do not know, but evidently they satisfied him, for a moment later he had caught her to his heart, and their lips met in their betrothal kiss.

* * * *

"I must ask your father to-night," said Arthur at length.

"I am afraid he will be very angry," said the girl.

"Why?"

Betty Polsue was silent.

"I know," said Arthur. "It is because I am poor, and because he would prefer that you should marry Geoffry Carthew. I saw the look of satisfaction on his face as he watched you dancing with him to-night. But I have your heart although I am poor, haven't I?"

Again the girl gave him the answer that he wanted to hear.

"It 's this blessed poverty that has kept me from speaking before," went on Arthur, "but this Christmas time is just full of joy. I should not have dared to speak to you to-night but for a mascot."

"A mascot, Arthur! What do you mean?"

"Read," cried the young man, and he passed her Sir Henry Vyvian's letter.

"Oh, Arthur!" she cried, when she had read. "Then we shan't have to wait so long after all."

She did not mean to say this at all, and she would gladly have recalled the words had she been able, but he gave a glad laugh at her tacit confession.

"I shouldn't have dared to ask your father without this," he said. "I should have no right to ask him for such a precious gift unless I could prove to him that even in this way I was in some degree worthy of it."

"Oh, but it is splendid," she cried, as again she

read the letter, "but———but———of course I would rather stay here, only hadn't we better get back to the others?"

"Poor old Carthew," said Arthur Stanley to himself, as he saw the look in that young man's eyes a little later.

* * * *

It was far past midnight when the last carriage left Michael Polsue's house. The bells of St. Ia were silent, but those of St. Uny were to be dimly heard across the calm bay.

Michael Polsue sat in his den for a last smoke before retiring to rest. He was tired, and although he had been glad to welcome his guests, he was not sorry they had now gone.

"I wonder where Betty is?" he said to himself. "I hope the little maid has enjoyed herself."

Scarcely had this thought passed through his mind when the door opened, and Arthur Stanley entered with Betty by his side.

"Ah, Stanley, not gone yet!" he said.

"No," said Arthur, and he told him why he had waited.

Michael Polsue shook his head.

"How much did you earn last year?" he asked abruptly.

"I earned a good deal," replied Arthur, "but I received about £100."

"Exactly. And do you think you have the right to ask for my daughter, with an income like that?"

"No," said Arthur Stanley, "but———"

"Listen," said Michael Polsue. "My child has never known what want means. I pray she never may———but———but well, life is uncertain. Anyhow, before I could give my consent to such a proposal, I must have proof that you can afford to keep a wife."

"I would not have dared to ask her or you so soon, had I not received this just before I came

here to-night," said Arthur, passing him Sir Henry Vyvian's letter.

Michael Polsue read it attentively.

"It may mean a great deal," he said at length.

"It will, I know it will," cried Arthur, and then he spoke in glowing terms concerning the promise of the letter.

"And you, Betty, my little maid?" he asked.

What need is there to tell what Betty said.

"I——I had made different plans," said Michael Polsue presently. "Still——when I married your mother we were very poor, but we were very happy for many years. God only knows how happy." And then he sighed, for his wife had died only a few months before, and his heart was very sore. "This I must urge, young man," he added solemnly, "you must not depend on me. Every man who takes a wife is in honour bound to keep her."

"It will be the joy of my life," cried Arthur Stanley. "Never shall a cloud rest upon her, if it is in my power to keep it away."

"That is well. I——I believe you are a good fellow, Stanley." Then he added to himself, "And perhaps it 's best. They love each other."

"You must come to breakfast," cried Betty, as a little later they stood in the hall.

"Let it be early," cried Arthur. "I shall be here at half-past seven. And upon my word it is nearly two o'clock. But it is Christmas morning, Betty," and then with all the fervour of a newly-engaged lover he wished her a happy Christmas, and hurried back to his rooms which overlooked the bay.

"I shall see her again in the morning," he said to himself as he strode down the drive.

The bells of St. Ia were silent as he passed the church.

IV.

Arthur Stanley and Betty Polsue became engaged on Christmas Eve; they were married the following Midsummer Day. Arthur declared that never had he thought it possible that so much happiness could be crowded into six months as was crowded into that blissful time. It seemed to him that every cloud had passed away from his life. Not only had Sir Henry Vyvian bought the picture on which he had bestowed so much time and care, but he had asked him to tell him when he thought he had anything likely to please him. Lord St. Godwin had also called at his studio, and although he had bought but little of value, he had spoken very kindly of his work. It seemed to the young artist, therefore, that his future was assured. Artists, he reflected, and especially young ones, could never be certain of the future, they were obliged to trust a good deal to fortune; but his prospects were so good that his future income was practically assured. This alone made the young man very light-hearted and gay, but when he realised that Betty Polsue had promised to be his wife his joy was boundless. For Betty, who in the past had been cold and proud, was all that a fond lover could desire. All thoughts of jealousy were swept away by the warmth of her affection. Indeed, he had never thought it possible that Betty could love him so devotedly, and trust him so implicitly. Often, as they talked of the future, and pictured themselves in their new home, his happiness almost frightened him. It seemed too great, too perfect for this world.

It is true Michael Polsue seemed somewhat troubled, and sad. But that was natural. He would be left in his great house alone, and therefore he would be somewhat lonely. But both Betty and Arthur promised him that they would spend many of their evenings with him, and that they would

take care that he should have plenty of their society.

Michael Polsue had made them a present of the cottage which Arthur had coveted so much.

"Fancy another dream coming true," cried the young man when he heard the news. "Heaven only knows how I have longed for Bentennick's cottage; it is just an artist's dream. Of course it is small, but it is more than big enough for us, and the studio could only have been thought of by a genius like Bentennick."

And so the days passed by on golden wings. The cottage became the wonder of those of their friends who were privileged to see it; for it was decorated and furnished not only by those who cared for beautiful things, but by the hands of love.

Thus, when Midsummer came, and Arthur and Betty were wedded, no cloud was in the sky, and the music of the church bells was only a faint echo of the music in their hearts.

"There is really only one whom my happiness saddens," said Arthur on his wedding morn, "and that is Geoffry Carthew, but he 's been a regular brick, and I don't believe, although I am sure his heart is very sore, that Betty and I have a truer friend than Carthew. Well, we 'll try and make it up to him in some way."

Thus it was that Arthur Stanley's wedded life began under the brightest auspices, and promised infinite joy, and when their honeymoon was over he returned to his work with joyful confidence.

July, August, September passed away like a blissful dream, but as the days grew short, and the clouds gathered in the sky, Arthur felt that something was wrong. At first it seemed a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, but it grew and grew, until it filled the whole heavens.

And he could not tell what it was, although it was terribly real. It was in the air he breathed, it haunted every room, it was in his wife's eyes. And yet he could explain nothing. It is true his good fortune had had a sudden ending. Sir Henry

Vyvian, his chief patron, had died, and this had been a great blow to him. But this did not explain the feeling of dread which enveloped his life.

As the winter came on it took more definite shape. He noticed that Betty was pale, and seemed anxious. He asked her why it was, but she gave him no satisfactory reply, Sometimes, when of an afternoon he went out for a long walk, or played a round of golf on the links near by, he found an empty house on his return, and when at length Betty appeared she would give no explanation as to where she had been.

As for Michael Polsue, he seldom came near them, and so coldly did he act towards Arthur, that the young man avoided Tredyack. It seemed like going into an ice house, he said.

Presently, Betty's behaviour more and more puzzled her husband. More than once he found her in tears, and on several occasions she gave a start when he entered the room where she was, as though she had been guilty of something wrong.

"It must be because we have to live so frugally," he thought. "Of course it must be hard for her to live in a cottage after spending her life at Tredyack; and then, having only one servant, she is obliged to do things to which she was never accustomed."

But when he spoke to her of these things Betty became almost angry. There was nothing the matter with her, she declared, and she objected to being watched as though she were suspected of some crime.

Still, Arthur was sure that the housekeeping worried her, and as day by day she grew paler and sadder, his heart became very sore. He began to fear for the future, too. He had spent practically all his ready money on furnishing the cottage, fully believing that the money he would be able to earn would meet all their needs, but the good prospects which had appeared so suddenly seemed to disappear just as suddenly. No one came to buy his pictures, and although he knew he was doing

good work, he might as well have spent his days in idleness. He could have borne this hopefully and bravely, however, had not this strange unnameable cloud arisen between him and Betty. Confidence between them seemed to have gone, and presently he met what he regarded as Betty's proud reserve, with words that were hard and reproachful.

One morning in early December when they came down to breakfast, he noticed that Betty hastily rushed to the letters which the little servant maid had placed upon the table, and having examined them, secreted one in her dress.

"Any letter of special interest, Betty?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Why, you hid your letter from me in such a way that one would imagine you wished to keep something from me."

"I don't understand you."

"And yet I thought I spoke plainly."

"Are not my letters my own, then?"

"Certainly they are, only——well you used to hand me all your letters to read. I never looked upon you as one of those modern women who resent giving any confidences to their husbands."

"Those modern women, as you call them, have at least made it possible for us to live our own lives," she replied.

"Then you intend to have secrets from me," he said, hotly.

"We don't live in Turkey," was her reply.

"Anyone might think an old sweetheart had written you," he said, and his heart grew sore and angry.

"Well, and what then?" she asked.

An angry gleam flashed from his eyes. "Be careful what you are saying," he said.

"Pray tell me why I should be?" she asked, and Arthur detected a note of defiance in her voice.

During the morning she placed the weekly bills before him. For some reason they were larger

than usual, and sore at heart and anxious, he questioned her concerning them.

"I will write out a detailed list of everything," she replied. "I did not know I was to account for every halfpenny, but as your housekeeper I suppose I must."

"Her love for me has gone," thought Arthur. "She regrets marrying me. Now that she sees what it really means to be the wife of a poor man, she wishes herself back with her father again."

That same day he came suddenly into the little sitting-room where she spent most of her time, and he found her busy writing.

"You seem to have a large correspondence, Betty," he said, coming quickly towards the table. Then he saw that she hastily snatched some sheets of paper from the blotter as if to hide them from him. But an addressed envelope still lay exposed, and he saw for whom the letter was intended.

"Geoffry Carthew," he said bitterly, "and so you are writing to your old flame?"

"How dare you!" she cried, her cheeks white with passion.

"How dare I!" he cried, his overstrung nerves finding relief in sudden rage. "It seems that it is I who should have asked the question of you. What right have you, a married woman, to be writing love letters to another man?"

She rose to her feet, quivering with rage.

"Apologise for that insult," she cried.

"Prove to me that it is an insult," was his answer. "Can you deny that you've written eight pages to him? Can you deny that I have surprised your secret."

"Since when have I lost the right to write what letters I choose?"

"Since last Midsummer Day," he replied.

"Then I shall hate last Midsummer Day."

"No doubt you do already. But now I shall insist. Shew me that letter."

"Certainly I shall not."

"Then you will force me to take it from you," he said, losing all control of himself.

She laughed bitterly. "Of course, you have more brute strength than I," she said, "and no doubt you 'll be true to the instincts of your class."

It was with difficulty that he refrained from fulfilling his threat, but presently he conquered himself somewhat.

"My eyes are opened, anyhow," he said, and he rushed out of the house.

And so it came to pass that as Christmas drew near again, all joy had gone out of the little home. Arthur Stanley doubted his wife's love. Nay, more, he felt sure that she had ceased to love him, and that she wished she had never married him. The gloominess of his prospects made his life black enough, but the mad thoughts, which, in spite of his struggles, persisted in haunting him, made his life a hell.

And yet he loved Betty with all the fervour of his life, but this love, instead of bringing him joy, added to his misery; it became a ghastly mockery, and in his heart were the fires of hell.

When Christmas Eve came, he felt as though some calamity were in the air. For days, in his mad jealousy he had watched Betty's every action, and although he would not admit that he doubted her faithfulness, a fear, to which in the past he had been a stranger, blackened the whole sky of his life. For Betty's behaviour seemed past explaining. Sometimes he thought he saw in her eyes a love too great for words, a love greater and diviner than the love which shone from them on the night she had promised to be his wife. But this was often followed by what seemed to him vindictiveness and hatred. More than once he had, unseen by her, watched her while she sat, apparently brooding, her eyes having a far-away look in them, while despair was plainly stamped on her face. She appeared to have lost all pride in her house, too, and ofttimes without saying a word to him, would steal out alone. More than

once, he discovered, she had spent long hours alone with her father, but on other occasions he had no idea where she had gone.

On Christmas Eve matters came to a climax. Throughout the day her manner had seemed more than usually furtive and anxious. She had started at the least sound, and he saw by the pallor of her face that she was ill.

"How she must hate me," he said to himself more than once.

At five o'clock he saw her steal out of the house alone, and, his heart mad with unnameable fears and black wrath, he followed her. Weeks of sordid struggle, haunting fears for the future, and the failure to realize the hopes which had inspired him, had told upon his nervous artistic temperament, until in his weakness, he had lost all sane outlook, and had become possessed by a very demon of jealousy and mistrust. He was very careful to remain unseen by her, nevertheless he kept within sight of her. She did not go towards her father's house, but took the road which led to the town. When she came to the church she looked up at the clock as if to note the time, and then left the street which was full of light and people, and turned down a dark alley.

As if by instinct he knew where she was bound. The little street which she at length entered was full of offices, every one of which he knew had been closed for business hours ago. At length she stopped at one of the houses and nervously pulled the bell. A second later the door opened and she entered. Arthur Stanley followed with murder in his heart. Outside the door by which she had entered was a brass plate

GEOFFRY CARTHEW AND SON

He stood by the door like one dazed, nevertheless he looked eagerly at the light in the window, and listened for every sound. How long he stood

there he did not know. In thinking it over afterwards, he knew it could not have been more than five minutes, but those five minutes seemed an eternity. But he made no effort to enter, he only waited.

He saw shadows on the blind. The faces of the man and the woman were plainly to be seen. The man was Geoffry Carthew, the woman was his wife. They were talking eagerly.

At length the door was partially opened, and he heard the sound of their voices.

"Oh, Geoffry, it is good of you. After all———" and then her voice died away in a sob.

"We must be very careful," he heard Geoffry Carthew say. "If anything leaked out, all our hopes would be dashed to the ground. You know what he———" and again Stanley missed the end of the sentence.

"You 've made me happier than I 've been for months; after all I shall have a happy Christmas," and there was a sob in her voice.

"As you know, it gives me more joy than I can say to give you happiness," was the reply. "Sleep peacefully, Betty, you can leave everything to me, and I will not fail you. But don't utter a word. In a few days all danger will be over."

Arthur Stanley saw his wife come into the street, and then hurry away in the darkness, but he did not follow her. Instead, he rang the bell of Geoffry Carthew's office, and again the door opened quickly.

"Is that you, Betty?" he heard Geoffry Carthew say.

"No," he replied, "it is Betty's husband," and he entered the open doorway.

V.

Arthur Stanley did not speak until he had entered Geoffry Carthew's office, and the door was shut. He was very quiet, although the storms of passion were surging in his heart. His eyes had a dangerous glitter, and he had great difficulty in controlling his voice. Geoffry Carthew was pale, and excited too, evidently he regarded the coming of his one-time friend as a serious matter.

"I have come for an explanation," said Stanley, and the very tone of his voice was an incentive to anger.

"Concerning what?"

"Concerning my wife's visit here."

"Then you 've been spying on her."

"That 's not your affair. She has just left this room. You do not deny it, I presume?"

The tone of his voice rather than his words aroused Carthew's anger. There was Celtic blood in his veins, and Celtic blood is easily aroused.

"Well, and what then?" he said.

"Only this. I demand an explanation. I demand to know what business she had in coming here, why she had a clandestine meeting here with you."

Had Stanley spoken in a different way, doubtless his answer would have been different. But the haughty, peremptory words only elicited a similar reply.

"I have yet to learn that I am responsible to you for my actions, or for the visitors I receive."

"Be careful, Carthew, I am a desperate man."

Carthew made no answer.

"This is not the first of these——private meetings?"

To this he got no reply.

"Answer me. This is not the first time you and my wife have met in secret?"

"Well, and what then?"

"Only this, I won't have it. Do you know what

you are? Do you know you are a miserable sneak, a mean coward?"

Geoffry Carthew checked the angry words that rose to his lips, but his hands clenched and unclenched themselves nervously. He, too, was fast losing control over himself.

"You confess then that you and my wife have your secrets, that you have had private meetings together?"

"May not your wife speak to an old friend? Look here, Stanley, if you can't act like a sane man you had better leave my office."

"A sane man! An old friend! You scoundrel! Tell me why Betty came to see you."

"Certainly I shall not. If Betty wishes to come to see me that is her affair and mine. I am not going to satisfy the curiosity of a jealous man."

"Jealous man! I have reason to be jealous. Oh, do not think I am a blind fool, I have seen and I know. You have been in love with my wife for years."

Carthew was silent.

"Tell me, isn't it true? Didn't you ask her years ago to marry you?"

"Well, and if I did, what then? You———"

"Ah, you confess it, do you? And now you seek to revenge yourself on me by stealing away her love. You know I have had bad luck, and that my pictures are not selling; while you—who are rolling in money, you———you, like a snake in the grass———"

"Look here, Stanley, if you do not leave my office I shall throw you out of it, that 's all."

"You throw me out of your office! I don't leave this office until I 've come to a settlement with you. You may have stolen away my wife's love from me, but you shall not steal away her good name. You 've blighted my home, but you shall not altogether ruin her life if I can help it. No! you shall not speak before I 've settled with you. Now look here!"

Arthur Stanley was in a mad rage. Jealousy was gnawing at his heart, and his brain was on fire with the ghastly doubts that haunted him. His control over himself was nearly gone. He felt sure that the man before him was his enemy, and in his blind fury, the ghastly thought had come to him that Betty, who only six months before had become his wife, was unfaithful to him.

"You have got to promise me this," he said between his set teeth, "aye, you 've got to swear to me here and now that you 'll not see my wife again, that you 'll hold no communication with her, in any shape or fashion, from this day. I 'll not leave your office until you do."

Geoffry Carthew laughed, and the laugh confirmed Stanley's worst fears.

"And what then?" he said, and there was a taunt in his voice. "What do you think will happen after I have done what you ask?"

"Then I am going to thrash you within an inch of your life."

"And if I won't promise?"

"Then, by God, I 'll murder you."

Both were filled with mad rage now. Whatever Geoffry Carthew might have said if Arthur Stanley had come to him calmly and with well chosen words, he determined not to yield one inch to his demands now.

"I shall not promise," he said. "Now do your worst."

"You 'll not promise?"

"Because——because——you——you dare to love my wife!"

"Yes," said Carthew, "if you will have it so. Why, man, what can you do for her? You, a helpless, penniless failure! You, who cannot keep a house over her head, you come to me who——who———. But there, I promise nothing, and what is more———"

He did not finish the sentence, for Arthur Stanley struck him in the face with all his strength, and Carthew fell heavily to the floor.

He lifted the little one in his arms.

"You 'll not promise, won't you!" cried the maddened husband. "Then I tell you this, as sure as you speak to my wife again, I'll murder you. Remember that. I 'll leave you now, or I should kill you as you lie there. But remember what I say."

Geoffry Carthew was rising to his feet as Arthur Stanley strode out of the room, slamming the door behind him. There was a strange look in his eyes when he found himself alone, and he sat for a long time thinking deeply, but concerning the thoughts he spoke no word.

As for Stanley, he made his way towards his little home, with nothing but despair and longing for revenge in his heart. Only six months married, and yet this had come to pass.

He passed out of the little town, towards the hillside where the newer houses were built. He heard some carollers singing

> "Love Divine, all loves excelling,
> Joy of heaven, to earth come down."

He laughed like a madman as the voices of the singers rang out upon the silent air.

"Love!" he cried, bitterly. "Love!" and then he strode on madly.

He passed another group of singers.

"Ef you plaise, sur, we be singin' curls to 'elp to pay off the debt on our chapel. Won't you give us somethin'?"

He uttered some unprintable words, and passed on. How long he stayed out alone he did not know, but it was hours later before he at length found his way to the house on which he had set such store.

As he entered his wife met him with a wistful little smile.

"Is that you, Arthur?" she said. "I was wondering why you were so late. Where have you been?"

He noticed the change in her voice, and thought he saw a glad light in her eyes. He remembered the words she had spoken to Geoffry Carthew.

"I've been to see your lover," he said bitterly.

"My lover!" She spoke like one overwhelmed with terror.

"Yes. The man you've been seeing secretly, the man who has made my life a hell."

She looked at him fearfully.

"Oh yes, I know everything now. But mind, I've put an end to it. I left your lover on the floor of his office, and I've told him that if ever you meet again, or if he dares to communicate with you in any way, I'll murder him. And I will too."

"And do you mean to say that——that——"

Then Arthur Stanley spoke words which drove the blood from his wife's face, and made her whole form tremble like an aspen leaf.

For a few seconds she did not seem able to comprehend the full purport of what he had said, but presently his meaning was clear.

"Do you deny it?" he cried.

"I deny nothing," and it did not seem to be Betty speaking at all.

"You admit its truth, then?"

"I admit nothing to you."

He laughed harshly. "What a fool, a blind fool, I was to trust a woman," he cried. "While you believed I should be prosperous—famous——"

"*You* prosperous! *You* famous!" and her voice seemed full of venom.

For some seconds he stood looking at her. He realised that the position was more serious than he had thought. What could he do? He could not go on living as he had been living. Her every word, her very presence, was an injury to him.

"Well, your lover is prosperous," he sneered.

"Yes, he at least is not a failure."

"He can give you what I cannot!"

"Yes," she replied, and there was a strange intonation in her voice, "he can."

"Will you promise never to speak to him, never to see him again?" He scarcely knew what he was saying, but this seemed to be the thing nearest to his heart, even then.

"No," she replied proudly, "I will not."

"You know what your answer means?"

"I know," and her voice was cold as ice.

"And you have counted the cost?"

She was silent.

"Then we say good-bye to-night."

She gave a gasp, but uttered no word.

"I have an honourable name," he said. "I cannot stay here and know it is sullied. But——but——I I married you. Great God, I married you. You wish you had never seen me, don't you?"

She was silent.

"I leave you everything," he cried, "everything I have. There are pictures here worth several hundred pounds. Perhaps you can sell them."

She laughed contemptuously, as it seemed to Arthur.

"I wonder you cared for his money," he said presently, in a dazed sort of way. "And your father is a rich man, too."

To this she made no reply, but stood looking at him with a strange light in her eyes.

Never did Arthur Stanley love his wife as he loved her then. In spite of everything, he longed to take her to his heart, and tell her that he forgave everything.

"Is——is there no way out of this?" he cried at length.

"No," she replied proudly, "after what you have said there is no way out of it."

"Very well, then," he said, "I will go."

He left the room as he spoke, and packed a portmanteau. "It 's the only way," he muttered. "She has ceased to love me, and I had better leave her free. Oh God, that it should ever come to this!"

"She has no need of money," he went on presently. "Her father is a rich man. Still, I will leave her everything save a few pounds. She shall not have reason to taunt me in that way."

He looked around his studio, the room of which he had been so proud, the room stored with the

pictures he had painted, and in which lay in confusion the materials and tools of his craft.

"No, I will take nothing," he reflected, "nothing. I shall never dare to think of my art again. It would drive me mad."

He seized his bag, and went down stairs. His wife stood on the same spot he had left her.

"Well, I 'm off."

She did not speak.

"You need not fear. You will never see me again. I daresay I shan't live long; you 'll soon be able to marry the man you love."

Still she was silent.

He did not move an inch towards her; he felt as though her very presence repelled him.

"I have left everything," he went on. The money is in the drawer of my desk, and all the bills are paid. Good-bye, and may Heaven forgive you."

She turned her eyes towards him, wild despairing eyes, but still she uttered no word. He opened the front door and went out. He thought he heard her gasp; but he did not go back.

With black despair in his heart he strode towards the station. He knew there was a late train for the North, a little after ten, and in a dazed way he determined to catch it.

Presently he saw the church tower standing out clearly against the wintry sky. All around him the people were laughing and talking. He remembered it was Christmas Eve. Like lightning his mind swept back to the last Christmas Eve. He had passed the old church then, he had entered it, and in the light of the moon he had seen the face of St. Ia on the eastern window. The remembrance brought an added pang. Then he had determined to ask Betty to be his wife, while now he was leaving her.

For a minute he stood before the old gray tower, and he thought of the legend of St. Ia, the Virgin Saint.

"And I believed it, too," he cried, "I believed,

although I laughed at the old superstition, that she was going to give me a Christmas present that was precious beyond all words. Oh God! It can't be that Betty could——"

Then he remembered what he had seen that night, remembered the words he had heard. Both had tacitly confessed their guilt. No, there was nothing for it. He must go away!

The clock began to strike ten, and heedless of everything he stood and listened. Barely had the echo of the last chime died away than the bells began to peal out.

"Peace on the earth, good will to men,
Peace on the earth, good will to men."

The message of the bells mocked him, and with a curse on his lips he walked rapidly towards the station. He heard the waters of the bay lap the foundations of the church, he heard the laughter of children, and saw lovers walking arm in arm.

Oh, what a ghastly mockery Christmas was! What a worse mockery life was!

He threaded his way among the people till he came to the station.

"Merry Chrismus, sur," said one of the porters who knew him well.

"Merry Christmas, eh!" he replied.

"Yes, sur, and may you and yer missus 'ave many of 'em. Doan't the bells sound sweet to-night, then, sur?"

He made no answer, but going to the office almost angrily demanded a ticket.

He took his seat in the train, and a few minutes later it slowly crept out of the station. "I shall curse Christmas as long as I live," he muttered as the guard blew his whistle, and, as if in answer to his words, he heard the bells of St. Ia peal out the message which had rung over the little town every Christmas Eve for more than three hundred years.

"Peace on the earth, good will to men."

VI.

A fortnight later Arthur Stanley was in Canada. He had not stayed a day in England longer than he could help. He felt as though everyone knew his trouble, and was talking about him. Nothing was clear in his mind, save that he was flying from his own land, not for anything he had done, but because his wife hated him and loved another man. In looking back over the last three months, he could see little with which to reproach himself. It is true he had been angry and suspicious, but how could he have behaved otherwise? He would gladly have done anything to win back his wife's love, but then what was there for him to do? She had met him with coldness and reserve. She had scornfully refused to answer his questions. By her silence she had tacitly confessed her guilt. What then was there for him to do? If he still continued to stay at St. Ia his life would be a hell; every sight of his wife would tear the wound at his heart, while his presence would be a constant reproach, a continual misery to her. There could be no marriage while her heart yearned for another; her marriage with him was a mistake, a fatal, haggard mistake, and the only thing he could do was to leave her for ever.

Only one thing eased his misery. She would be, whatever happened, free from want. Her father was a rich man, and Betty was the darling of his heart. Added to this, he had practically left everything he possessed behind. And he had done his best. It was a ghastly mistake, and he would have have given years of his life if it could have been otherwise; but it was too late now. He still loved her, loved her like his own life, and the best way he could shew it was to relieve her of his presence, and free her from the galling chains of the marriage tie. It was little he knew about the law,

but no doubt she would be able to obtain a divorce, and then she would be happy.

It was all vague to him, for his mind was unhinged, and he could think of nothing consecutively, but he found a certain relief in the thought that he was widening the distance between himself and the woman whom he felt he had robbed of happiness.

He knew nothing about Canada, and was utterly ignorant of any means by which he could obtain a livelihood, but he had no fears for himself. His parents were dead, and he knew of no one to whom he could apply for help; but that did not matter. He could earn a living somehow. Strange as it may seem, too, he obtained a situation without much difficulty. On the night he landed at Quebec he saw an advertisement in one of the newspapers stating that men were needed away in the interior of the country. On the following morning he applied at the office mentioned in the advertisement.

"But," said the owner of the office, "you are not the kind of man I advertised for."

"Why not?" said Arthur Stanley. "I am young, I am sober, I am strong, and I am willing to work."

"Yes, but you will not be willing to do the work I have in my mind."

"I am willing to do any kind of work."

"But this work is the work of a labourer. It is in a lonely part, hundreds of miles away from a town."

"That 'll just suit me," replied Arthur. "The farther I can get away from a town the better I shall be pleased."

"Why, have you done anything wrong?"

"Wrong? No."

"But——but you look and speak like a gentleman."

"What then? I will work for you faithfully."

Mr. Lawrence looked at him steadily; he was a man about fifty years of age, and during his life in Canada had had a large experience with men.

He had been in the country thirty years, and during that time had risen from poverty and obscurity to a degree of eminence and wealth. He was a large landowner, and was also deeply interested in large stretches of territory. He was particularly interested in the land he was anxious to develop, and for that reason had determined, contrary to his custom, to personally interview all the men he employed. Of course he saw at a glance that Stanley did not belong to the labourer class, moreover he liked his appearance.

"Come in here," he said, leading the way to his private office. Half an hour later Stanley was engaged to work on the lonely farm. Not as a labourer, however. Mr. Lawrence saw means whereby he could be better employed, and therefore, although the appointment was no sinecure, it was better than might have been expected.

"The farther away from civilisation the better for me," he reflected, as the train bore him out of Quebec. "It is the very place for me. Once out there it will be impossible for me to meet with anyone who knows me. I shall to all intents and purposes be dead."

Thus he tried to ease his heart-hunger by work, sought to forget the past few months by devoting all his energies to his master's interests. Moreover, Stanley was surprised at his own aptitude for his work. In a few months he had proved that he had great gifts, not only for business, but for the management of men. The man whom Mr. Lawrence had made manager was unequal to his post, moreover, he had not his employer's interests at heart. Thus it came about that in the natural course of things Stanley took his place. As time went on, too, he saw possibilities of which even his employer never dreamed, and he made the most of them. When at length Mr. Lawrence paid a visit to the settlement he blessed the day when Arthur Stanley came to his door.

"He 's the very man I need," he said to him-

self. "He has taken to the work as a duck takes to water. He was utterly ignorant of the possibilities of land, and yet, because he had a good education and a mental grasp, he has done a hundred times more for me than the ordinary man, born and reared on the land, could do. I must be careful I don't lose him."

After this he made certain proposals which Stanley accepted, although he had but little interest in money making. Still, he was glad of his new responsibilities and of the possibilities they offered, because they helped him to forget his heart-hunger. While he was thinking of his duties he was kept from brooding over the past, and from painting gloomy pictures about his wife.

The first Christmas passed away without his realising that it was Christmas. Away out there in the silence, far distant from the haunts of men, there was nothing to remind him of the great Christmas festival. The bells of St. Ia had rung, and he had never thought of them. As a matter of fact, he had difficulties not only with cattle at the time, but with men, and when one morning he looked at the calendar he found that Christmas Eve and Christmas Day had passed without his knowing it.

"So much the better," he reflected. "Had I thought of it I should again have lived through the mad misery of a year ago. All I have to do is to drive her from my mind and heart. As for her, I expect she will have forgotten me before this."

His work prospered; so much so that before two years had passed away he found that he was becoming a rich man. He had bought and sold to such advantage that, even although he had but a comparatively small share of the profits, he found he had made more money in two years than he could have made in ten by painting pictures. Indeed, as his second Christmas in Canada drew near, he found himself to be quite a man of affairs, engaging in larger and important enterprises.

His employer, John Lawrence, had written to

him, asking him to spend Christmas with him, and urged that he would take no excuse.

"You have a good foreman now," he wrote, "so that you can leave a week without difficulty; and there are many matters I want to discuss with you. Besides, I want you to see my home. It is only a few miles from Quebec, and while it has all the advantages of civilisation, it is also as much in the country as that lonely district where you have in the main lived for two years."

"Well, why shouldn't I?" he asked himself. "For two years I have lived away from all social life, and the thought of spending Christmas in a refined home pulls me."

So he wrote his acceptance, and on the morning of Christmas Eve he found himself at his employer's house. The temperature was several degrees below zero, but he did not feel cold. For that matter he rejoiced in the crisp, cold air, and in the bright sunlight. The sleigh bells made sweet music, too, while the frozen snow beneath his feet reminded him of a Christmas he had spent in his boyhood, when not a care distracted him.

John Lawrence gave him a glad welcome, for not only had Stanley become very valuable to him, but he liked him as a friend. His only son had died three years before, and he thought he detected a resemblance between the handsome Englishman and the son he had loved so much. Added to this, he discovered that he and Stanley had been educated at the same school. These matters, and the natural affinity which linked the two men, created a friendship which the older man cherished even more than the younger.

"We are going to have a few people here tonight, Stanley," he said; "have you got any evening clothes?"

"Yes," replied Stanley. "You remember I had to dine with those fellows some months ago, when we were dealing with that Ontario scheme? Well, I got some evening clothes for that occasion, and I thought I might as well bring them with me.

Otherwise I've never had occasion to use any for more than two years."

"Ah, just so. By the way———of course you are not married?"

Stanley felt as though someone had stabbed him, but he shewed no signs of pain.

"I've no wife," he said, shaking his head.

"You've never told me anything———about your life in England," the older man suggested presently.

"There's nothing to tell," replied Stanley. "I was fairly well educated, I suppose, and my father died when I was twenty-two. My mother died years earlier. I spent nearly all my father left me during the years I was studying at the Art Schools, and———and I am afraid I never made much out of being an artist. So———well———seeing there was no future for me in England, I came out here."

"Do you know, I had a sort of notion that some woman had jilted you?"

Stanley did not reply, and the older man seeing the look in his eye pushed the question no farther.

"You mean to settle down in Canada?" he asked presently.

"I expect so. I've nothing to go back to England for."

"And you are doing well with me, eh?"

"I hope so."

The two men were sitting alone in the smoking room of John Lawrence's house. As yet he had not been introduced to his family.

"Of course you have an interest in what you've been doing, beyond your salary," he said, "but I've been thinking———of a———well———partnership."

Stanley looked up in surprise.

"Yes, the truth is I feel as though I want to slack off a bit, and———and you handle affairs as well as, if not better than I do. But it would not be fair to ask you to assume the responsibility I want you to assume without———well making it worth your while. I saw during our last conversation that you had big schemes in your mind,

schemes that you could carry out better than I. But they need capital, eh?"

"Yes, they need capital."

"Well, what do you think of the idea of partnership?"

Before Stanley could answer the door opened, and a young woman of perhaps twenty-four years of age entered the room.

"This is my daughter Amy, Stanley," said John Lawrence.

When afternoon came John Lawrence's other guests arrived, so that both he and his wife were kept busy. He had a chance of talking to Amy Lawrence, however. She was a quiet home girl, of no remarkable beauty, but as far as the young man could judge, of a gentle affectionate nature.

As the evening advanced, Stanley became restless and miserable. It was three years that day since he had become affianced to Betty Polsue, and try as he would to drive her from his mind and heart, the memory of that happy time haunted him. It was almost like a dream, and yet it was terribly real. He was far, far removed from St. Ia,—for that matter John Lawrence's house was some distance from the nearest village, and yet he felt as though Betty were near him. Then he thought of their parting two years ago, when she had practically confessed her love for another man, and when she had told him to leave her for ever.

The memory was maddening beyond words, and in spite of the fact that he was a guest, he put on a heavy fur-lined coat and fur cap, and went out into the clear frosty night.

"No, no," he said presently. "It is better as it is. I am not wanted in England. If I were there I should stand between her and the man she loves. Neither of us has heard from the other for two years, and she will think I 'm dead,—and better so."

The world was white and wintry. The ice crystals shone in the white light of the moon, and not a sound was heard to break the silence.

"Oh God, I wonder what she's doing now!" he cried.

Then his heart ceased to beat, and he stood like one transfixed.

Away in the distance, he knew not how far, but it seemed infinite to him, he heard the sound of bells.

"The bells of St. Ia!" he gasped.

Was it imagination or was it real? Although the sound was far away, it was as real as on that night when he had asked Betty Polsue to be his wife.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight,
Peace on the earth, good will to men."

The sound was wafted across the still air, and then melted into the infinite heavens.

"It's only my imagination mocking me," he cried, then he felt as though the blood froze in his veins, for, amid the pealing of the bells, he heard something else. It was the sob of a woman, —it was a cry he could not understand.

He seemed as one who woke from a dream. The bells ceased ringing, and no sound broke the silence of the night. He looked at his watch, and he knew that it was just ten o'clock in England.

"It's my fancies playing me tricks," he said, "and yet it's just the time that the bells of St. Ia begin to ring."

He found his way back to the house and mingled with the merry-makers.

Before Arthur Stanley's Christmas visit came to an end he was John Lawrence's partner, and he knew that he was on his way to become a rich man.

"Come again, my boy, come often," the older man said when they separated, "we shall all be glad to see you," and Amy Lawrence seconded her father's invitation.

The months passed away, and Arthur Stanley prospered more and more. Schemes of which John Lawrence had never dreamed were brought to fruition, plans which he had thought impossible had become accomplished facts. Arthur Stanley,

who had been a comparative failure as an artist, at any rate from a financial point of view, had become a rich man. He often went to John Lawrence's house, and at every visit he was welcomed as though he were a son of the house. More than one of Amy Lawrence's friends hinted that they should not be surprised to hear of a wedding at the Cedars, which was the name of John Lawrence's house.

Arthur Stanley spent the next Christmas at the Cedars, but he did not hear the bells of St. Ia. No sound broke the stillness of the night, and he felt as though a link with the past were broken for ever.

And yet he never forgot Betty, he never ceased to love her. Often amidst his loneliness his heart cried out for her, even although he felt that she was relieved at his absence, and that she would repel him with scorn if ever again he crossed her path. Sometimes he asked himself whether he had done right in leaving her, and whether he ought not to have stayed in England even although she wished him gone, but when he remembered all that had taken place, he felt that he could have done no other. He was prosperous beyond his fondest expectations, but prosperity brought him no happiness. Even although he drove his wife from his mind, the pain was still there. He was thinking of this as the fourth Christmas since he left Cornwall drew near. He was to all intents and purposes dead to England. Never once had he in any way had communication with anyone living in the little fishing village of the West. No one knew what had become of him, neither had he heard a scrap of news from any of those with whom he had spent years of his life.

He was up in the Rocky Mountains district, whither his affairs had called him, and was one evening driving as fast as his horses could take him towards the distant town where he proposed spending the night. It wanted but little more than two weeks to Christmas, a time which he dreaded.

He had been driving for some miles, and was pondering whether he should again eat his Christmas dinner at John Lawrence's house, when, as if by instinct, the horses came to a standstill. He knew where he was, and whither he was bound, and yet he seemed suddenly in a kind of dreamland. He was back at St. Ia. He saw the tower of the old church, he saw the blue waters of the bay, while the faces of the people in the narrow streets were plainly visible.

Then, as if by magic, the vision, or whatever it was, passed away, and he was in a lonely road in a lonely part of Canada. He saw the steaming, panting horses in front of him.

Then, in the evening sky, it seemed to him that he saw a shadowy form become more and more corporeal. He saw her face, too—it was the face of Betty, pale and wistful. In her eyes was a look of infinite love.

"Arthur, Arthur, Arthur."

It was Betty's voice. It was far away, and yet it was near. It was as distinct as the voices of the people he had heard that day, and yet it was unreal, as unreal as the voices one hears in dreams.

"Arthur, Arthur, Arthur."

"Yes, Betty," he cried, and yet he did not know whether he had spoken.

"Don't you know that I loved you, that I have never ceased to love you. Oh Arthur, my love, my husband, don't you know?"

The vision of the face passed away, the voice ceased, and he awoke as if from a dream.

"Did you see anything, hear anything?" he asked the driver.

"No," replied the man. "I wondered why you told me to stop the horses."

"Betty needs me, or perhaps she is dead," he thought in a dazed sort of way. Then he drove towards the town as though the furies were at his heels.

Two days later he had booked his passage to England.

VII.

"I wonder if we shall get back in time for Christmas?"

"Doubtful. You see we 've had rough weather and a head wind. Still, we are making up for lost time now."

The first speaker looked out on the vast expanse of waters, his eyes burning with a strange light.

"You want to get back in time for Christmas badly?" asked the other.

"I don't know," was the reply.

The two men were, with the exception of some sailors, alone on the deck of the homeward-bound steamer. The sea, although the storm had much abated, was still rough. Angry clouds swept across the wintry sky, and the darkness of the night was only illumined by fitful rays of the moon. They had not spoken before, but now, as after dinner each had taken it into his head to leave the brilliantly lit saloon and brave the elements, they found themselves exchanging the usual civilities.

The first speaker had been regarded as a lonely taciturn man. He had scarcely spoken to his fellow passengers, and more than one pointed him out as one who might have had a sad history.

"The Captain thinks it possible for us to land by the morning of Christmas Eve," he said presently, "but even if we do I am afraid that——" He did not complete his sentence, but turned and watched the great sombre clouds.

"I should like to get home in time for Christmas myself," said the other, but I fear very much. The weather still looks bad. Besides, I shall have a long railway journey after the boat lands at Liverpool. I am going to Cornwall."

The man gave a start. "Cornwall!" he cried, and then added, "Yes it 's a long way from Liverpool to Cornwall."

He stood like one transfixed.

"Yes, it is. I live near Falmouth; lived there all my life. Every inch of me is Cornish. Tremain is my name—one of the oldest in the county."

The other did not reply, but he seemed deeply interested in what his companion was saying.

"I promised my wife and children that I'd be back for Christmas, if possible," went on Mr. Tremain. "I've never spent a Christmas away from home since I've been married, and I should be awfully grieved if we are late. I've been to Canada on business," he added. "A great country—Canada. In fifty years from now it'll be the crown of our Empire. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, it's a great country. By the way———that is, I suppose you know Cornwall well?"

"Almost every inch of it. Ever been there?"

"Yes, I was there some years ago."

"Oh, what part?"

"At St. Ia."

"St. Ia! Why, I was there less than four months ago. I wonder if we know the same people? How long since you were there?"

"Four years," replied the other, and then he repeated the words as if to himself, "Four years."

"Four years, eh? Well, that's not long, and yet changes have taken place even in that short time."

"What changes?" asked the other, quickly.

"Of course," said Mr. Tremain, "Cornwall does not change as much as some parts of the country, we are so much out of the world. All the same, Cornwall is a different county from what it was a few years ago. Even St. Ia, quiet, out-of-the-way place, as it is, can't escape it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this. We hear of men in London being rich one week and poor the next, and we think of Cornwall as a part of the world where such things don't happen, but they do. Even in a quiet fishing village like St. Ia you hear of things that surprise you."

"What things?" asked the other.

"Well, ten years ago, five years ago, the richest

man in St. Ia was Michael Polsue. Ever heard of him?"

"Yes, yes; I have; but what about him?"

"Well, let me see, is it three years ago or four? —I've forgotten, but anyhow, he was regarded as one of the soundest men in the West of England. Then one morning he was found dead in his bed. Have you ever heard of it?"

"No, never; go on—tell me about it."

"As I said, he was found dead in his bed. Some said it was suicide."

"Suicide!"

"That's what some said, but it wasn't that. He died of a broken heart."

"A broken heart! Why should he? That is, you see———I———I used to know him, and———"

"You've never heard? Why it was the talk of the county. Yes, he died of a broken heart. He was a very proud man, and always held his head high. As I said, he was looked upon as one of the wealthiest men in the West. But after he was dead it came out that he wasn't worth sixpence. Indeed, there is no doubt that he would have been a bankrupt but for a man named———oh, it's escaped me for a moment———Carthew, that's it! Yes, Carthew saved him. And that's another case of change. Six or seven years ago he was in a very small way, had just a few small boats. Then suddenly he began to make money, and now Carthew controls half the money-making things in that part of the county."

"And Carthew———saved Michael Polsue from ruin?"

"He saved him from disgrace, anyhow. But the old man couldn't bear being penniless in the town where he'd been rich. Besides, I think he had some other trouble, too; I do not know what it was. It's getting cold, isn't it? Shan't we go below?"

"And Carthew, does he still live at St. Ia?"

"I believe so. In fact, I did hear that he lived in a house not far from Michael Polsue's old home.

He married a girl from Devonshire. Won't you come into the smoking saloon?"

"But———but Michael Polsue had a daughter, —what's become of her?"

"Yes, there was some story about her, but I don't quite know what it is. You see, I am not a St. Ia man, but I think she died too. I'm not sure about it, only that is my impression. She was said to be a great beauty, and as proud as Lucifer. I have heard that Carthew wanted her, indeed I'm pretty sure he did. If I remember correctly, however, she married an artist fellow who turned out wrong, and if I mistake not, she and her baby died soon after her father. Won't you come into the smoke room? Then I am afraid I must go alone. It's frightfully cold."

Arthur Stanley paced the deck for hours, forgetful of the piercing wind and the heaving sea. What he had heard made his brain reel, and it had opened his eyes to things of which he had never dreamed. Like lightning his mind swept back to the time when his mind had been torn with bewildering thoughts, and his heart hot with jealousy. Oh, what a fool, a blind fool, he had been. Old Michael Polsue, whom he thought to have been rich, was, even when he had married Betty, on the brink of bankruptcy, and Geoffry Carthew had saved him from disgrace. This, then, was the secret which Betty had kept from him. Old Michael had besought her not to let him, Stanley, know. Yes, he saw it all, saw the depths of misery to which his mad jealousy had dragged them.

But these things were not first and foremost in his mind; they were swallowed up in the more terrible news which his chance acquaintance had told him. Betty and her baby dead! Her baby! He had never dreamed of this. Oh, the horror, the ghastly terror of it all. Betty dead! The girl who, in spite of everything, he had loved, and for whom his heart had been yearning for years.

He dared not go to St. Ia now. He did not care whether the boat was early or late. The very sight

of St. Ia would drive him mad. It was too full of bitter memories, of terrible associations. He who should have been patient and loving through everything, had been maddened by insane jealousy, and was really a murderer. He had broken his wife's heart, he had killed her.

And all the while his heart was torn with agony, the great vessel ploughed its way through the heaving sea, and he knew that every throb of the engine brought him nearer the shores of his native land.

* * * *

"Well, sir, we shall be in Liverpool in three hours." This was three days later.

"What!"

"In three hours. Yes, we 've made up for lost time. Every passenger on board will be able to spend his Christmas at home, no matter whether he lives in Scotland or Cornwall."

It was the Captain who spoke. He was a kindly man, and had often noticed the look of pain on Stanley's face.

"I hope you 'll have a merry Christmas, sir, and that you 'll find your loved ones all well."

"Loved ones!" gasped Stanley. "I have no loved ones. Christmas will be hell to me."

"No, no, sir; you are joking."

"Joking! I shall never joke again."

"Every cloud has its silver lining, sir, and what I say is that Christmas always brings good luck. I 've had my troubles, too, Mr. Stanley, but there 's something in Christmas that makes everything brighter. I 'm afraid I 'm not as religious as I ought to be, but somehow, when I hear the Christmas bells ringing, and I think about our Lord being born away in that little Eastern village, I feel my heart grow tender, and the faith which my mother taught me grows real again."

Arthur Stanley laughed bitterly.

"The thought of Christmas drives me mad," he

cried, "and the Christmas bells seem only a death knell."

The Captain looked at him steadily. He would have liked to ask him questions, but he dared not. Still, he could not help leaving him with a cheerful word.

"It 'll be better than you think, sir, and Christmas will bring you good luck, see if it don't."

A little later the vessel drew up to the landing stage.

"I 'll return to Canada by the first boat," he said to himself. "I dare not, no I dare not, go to St. Ia."

And yet, as though drawn by some strange power, he followed the crowd to the train that stood waiting.

"I 'll go and see her grave," he said to himself presently. "Oh my God, help me to bear it!"

A little later he was travelling westward.

VIII.

When the train had crossed the Tamar, Arthur Stanley grew excited. During the whole day his heart had been filled with black despair, but no sooner did he hear the soft-toned voices of the Western people than a new spirit seemed to possess him. After all, he had lived the happiest years of his life in the little town by the Western Sea, and in spite of his hours of madness he felt as though he were nearing home.

"Oh, if I had not been a mad fool," he said to himself again, "but even if she were alive she could never forgive me. Why I left her at the time when she needed me most, and I taunted her with words which no woman could forgive. 'Oh God forgive me, for I can never forgive myself! And yet we might have been so happy. I doubted her when all the time———" and then he went over all the miserable story again.

On, on, swept the train. He noticed the names

of the little stations through which they passed, he saw the cottagers, laden with Christmas cheer, preparing to enjoy the festive season, he heard cheery laughter and good wishes on every hand.

"Merry Chrismus to 'ee then, Pitter my deear. Now be sure you do come ovver to denner to-morra. We be goain to 'ave piggy faist, so doan't 'ee miss et, doan't 'ee for sure."

"Iss, we 'll be sure to come, Aunt Mary; we sh'll git to 'ee 'bout haalf pas' 'leven, I do reckon, but not afore, cause Jane and Tryphena be goin' to the prayer mittin' to the chapel first. Happy Chrismus to 'ee, Aunt Mary. I spoase Billy Liddicoat and Tom Crawl and the rest ov 'em will come and zing curls like they allays do."

"Iss for sure, 'twuddn' be a vitty Chrismus 'toal, if Billy Liddicoat didn' zing 'Angels from the rounds o' glory.' "

Oh, how sweet were the voices of these simple folks! And how happy they seemed! If only—— but everything was impossible. He would go and visit Betty's grave, and then return to Canada, and to his work there.

The train drew up to the little station of St. Ia. Outside, the waters of the bay shone in the light of the moon, and he could see the bold outline of the cliffs. The sky was clear, the night was frosty. It was just such another Christmas Eve as that on which Betty had promised to be his wife.

Here and there he saw a face that he knew, but no one seemed to recognise him. He did not recollect that he had been clean shaven when he left and that now he wore a beard. Besides, his great fur coat enveloped him from head to foot.

"Wot hotel be 'ee goin' to then, sur?" said a porter who had but lately come to St. Ia.

I don't know; I 'll send for my luggage when I want it," and he walked away.

He had no plan in his mind as to what he should do or where he should go. He had a vague idea about finding his wife's grave, but he reflected that he could not do this until the next day. Perhaps

he would go and look at the house where for a little time he and Betty had been so happy.

He had barely left the station when he heard a child's cry, and looking he saw a little group of people. Scarcely realising what he was doing, he made his way towards them.

"Who's cheeld be thee my deear?" he heard a woman say.

"Daddy's booty," was the answer.

"And who es your daddy?"

"He 's daddy—my daddy."

A gas lamp was close by and Stanley saw that in the centre of the group was a little child, perhaps three or four years old.

"And where do yer daddy live?"

"I dunnow, I 'm come for him."

"'Ave 'ee got a mauther, then?"

"Corse I 's got a muvver."

"And where es she?"

"Makin' the 'ouse Kismus for daddy. Pleese let me go, I want to find my daddy."

"But where es a? 'Ave ee seen un?"

"No—o—o." Stanley saw the little lips tremble, and she began to cry bitterly. "I want my muvver," she sobbed.

Stanley's heart grew warm towards the wee mite. She did not look like a labourer's or a fisherman's child. Her clothes were tastefully made, and even her childish speech suggested that her parents were gentlefolk.

"'Tis a lill maid wot 'ave lost 'erself," said a woman to Stanley, "and we be tryin' to vind out 'oo she es, so that we can taake 'er back to her mauther."

He elbowed his way until he came close to where the little maid was. He had never been particularly fond of children, but the child's plaintive cry had appealed to him, and he wanted to take the little thing in his arms. It seemed to him that something so sweet and innocent might ease the aching of his heart.

"But why is she here alone?" he asked.

"She do zay she 've come to the train to vind 'er daddy," was the reply. "I reckon she 's the cheeld ov some visitor, and she 've spectin' 'er father by train."

"She 's a dear little mite." The words escaped his lips almost unconsciously, but the child heard him, and looked up into his face.

"Look here, my deear," said a man, "ef you 'll come wi' me, I 'll taake 'ee to a plaace where we can vind out where yer mauther es, and where you do live."

"No, no," sobbed the child, and she moved towards Stanley as if for protection.

"Is——is you my daddy?" she asked.

"Perhaps I can find your daddy for you," he replied with a smile.

"Ave you come in the puffer train?"

"Yes, I 've come in the puffer train."

"Muvver ses my daddy will come in the puffer train, so you see vat wos wy I 've come."

He lifted the little one in his arms, and, without a murmur, she nestled her head against the fur collar of his overcoat.

"If you 'll tell me where your mammy lives, I 'll take you to her," he said, "perhaps we shall find that your daddy has come home."

"No," replied the little one, "I 's come for him. Muvver said he would come in the puffer train on Kismus Eve. Is vis Kismus Eve?"

"Yes, I suppose it is," replied Arthur with a sigh. "Does your mother know where you are, little one?"

"No," and she laughed gleefully. "You see, I wanted to give Muvver a sprise. Do you like sprises?"

"I used to."

"I do, velly much adeed, so I fot I 'd give Muvver a sprise, and bring home my daddy. Are you sure you isn't my daddy?"

"Should you like me for a daddy?"

"Velly much adeed. I fink you 'd be a lovely

daddy," and nestling close to him she added confidingly, "I 'll kiss you if you like."

She had utterly forgotten her trouble, and had become quite oblivious to the crowd.

"Look 'ere, sur," said the man who had spoken before, "ef you 'll give she to me, I 'll take her to the pleece station. Very likely they 'll know who she es there."

"No, no," cried the little maid, and she clung more closely to Stanley, who saw that her lips began to tremble again.

"I 'll find out who her parents are, and take her to them," he said. Somehow the child's prattle eased his aching heart, and her presence seemed like a welcome. "I 'll take her to one of the shops," he added, "very likely I shall find someone who knows her mother."

"Iss, that 'll be best," said the woman who had first spoken to him, "and look 'ere, we must git to the train quick or we shall be late."

"I wonder who that genleman es?"

"Dunnow, I 'm sure. Reglar swell, by the look ov un."

"Iss, he es fer sure. And didn' the little cheeld taake to un?"

Meanwhile, Stanley walked away with the little one in his arms. Many turned and gave him a second look as he passed, but he gave them no heed. All his thoughts were taken up with his charge.

"What 's your name, little kiddie?" he asked tenderly.

"Sometimes I 'm daddy's booty and muvver's blessing, and sometimes I 'm daddy's lovely one and muvver's darling."

"And haven't you got any other name?"

"I 's Joan, and I 'm velly glad adeed that we 've got away from them peoples. I don't like 'em. But I like you. I wish you was my daddy. Will he be like you?"

"He 'll be ever so much nicer than I am. Do you like chocs?"

"Yes, will you buy me some? Muvver ses Daddy will buy me 'eaps and 'eaps when he cums home."

"Oh, he 's away, is he?"

"Yes, and Muvver always makes me pray that God will bring him 'ome velly quick. And God will, won't He?"

"I hope so."

"Vat wos wy I came down to the station to-night. You see, when Muvver left me in bed last night I prayed vat God would bring him home to-night. I wanted to give Muvver a sprise, so I just comed to the station to meet him."

"And where is your mother's house?"

"It 's on Burnum Hill."

"Burnum Hill?"

"Yes, Muvver ses burnum is a bootiful flower."

"Laburnum Hill!——" he stopped suddenly. The cottage in which he had lived had been situated in that part of the town called Laburnum Hill. He held little Joan more closely to him, somehow the fact that she lived at Laburnum Hill made it less strange that he should be carrying her.

"What is the name of your house?" he asked.

"I dunnow. I do love you, cos you are goin' to give me chocs."

He took her into a confectioner's shop, and bought her enough to make her ill for a week.

"Now, shall I take you home?" he asked.

"Yes, oh, I do wish you 'd be my daddy!"

"Why?"

"Cos then I fink you 'd make Muvver happy, and she wudden' ky when I asked fings about him. I 's a velly good girl," she added, "and I 've got a three million lover and a kisser. Don't you want me to kiss you?"

"Very much indeed."

She seemed to have no more fear of him than if she had known him all her life, and she placed her little lips on his without hesitation.

A minute later they passed by the old church tower, and, as if by instinct, he stood and looked

at it. His heart grew heavy again. Of course he would find the child's home, and then he would be left in the darkness.

"Have you ever heard the bells ring?" he asked.

"Yes. I don't like them."

"Why?"

"Cos they makes my muvver cry. She always cries when they ring."

He gave a start as though someone had struck him, and clasping the little one closer he made his way towards Laburnum Hill.

"Do you know your house when you see it, little one?"

The child nodded. "I 'll tell you when I gets there. We will sprise Muvver, won't we?" she laughed.

His heart was beating wildly. He knew every house, every turning. It seemed sometimes as though he had never been away at all, except——

"There, that 's my house. Now we 'll give Muvver a sprise."

They had stopped before his old cottage.

He wondered in a dazed sort of way who lived there, and he congratulated himself that his meeting with the child would make it possible for him to enter the house again. Her mother would naturally wish him to explain how he had happened upon her.

He went to the door and pulled the bell, still holding little Joan in his arms. He thought he was going mad, otherwise he could not entertain the wild fancies that were floating through his brain.

But no one answered his summons. No lights were burning, the place seemed abandoned.

"I specs it's cos I've been a naughty girl. I specs Muvver fot I was lost, and is gone to find me."

He tried the door; it was fastened, but if it had not been altered he knew means by which he could open it. A minute later he stood within the house to which he had brought home Betty.

He turned up the lights and looked around him, his brain became dizzy, his mind seemed to reel.

Everything was just as he had left it. Great God! what did it mean?

"I specs Muvver will fink I 's a velly naughty girl," said Joan. "Please will you petend you are my daddy?"

He caught her up and held her close to his heart. "Why do you want me to pretend I am your daddy?" he asked.

"Cos then she won't be grieved wif me."

"You see," she went on, "she told me to-day that she would never be solly or sad again if my daddy would come home."

"Did she say that?"

"She said it this morning when she was making the mince pies."

For a few seconds he was unable to speak.

"Is that your daddy?" he said, pointing to a picture of himself which hung over the mantelpiece.

"Yes, that 's my daddy."

"Then what is the use of pretending. Is he anything like me?"

Little Joan looked at the picture, and then at Stanley.

"Why, you is my daddy," she cried, "it 's only the hair on your face wot makes you not my real daddy."

Again he held her to his heart and kissed her repeatedly.

"Oh, thank God! thank God!" he cried again and again.

"Yes, and Muvver will fank God too," said Joan. "You see, we asked Him to bring you back, and now we ought to fank Him. Cos you are my daddy, aint you? We are not petending, are we?"

"No, we are not pretending a bit. No, thank God, there is no pretence," he added to himself.

He mended the fire, which had burnt low, and busied himself around the house generally, while little Joan trotted after him. Presently he found his way into the studio. Everything was the same, except that nearly all the pictures were gone. As

he reflected on what this meant the tears came into his eyes.

"Doesn't Mammy have a servant to help her to do the work in the house?" he asked.

"No," said Joan, "she does it all herself, 'cept what I do; but I's a velly big strong girl, and I helps her a lot."

He found his way back to the living room again, his heart was beating wildly with joy, and yet fear was gnawing at his heart. What after all if she refused to forgive him?

He heard hurried footsteps on the garden path.

"It's Muvver," cried Joan. "I'll go and tell her I've brought you home," and she ran away, while he with fast-beating heart stood awaiting her coming.

He heard the patter of Joan's footsteps in the hall, while the sound of the front door being opened also plainly reached him.

"Muvver!"

"Why, it's you, my darling," and every nerve in his body quivered as he heard the voice. It was Betty's voice. Betty, the only woman he had ever loved, ever could love.

"But you've given me such a fright," she continued, "where have you been? Oh darling, how could you be so naughty?"

"But, Muvver," he heard Joan say, "I went to bring home Daddy!"

"Went to bring home Daddy! What do you mean?"

"Why you asted God to bring home Daddy, and you told me to ast Him to bring home Daddy, and I asted Him to bring him home for Kismus, and so I wented to the puffer train to meet him."

"Went to the puffer train?"

"Yes, and Muvver, I've brought him home. Isn't that a nice sprise?"

"You've brought home your daddy! Then——— then, where———"

Stanley did not know whether she came to the room where he was, or whether he went to her.

He only knew that they stood looking at each other.

"Betty," he cried.

"Isn't it a bootiful sprise, Muvver?" laughed Joan.

"Betty," he cried again, "can you forgive me?"

And then neither of them knew any more except that they were in each other's arms.

It was all explained presently. It scarcely needed explaining at all, it was so very simple. And as Betty told her story he felt more and more ashamed of himself. Her father's knowledge that he was financially a ruined man, his pride, and his desire that Stanley should be told nothing, her long days and nights of anxiety, and her endeavours to save her father from the disgrace he dreaded, and then of Carthew's loyal friendship. She told him everything, while he bowed his head with shame.

"I know I was wrong not to tell you," she said presently, "but I was angry with myself that you had been led to marry a penniless girl; you see, I had hoped to make you rich, and I wanted to keep the trouble from you as long as I could. Besides, father dreaded your knowing. He said he ought not to have allowed you to marry me without first letting you know, and he asked me to see Geoffry Carthew. Besides, I was not well. You see, I—— I learnt that little Joan was coming, and then ——when——when——you suspected——that is, when you said——"

"I know, oh, I know!" groaned Stanley. "But you forgive me, Betty, tell me again that you forgive me!"

Presently he told her of his life in Canada, and what led to his home-coming, while little Joan looked from one face to the other."

"I didn't fink peoples cried when they is happy," said Joan reproachfully, looking at her mother's tear-stained, happy face.

"But how did you live, Betty? You had so little money! Oh, what a brute I've been!"

"I sold your pictures," she sobbed. "Several visitors had seen your work among Sir Henry Vyvian's collection, and so I had no difficulty at

all. It———it was very hard to part with them, and I don't think I could have done it but for Joan. I couldn't leave the house, either. Somehow, I always felt you 'd come back, and I wanted you to find everything as you had left it."

"But I brought home Daddy, and gave you a nice Kismus sprise, didn't I, Muvver?" interposed Joan, who, sitting on her father's knee, had been intermittently listening to the conversation.

"And I think it 's time for Joan to go to bed," said Betty. "She is generally in bed hours before this."

"Joan is velly sleepy," said the little maid, "and boaf of you will put me to bed to-night, cos I wos a good girl, and gave you a nice sprise, didn't I?"

A little later they stood hand in hand watching her as she lay in her cot bed.

"You 'll boaf of you stay wif me till I go to sleep, won't you?" she asked.

"Yes, my darling."

"You 're sure?"

"Quite sure. And we 'll both be here when you wake up in the morning."

"That 'll be lovely," she said contentedly.

She nestled her head among the pillows, and her eyes closed.

"Thank you, dear God, for giving me Daddy for a Kismus present, and for letting me give Muvver such a bootiful sprise," she murmured drowsily.

The eyes of Betty met her husband's, and he saw that they were full of tears.

"Oh, my darling," he cried, "I didn't think it was possible to be so happy. And———and———I never dreamt———of Joan. I am ashamed of myself, but———but———" and again he folded his wife in his arms.

The clock in the living room struck ten, and it had barely finished when the clock at St. Ia began to strike the hour. Scarcely had the last note died away than the eight bells of St. Ia pealed out.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight,
Peace on the earth, good will to men."

Both stood listening, their hearts too full for words, but little Joan lay peacefully asleep.

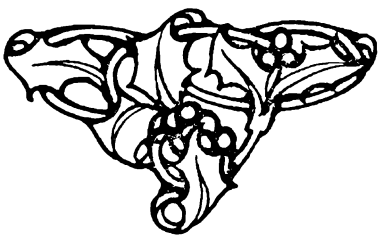
"Do you remember how they rang out five years ago, Betty?" he asked.

She looked up into his face with love-lit eyes.

"I believe every word of the old stories about the bells of St. Ia," he said.

"So do I," she replied, with a glad laugh.

And as they went down stairs together they could still hear the bells pealing across the bay, as they had pealed for more than three hundred years.



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