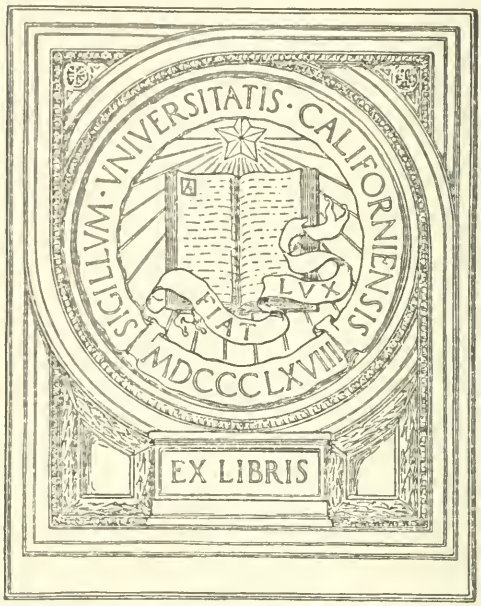

A CORNISH DROLL

Printed in Great Britain

A CORNISH DROLL

A Novel

by

EDEN PHILLPOTTS

Author of

"The Grey Room", "George Westover", "Peacock House", etc.

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To
M. BUXTON FORMAN
IN FRIENDSHIP

A CORNISH DROLL

I

My darter's youngest darter be set to mind me nowadays, because I'm a terrible old man and I might die any minute. A very clever girl, and being at her wits' end to find me something to do a bit ago, she hit on the witty thought that I should write down the things that have happened to me in my early life.

"You've got your eyes and you've got your memory, gran'father," she says, "and you're a fine penman for your age also, so why for shouldn't you tell your story? Then you wouldn't need to talk so much, and be so busy, and it would pass a bit of the time for you and spare your game leg."

Well, I saw through it, of course, because the girl was wonderful fond of her books, and

no doubt listening to me chattering often worried her sore and kept her from the printed page.

"I might do it, Maggie," I said, "but who the mischief would read it after 'twas writ?"

"Why, all the village," she told me; "and you'd surprise a good few people who've almost forgot you're still alive nowadays."

I thought over what the child said, and one wet day when I couldn't sit in the garden I took my pen and my glasses, and a few sheets of paper from Maggie's desk, and began putting down things that happened to me seventy years ago, when I was ten year old.

'Twas rather a mournful tale on the whole, but I hung on to it, being a very determined old man; and there's no doubt, in a manner of speaking, 'tis a very moral tale and shows the ways of God with His creatures, for I was a right down bad lot for the first five and twenty years of my life. There's no doubt, in fact, that I was so wicked as I could be with my scanty gifts; but if I'd been cleverer and richer, then for certain I should have been a lot wickeder also. The spirit was

willing, but the pocket was empty and the brains was weak; and as it had pleased God to call me to the humble station of a labouring man, down nigh the Land's End of Cornwall, I was mercifully prevented from any far-reaching sins. Even them I did commit for the most part came to nought; and that was God's will also. In due course He brought me to see that honesty was the best policy if you're a fool by nature; and once I got hold of that great truth there never was a honester man than me.

'Twas a case of "go and sin no more" after I got up five and twenty year old; and though I ban't going to say I've never done wrong from that time till the present, being a matter of more than half a century, and me only a weak, human creature, still the balance have been on the side of righteousness, and when my white hairs go to the grave, there'll be two generations of my family to respect my name.

If I'd been good always it might have been a thought tame to tell about. For take the Holy Bible's self, as Jimmy Lanine said to

me. Knock out all the scamps and where are you? Without a doubt they be there to make the saints shine brighter by contrast and keep the Good Book going; and if the things I set down be more about bad folk than good, yet there's some very nice, high-minded people I've met in my life and, no doubt, they'd never have shone as they did but for the fine contrast the other sort offered.

As a retired policeman, old Jimmy Lanine was bound to stick up for wickedness, because his bread hung upon it, in a manner of speaking; but I said then, and I say again, that I shall prefer to see the next world without it—tame or otherwise.

Me and Lanine have very curious conversations on that subject, because I argue that when it comes to Heaven, his occupation will be gone; but he says that human nature's human nature, and if we be still going to be ourselves, there's bound to come a bit of work for the sake of law and order—wheresoever we are. They had to turn Old Nick out of Heaven for that reason, and the same thing might happen again. Lanine does love his

business something wonderful and can't abide to picture Eternity without its troubles; while for my part, as a man who once tossed upon the sea, there's nought more cheering in the whole Book than the verses that promise lasting peace and say there won't be no ocean up aloft. And very like, come he's my age, the taste for policeman's work, even in its highest branches, will have left Jimmy Lanine, and he'll feel quite content to shine at something more in keeping with what we be told about the Happy Land.

As for me, my name's William Chirgwin, and I'll start to tell when I was a dinky boy and my mother died. Seventy years she's been in her coffin, yet I mind her very well, and I'm sure I wish she'd been spared a bit, for she was a terrible great loss to me.

II

Mother and me had got a deal in common and we both went in cruel fear of my father. He was too fierce a pattern of man for

us both, and we knuckled under, of course. She'd talk to me about him, when he was to work; but never did she talk treason. And then she told me she was going to die, and I said I'd die, too, because I didn't want to bide along with father. 'Twas a consumption of the lungs carried her away, brought on without a doubt by starvation and hard living. For we was terrible poor and my father ought never to have married, to say it in all kindness, for he was a great drunkard and only a stone-breaker, and a man that never had no education nor friends, nor nothing to help him along in the world. His two brothers had no use for him and never helped him to go straight.

It got to be known that mother was going, and well I mind on a winter day seeing a gert flock of white wild geese a-turning and twisting up over the moor edge in the sunshine of a frosty morning. And full of my own child's thoughts, I rushed in the house and cried out:

"The angels be come for you, mother! And do 'e ax 'em to take me too!"

Father, as was in along with her, went out and marked the birds settle, and afore night he'd shot one. It did mother a power of good, and she always called a goose "a angel", after that, poor dear.

I was seven year old then, and she lived three year more, thanks to the goodness of the people, for they took a wonderful deal of pity on her and me; and my uncle—Jack Chirgwin, my father's brother, as had the little farm of Journey's End, at Madron parish nigh Penzance—he took me to work when I was ten year old, and I made a penny a day and my dinner by him for a year and then rose to higher things. He was father's elder brother, but a different sort of man. Journey's End was my uncle's own property and he'd bought it after saving for it for thirty-five years; and what would hap to it when he went, none knew, for he was a bachelor man and had no near relations in the world, save his two brothers and me. My father and the master of Journey's End weren't none too friendly, because Uncle Jack didn't hold with father; but he had brains

and my poor father hadn't a pinch; and for my part, looking back now, I forgive father everything. The fools be well known to suffer for their folly to the full as much as the knaves for their knavery; but God's on the side of the weak-minded—we must never forget that. They are His chosen—always a very cheering thought for a man like my father, if he'd been clever enough to think of it. As for me, I never had more brains than please God I should have—not to say it complainingly, I'm sure; but often and often in a tight place I've wished as I had another ounce or two; and often and often I've had to trust, where it would have paid me a long sight better to know.

I've always had a great faith in God, and my fellow creatures also; and faith be often strongest when the wits is weak; but though I own to it that men and women have given me a bit of a jar often enough, yet God never have but once or twice; and then 'twas only the difference of the point of view between me and Him. But 'tis all one in the long run and the Almighty will come out top, and have the last word, and for my part I

shall always cleave to it that we'll like Him better when we know Him better.

My mother died in her sleep at last, and my father felt, then, that he wanted to be up and off and never see the scene of his miseries no more. He must have been rather an unkind man in his way, though I'd shame to say anything harsh of my own parent. But, be it as it will, so soon as mother died, he cleared out. He just said: "Thank God she's a goner!" Then he mixed himself a "Samson", which be a drink half-cider, half-brandy, and then he took his fardel and bag of tools and his few shillings of money and just vanished into the air.

So there was I, left a homeless orphan, and the poor sticks in the cottage didn't pay either landlord or undertaker. It seemed a thought hard, but poor father never had no education.

So Uncle Jack rose up, like the good man he was, and took me, and I stopped along with him till I was twenty year old. And by that time terrible strange things had befallen me and I couldn't stop no more. Not that

I've much right to complain against 'em, for the greatest joy that I've known fell to me at Journey's End. 'Twas too much happiness for one undeserving creature, however, and it couldn't last, and it didn't.

As I've said, Uncle Jack was a bachelor, and being terrible 'feared of the women, and haunted after middle-age with the dread as they'd sooner or later catch him for the sake of the farm, he wouldn't have nothing to do with the spinsters—not even that curst, vinegary, flat sort that carry virginity on their faces, to be read all down the road. He hadn't the understanding to know there's a lot of poor female creatures not worthy to be called women, and that with such he was so safe as with the cabbages in his garden. 'Twas just the flutter of a petticoat as frighted him, so he engaged only the married ones. His head man and his head man's wife lived to Journey's End with him when he took me; but after they'd been there a good few years, they left, to better themselves, and Uncle Jack was awful flustered at the loss. He thought very like as we two might get on

together without any women at all; but when I tried to cook, he found he was wrong.

Journey's End stood in a parcel of trees wi' good tilth all round about, though not much of it. 'Twas Uncle Jack's own, and he was terrible proud of it.

Jack Chirgwin was one of them little-go-by-the-ground men—a podgy, short and stumpy chap. Red in the face and blue in the eye he was, and he wore his hair in a fringe under his double chin; but his crown was bald and stood up over his red wrinkled neck and forehead, like an egg out of its cup.

A lot of sense he had to him, though he was obstinate, and when he made up his mind, 'twas a thing no more to be changed than what happened yesterday.

When first the head man and his wife went off, Uncle Jack felt in a great quandary what to do. I thought perhaps a widow woman, but he distrusted that sort most. At last he tried a fisherman's wife from Newlyn and she failed him cruel, because she drank his spirits and was always asking her husband up to tea, so Uncle sent her packing and swore by the

saints that he wouldn't have no more females about him.

"Us'll do wi'out 'em and a good riddance," he said. "It shall be St. Tibb's Eve* afore another petticoat comes here. You've got to larn to cook, William, and the sooner the better."

I never went against nothing he said and I did my bestest, but I turned out a terrible buffle-head at it, and after Uncle had been took bad twice, with a feeling like a cannon-ball lodged on top of his left hip-bone, he saw that cooking would be for ever hid from me.

"What the hell you do to the meat and puddings I don't know, William," he said to me; "but I want two-penn'orth o' peppermint every time I let down a dish you've cooked; and so no doubt 'tis true that only women and Frenchmen can cook and Englishmen can't larn it."

Neither of the other two chaps at Journey's End would take on the kitchen work; but they both said that if such belly-vengeance food was to be the rule, they'd have to go.

*St. *Tibb's Eve*. Never.

Uncle was a good bit put out, but he saw the reason for it, though he had a slap at me afore he changed his plans.

"I thought you was going to be a useful chap, William," he said to me one morning. "Ess fay, I declared to myself that you would prove a blessing in disguise; but as things are 'tis quite the other way; you be a terror and you be paying me for my kindness by trying to shorten my life."

"I shall do better come presently," I ventured to tell the man. "You wait till dinner, Uncle Jack." I'd made a star-gazing pie for dinner that day and it promised so well as ever a pie did promise. 'Tis a pie of paste and pilchards, and you bake it with the fish poking their noses through the crust. Pretty eating, too; but, of course, it have got to be handled clever, and I failed again. The dowl knows what I'd done to the pie, but 'twas hard as granite outside and the fish was raw underneath.

Uncle he got it open, and me and t'other men looked hopefully upon it; and then Uncle dashed down his knife and fork and shouted out:

"Fetch in the bread and cheese and take this here mess to the pigs!"

'Twas the last straw, you might say, and after all his great speeches in the village and out, Uncle Chirgwin was forced to go back on his word and seek a woman for the farm.

"'Tis a matter of life or death," I heard him say to Mrs. Penrose at our outer gate the next evening. "'Tis life or death, or I wouldn't do it. But I've lost two teeth out of my false lot—snapped off like stubble in yonder boy's parlous cooking—and my innards be just one everlasting strife, and my sleep's forsaking me. So it have got to end. And if you know a respectable married woman that can handle a bit of bacon and a potato without disgracing herself, you'll do me a kindness to name her."

Mrs. Penrose thought, and, mother-like, cast her mind over her own first. She had thirteen, and the first batch, by her husband, Tim Cardew, as was killed in Carn Brea Mine, was all doing well; but the second lot, by Michael Penrose, was only coming on and the

eldest of 'em had reached no more than fourteen at this time.

Mrs. Penrose thought a bit, knowing Uncle Jack's weakness. Then she spoke:

"I suppose now as you wouldn't be afeared of a maiden not seventeen year old? I understand very well how 'tis with you, Mr. Chirgwin, and I know the females are cunning toads, and I've always thought you was terrible clever to keep out of their way same as you have done; but there's my darter, Mercy Jane—she couldn't have no designs on 'e at her tender age, and what that girl don't know about cooking idden worth knowing. She's the nessel-bird* of my first husband's family and a towser for work and very understanding every way."

"If she ban't yet seventeen, she wouldn't think to catch a man sixty year old, of course," says Uncle Jack.

"That she would not. And my advice to you is to give her a trial. Clean as a new pin, she is, and always cheerful and always to work."

"She'll be a gallavanter at her age," said

*Nessel-bird. The youngest.

Uncle doubtfully. But Mrs. Penrose pressed it and sang Mercy Jane Cardew's praises, and added that if 'twas a failure, the girl could easily be sent home again. And so it fell out that she came along to see if she was clever enough to please the master of Journey's End.

But Uncle he went to old Mother Nancherrow afore he closed with the offer. She was the only woman he ever believed in, and seeing that she was the wisest creature on the country-side, he couldn't choose but do so. A sort of a white witch, many called her, and for certain she knowed a cruel lot of strange things. But her advice was run after, and she was very large-minded and didn't care a pin whether you took it or left it, so long as you paid her fee.

Mother Nancherrow said no harm could come of trying the girl, and so Mercy Jane came, and it idden too much to say that she managed all us men from the first. Such wits no young thing ever had afore; and as for cooking, Uncle Jack found hisself unwell again after she'd been in the house three days; but

he said this time 'twas all a testament to the new cook's skill, because the food was so proper, he'd ate far too free of it.

So she stayed and much came of that. To look at, Mercy Jane was tall and straight, and slim, but she had womanly rounds about her and a womanly smallness of hands and feet. She wore a pink print work-days and had a very fine blue gown when she went out. Her eyes were grey as glass, and large, but she kept her eyelids down over 'em a lot and her lashes spread out in a very pretty fashion. She had a nubby nose, and a lovely colour to her cheeks, which was so rosy as blotting paper. And her mouth was large but a proper shape. She'd got a regular stack of brick-coloured hair, as she wore piled up so bright as autumn leaves 'pon top of her head; and she was always cheerful and willing. But she kept herself to herself a good bit and you couldn't tell what she was thinking about most times; and you'd hardly know she was in the house half the day, but for her singing. Uncle was troubled about the singing at first, though he put up with it, for he soon found

out his luck and didn't want to do nothing to drive the girl away.

And then, after she'd been along with us some years, and drawing six pound a year for it, a terrible queer thing happened to me.

I hadn't nothing in my life, then, but Uncle Jack, and though as good as gold and better, he was full of his own ideas and felt he'd done all he need do for me when he gave me a home.

But me and that girl—young things together—we got seeing a lot of each other till at last it broke over me, like a cold sweat, that I was in love with Mercy Jane, and wanted her something cruel for my very own, and certainly couldn't live in no sort of comfort much longer without her.

III

I was just nineteen year old and Mercy Jane a bit younger, when I made this great discovery, and the first time I proved it was down in the village of a Sunday.

A good few of us chaps did used to collect

nigh the church of a Sunday morning, to see the folk go to worship, and it happened that one day Bob White from Gulval was there along with Tommy Noy and Alfred Taskes and Ned Trebarth and a few more chaps. And there passed by Susie Penrose and three or four of her little brothers and sisters, going to Sunday School. And Bob White in his dashing way said:

"Susie Penrose is a proper maiden, sure enough—very different from her half-sister."

Then I felt the blood get in my head and my Sunday collar pretty well choking me.

"Which sister, Bob White?" I said, walking up to him and putting my nose close to his, like a tom cat when he's going to have a bit of a shindy with another.

"Which sister, Billy Chirgwin? Why, Mercy Jane—her as lives along with you and your uncle to Journey's End," answered Bob.

"Say that again," I said, and our noses very near touched.

"Fifty times, if you like," replied Bob. "She's gotten green eyes, Mercy Jane has. Not her fault, but her misfortune."

Then I told him to be so good as to come up under Madron Wood and take off his Sunday coat; and he done so. And I took off mine, and t'others all came to see the fun, and Ned Trebarth looked after my things, and by the same token stole my new green and red tie, while I was going for Bob; and Tommy Noy looked to White and cleaned him up after the first round.

Two rounds we fought and no more, because in the middle of the second we closed and I throwed Bob in the brambles and sprained his leg. Then he gave in and said that Mercy Jane's eyes might be any colour I damn pleased. 'Twas a good bit of fun enough and nobody the worse friends after; but I never heard the end of it, and two days later Mercy Jane—she got to know what had happened, and from being so friendly as brother and sister, she turned right off from me, and I felt fearful cut up at her coldness.

But when she knowed how I'd handled young White for saying her beautiful eyes was green, Mercy Jane appeared to grow up. I'd never felt, somehow, as she was a woman till

then, though after that I very soon knowed it. She went that distant like. And I didn't understand more than the dead what I should do. Just a silly zany I was in them days, as got water in his eyes if a maiden so much as looked at him. Yet all the time, mind you, I'd have gone to the world's end for her. Brave enough away from her—and why not? I stood six feet tall now and was filling out and had a barrel on me like a pony and arms wi' muscles on 'em so big as loaves of bread.

I will say I tried to larn, and from Bob White himself I got a lesson. For he was one of them lucky chaps that loves a petticoat more'n he fears it, and I'm sure, where the girls be the matter, that "perfect love casteth out fear" with many men; and in time it did the same even for me. But Bob was too general and large-minded, and it got to be no triumph for a girl to keep company with him, because he frittered his feelings away a lot too much. He saw the error of his ways hisself, for that matter, and often moaned that he wasn't born a Turk or some such foreigner.

"I could have any one of 'em," he told me; "but what be one to a heart like mine?"

I warned him against such unruly passions and made bold to think that one should be enough for any honest man; but he thought not. He spoke things that surprised me. He said, in his judgement, that a monopoly was bad, and that if law allowed from two to six wives, the lot of men would be easier, and the lot of women hopefuller too. He lived to think different, however, for, of course, he took one at last, and she made him see that even one may be too many under some circumstances—esp. cially if you hanker for more.

I V

So times was changed and I soon knowed I loved Mercy Jane furious. She was a bowerly piece and, of course, I weren't the only one by many. But she went her way, as if there weren't a man in the world, and come her day out, to her mother she always would go.

Then I took my courage, after a sweaty

night of fear, and axed her in so many words if she'd go for a walk some evening. She looked sideways under them lovely little frills of eyelash and said she'd think of it, and I noticed when I talked to her now that my voice was all over the shop. Two days later I axed her again and she said she'd come; and she did come. 'Twas the dimpsy of a summer evening and we went up over past St. Madron's ruined well and chapel on the hill. We walked out in the moor presently and pitched on a stone and watched the light fade out of the sky. 'Twas still and fine, and the engine-stack of Wheal Carn looked so black as ink against the sunset and the airy-mice was winging and squeaking very lively along the edge of the woods.

Yet try as I might I couldn't find nothing to tell about. 'Twas a very silent walk in fact, but I kept looking upon her a lot and for the most part she held her eyes to the ground.

"That's a terrible big dew-snail," I said, pointing to a great black creature crawling over the grass.

"So 'tis then," she answered.

"You don't sing about the house so much as you did," I said again ten minutes later.

"Don't I?" she asked.

"No," I answered, "you do not."

But nothing came of it.

Then I had a slap at another subject:

"The evening star be wonnerful bright," I said.

"Not brighter than usual," answered Mercy Jane.

But I declared 'twas, and she wouldn't argue about it and allowed I might be right.

Then, after a long silence, us heard Madron church clock tell nine, down far ways off.

" 'Tis time we was gwaine back-along," I said.

Presently a night bird began hollering, and another answered it, and I told Mercy Jane 'twas owls; but she said 'twas more like crying children. I made some joke, then, I mind, about the pisgies and the spriggans; but she grew comical-tempered in a minute and I found that she took all such matters very serious.

"You don't mean for to say you believe in

the little people?" I asked her, and she told me to mind my own business. It promised to spoil the end of the walk, but she forgived me afore we got home, though not till I apologized very humble. I said:

"I'm a know-nought gert fool, Mercy Jane, and I dare say there's millions of fairies in Cornwall yet, and why not? And I'm sure you be so wonnerful as a fairy yourself for that matter."

I felt that was pretty smart, and she liked it, too, and said as none could prove there wasn't fairies, while a lot of very clever people knowed for certain that there was. Her own father had heard the spriggans knocking in the mine two days afore he was killed, and her grandfather had been pisgey-led two different times in his life and could swear to it on the Book.

I said as the walk had done me a power of good and made so bold as to hope she'd come up over and pitch on thicky stone again some evening; and she said if us had another fine evening she didn't know but what she might.

At day-down a week later we went again,

and I had terrible poor speed that time. I was a strong, hulking giant of a man and could face anything on four legs, or anything on two, for that matter—anything but Mercy Jane—yet I don't know what 'twas, but I found myself so dumb as a quilkin * when along with her. And for all that I was right down miserable when out of her sight. I felt it couldn't last, but something told me to go on trying to please her, and I toiled like a lion to do it. And sometimes I got a smile and a kind word, and sometimes she growed that short and impatient with me that I felt any minute she might slap my face.

'Twas an up and down sort of time and I very near ran away once or twice, for the strain was cruel. Now and then I'd get forwarder, and then all the good was done away; and now and then I'd almost feel bold enough to speak and offer for her; but that was generally of a night, and when the morning come my spirit was gone. She'd do terrible kind things one day, and cut me to the heart the next. And then she went out twice with

* *Quilkin*. Frog.

Johnny Vingoe, and I felt things was at a climax.

Uncle Jack got a tissick on the chest about then—'twas spring time again—and he often had 'em—and he wanted to see Mother Nancherrow for it, and she comed in one evening and looked at the man. In her clever way she'd guessed what was amiss with him afore she saw him, and she brought along marjoram and elder and a few suchlike herbs to make a valiant drink. Then, seeing what was wrong, she bade Mercy Jane hot the kettle and fetch a saucepan. Then she began to make the physic; and while she made it she talked.

Uncle he sat a-gurglin' and chockin' in his dog-eared chair one side of the fire, and Mother Nancherrow she knelt at the hearth and stirred, and Mercy Jane sat by the table darning socks, and I was not far off making rabbit nets—a job at which I was pretty spry. T'other men weren't in and us sat there silent as mice, but for uncle's wheezin', and listened to the old woman.

Cruel fine talk 'twas. Few were the hidden things that woman didn't know, and she was

terrible vexed with life as it was and much wished us could all go back to life as it used to be.

"Along of these here fansical schools," she said, "the childer doan't believe in nothing at all, and the ripe wisdom of us ancient folk be dust in the balance afore 'em. As if we didn't know and hadn't seen with our eyes and our forefathers afore us! Take charms, for instance, who can cure wild-fire, or burning, or toothache like I can? Who can staunch blood so quick as me? Yet, where fifty in a year was wont to come to me for such service, five don't now. And look at the holy stone up over—the stone with the hole in 'un, called the Crick Stone, and the Long Stones and the Written Stone and other sacred and magic things—all idle—all idle. Who visits the Crick Stone now? Who goes there for lumbagey, or rheumatism or other cricks, and crawls through the hole again and again against the way of the sun? What mothers take their babes there to make 'em strong and lusty? Yet well I know the hidden vartue and have proved it a thousand times."

"We'm forgetting the clever things our fathers did. 'Pears as if the world was to be saved by electricity nowadays," said Uncle Jack. Then he coughed fit to die.

"Doan't you be talking: list to me," answered Mother Nancherrow.

"As for electricity a time will come when us shall pray to our God to take it away again. 'Tis playing with lightning at best and the devil's weapon in my opinion. Didn't the Saints know? When the holy men come hither in a boat-load from Ireland, 'twasn't electricity they brought, but the power of God and the trick of doing miracles in the Name. They didn't quarrel with nobody. They let the conjurors and the white witches and small people alone, and them as wanted the Light of Christianity was welcome to it, and them as did not could go their own way, so long as they didn't have no truck with God's chosen. But 'tis all gone now, swept away by these blasted board-schools and city-bred teachers, as have no faith in nothing but themselves and machinery."

She poured the herby tea in a basin and

told Mercy Jane to set it upon the window-sill to cool.

"They saints done a power of good no doubt," said my Uncle.

"Ess fay! and would again to-morrow if anybody had the faith to trust 'em," answered the old woman. "Take our own—take St. Madron—us don't want to go not a step further for healing wonders. Yet who tramps up along to his ruined chapel now? Who dips there in the running water—once blessed, always blessed? Who bathes there for the thing their heart wanteth and calls to the listening saint for it and then goeth home rejoicing?"

"Not a soul," admitted Uncle Jack. "Yet when I was a young man 'twas a deed not seldom practised, and many a mother dipped her babby in the old font and left a rag hanging on the thorn tree over the altar-stone. I can mind so many as twenty rags dancing there to a time; and the birds would come and pluck at 'em for their nestes."

"The magic be there," declared Mother Nancherrow. "The good belongs to the water

for evermore, and that's why it don't run dry in the hottest summer like the common streams. 'Tis blessed and it ban't the saint's fault, nor yet mine, that the people don't make use of it. But there 'tis with all its vartue running to waste year after year. But I know this: I wouldn't be without a bottle in my house for untold gold."

Uncle said 'twas very interesting to hear tell of such things and I stole a look at Mercy Jane to see what she thought; but she was darning for dear life and didn't 'pear to be interested. And I was glad of it, because there had come into my head a dashing thought. I stared at her; but my mind was lifting far beyond Journey's End and the people in it. I felt a wonnerful call. I felt so strong as a team of horses. 'Twas borne in upon me, like the Light was borne in on Paul, that this here St. Madron might be the very man for my business. And I said to myself: "If a wise woman, like this here, and a wise man, like Uncle, can believe in the holy saint, what right have a silly fool like me to dare to doubt?"

And then I cast my eyes on Mercy Jane again, wi' her hair bright as fire in the cannel-light and her head standing out like a picksher against the old cloam and butter-prints and beer glasses and the like on the dresser behind her.

Mother Nancherrow talked a bit more; then she had a drink of Uncle's spirits, and he had a dose of her physic and the night ended.

But sleep wouldn't come to me and I was already thirsting for the light of day, being full of St. Madron and his chapel and his well. 'Twas my resolve at dawn to be up over and get in the ruin and take a dip for luck, and call upon the Saint with all my might to give me what I wanted in the shape of Mercy Jane Cardew. I knowed very well 'twas time and more than time I axed, and yet the awful fear of getting a frosty answer had held me back. But somehow, after hearing Mother Nancherrow, I burned wi' strength and resolution and did believe most steadfast that the Saint would give heed. I argued long with myself upon it, too. I weren't asking the holy man for no impossibilities. For instance,

if Mercy Jane had been tokened to any other chap, I wouldn't have done it; but, for all I knowed to the contrary, she was heart-whole and free as air; and I felt that if she had secrets about Johnny Vingoe, then 'twas time they came out. For one thing had got to be deathly sure in my mind; and that was if I couldn't get her, I should have to sling my hook beyond sight and sound of her.

V

At peep o' day I was sleeping like a pig and didn't wake till four o'clock. But I got in my clothes very quick and was soon away to St. Madron's chapel—a horny-winky, lonesome place 'pon the moor-edge a mile from Journey's End.

Up I went through a strong easterly breeze, and the spring was in the air and green things breaking out of the dead grey ones under my feet and all round about. An early lark had gone aloft to catch the first sunlight, and he catched it and hung like a spark o' fire far

ways up in the blue and poured his heart out. So I came to the holy well and ruined chapel. 'Tis a queer little broken down spot wi' walls no higher than a man's shoulder and stone seats running round inside. Briers and grass and moss be over all, and above the altar-stone there standeth a great white-thorn girt with an ivy-tod. Furze and heather bound the ruin together; the floor was full of green grass and daisies; on the altar was a hole that had catched rain from the last shower and flashed back the brightness of the sky. St. Madron's stream ran behind, aglint and full of noise, and the wild parsley was budding beside it, and the forget-me-nots twinkling blue above the water, and the furze lifting up in a bank of gold above.

And coming here, at the first red sunrise light, I was struck into a gert terror, for upon the altar-stone I saw clothes and a woman's white smicket and a pair of shoon and stockings. Then, bending down, I peered out through a hole in the wall and my knees knocked and I went bivering over with cold, as though I'd been struck with frost.

For there was Mercy Jane, just rising mother-naked out of St. Madron's stream! Her hair was blowing round her like the merry dancers, and the morning light touched it and she herself flashed through it white as curds. And that's all I knowed, for I went so weak as a goose-chick afore that wonnerful sight, because I'd never seed a girl unrayed in all my life afore, and 'tis a most amazing thing. I dropped then, as if I'd been shot, and crawled off, and she come to the altar-stone and I heard her singing like a grey bird and getting back in her clothes. For my life I didn't dare move, but hid in a brake close by outside the chapel till she was off and away. I lay there thinking and wondering and sweating with jealousy, for somehow I guessed very well she was come to pray to the Saint; and what her prayer had been about I'd have given ten year off my life to know.

Presently I crept forth and looked around. She'd left a rag of her dress on the white-thorn tree and 'twas fluttering there; and in the sand by the stream I found a clear print

of her foot—little toes and heel; and such was my frantic state that I knelt down and kissed it!

Somehow I couldn't go home again. My tongue was dry as a chip and I drank a drop of St. Madron's brook, at the place where Mercy Jane had dipped, and then I wandered about an hour and more, and then I went home-along. But I turned against breakfast, and the thought of seeing Mercy Jane put me in a regular stew, so I just went to the stable and got out a hoss and marched off to my morning's work. 'Twas harrowing, I remember, and hour after hour I followed the machine and felt as if the tines was running over me instead of the earth; and yet I knowed myself to be a long sight more of a man than ever I had been until that morning.

But three days and I got no forwarder, and at last in a sort of shame and despair, I ordained to go from Journey's End and have a look at the world and see if I couldn't knock a little more sense into me.

But my Uncle took the idea very ill. However where a man was concerned I could be

brave as you please; and I decided to go; and he said I might go to the bad place, for all he cared—being properly vexed at me for daring to think of such a thing. But go I must, I told him, and Mercy Jane was a good bit interested and surprised. She even axed me to stop; but I'd got my box packed and the trap from the "Seven Saints" public-house been ordered by that time.

'Twas the most terrible moment of my life without a doubt—the moment when I was waiting for the trap.

"Where be you going?" asked Mercy Jane.

"To Market Jew," I told her. "There's a man there be meaning to give me work."

She looked at me with her wonnerful eyes and there was a tear in each of 'em.

"I'm sorry," she said. "We've been very good friends. I ain't got many."

I heard the trap coming up the road and I had a bold idea.

"May I kiss my hand to 'e as I drive off, Mercy Jane?" I ventured to ax.

"Yes, if you like, Will," she said.

Then I got more dashing.

"May I venture to kiss your hand afore I drive off?" I axed.

"Yes, if you mind to, Will," she answered.

And then the deed of my life come into my mind; and being strung up to a terrible pitch by now, I chanced it and spoke again.

"May I kiss——?"

My face was pretty near so close to hers now as it was to Bob White's afore we had our little difference. I couldn't finish my speech; but she knowed what I meant. What didn't she know, for that matter?

"Yes, if you please, Will," she said.

"'Please'——by God!" I answered; and then—well—I just let go.

And she done her share I will say.

"Hold tight! Hold tight for the love of the Lord!" I cried out. "This is the greatest moment in my life, and 'twill never come back again."

"Us'll have better still, please St. Madron," she said—to encourage me; and then I told her that I loved her like a raging flame and must have her for wife or die. I was so brave

as a leash o' lions by that time and would have fought the dowl for her.

In a word she took me.

"I knowed you'd ax, William," she said; "I expected it a good bit sooner, that's all."

When the trap arrived, she was tidy and cool again and gentle as a child. All her fierceness and fire was gone and she said to me in a little quiet voice:

"Shall I go and unpack your box for 'e, Will?"

And I said:

"If you'll be so terrible kind, Mercy Jane."

With that I went out and give the chap from the "Seven Saints" threepence for hisself. By chance it was Mercy Jane's own elder brother.

"Have a drink, Saul Cardew," I said to him. "I'm sorry you've had your trouble for your pains, because I ban't going after all. Things have happened within the hour, Saul, and I shall bide along with my Uncle."

The next job was to tell Uncle Jack, and so far as that went nought could have fallen out more easy, and if I'd been a crafty man I could have managed better; because, such

was his great joy at hearing I'd changed my mind and meant to bide, that he forgave me for daring to want to be married. In fact he made nought of that.

"She's very near wife-old," he said, "and I only bargain that Mercy Jane and you shall stop at Journey's End until my dying day."

This we very willingly promised to do.

And then the love-making. What she didn't know about that weren't worth knowing, though many and many a time I wondered how such a busy woman found leisure to larn. But she was ripe at it, and she taught me my part and I done my best, though I didn't always please her. Her moods changed, like the sun on a cloud, and I was always a day behind the fair, you might say.

Us didn't sit 'pon gates no more listening to the owls hollering. Us went about, and I took her to a revel or two by train, and suchlike jinks. Then Uncle Jack, he got a bit restive and said that in his opinion the work of the farm was suffering inside the house and out, and that the sooner we was wed the better for his comfort.

We didn't want a second bidding, I promise you! The banns was up very next Sunday, and be gormed if, at the second time of axing out, young Huxtable from Upper Madron Farm didn't forbid 'em! He was Farmer Huxtable's son, a very blustering young man, accustomed to have his own way; but 'twas well known that he was weak in the understanding. They hustled him out and as he went he shouted: "Yoicks! Tally ho! Gone away! Mercy Jane's a vixen!" He kept it up in the church porch and 'twas a very sacrilegious business altogether.

I taxed Mercy Jane with it afterwards, but she swore to God she'd only talked to the young man twice in her life, and that was because he talked to her and wouldn't let her pass over a stile. Anyway, the poor fellow went from bad to worse and was shut up in an asylum, finally, and died there.

Upper Madron, I should tell you, was the farm next to my Uncle's, and Huxtable was owner. 'Twas at least ten times so big as Journey's End and a very prosperous place; but Huxtable had his skeleton in the cupboard, too, for he'd married a female with madness in

her family; though the fact had been hid from him very cunning by the woman and her relations, and not till his eldest son growed to twenty did the frightful thing appear. Never was such a sane man as Huxtable himself, however, and he'd watered the poison down a bit in his children; but there 'twas, and Neddy Huxtable began to grow wrong after twenty. It came out that he was very much set on my Mercy Jane and I've no doubt in my mind that he did offer for her and that, if he'd been all there, she'd have took him; because she was that sort of woman. But, of course, no self-respecting girl could marry a man with a screw loose. In fact, it didn't ought to be allowed; though Uncle Jack in his woman-hating way said that, in his judgement, no sane man ever did offer for a girl.

"'Tis always done in a moment of madness," said Uncle Jack, "and some people be mad for ever afterwards and never recover, and that's called a happy marriage; and some get over it again in a month, or a year, or two years, as the case may be; and that's the usual course of events."

But for all his harsh speeches he was very well pleased to have such a woman as Mercy Jane to keep house for him; and he gave her a ten-pound note for a wedding present, and he done the like for me.

We had the wit to know that the less difference our marriage made, the better for his comfort; and so we just wedded without a spark of fuss and we went to Plymouth for three days, by which time all the food that Mercy Jane had cooked for Uncle Jack was ate up; and then we come home again and went on with life just as if nothing had happened.

I called Mercy Jane "Mrs. Chirgwin" to the neighbours, and she called me "my husband", and that's the only difference outwardly that any could have marked.

As to her morning dip in Madron brook, I didn't tell her of my adventure till after we was wedded; and then she confessed that she'd gone to ax St. Madron to hurry me up a bit. And she believed very steadfast in the Saint for ever afterwards.

VI

Well, not to put too fine a point upon it, Mercy Jane ruled me. She was a woman of very strong character, and as she grew older, her strength became greater and she would be obeyed. The curious thing was that my Uncle suffered more from her than what I did. I loved her something tremendous and 'twas nought to me to fall in with her wishes and do her pleasure. Besides, such was her great cleverness, that very well I knew she was right and I was wrong, when we had a difference of opinion; and so it proved easy enough for me to give into her. But Uncle Jack couldn't see that she was a million times cleverer than him, and he got very unreasonable about her at times. He even went so far as to say I didn't know my place and was laying up a lot of trouble for us both in the future by being so easy.

"Come that woman's thirty year old, the terror that flieth by night will be a fool to her," said Uncle Jack. "I know the sort. She won't have no children, and she'll go

from strength to strength and play a lone hand against you and me; and a very poor look out it is."

"Not so," I said. "The woman is mine and she have a deal of sense and love, and she's scarce twenty year old yet; and I'm sure if I call to her memory what she promised in the Marriage Service, we shan't have another word."

And I did so, and I was very sorry to find she took the Service nothing like so serious as I had the right to expect.

"I was a thought young to marry," she said; "and I won't be sure, William, but I haven't made a bit of a mistake. You're not quite the man I thought you was—no man ever is what we think him, for that matter—and though you'm so strong as a bear, yet the strength do stop short afore it gets into your head, seemingly. In a word, you're rather a silly chap and I don't find you get no cleverer."

Well, who was I to deny it?

"Silly I am," I said. "And if you talk like that, Mercy Jane, I shall begin to think that the silliest thing of all was when I took you.

But brains or no brains, you know what I think of you and your will be law, and so what you've got to quarrel with be gormed if I know."

"'Tisn't you," she said. "You're all right, I dare say; but Uncle Jack gets on my nerves and I feel I want a bit of a change of air."

"Nerves!" I cried. "'Tis the first time I ever heard you name the word."

"I've got 'em, however," she declared. "I've got 'em, like any other female, and he gets on 'em, and I'm inclined to think afore we're a year older that I shall have had enough of it. Yes, my nature's calling out for a change."

You could have knocked me down with a breath.

"'Enough of it', Mercy Jane! Good powers, enough of what?" I axed her.

"Enough of messing about here, under his beck and call."

"You know you ban't under his beck and call," I said; "and you can't say you are—not if you want to be truthful."

"Call me a liar and have done with it," she answered back, and, galled as I was,

I couldn't help wondering how such a transformation could come over a young woman in the short space of a year and a half.

Mercy Jane was a girl of many ideas, and where she'd picked 'em up from I never found out; but I couldn't listen to 'em latterly without protesting. Not that protesting made any sort of difference. She wouldn't go to church after a while and that, of course, let the Devil have his chance with her; and then, when she began to say that she was thrown away at Journey's End, my Uncle Jack, he up and agreed with her very heartily, and advised her—for her own peace of mind and self-respect and pride—to look round and see if she couldn't better herself.

She said 'twas an idea long rooted in her own head and she'd see what could be done; but, of course, before we got to such sorrowful speeches as that, a good bit had happened and I was exceedingly startled to find out that though Mercy Jane hadn't much further use for me and Uncle Jack, yet other men interested her a lot.

"Be gormed if I don't think my wife begins

to grow a bit flighty!" I said to Uncle Jack one evening, when she was out. She'd gone to a penny reading with her sister Susie and Susie's young man. He was one of them wandering preachers and done very well at it owing to his great gifts.

"'Flighty?' I wish she was a bit more so and would take flight altogether," he said in his rough way.

"If I knowed what 'twas I do to spoil her, I'd surely try to alter it," I said; but my Uncle was in a very coarse mood and wouldn't hear of that. "You go on being what you are and, please the Lord, you'll sicken her and she'll sling her hook," he answered. "I don't want to speak a word beyond the truth about your wife," he continued, "but to keep well within the margin of facts, I reckon that marriage have utterly ruined her, and from being a busy, good-natured, useful and clever-cooking creature, she have turned into an idle, caddling, vain and selfish bitch. And if the word's hard, I don't care. She's always grumbling and always on the look out to pick up a better man than you; and I wish to God she'd find

him and be off, for life's going awry and I'm very tired of it."

"If she goes, I go," I told Uncle Jack.

"Don't you be a fool," he answered. "If she goes, it won't be on your arm, or by your leave either. She'll fly by night, as the saying is, and very likely take the spoons along with her. Yes, she'd sink to the spoons, if I know anything. Marriage have knocked all the little virtue out of her she ever had; and if you see her casting her eyes on anybody, for love of peace and comfort, don't you interfere but help her all you can."

I was shocked to hear a man getting well up in years say such Godless things as this. But Uncle Jack didn't seem to see how very painful 'twas for a husband's ear.

"I love the woman," I said; "and I'll leave no stone unturned to bring her to reason and repentance. 'Tis only the high spirits of youth," I said, "and I make little doubt that presently she'll calm down and find her true happiness with me."

"Of all fools I like least the hopeful ones," answered Uncle Jack. "You'm so solid and

tasteless as a 'tater, William—to say it not unkindly—and it grows to be a question in my mind whether you'll ever hold her, try as you may. She wants what you can't give."

But I wouldn't have that.

"You mustn't think I'm that sort of man," I told my Uncle. "I wouldn't hold her an hour against her will, and if she can find a chap as be likely to offer a sharper sauce to her life than what I can, then I hope she'll go to him and stop with him. And the quicker the better for all concerned but her soul. If she's looking for such a man," I said, "let her find him; but she will not."

Of course I spoke in my pride, well knowing she loved me with all her heart.

"And what would you do to such a man if he turns up?" asks my Uncle Jack. "I suppose you'd break every bone in his body, of course?"

"I shouldn't break his bones," I answered. "Far from it. I love Mercy Jane and always shall do; and if she finds another she can like better than me, then, for her sake and not for anybody else's, I should go to the man—not in a rage, but just peaceful and calm, and

tell him her likes and dislikes and how he'll do best to humour and manage her."

Uncle snorted a bit at that.

"You ban't the sort that makes history or gets into the papers seemingly—I'll say that much for you anyway, William," he allowed.

But little he knowed what was coming then.

"And I don't want to do so," I said; "I'm safe enough—I'm more to her than anybody else in the world. She loves me."

The very next night, however, I found Mercy Jane walking along with Michael Jago, the carpenter. And you couldn't say truthfully that they was just taking the air without shame, because he'd got his arm round her waist and she had her head on his shoulder.

Of course, they didn't expect to see me come out all of a sudden from behind a hayrick; but that's what I did do, and Michael looked very foolish, and Mercy Jane, she tried to make me look so, but failed. 'Twasn't at all fitting, I thought, and I told 'em so; and I reminded Michael that he was a Sunday School teacher and very well considered, beyond

his carpentering. I talked to 'em most serious about it, though I dare say it was a bit audacious of me, seeing Michael Jago was a good five year older than me and a much cleverer man; but I was lifted a bit above myself no doubt, and I took him to task very stern, and then I told him to go; and I bade Mercy Jane come home with me, which she did do, rather to my astonishment.

She was more saucy than sorry, however, and I felt a good bit niffed about it. Nor was it any use to tell Uncle Jack, because well I knew that, if he'd heard what was going on, he'd have run to Jago hot-foot and very likely promised him his custom to take the girl.

'Twas a curious case without a doubt, and though her vagaries begun to make me feel us would very soon see the beginning of the end, yet for my dear life I couldn't help feeling terrible proud that I'd catched and married a woman such a lot of men were running after. I explained that to Uncle Jack and he laughed his rather rare and nasty laugh.

"You'm damned easily pleased," he said.

VII

And so I let her go her way and see the world and the men in it; because at that age I was a thought vain if you'll believe me, and I used to think that after all she might contrast the other men with me and see that I was the sort not built to wear out. I loved her with all my heart and I wanted only for her to be joyful and to take the pleasures of being alive while still a girl.

I told her that, and she said 'twas the very thing that she wanted herself.

Her manner changed about that time and she grew comical-tempered and gived up singing round the house; and Uncle Jack was glad and I was sorry, because there can't be much on a body's mind if they sing at their work.

The end came like a thunderbolt and I may as well get to it, because there's nothing gained by delay.

On a night in summer I came home dog-tired, for we was saving our hay, and I called for Mercy Jane and she didn't answer.

"Where's my wife?" I asked Uncle Jack,

who was getting his own supper and in a terrible temper.

"The Devil knows where," he answered, little thinking how true was his words.

And then, weary as I was, I went into the village to seek her.

None of her friends hadn't seen her, so I tramped up to Jago's place, where he lived with his mother. The cottage was dark and silent, but I heard the sound of a female in distress, so I opened the door and went in the kitchen; and there was Mrs. Jago sitting by the fire with her apron over her head rocking about something terrible and weeping buckets.

My heart went out to such sorrow and I tried to comfort her.

"Why, whatever have happened?" I cried out, even forgetting Mercy Jane for the moment. "Don't tell me anything have overtook Michael?"

"Yes," she said, "a blasted, designing, wicked woman have overtook him; and he's runned away with her——"

She broke off, because the fire flickered up and she saw who 'twas she was telling to.

"'Tis your wife," she said, "and I'm glad

for you; but cruel sorry for Michael."

"My wife gone along with your son!" I cried. "Never, Mrs. Jago!"

"There's his letter, if you doubt it. 'Twas all planned in cold blood—by her for sartain. She's fixed him and stolen his sense and ruined his life. You'd better light a candle and read it."

I did so. I don't hold with reading another person's letters in a general way, but there are times when 'tis an allowable deed. So I struck a match and lit a candle and read Michael Jago's letter to his mother. 'Twas his point of view, of course, and I couldn't be expected to hold with it, though even in my misery I was surprised to see what good penmanship the man had.

MY DEAR MOTHER,

I am about to take rather an out of the way step and go off with William Chirgwin's wife. I feel that I shall never be happy again until I have done so, because we were made for one another and it would be a very foolish thing to keep apart and both live wretched any longer. She made

a terrible mistake when she married William. But she was little more than a child at the time and little knew the sort of man he was. She has tried for more than a year to understand him and she cannot do so. He is a very uncertain and devious man. He has secrets from her and she is too high-spirited to stand that. We are going to Plymouth until the storm has blown over, and then, as soon as William has divorced her, we shall come back and be married. Or we may be married at Plymouth and come back man and wife. I hope he will not be long. You know my head is screwed on the right way and that I look before I leap.

Mercy Jane and me were meant for each other in the most wonderful manner. We be wisht as winnards when apart. We think alike on every subject. We cannot live separate any longer. I hope William Chirgwin will be reasonable about it. We did not act hastily. We are not the least ashamed of what we have done.

We have no unkind feeling for William, or anybody. We shall write from Plymouth.

I remain your affectionate son,

MICHAEL JAGO.

I folded up the letter and gave it back to the man's mother.

"I've only got one thing to say," I told her. "I'm not the revengeful sort and don't bear malice or hatred or uncharitableness, nor nothing like that; but this I will say: I ban't going to the expense of a bill of divorcement for your son, Michael. Reason in all things, is my motto. They've done a very wicked thing and I don't care who hears me say so. To run away with a man's wife is clean outside religion and I'm not going to put my hand in my pocket to make things easier for 'em. I blush for 'em."

"Your best course will be to find another—at your age," she said.

Then she wanted a lot of information about Mercy Jane, and whether she was a good cook and mender, and whether she was good-tempered, and when I first began to feel she was looking

to another man for her consolations and so on; but, though civil, I wasn't in a very talkative humour just then. I explained that this had cast me down a good bit, owing to being so unexpected; then I advised the poor woman to put on her kettle and drink a dish of tea with a dash of brandy in it; and then I left her and went home.

"Well?" said Uncle Jack. He'd gone to bed and I went up to him in his room with the shocking news.

"Well? Where is she? Drownded, I hope!"

"Worse than drownded," I said. "She has sloked off with Michael Jago, the carpenter. I've just been having a tell with the man's mother. She's taking a very dark view of it."

"Gone!" said Uncle Jack.

"Gone to Plymouth," I told him, "and Mr. Jago—be damned if I'll call him 'Michael' any more—Mr. Jago have left word for me to get a bill of divorcement at my earliest convenience. 'Tis adding insult to injury, in my opinion."

"I should think you'd do that without being told to," said Uncle Jack. "Be rid of the wicked

baggage for ever first minute possible and——"

He broke off, having his human feelings like the rest of us, and tried to cheer me up.

"You look pretty chap-fallen," he said. "Of course, this be a painful thing for you, William, and nobody's more sorry than me; but you must try to think how much worse it might have been."

'Twas well meant—just one of them silly things we say to people in trouble; but for once my temper gave way, and I answered in heat.

"If you'll show me how it could have been worse, I'll thank you," I said, "for be shot if I can see what could be worse than for a man's lawful wife to run away from him with a carpenter."

"She might never have run away at all," said Uncle Jack. "But be that as 'twill, I don't expect you to see the glorious truth at such a moment. You must wait, my poor William, till the dust she've raised be laid a bit. Then you'll find that you grow more and more at peace with the world. You'll surprise yourself in a week to find how peaceful you are."

He sighed, but 'twas with relief, not sorrow.

"You go down house and eat up that rabbit pie and drink a good tot of spirits out of my bottle; and then you go off to bed," he advised.

Well, there wasn't anything else to do and I felt sinking, for appetite won't wait and the belly must be filled come joy or grief. So I ate and drank, and in the silence of night, after a good stiff drop of Uncle's gin, I ban't ashamed to say I wept.

'Twas so cruel lonesome to think of Uncle Jack sleeping upstairs in peace, and me all alone, deserted and forgotten by the creature I loved best in the world. I couldn't believe it. I expected every minute to see Mercy Jane come in and fling off her sun-bonnet. But she didn't come.

VIII

Next morning I went up to see Mrs. Jago and read her son's letter again. I couldn't see no more light in it, however, and 'twas rather fantastic to find the old woman seemed to think all the blame belonged to me.

"Why to God couldn't you keep a tighter hand over your wife?" she said. "Such a weak and feckless creature as you didn't ought to have had a wife. 'Tis all your fault—every bit—so far as I can see."

'Twas a new point of view to me, and I'm always ready and willing to look at a thing from all round it. But I couldn't honestly agree with Mrs. Jago; and I told her so.

"Ban't my way," I said, "to speak ill of people behind their backs, and I never have done it and never will; but I tell you, frankly, and I'd say it afore their faces just the same, that my wife and your son have done a very rash and wilful deed, and I'm thoroughly ashamed of them, and I can't see for my life what they think be going to come of it."

"Don't you divorce the wretch—that's all," said Mrs. Jago. "Then my Michael can't marry her."

That was another view again and I felt very unsettled in my mind, because if Mercy Jane weren't going to be wedded to the carpenter, it looked as if she'd drop out from the ranks of respectable people altogether. And that's

a very terrible thing to happen to any young and comely woman in her early twenties.

I was very much upset about it and when I went home it ran into my mind as the most extraordinary thing as had ever happened, that a man should have a father in the world and a wife in the world and both gone from him.

And then I slowly and horribly began to understand that Mercy Jane was properly off, with never so much as a letter to me to express shame, or to say "good-bye". Instead of getting better, it got worse. Everybody was very comforting, I'm sure, and most of them congratulated me on a merciful deliverance; but I couldn't feel that myself nohow, and I got a sort of dislike of Journey's End, and a kind of feeling to get away at any cost and go off into the world and distract my mind, if it could be done. I knowed the sea very well, being often down to Penzance; and now I got a sort of call to it and felt the only thing for me was to go out on the restless deep in hopes that 'twould blow my troubles away in course of time. And then Uncle Jack got nasty; because he thought he was going to settle down again

with me and a hideous old widow as he knew about. She was looking out for a home and her character was of the humble and meek kind. In fact, she had a modest way of thanking everybody for nothing, and even I felt there was no fear of being ruled by her. But my Uncle didn't want me to go and, in his rage, he went so far as to say something about altering his will. However, I'd reached a pitch of misery by then that I didn't want his money, or his farm, or anything. I just hungered to be on the rolling sea, for something told me that I could never get no peace till I left the land and turned my back upon Madron and my great misfortune.

'Twas all done like lightning, for men were badly wanted just about then, and in my young days they didn't ax many questions if a chap was stout and strong and likely to be useful. Anyway I got a job in a sailing ship that went back and forth between the West Indies and Penzance; and almost afore I grasped the great thing I'd done, I sailed in her and set out—a very mournful pattern of man—to begin my life anew.

Six very clever voyages we made and then we was wrecked in mid-ocean.

Shipwrecks be such common things that 'tis any odds you can't remember mine. It happened more than half a century ago, and it was a very complete and terrible affair. Yet never a cruise began better. We had fair winds half-across the Pacific and I saw the deep for the last time. I had concluded with myself by now that the life, though terrible hard, was good physic for such a sad man as me. The sailors were kind enough after they'd played off all their games on me. And one taught me the German concertina and I never forgot the precious art.

The Sea Urchin—my ship was called—a brigantine with fourteen hands. She was fast, but old, and nobody ever pretended she was a very sea-worthy craft. But I knew very little about that. It was three weeks afore we got any weather on our last voyage and we'd had very little afore, so I beginned to think the dangers of the deep was made too much of ashore—just to fright landsmen.

Only one thing I did to call any particular

attention to myself—and that was when poor Bright—the cook's mate—fell in the sea. He was standing talking to me and we give a lift and he got off his balance and was gone like a flash. 'Twas a terrible startling thing to see him one minute smoking his pipe and talking about his home at Shields, and the next to mark nought but his head—all mouth and eyes—poking up for a moment in the wake of the ship. Well, I lost my presence of mind. I bawled out, so as to be heard all over the ship:

"Here's Arthur Bright have falled in the sea!"

And then I jumped overboard to save him. But, in the heat of the moment, I clean forgot I couldn't swim, and not till I was in the water did I remember it.

A fair, clear day fortunately, though a sea running; but they dropped a boat and by God's goodness picked us both up in the nick of time.

The Old Man was very vexed about it and from that day onward he never would believe I had all my intellects; but Arthur Bright felt very much obliged to me for the friendly

thought, and we got to be pals after that. He had a wife and two childer at Shields and was very fond of them; and when I told him my story he took a kindly interest, but couldn't give me much hope. He advised for the bill of divorcement, however, because he said that if I didn't have that, my wife might come back on me any day and demand to be took in and fed and clothed.

"Your only chance is to let her be free to marry t'other chap," he said. "And if you want to pay him out and give him what he deserves, the sooner you do so the better."

But now that happened that put Mercy Jane out of my mind for many days.

I can't describe the storm, when it did come, because I ain't got no big words to do it in; but it growed wickeder and wickeder and we was soon all over the place without power to make sail, for half the canvas was blowed away. Then, with the cruel straining, the ship began to leak like a sieve, and 'twas pumps day and night for three nights and days. And then we knowed that the rotten vessel was going to sink and we must get out of her if we didn't

want to do the same. The weather was a little better—so Bright said—though I couldn't see no amendment and doubted how a boat would live an hour. But there wasn't any choice and the moment we stopped the pumps the water gained something terrible.

'Twas devil take the hindmost at the end; but we all got in the three boats and the first was swamped and a lot of good men drowned under our eyes; but the others swam and they wasn't out of sight of the wreck afore she went down.

I wish I could tell it all in fine language, I'm sure. I only know we was thrown about like a straw over hugeous gert waves and slapped down into a regular pit of black water one moment, and rolled up mountains high the next. For three hours 'twas just a bit of luck whether we was swamped or no; but 'twasn't to be, and afore night the sea began to go down. One man we lost overboard and one broke his leg. And in the morning, much to our horror, we found as he'd finished himself under the darkness and cut his throat. Taken from the evil to come, poor creature. He seemed to

know what was in store and reckoned to get out of it. And he was right, for it wanted a tolerable strong man to come alive through what was waiting for us.

We throwed him overboard and that brought our company down to five. 'Twas the smallest boat of the three we'd got; but there was enough food to last a bit, and so much the more because two of us was gone.

In fact, such is the amazing power of human nature to put a bold face on life and hope against hope, that some of us was cheerful as crickets before another night fell. We ate and drank and rested, and the rest was the thing that did us most good, for we'd not known rest these many days.

The second mate was our skipper, but he didn't know too much in the way of navigation, and hadn't an idea where we might be.

'Twas a pity we didn't know, because it meant life or death; and yet again it was a good thing we didn't know, because if we had known that we was blown out of the track of ships, that would have been so good as knowing we was dead men. We began in great hope, as

I tell you, and hope only got low with the victuals. Like hawks for a sail! But no sail came. Then we began to lose heart, and then you could gradually see what stuff we were really made of.

Things beginned to get very painful and horrid then, and I idden going to live over them cruel, ugly days again. 'Tis enough to say that a man called Thornton went mad and died, and some of us wanted to fling him overboard, and some of us didn't. But I was the strongest among 'em from the first and there was one more ration of water all round when Thornton died; so I said:

"Us'll put him in the sea, neighbours, and hope on and leave it in Higher Hands."

Two days passed and 'twas one must give his life for the rest at last. I was the youngest, and I'd got the most strength, and I could still talk; but none else had any voice left but me. And the second mate got four buttons and one was black.

Then—well, 'twas nothing at all, but I felt it wouldn't become me to draw a button against older men. They were all of 'em married, too,

and take it one way and another I knowed it was my duty to give up my life for 'em. I never will allow 'twas anything at all to offer it, for what had I to live for? Anybody would have said I was the right one to go. And so I said:

"Hark to me, boys; us won't have none of this drawing of buttons. I'm the one to be off, and I'm the youngest, and there's a bit more on me than any of you."

They whispered and refused, and the second mate said we must draw, but I was stronger than the lot of 'em put together and refused to draw. I took the buttons from his shaking hand and flinged 'em overboard.

"The night be coming," I said, "and we can lick the dew till sun-up; and then if there's nought in sight, I'll go."

I knew what the poor devils wanted was drink, and I planned it all very clever, so as not a drop o' blood should be wasted. I'd got a pannikin ready.

But ban't no need to torment your soft hearts with all that. We groaned through the night somehow and I'll swear they wasn't more

hungry for day to come than I was; but with light the longed-for thing appeared—not a mile distant neither. A steamer 'twas; and if she'd passed an hour sooner she'd never have seen us.

They took us aboard and one poor man he died afore night. But the rest of us survived it.

The ship was bound for Europe and we were all landed at Genoa in Italy, and sent home from there.

IX

When I read the last chapter to my friend, Jimmy Lanine, the policeman, he was very cross and thought that I'd wasted my chance and spoilt all.

"'Tis the greatest and rarest thing that ever happened to you," he said, "and you tell it like a schoolboy, as if 'twas a matter of no account. It might be no more than going for a walk after Sunday dinner. If I was you I should write it all out again and make a great deal more of it. You leave out the most

interesting matter of all to the thinking mind. And that is what your feelings were on that terrible night when you was waiting for the sun to rise on your death. How was you going to slay yourself and what did you think upon during them last hours?"

But I wouldn't go into the affair with Lanine. In fact I just shut him up.

"'Tis past and over, and I won't speak of it to you or any man," I said. "A great deal too much was made of it at the time, and there wasn't any credit to me at all. Death, when you've been through all the worst part of starvation, is a friend, not an enemy, and I can solemnly assure you, James, that 'twas with thankfulness and not dread that I met the morn that day."

So we left it at that and now I must push on with what happened after.

When I got home, I went to Madron straight and come in upon Uncle Jack one evening. Little or nothing was known of the wreck till a week later, but Uncle met me very friendly and was a good bit interested in my adventures. I told him all that was needful to be told

and he asked when I should be sailing again.

'Twas his fun, of course, for he'd seen by my manner before that, that I was a good bit disappointed with the sea.

"I always thought that them adventures we read about was too exciting to be true," I told him, "but 'tisn't so. Wonderful things do happen on the deep and I've tasted 'em on my seventh voyage; and, God willing, I've had enough. Never, never again," I told Uncle Jack, "will I willingly set foot upon a ship. I've seen death and I've felt it, and many years be took off my life, no doubt. And, in a word, I won't go back. I'm here to do your bidding, and if you want me, say so, and if not, I'll look round and see if I can pick up a job."

"I shall be very glad for you to stay along with me," said Uncle Jack.

I'd been from home but two years; but a good few things had happed to other people besides me. There was a lot of news, of course.

"Michael Jago's home again. He came back just after you sailed two years ago," began my Uncle.

I stared. Then it all came back in a cruel wave over my brain.

"And her?" I asked.

"No," he said. "Michael's back alone. I dare say you'll be a bit interested to hear him on the subject of Mercy Jane. He's like me now—no more females for him. A bachelor he'll be."

"Where's she to?" I asked; but he didn't know that.

"The less you inquire, the better for your peace of mind," he told me.

But the thought of my beautiful Mercy Jane at the world's will—a homeless, roaming, forlorn thing—pretty well tore my heartstrings out. The best I could think to do was to go and see Michael; and so I did the very morning after I came back to Journey's End.

He wasn't home when I called, but his mother was and she seemed pretty cheerful and contented again.

"You'll find him in the shop," she said. "He's a reformed character, Mr. Chirgwin. A cruel lesson he's had, but 'twasn't in vain."

So I went down to the shop and Michael knocked off work for half an hour and lit his pipe and talked.

I gathered from his speech that he was still a good bit annoyed with Mercy Jane, despite the time that had passed.

"Once for all," he said, "I'll give you credit for innocence in the matter. But had you been a more crafty build of man, I should have guessed the whole thing was your doing and that you'd planted her on me."

"How can you dare to say so?" I asked, and he answered that he had long ago reached a pitch in the matter of my wife when he'd dare to say anything.

"A fortnight," he said. "A fortnight was all the time I spent with her, and at the end of thirteen days she'd cost me thirty-eight pounds! That's what she is. I stood it pretty well at first; but towards the end of the time I began to lose myself. We expected to hear from you that you'd divorced her, and we looked in the paper every morning and saw nought about it; and then my mother wrote and told me you'd gone to sea and done nothing.

"Then Mercy Jane began to give me a taste of her quality. We was residing in rooms, but we spent most of our time at a little place of refreshment and at the theatre of an evening. And we made a few friends. Well, I was for coming home and facing the music; but she liked Plymouth and the theatre and the Godless life, and when my money ran out, she showed a changed spirit.

"She cooled off me something shameful. She hadn't a good word for Madron and thought as we'd better settle in a city. Then, when I felt 'twas time to assert myself and did so, the end came like a bolt from the blue. In a word, William, she left me for a publican's son! And this I will tell you, that a more reckless, brazen creature never walked the earth."

"Steady, Michael!" I said. "Remember you'm talking to the woman's husband."

That cut him short and he seemed rather surprised at the line I took.

"Sorry, I'm sure," he said. "Perhaps I'm judging her a bit hard. If you can forgive her, who am I to be angry? She's an amazing

piece, without a doubt. And if you feel it's only a lark——"

"No," I said. "You mustn't think I'm looking at this in too light a spirit, Michael. I'm a good bit vexed about it still, and I wish very heartily she'd been a different kind of woman; but since I saw you, things have happened to me also and there's nothing like sailing the sea for correcting your opinions and making you larger-minded."

Then I told him what had happened to me, and he wouldn't believe it.

"You've read it in a book," he said.

"If I have, 'tis the book of life," I answered.

Then we talked a lot more, and the upshot was that I gathered he'd quite got over his feeling for Mercy Jane. In fact his love had turned to hate, which I was sorry to see, and I told him that the loss of his thirty-eight pound, though a heavy item, oughtn't to make him feel like that to any fellow creature.

"You must understand," I said, "that women be sometimes built to change their minds. 'Tisn't their fault, 'tis their character by the will of their Maker. Mercy Jane was

fond of me once; and a better wife, for a year or so, no man need wish. Then she got fond of you. By all accounts her feeling for you didn't last so long; but there again, who can tell? There may have been that in your character that vexed her. She hated nearness always and in my case the trouble never cropped up, because I had nought but ten shilling a week from Uncle Jack, which I handed over to her as a matter of course; but in your case—a money-making man like you—perhaps she hoped for better things. Perhaps you pulled the long bow a bit and led her to think——?"

But there Michael Jago cut me short, and lost his temper.

"I don't want no more of it," he said. "'Tis a very nice thing for you to come to me and tell me that I didn't treat her proper! Damn the little cat—a heartless, greedy, selfish wretch. Not another word will I hear about her. Women be all alike, and I've done with 'em for ever more."

The interesting thing about that was that he kept his word till he was well into middle life. Then his mother died and left him

helpless, and he wedded Mr. Curnow's sister—a very nice spinster woman, so tame as a dormouse. And she made him a good wife.

X

Now that I was back on the scenes of my wedded life again I couldn't get Mercy Jane out of my mind nohow; but then that happened to distract my thoughts a good bit and, much to my surprise and inconvenience, I found myself in the public eye. Them sailors got talking about their adventures in London and making a lot of fuss. And then my name came out, and be gormed if the newspapers didn't think the thing was interesting enough to print, and one of the seamen had a tell with a writing chap and there was three columns in a London news-sheet and most of it was copied next day into the Cornish papers, especially the *Penzance Trumpet*!

Of course, when it got into that, the murder was out and high and low knowed about it, though why, because a few poor sailor-men

come within an inch of being starved to death on the high seas, such a flare-up should be made, I never could tell. As I said to Joe Tregenza, the shoemaker:

"If there'd only been another few hours of it, I should have died for 'em, and very like 'twould only have been keeping the wolf from the door a few more days, and then they'd have perished also and none any the wiser but the Almighty. Many and many such a scene His Holy Eye must have looked down upon."

"No doubt," allowed Joe, "but the fact remains that you was saved by the skin of your teeth, and so the brave thing you meant to do have been told by the other fellows; and, whether or no, 'tis better to be praised than slaughtered and better to be feasted than fed upon."

Joe Tregenza was a practical man I will allow, and what he said was true; and as to being feasted, that was true also, because when it got out that I had meant kindly by my pals in the boat, the people seemed to be pleased with me and thought I'd showed a proper spirit.

For such was the amazing goodwill and kindness and generosity of folk—high and low—that nothing would do but they gathered a bit of money for me and gave me a public feast!

'Twas a terrible anxious time, for I couldn't go out of the house but people wanted to shake hands, or some such nonsense.

And very interesting, in its way, to see how friendly the world can be if it thinks a chap have done his duty. To do that, seemingly, be quite enough in these slack-twisted times to make you a marked man. And then the Mayor of Penzance must needs send for me and break it to me that the purse would be presented by the gentleman what hoped to get in Parliament in the Conservative interest at the next General Election; and I was to make a speech!

With that I fairly took fright and told the Mayor openly that I'd sooner go without the purse, or the feast either, if I was expected to say anything. But he was a Mayor and to him the power of standing up and talking in company was given. He said there was no difficulty and I'd only got to put it in my own words. He threw out great hopes about the subscription

and said it would run into three figures; so that cheered me up, of course.

Uncle Jack was pleased in his acid way with the turn things had taken, but there was a fault he'd got, and that was, never to give people credit for high motives in what they did, and I'd often feel a good bit surprised how he looked at the black side of human nature. In fact, I can't honestly say that he trusted anybody till he found he could; whereas my way was to trust everybody till I found I couldn't. But you grow out of that.

He said:

"There's a dark side to all this and I'll tell you what 'tis. If you'd just kept a labouring man and gone on your way shifting muck and sowing mangel and ploughing the earth in due season and all the rest of it, nobody would have cared a clod of earth about you; but now that you've risen to be a curiosity and there's money being got—well, you mark my words: the first thing that'll happen will be you'll have Mercy Jane on your hands again; and the next thing will be that your father will turn up, if he's still alive. They'll see it in

the papers and swoop down like a pair of Kriss-hawks!"

'Twas a very startling idea.

"I shouldn't know the man if I saw him," I said. "I was but ten when he went off."

"I should know him, however," answered Uncle Jack, "and if you'll take my advice you'll have nought to do with him. He'll only come for what he can get."

"I hope he'll be proud of me, poor man," I answered. "For mother's sake I should try to be of some good to him if he was to appear."

"A lot your mother had to thank him for—the drunken rogue," snapped back my Uncle. "All the same," he continued, "I'd sooner he was to come than your wife. And this I'll say now, and you remember it: she don't darken these doors—never again."

I asked him about the speech, and he advised me to write it and larn it by heart. Which seemed a very wise thought. And I bought a pennyworth of paper and wrote down the affair in as few words as I could. But it didn't seem to go very suent, and the night afore the feast I lost the paper after all.

What I did say surprised me, for next morning, come to read the news, it all ran beautiful and straight in print, though at the time, what with clearing my throat and catching my breath and a bit of a choke and laughing at a waiter who let off a cork and nearly catched his worship the Mayor in the eye—what with these things I didn't appear to be making a very clever speech at the time.

However, we began with "The Queen", and then "One and All", and the good old Cornish toast "Fish, Tin and Copper"; and then they came to me, and the gentleman as hoped to get in for the Conservatives was a wonderful tonguer and he told the whole story of the storm and the waves and the thunder and lightning in such a way that I could hardly credit he hadn't been there hisself. And then the thirst and starvation and the rest—why, he made me live it all over again and, though I'd just let down the best dinner I'd ever ate in my life (or ever have ate since) yet the harrowing way he talked made me hungry and thirsty again, to hear him. And then he come to me and—oh my dear life! I didn't know where to

look. However, it finished and I was going to drink my own health with the rest, but my neighbour pulled me back in my seat and Uncle Jack, who went along with me to give me courage, he pulled t'other side and down I went and no harm done.

Then come the purse, which took the form of a cheque, though I'd rather have had the money. But it stood good for two hundred and twenty pound, which was the main thing about it, and 'twas explained to me I must write my name on the back and they'd let me have the money at the bank without a question. 'Twas Bolitho's Bank, too, so I knowed 'twas all right and straight.

Well, a good few friends seen me and Uncle Jack back to Madron when 'twas all over, and be gormed if I know which was furthest gone, me or Uncle. I'd took quarts without a doubt, and not knowing the strength and never tasting champagne afore, I thought 'twas just a company drink and no more clogging to the brain than cider. But it mounted like spirits, and I had a cruel head on me next morning; and Uncle Jack didn't get up at all

but kept his chamber and said as 'twas some pink jelly he'd ate.

"I knowed 'twas bad for me when I let it down," he said. "And 'tis working in me and may be my death afore the day's out."

But he was all right the next morning and we thought upon the money and I surprised him with my ideas.

He reckoned as I'd just leave it where it was to goody; but I said I should do no such thing. In fact, my mind was made up.

"I be going to take over 'The Dog and Gun'," I told my Uncle. "'Tis a very good little public-house for the tinners, and Jetho Martin's widow leaves next week, and I've talked to the brewers to Penzance this very morning, and they be quite agreeable."

"What do you know about a pub. except how to drink in it?" he asked; but I wouldn't be daunted and, to cut a long story short, I took it and in a week from that day, twenty-five pounds of my money was spent and I'd started as landlord of "The Dog and Gun". 'Twas a very little place and the custom was mostly miners from up over. But I knew

Martin had made his living there for a matter of ten year, and I didn't see why for I shouldn't.

So I went at it with the help of a young fellow from Penzance—a potman out of a job. I only took him on for a week, however, because in that time I felt I should be equal to the task myself.

And then if Mercy Jane didn't come back! She looked a bit stouter, and for the rest I never seed her in better trim. She walked in the bar, and the potman, as didn't know her, come in the parlour behind, where I lived to now, and said there was a young lady as wanted to see me.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Chirgwin," said she long afore I could open my mouth. "I'm very wishful to have a few words with you in private if you can spare me the time."

I kept my senses and asked her to come in the kitchen, where we should be private. And when we got there I locked the door so as we shouldn't be interrupted.

I quickly saw she wasn't quite sure of her welcome when I asked her what she'd come for.

"I'll tell you," she said. "and I know the

gentleman you are, William, and I know you'll listen patiently. You're famous now and England have been ringing with your name and, somehow, when I got to hear about it, I felt I must just tell you how my heart burned with pride to think 'twas my husband had done such a noble deed. Then I remembered that I'd lost you and I cried rivers. I can't tell you why I left you, William; I can only say that the moment I was gone I longed to be back again. And you may believe it or not as you please, but I'm a contrite woman, and I don't much want to live no more, and I've only just come to say farewell to you and hear your voice once again afore I make a hole in the water."

Still I kept firm, though she was weeping now.

"What have you been up to?" I asked her.

"I've got no secrets from you," she said. "When that wicked rascal—Jago, I mean—when he left me, I didn't know where to turn and was too ashamed to come back. But after some terrible trials, though nought to yours, I managed to get a little sewing and I've been keeping myself ever since with my needle. I've

been sewing for a shop eighteen hours a day, and if I look ill, that's the cause of it."

"Can't say you do," I answered. "In fact you never looked better."

"'Tis the excitement at seeing you," she assured me.

"And what do you want now?" I asked her.

"Your forgiveness," she said. "I can't go into the next world without it. I'm young to die, but I can't live no more. I can't be a hindrance to you. I suppose you haven't divorced me, or I should have heard tell about it; but I shall divorce myself by death. And then you'll be free to marry again. And I hope you'll find a far better woman than what I've been to you."

"Answer one thing," I bade her. "Why for did you go?"

"To relieve you," she said. "It came upon me that I was only a tax and a hindrance. I thought if I was to go, you might rid yourself of me, and then look round and find a woman with a bit of money to help you in the world. I knew that with your great parts you was bound to make your mark sooner or late. And, be it

as it will, I only left you for love of you. And I don't suppose you'll believe it; but so it is."

Her glass-grey eyes was all wetted with tears and shone like lamps, and her gloves had got wet, too, so as I could see the pink of her little hands through 'em.

"Where's your wedding ring to?" I asked her very sternly.

She fetched it out of her pocket. 'Twas tied to a bunch of three keys.

" 'Tis here," she said, "I've brought it back to you."

"Why for didn't you write when you went away?"

"I hadn't the heart. I couldn't tell you I was leaving you for love of you, because right well I knowed you'd have talked it over with Uncle Jack and he'd have made you think 'twas false."

"And what happened to you after Michael comed home?"

She looked at me doubtful-like.

"Nought worth naming," she said. "I only know that for years I've lived in one room on my sewing; and I won't keep you no more from your business more than to say I'm

thankful you've risen to such great things. And try to think of me sometimes, William. I'm a poor, weak, feeble creature; but when you feel your manhood rise against me, remember that I was responsible for all your good luck after all. Because if I hadn't run away, you never would have left Journey's End, and if you hadn't done that, you couldn't have had your amazing adventures and offered your life for other men and growed to be the most famous hero that was ever reared in Madron."

Then I surprised her—at least she appeared to be surprised; but looking back I ban't too sure she was. In fact, Mercy Jane knowed me inside out, and always had done.

"Take off your gloves," I commanded her; and she obeyed. I couldn't see as her fingers were much needle-marked, but I let that pass. I let everything pass. I wanted her. I hungered after her like I'd thirsted after cold water in the boat. My hand shook, I couldn't speak. My knees shook under me. I had just strength of mind to put the ring back on the right finger and then I took her in my arms and crushed her up against me till her stays cracked.

So she came home, and along with her the custom improved and things seemed almost too good for this world for a full six months. She settled down like a bird in its nest. She went to church of a Sunday, and seemed a changed creature. As a barmaid you couldn't have wished for a cleverer woman, and she fairly surprised me with the amount she knew about liquor. But never would she take more than her two glasses of brown sherry wine at supper.

All went merry as a marriage bell with us, I'm sure, till a great misfortune overtook us, and but for that I shall always say that Mercy Jane would never have left me no more.

XI

I can't say that Mercy Jane and me made money, but for quite a good bit we didn't lose much and I shall always think that, given time and a bit of luck, we might have done very well. But that happened that interfered a good bit

with profits and, even before the crash came, my wife and me didn't always agree about the way to run the bar. I had a silly trick of giving poor people a drink free, gratis, and for nothing, and of course 'tis a very bad habit for a publican to get into; because it comes to be known among a certain class of wandering men. They tell one another from the kindness of their hearts, for there's great sympathy among the tramps; and if you get a name among them, it soon travels; and it's something marvellous the distance an idle man will walk for free drinks. So they'd come in, footsore and worn out with not a halfpenny piece in their rags; and they'd stop and talk and tell their adventures and listen to mine; and beer would go without anything to show for it in the till.

Mercy Jane said 'twas wrong and I couldn't deny it and tried to behave better. Then all went to rack in a very unexpected and painful manner.

A middle-aged party came into the bar one afternoon and found me alone there. He was clearly an unsuccessful sort of man and from force of habit I was going to draw him half a

pint; but I remembered Mercy Jane and waited.

He asked for liquor and looked terrible hard at me. Then he fetched out a red cotton handkerchief and began mopping his eyes. He was greyish, with an underhung jaw that had a week's growth of hair on it. His eyes was blue and hard as a jackdaw's, and his nose was a drinker's.

"Let's see your money, mate," I said. "We have rather too many of your sort this way."

"You won't charge me when you know who I am," he answered. "In a word, William Chirgwin, I'm your poor father!"

"Father!" I cried out.

"God's my judge, and if you don't believe it, your Uncle Jack will prove it to you. 'Twas quite by accident I heard a bit ago of your wonderful deliverance from death, and I said: 'Before I die I'll shake his hand and give him a parent's blessing'."

He was very much upset, but he kept talking and, from having my doubts, he soon proved to me that he was what he said. He went over the past, and talked about mother, and was so much cast down over her sad end that I had to comfort him.

"Bear up," I said. "'Tis no good dwelling on the past now."

But he would do it.

"I must," he answered. "I must confess and then I shall die easier. My conscience is working in me and I want you to forgive me afore I go."

'Twas the return of the prodigal father you might say; and I felt it, naturally, for I could see there was a lot of good in the poor man still.

"I want to go and meet your mother in a better land and make it up with her," he declared. "You'd best to give me a drop of brandy, for I'm feeling very fainty. This meeting be almost too much for me."

I got him to drink and then he put his grey head down on his hands and cried like a child; and my heart went out to the man to think that, after all his wickedness, the Lord hadn't forgot him and had touched his sin-worn heart and brought him to see his duty at last.

He rose presently and said that now he could depart in peace; but who was I to let my own father go a beggar into the world?

"No," I said. "You may not have been a

pattern parent to me, father; but life is life and a very difficult thing, as none knows better than me; and I won't let you go while I can do anything for you."

"What can you do?" he asked. "I suppose you are only the potman here at a few shillings a week?"

But I explained that I was landlord, and, of course, he was struck with amazement.

"If I'd known you'd risen to such a high place, I'd never have dared to come afore you," he said. "I'm one of the failures, I am. Everything have gone wrong with me, along of having no book larning. You'd better let me be gone, William. None will know 'twas your father. And always remember this: no man was ever prouder of his boy than I am—though I'm unworthy to have such a wonder of a son."

He wept again and I couldn't stand it, and said that he must put himself in my power, and I'd see if I could improve his health and fit him for regular work again, after he'd had a bit of a rest and plenty of wholesome food. And if he didn't go down on his knees in the bar and

kiss my hand! 'Twas only by God's goodness nobody came in till I'd lifted him up, and then I gave him a drop more brandy and a biscuit and tried to cheer his broken spirit.

Well, he stopped. He was terrible humble and grateful for a week; and then he cheered up; and then, slowly but surely, a change came over him. In a word, though I'm not forgetting my duty to my own father's memory, it can't be denied that the man had his faults. He wasn't so easy to please as you might think, and he got giving me a lot of advice about the public-house that Mercy Jane didn't hold with.

He was particular about his food, too, though in the matter of drink anybody could please him, because he wanted nought but brandy. He ran into a lot of brandy without a doubt; but a father is a father, as I said to Mercy Jane and Uncle Jack.

My Uncle, he took a very dark view of it, and only saw father once to make sure 'twas him and not an imposter.

"You be sure 'tis my parent, Uncle Jack?" I asked him.

"Yes," he said. "That's George Chirgwin. 'Where the carcase is, there will be the eagles gathered together'. He'll drain you like a leech, if he don't die afore he's cleared you out. But he's pretty far gone and if you be going to keep the bottle open always, he may float away on brandy yet afore all your money does."

'Twas a harsh way to talk of his own brother; but Uncle Jack had a hard heart in some things.

My father forgived him, however, for with all his faults he had a forgiving nature. He settled down with me and pretty well lived in the bar, and the generosity of the man was another good quality in him, for he loved to stand drinks. Once in a thoughtless moment I asked him to pay, after he'd gived some tinners half a bottle of gin on a cold winter morning; and he broke down again, and put his old grey head in his hands; and between his tears he reminded me that he didn't own a penny piece in the world.

"I'm at your mercy, my son," he said. "I'm like an old faithful dog as have done his best but ban't useful no more. And if you can't do with me, I'll pack my fardel and be gone. It

shall never be said as I come between my only son and his happiness and prosperity."

Well, I apologized to the man and cheered him up and promised him that a time would come when he would be well and strong again and ready to make his own living once more. But he doubted it. He said his constitution was gone, along of sleeping in damp hayricks and going too lightly clad. He was very full of the trials he'd been through, and when strangers would come in and ask to hear my adventures, father, as had his regular corner by the bar now, would begin about himself and talk by the hour.

Somehow he didn't hit it off with Mercy Jane from the first. She can be so soft-hearted as any woman when she pleases; but my dear father rubbed her up the wrong way something terrible; and I stuck up for him and tried to make her see that he was an invalid and must be humoured; and she said I was a fool and that the money was going and that afore I could look round 'twould have gone.

There wasn't much daughterly feeling about Mercy Jane to my father; and yet to her own

family, the Penroses, she was as good a daughter as you please. In fact, she spent as much time along with her stepfather and mother as with me latterly.

And then I could see, by certain signs, that life was beginning to fret Mercy Jane once more. She never could stand the steady drag of the working-day world and, what with father's health getting worse instead of better, and money growing a little tight and one thing and another, she began to get very silent and down-daunted.

I catched her crying twice and tried very valiant to cheer her and asked her what was amiss; and she said she'd got a terrible craving on her to go back up to Plymouth and do a little more sewing.

"'Twill ease your burden, Will," she said, "and 'twill be a bit of a change of air for me. There's something in the peace and quiet of Plymouth after this noisy place," she said, "that do me a power of good. And, in a word, I feel I must go; I'm sorry; but go I must."

I was very much annoyed and even spoke harshly to her. I thought 'twas a very

unwifely idea and allowed myself to doubt her motives. And finally I exercised my authority as her husband and forbade it once for all.

She cried bitterly all that night and all next day; then I happened to be called to sit on the inquest of poor Saul Preedy, as was blowed to death in a stone quarry hard by Madron. There wasn't a bit bigger than a walnut for us to sit on, but the law had to be obeyed.

And then I went home and found father had had one of his attacks. In truth, he was rolling about in the sawdust on the bar floor with a customer or two trying to undo his shirt collar. And, on shouting for Mercy Jane, I received no reply.

In a word, she was off. I looked for a letter for a month, but none came. 'Twas a great and undeserved blow, and yet I got no sympathy from a soul.

"'Tis the ruling passion for change," I tried to explain to the people. "Us can't help our characters. There's gipsy blood in her mother, and so all's said."

They thought I ought to inquire after her, and I was considering of the matter when poor father's illness gained upon him and I had to

put my duty as a son afore all else. He was an impatient sufferer along of his bad education; and he turned against me at the last, because I would obey doctor's orders and keep him down to half a bottle of brandy a day. God, He knows I didn't do it from any mean motive; but only in hope to cure poor father. But Providence was against me in that matter; and the man had his way about the brandy and Nature wouldn't be denied in consequence.

XII

Poor father seemed to know to a farthing when all my money was gone; and then he died. 'Twas drink that killed him and the doctor said if he'd had as much liver as would have covered a five-shilling piece, he might have saved him; but 'twas all used up. He was shrivelled to a mere natomy at the finish and he used bad language to the last. In fact, 'tis idle to say the poor man made a good end in this world, though I'm sure I hope he made a better beginning in the next. 'Twas just

a case for the mercy of God, and I've very little doubt that the charity of Heaven will cover poor father. I was the only person in the world that mourned at the funeral, though I begged Uncle Jack to come. 'Twas slottery weather when he went under, and I couldn't help thinking in my curious way that there was a lot more water in the grave than poor father would have liked. A very unkid funeral, and I felt it a lot.

Then there arose the question what was I going to do.

My money was spent and, with my usual good luck in small things, my lease of "The Dog and Gun" was just running out at the same moment. So taking one chance with another I felt 'twas time I made a new start in the world.

Nobody seemed to be wanting a hand for the minute, but Uncle Jack could always do with me. The kindness of that man was something amazing, and to this day I never pass his picture without blessing him. Like one of they baboon monkeys he was to look at. Hair-pitched*, but a good crop of whisker especially under his chin. A fighting mouth he had with

*Hair-pitched. Bald.

fine yellow false teeth in it, and eyes of a dark brown.

And now that I found myself back once more at Journey's End, I might tell you a bit about it. A horny-winky place most people thought, wi' the moors rolling out beyond. Not far from the famous wishing well of St. Madron, as I've told about, and our land was pretty middling, what there was of it, and the house was terrible ancient with walls four foot thick. The stairs was of stone, and they rose up from the kitchen into Uncle Jack's bedroom over; and there was three more rooms, too, all of which opened into each other and into Uncle Jack's. An old-fashioned place, but they didn't know better in them days and, whether or no, it answered very well for such as us. Then, besides the kitchen, on the ground floor was a dairy and wash-up; and 'pon each side of the front door stood a very nice chamber, though both damp and smelling of toadstools, along of being so little used. In Mercy Jane's reign they was all right, and sweet and fit for company; but after she went the first time, Uncle Jack and me had no use for 'em and they got a thought

mouldy and out of order. Then there was a cow-byre and a good stable for five horses, though Uncle Jack never kept no more than two.

So I settled to the land again and all went very well, though I missed my wife a good bit.

And then Farmer Huxtable died and his son—not the one weak in the head, but the eldest that followed after at Upper Madron Farm—he cast a greedy eye over Journey's End. And none could blame the man for that, because, you see, Journey's End ran like a slice of cake into his property. And if he could have had my Uncle's farm and land, he might have put a ring fence around his place and got it all so nice and regular and compact as you please. He'd have had other arable land three parts round him and the moors to the north.

And he comed to us one Sunday to tell about the idea. He looked to be an active and civil spoken man of forty or thereabout, and he comed in very cheerful to find Uncle Jack asleep beside the kitchen fire and me sitting playing my German concertina t'other side. 'Twas an art I'd managed to larn at sea from a poor fellow as lost his life at the wreck, and I'd gived myself

a very fine instrument and generally played for five or six hours of a Sunday. And I was often asked to a rally of neighbours just on account of it, because, being a patient man, I would sit by the hour and play for the people while they danced. Uncle Jack liked it after dinner Sundays; it put him to sleep: but now he had to wake up and get in his coat and do up his waistcoat also.

Gregory Huxtable didn't waste time and more didn't Uncle. He wasn't properly awake, or he wouldn't have been so terrible rude; but as it was I felt a good deal hurt for the younger man, because he had begun by being very civil, and there wasn't any harm that I could see in asking Uncle Jack if he'd make a price for Journey's End. But my Uncle couldn't have been shorter if the man had offered to cut his throat.

"Sell my house and home!" begins Uncle. "Why, where's your manners? 'Tis enough to make your father turn in his grave. What would you say if I come forcing myself in on you —on the Lord's Day too—and axed you to sell Upper Madron?"

'Twas a little bit of hypocrisy for my Uncle to

drag in the Lord's Day like that, because at other times in his natural state, he always made it a vain boast that he hadn't been in a church since he was christened. Not an unbelieving old man, you might say; but never one to neighbour in the Lord's House. But now he was ready to find any stick to beat the dog.

"You may buy Upper Madron and welcome if you can pay for it," answers Gregory Huxtable. He'd gone a bit red in the face and his black eyes flashed. "But as I don't suppose you want my place and I do happen to want yours—there 'tis. Everything have got its price, so perhaps you'll tell me what's yours for Journey's End?"

"I ban't going to sell it—not for no money," answered Uncle, "and I think it a very improper and outrageous thing for you to come and ax me for it, so now then!"

T'other got up and prepared to take his leave.

"As you please," he said; "but you mark this: sooner or later I shall have Journey's End. I be set upon it firm as a rock, and 'twill take a stronger man than you to turn me from my purpose."

Then he left and I reproved my Uncle; but he took a very crooked view of the whole matter in my opinion and couldn't see for the life of him that he'd made trouble. 'Twas one of his pig-headed days; but I knew him well enough to feel sure that, once he'd said it, he'd never change no more.

And he never did. The incident passed off and I shouldn't have set it down here, because it don't show Uncle Jack at his best, but it have got to be named owing to what come out of it long afterwards. So please to remember it.

XIII

And now I reach a mighty queer happening. A year had passed me by and very near another, and then there slowly but surely comed over me a sort of a renewed interest in Mercy Jane. I'd asked at her home, now and again, whether there'd been any news of late, but her mother always said that they'd heard nothing and she didn't seem as if she wanted to.

"The less news the less trouble, where your wife's concerned," said Mrs. Penrose. "And if I was you I wouldn't ask no questions and then you won't hear no stories. She won't come back to you no more, unless you come into another fortune; and that sort of thing don't happen twice. You might go to sea for fifty year, like my own brother, and not get the chance to do anything clever again."

But I was surprised she could take such a low view of her own daughter.

"You ought to have a better opinion of her," I said. "In the matter of Michael Jago, I always held she was wrong and I told her so to her face when she come home, and she didn't pretend to deny it. But 'tis quite different now. She's still earning her own living sewing at Plymouth, no doubt, and very like she's never heard my poor father's gone; and my opinion is that if she knowed it, she'd come back."

"You think so," said Mrs. Penrose. "Well, why for don't you go to Plymouth and find her? 'Twill set your mind at rest, if it didn't do anything else."

She spoke in jest, for she never understood Mercy Jane, but I took it in earnest and the very next winter, having turned over the idea in my mind for six months, if I didn't go up to Plymouth for the inside of a week with a view to seeing if anything could be done. Uncle Jack objected most strongly and, indeed, I may say we had high words—for the first and last time, thank God. He strove to turn me from my will, but 'twas all in vain.

"She may be ill and starving and too proud to come back to me," I said to my Uncle.

"No," he said. "Pride weren't her failing. You put an advertisement in the *Western Morning News* saying as how you've been left a sack of money by somebody, and she'll be back by the first train."

I'd saved ten pounds and more while working for Uncle Jack, so I drawed it out and went off to Plymouth for to see if my luck would bring me to Mrs. Chirgwin. But it wasn't a hopeful quest and though I went about in the small streets and dropped in to scores of places where there was cards up about sewing, not one of

the sempstresses as I saw proved to be Mercy Jane, and not one could give me any news of her.

My money was very near gone and my hope was gone likewise. Then the last night as I meant to bide, a whim took me into the theatre. 'Twas a pantomime being performed, for Christmas had been gone but a fortnight when I left home; and I thought all the nonsense of the stage would amuse me a little bit and lift up my heart, which was very low. So I paid a shilling and went in the pit.

Well, 'twas a very gorgeous affair and I laughed with the loudest for a bit; but presently I stopped. Because when the King of the Cannibal Islands, or some such hero, comed in, there walked behind him two tall girls, and the tallest was Mercy Jane. Mind you I might have stood it better if she'd had her clothes on, but, at the first glance, what I could see was a pair of green stays and a pair of pink boots; and all the rest was my wife.

Cool as a cucumber she was, and well she might be for that matter; but as for me, the blood

rushed up in my head and I rose from my place and forgot myself and shouted out:

"Souls alive! that's Mrs. Chirgwin!"

But the band was making a proper tantarra at the time and only one or two people heard me and them behind told me to sit down; so I sank back in my seat and glared at Mercy Jane till my eyes very near bolted out of my head.

She hadn't nothing to say, and all she had to do was to look beautiful and fan the King with a palm leaf; and what she was meant to be in the pantomime, her Maker alone knows. I couldn't find her name in the programme and nobody didn't seem to pay any attention to her on the stage. Presently she went off with her nose in the air and that self-possessed, just as if she was by my fireside. And after she'd gone I wanted to go, too, and just think it all over; but I couldn't get out without putting a lot of people to trouble, so I sat on; and I was glad after that I did, because, come presently, Mercy Jane walked on again with the other tall girl. They was dressed different now and, startled out of my life as I had been, I couldn't help feeling awful proud of her when she come on

again in black clothes that fitted like a glove, wi' a lot of gold on her bosom, and diamonds and emeralds and pearls a-flashing like a jeweller's shop front. Her hair was her own—how well I knowed it! No woman ever had such a wonderful mane afore.

Mercy Jane comed in twice more: once as a parrot wi' a yellow crest and wings and a lot o' tail feathers hanging out, so natural as life, behind; and the last time I seen her was in the transformation scene, and my blood went curdling to my boots, for she was in a blaze of light hanging up in the air wi' less clothes than ever and nothing to support her that I could see; and if she'd dropped, she'd have fallen into a gert flame of red fire and been burned to a cinder.

Well, the instant moment 'twas over, I went round to the stage door to wait for her, and in course of time out she came.

Nothing ever made her flustered and when she saw me she stood still and merely said:

"Oh my gracious!" And then she shook hands.

I declared I was coming home along with her, but she explained that she lived with a clergyman's widow, who wouldn't allow me to step in the house at that time of night.

She said:

"You must know that on the stage we're never married, and if I'd said I was a married woman, they wouldn't have took me on. So I must ask you, William, not to interfere in any way, else I shall lose my job, and it's a good one."

She wouldn't give me her address, but she promised to write to me and said that she was terrible afraid there might be a scandal if any of the theatre people seed her along with me. She said they was strict as dragons to the Plymouth theatre, and if a breath was breathed against any girl, the management wouldn't keep her. They'd put themselves to a lot of trouble over and over again getting rid of girls, because they would go with their men friends to have tea of an afternoon and so on.

Mercy Jane told me she was tolerable well content and drawing good money.

"But I'm most tired of play-acting," she

declared, "and I shall want a change pretty soon now."

"Come and have it with me," I said; and she answered that she didn't know but what she might. She wore a fine rabbit fur coat and looked wonderful blooming, but something in her manner told me she hadn't any use for me just then, and I was too proud to force myself upon her.

I axed her if she'd like to hear the home news and she said she wouldn't. All she wanted to know was whether poor father was dead, and I told her he'd been gone some time and that I was back with Uncle Jack.

Then she said she really must be going, or she'd get into sad hot water, and I let her go, but not afore I'd given her a piece of my mind and told her that in my opinion she ought to come back to me.

"Not while you live at Journey's End," she said. "I had enough of your Uncle Jack when we was first married."

"I'll leave him," I replied. But she thought things had better go on as they were for the present.

"I'm saving a little money," she explained, "and when I leave the stage, I'll very like come down to Madron for a bit. You never know what may happen."

"I'm your husband, rain or shine," I said, "and I'd be a good husband if you'd let me."

"Time enough," she answered. "I'm wearing very well, and so be you by the look of it."

She promised faithfully to write the very next week and tell me all her adventures, and then, while I was talking to her and saying how cruel lonely I was without her and so on, she hailed a hansom cab.

And right afore the driver I kissed her. I didn't care a damn. Of course, he didn't know she was my wife, and she said, very loud, that I ought to be ashamed of myself, and where was the police and so on. Then she gived the driver an address I couldn't catch and he called me some bad names and drove her away. 'Twasn't a pleasant parting exactly and I hadn't said half or yet a quarter of what I wanted to say

Weren't no good craakin* over it, however. She was gone and I stood there in the cold moon-

*Craakin. Complaining.

light all alone. Then I had a drink and went back to bed. And the next morning I felt that my poor jaunt was about over. I hadn't the heart to go to the pantomime again, so I went to the railway station and bought my ticket and returned home.

Of course, some husbands would have made her come back; but then, you see, I hadn't much to offer and I felt a bit tender about it. To take her from the joy of life and the applause and her friends and plunge her back into Journey's End, might have been too much for her; and if I'd done it, I felt certain she'd be wanting another change afore twenty-four hours had passed.

Well, I got home very full of my story, you may be sure; but nobody seemed to think I'd done right, save Uncle Jack. He said 'twould have been the height of madness to try and get her back; but her mother was more interested in Mercy Jane's fur jacket than anything and was full of a plan to write and borrow some money off her. But both she and her husband and Uncle Jack, and in fact everybody as heard the tale, told me not to count on no letter from

Mercy Jane. I scorned the thought and knew she'd keep her word; but the people were right: she didn't. And that vexed me a good deal, because I'd been so kind and gentle as I knew how, and never said a harsh word to her; and I'd offered her a drink and everything. But surely to God it weren't no crime in me giving my own lawful wife a kiss after I hadn't seen her for years and years?

However, no letter came and, after six months more were passed, I got that restless that nothing would do but I went up to Plymouth again to have another try. But 'twas too late then. The pantomime people were all gone and nobody at the play-house had ever heard of Mrs. Chirgwin. The man at the stage door, however, seemed to remember Mercy Jane when I described her appearance.

"I believe I know the girl you mean," he said. "She was a very tall, quiet, nice young woman with red hair. The boys used to call her 'Dormouse', and she had a lot of friends in Plymouth. But I haven't seen her since the panto."

"She was my wife," I told him. "And as

good as gold in many ways, though not so truthful as you might wish. Must be doing some new thing. She's taking in sewing again now, I expect."

"No doubt you know best," said the man.

I saw nothing of her and heard nothing. And then I went home again.

"She may be a bit of a rover," I said to her mother the next day; "but a heart she has got; and I'll stake my hopes of Heaven, if need be, that she'll come back to me sooner or late. I feel, somehow," I said, "that she haven't finished with me yet by a long way; and though I know she hasn't been a pattern wife to me, owing to her doubtful up-bringing and gipsy nature, which she can't help, yet I never will believe she could forget me."

Mrs. Penrose got nasty when I hinted at the way she'd brought up Mercy Jane. She could be a vulgar woman when she was vexed, so I left her talking and went on my road.

And then, if you'll believe me, not a year after, if I didn't get into the public eye once more and attract a deal of widespread attention! No doubt I paid a pretty heavy price for my

fame, but there 'twas: Providence called upon me to do a deed a good bit out of the common way and I done it by God's help.

XIV

I was walking along late one night in winter-time, coming back from a wedding, with my German concertina under my arm—afore Christmas 'twas. For they'd often ask me to a revel because of my music.

But my thought weren't none too cheerful, for life looked unkid just then to Journey's End. And now, suddenly, right ahead, I marked a blaze of light and saw very clear as a hugeous fire had broke out somewhere. So far as I could tell in the dark 'twas at Lord Eva's mansion up on the hills out Paul way.

So I went a bit nigher and got up 'pon a hedge, and it looked only too plain that 'twas Paul Park—a very famous old family place and one of the biggest houses in the West.

My first thought was sorrow for the poor young man, because Lord Eva had only been

reigning to Paul Park a year, and when his father died, 'twas said it took the son just all his time to stem the tide and pay the dues and keep the family seat from changing hands. But he was a banker by profession and worked so hard at money-making as his father had at money-spending, and 'twas said by them who 'd heard it, down the back stairs at Paul Park, that by the time Lord Eva died, if he lived to be sixty-five, he 'd have his house and lands all clear again to hand on to his son in due course. The Evas was a curious race and ran good and bad alternately. There 'd rise up a good lord and he 'd make all smooth and pleasant and get the place in working order, and look to the farms and be a blessing to his people; and then he 'd go; and the next one would play hell and tommy with the place, and keep bad company, and drink and gamble, and make shocking work for the heir. Their history would fill a book; but it never had a more exciting chapter than this one.

I ordained to get a bit nearer, for there was sure to be a pack of trouble and any pair of hands might help. So I put my musicker in

a lew corner of a bowjey* and trotted off to see the fire. And then came a sound like thunder behind me and a roar of wheels and a rattle of horse-hoofs, and there was the Penzance fire engine going hell for leather to the place! They very near ran over me, but not quite, and being pretty nimble and knowing a good few of the chaps on her, I got up behind and a man gived me a hand and I scrambled alongside of the rest. 'Twas rough driving, and you had to hold on if you didn't want to be throwed over the hedge.

There'd comed a call some time back and a man from Paul Park had rode a hoss to death going to Penzance with the news.

His Lordship and the Lady Eva was up to London, and there was none but servants in the house, and the man as came out said as all were safe. But he was wrong, for when we tore up to the great gravel tract spread out afore the face of the house, an old chap ran screaming to us and said the nurse and the child—Lord Eva's only one—was up aloft, cut

Bowjey. Field barn.

off and beyond mortal power to save if the firemen couldn't do it.

An under nurse had got out somehow and gone mad. She was running up and down hollering, and under her arm was a looking-glass —the only thing the poor fool had saved when she bolted. And then, just as the ladder which came behind the fire-engine arrived, a ghastly thing happened, for the woman, standing up at the top window in the nursery, lost her nerve and jumped and come down like a sack of potatoes. That finished her, and they carried her out of the way. The front of the house was belching fire from two floors, and such a red hot hell of a blaze you never saw. 'Twas one of they red brick houses, built in the reign of Queen Anne, with a broad flat face and rows and rows of windows. But up one side grew a strong mass of ivy, and virginny creeper covered most of the rest.

We got the fire escape and run it up to the nursery window; but it didn't reach it by ten feet. Two firemen went up only to come down again and then they tried to lash a light ladder on to t'other; but it wouldn't work and the

fire out of the winders burnt off the top of it.

They was pouring tons of water into the place now, but nought could save the house and 'twas just a question how long the roof would stand. We laboured at the ladder, but 'twas all in vain, and then I had a thought. I'd seen how 'twas, and where the green stuff went up to the roof. 'Twas a thing a monkey could have done, but doubtful for a man. However, I'd larned a bit at sea, and my life weren't worth a rush to no one, anyway, so I got a coil of rope and put on a big voice and, when the last dauntless chap came down the ladder with half his moustache burnt off, I went up.

The commander ordered me down; but I didn't obey and got to the top with no worse than a lick o' flame from one of the winders. And then I called upon the Lord and cast off.

'Twas the ivy I meant to trust to and I felt very little hope as I could get my fingers into it; but 'twas a terrible ancient plant and the main stem proved pretty near so thick as a cable. If I could get up a matter of five feet, then there was a stone parapet ran round the

house—just a beading of stone; but enough for foothold and rest. And there I did get, or it might be properer to say the Lord let me get there, for all was of opinion after that no man could have done it without unseen hands to help him.

Perched up there I was in a cruel smoke, but the fire was mostly under. And overhead was the nursery winder and I could hear the child hollering for all he was worth. That gived me a flip up. I knowed that I must be done for, but still felt 'twas just possible to carry through my job first. The ivy was getting thin now, but four feet would reach the ledge of the winder and I reckoned that once my hand gripped on that, my great strength would get me in. So I cast off again and worked so quick as I could. My hands was all torn to ribbons grinding against the brickwork, but there was a pinch of strength still in 'em, though to this day I remember the awful curious feel of the blood running down my sleeves and wetting my body. I kept my nerve by great good luck, but none can ever guess what I felt when one great ivy

strand tore off the wall and I felt it ripping. I'd got two to trust to and t'other began to go also, but I was just under the windowledge then and I grabbed for it and got it. And there I hanged gasping for a full ten seconds afore making the final effort. There was smoke rolling out above me and fire underneath from the lower story, and I never should have done it then, for my strength was spent; but the nursery winders had iron bars over the bottom; and giving my first heave up, I got one elbow on the ledge and my hand struck a bar and held to it. After that there was no more trouble and 'twas only a question of speed. The bars covered the bottom half of the winder and the top part was wide open, for the poor dead woman below had pulled it down and so got out and fallen over. If she'd waited and kept her senses they might have got a rope to her and saved both her and the child; but now the fire was in the room and I falled on my hands and knees to get under the smoke. To find the poor little boy was easy enough and, luckily for him, he'd falled out of bed and was on the floor, too. And I soon

got to him. There was a bath full of water on the nursery floor and, before you can read this line I be writing, I'd took a blanket from his cot and dipped it in the water and whipped it round him.

Poor little chap! My heart properly bled for him, and how God managed to spare the terrified brain of him I couldn't tell you; but that He done; while for my part I tried to calm him, but it weren't no time for singing babies to sleep. I rolled him up in a bundle, head and all, and got my rope twitched round it and then to the winder I went, with the flames pretty well licking the pair of us. They hollered below, but soon marked my game and in less than two minutes from the time I got through the winder, the boy was safe on the grass under. The rope burned through while he was still twenty feet from the ground, though I'm sure I let it run through my hands fast enough, as you can see for yourself if you look at 'em this minute; but there was plenty of arms stretched out to catch that valuable bundle and the child took no hurt. I remember wondering even at that minute, when you'd

think my mind might have other matters upon it, whether he'd keep the family tradition and turn out a bad lord, or whether this job would break the family luck and let the Evas have two good lords running. But as a matter of fact it didn't. That babby growed up to be pretty near the worstest Lord Eva ever known in modern times. A proper tearing young rake-hell, by all accounts—not that we West Country folk ever caught sight of him much, for he hadn't got any use for Cornwall.

However, that's neither here nor there; he was safe and the people down under roared; and then they catched sight of me and their tongues growed still, for they felt sure as death that I was a goner. The roof at far end had fallen and it went off like cannon shots and began dropping towards my end. For a minute I thought to jump and finish off quick; then I looked in the room again; but the fire was there and I got a whiff of red-hot smoke that nearly burnt my eyes out. So I turned tail to that again and looked down. There was a man at the top of the ladder trying all he knew to get a rope to me and twice he

throwed and twice he missed. And a damned brave, good fellow he was. I swear I never seed such a brave deed, and I shouted to him for the Lord's sake to get down, because the ladder was afire ten feet below him, and he went, though unwillingly. Then I found my coat was burning and the glass splitting and cracking behind me. So I knew the end had come. But the ivy was still there and it seemed to me that if I could hitch to it again I might still fetch down. I can't remember much more about it, for I was unconscious ten seconds later, and bided so for many a day; but what I done was this: I dropped to the windowledge and then struck out with the left hand for the ivy and then the roof fell in over head and I got a smack from something that very near tore my shoulder out. But I was hanging on and it looked pretty hopeful and I was coming down towards the head of the ladder, but just a few feet over it I went faintly, like a fool, and began to fall. I just remember grabbing at the ladder and holding on for a second. Then it gave way, for 'twas burned through very near; and down I went scrunch to the

bottom. 'Twas the accident of a bit of luck saved my life. Because a flower-bed ran below, and the gardener had been trenching deep there that very week and the earth was soft as butter. I broke a leg and an arm and a rib or two; but they found there was life in me.

And I'm sure the kindness of everybody you never would believe. 'Tis something perfectly amazing to me what people will do for a fellow creature if he's had the bad fortune to hurt hisself a bit here and there. Even the doctors gived me all the credit for living, though, of course, the cleverness was theirs.

XV

I was insensible for four days and then the life flickered back into me and some strangers round about the bed seemed very well pleased. Then my two doctors turned up and they were pleased, too. But they kept me terrible quiet for a long while and wouldn't tell me none of the news, except that the little chap I'd saved was well and jolly. Then came a day presently

when they let Uncle Jack see me, and for once in his life the woman-hating man was womanish himself, and let fall gentle words, and said he felt very glad, indeed, that I had been spared.

"Be there any news of Mercy Jane?" I asked.

"Not yet," he said, hardening back to his true self, "but there darned soon will be."

I was a thought hurt she hadn't written, because they told me that the affair had got in the papers, and she was sure to have catched sight of it in the *Western Morning News*, to Plymouth; but then I remembered that she mightn't be in Plymouth no more. For that matter she mightn't be in the West Country at all—such a wanderer as her.

Paul Park had been burnt to the walls and a terrible lot of precious things was gone, including plate and pictures and ancient furniture; but though 'twas said Lord Eva was fretted cruel about his heirlooms, yet Uncle Jack couldn't see why for; because all the damage was covered by insurance and he'd got enough to build the place over again and build it better,

and to buy so many more pictures and silver plate and tables and chairs as ever he could want.

I was terrible afraid my usefulness was gone, for as yet I didn't feel as if I could move any member but my tongue; but the nurses at the Cottage Hospital, where they took me, was cheerful and hopeful creatures and I soon began to feel alive again. Then came the great day when Lord and Lady Eva was allowed to see me, and I'm sure I felt shamed to lie there and hear them tell.

If they'd had fifty childer and I'd saved 'em all, they couldn't have made more fuss; and no doubt wouldn't have made so much, for that matter; but 'twas owing to having only one, and him a boy, that caused 'em to be so greatly obliged.

I kept on telling 'em 'twas nothing at all for a sailor-man to do; but they wouldn't have that and his lordship regular cross-questioned me, till I had to admit I didn't expect to come out of it alive.

"A cleverer man would have made nothing of it and not scratched his finger," I said.

"I'm only very glad the young lord didn't take no hurt. I must have frightened him something cruel; but there wasn't time to quiet him down."

"I hope he behaved like a brave boy," said Lady Eva.

"Yes, he did," I told her. Of course 'twas stretching facts a little, because the child had no more chance to behave one way or another than a pound of tea would have to behave while you wrapped it up in a paper bag; but I make no doubt that if he had been older and had sense he'd have kept his nerve well and done what I told him without any fuss. He turned out wicked, certainly; but none ever questioned his pluck.

They axed what I wanted most, and I thought of Mercy Jane and yet I felt, come to think of her, I didn't want her if she didn't want me. So I axed for a new German concertina, as mine had been heard no more of; but they scoffed at that, and the upshot was that Lord Eva would give me the enormous sum of a thousand pound; and the next time he came, he brought his nipper with him and made him

sit on my bed and hear about how I saved his life. It bored the child above a bit; but he was terrible interested in a bunch of purple grapes as I had beside me, and he sat so good as gold till they was gone. It got in the papers what the generous lord had done and presently, when 'twas found that I should go a bit lop-sided for the rest of my days, owing to the broken leg settling down an inch shorter than t'other, if that great man didn't offer me work, too! He said as I might be a lodge-keeper to Paul Park, and but for Uncle Jack I should have agreed to do it. But my uncle didn't want me to leave him and so at first I declined his lordship's kind offer.

Then who should come to see me one fine day but Mercy Jane!

I felt no very great surprise, for I knew her better than anybody else in the world. She never was what you might call a fair-weather friend; but the moment she heard that I was broke to bits and like to be lame for life, then she packed her box and came.

She was proud of me, too, and wanted to nurse me and everything. She'd left Plymouth

and gone to Exeter and gived up the stage and took to sewing again. And she'd saved four pounds and come to lay them at my feet; and when I told her what Lord Eva had done, it came as such a bolt from the blue to her that she very near fainted.

She said she didn't deserve to stop along with me, and then in the same breath promised never to leave me no more. And they let her spend a good bit of time with me; and all was joy and gladness, I'm sure—except in the matter of my Uncle Jack.

He looked at the return of Mercy Jane in a very un-Christian spirit, in my opinion, and I felt shocked to see an old man so quick to think evil. But there 'twas: he put his foot down and said as he didn't want my wife to try her luck again along with him; and as I couldn't bide no more at Journey's End without her, I had very reluctantly to leave. And I will say my uncle didn't quarrel with me about it; but he never quite forgave Mercy Jane for what she'd done in the past and couldn't understand that 'twas her roving spirit and love of seeing new places that prompted her to her

lonely, industrious life. In fact, like a lot of others, he never understood the woman.

However, it did promise as if she was back for good and all at last, and a better wife than she made me, for a full year and a half, no man need wish to marry.

The question was what should us do with our fortune, and I thought to take the lodge-gate as Lord Eva had offered, and save it all, but Mercy Jane was for trying a shop and spending a little of the money in order that we might make yet more in the long run.

"So long as you'm happy, 'tis all one to me," I told her; so we looked around, and then we found a very nice snug business in the grocery line. But so soon as it was found, Mercy Jane fixed her mind on dry goods, and then again she fancied other things. And at last, after a lot of different ideas, she decided that a tobacco shop nigh to the Penzance Assembly Rooms would be a fine and prosperous adventure.

I didn't much like living in a town; but her idea was to make money fast and then retire and live in some quiet and peaceful spot, with

nought but the joy of each other's company; and so we took the tobacco shop and laid in a very fine stock of pipes and cigars and all manner of things that smokers need. And Mercy Jane served behind the counter, when she was minded to do so of an evening, and at other times I did.

My fame had got about, and many and many a man, out of kindness, dealt with me. In fact nothing could have been better than the start when we went into business. We lived over the shop, and hired a maiden, and spent but two hundred all told on furniture and goods.

Of course, along of her stage work and education, for she'd taught herself a lot, Mercy Jane was now very much changed from the cottage girl I married. Now she dressed herself in most dashing frill-de-dills for the public eye, and oft went out walking to the admiration of the people.

And she was happy as a lark, mind you, too, which be a great deal to say of Mercy Jane; for along of her brain-power and her gift of thinking and her passion for change of air and one thing and another, she wasn't what you

would call a contented woman ezacally. Great joyous moments she had, no doubt; but she'd bide very quiet between 'em, and then no mortal man could tell what was going on in her intellects.

XVI

We prospered pretty clever for a bit, though I fell in a stupid habit of letting folk try different kind of cigars—just to see if they liked 'em. And it got to be known in Penzance that you could always have one free smoke in my shop; which brought a lot of nice young men, but didn't go to improve custom in the long run. Somehow they always found the cigar weren't exactly what they hoped. So I had to stop that; and when I stopped it, the young men fell off, which was a sorrow to Mercy Jane; because she was young herself still—younger than her years, you might say—and she liked young people about her.

We had a good bit of theatrical custom, and now and again I went to the Assembly Rooms.

with paper, and Mercy Jane never missed one travelling company, being a great lover of the drama. She didn't want to go back to the stage herself—not at all; but she liked the play and especially sad plays in which terrible things happened. She'd weep fit to kill herself over these, and it got on my nerves after a bit, because if you'm always going to play-acting 'tis the same as if you're always reading story-books. Such things make real life seem a thought tame, and you get in the habit of flying to books, or the theatre, like the drunkard flies to drink.

If there was one thing that Mercy Jane never could stand 'twas tameness. She was a marvel at dodging the regular grind of life. She weren't built to pull against the collar, and she wouldn't. In fact, she had a soul above work—which be a very tiresome state of mind for a married woman in a small way. And yet again, 'tis wronging her to say she wouldn't work. If the subject was pleasant to her, she'd dash at it in a very spirited fashion indeed; for she had a way to exhaust anything rather quicker than a common sort of person can.

'Tis the same with childer. You'll see two little things with an orange a-piece. One will make the fruit last a morning and get joy at it for three mortal hours; and t'other will suck his orange in five minutes and be busy to see if there's half a chance of getting another. 'Twas just that: you might say my Mercy Jane had a power of sucking her oranges terrible quick. She took a large view of joy, and she wanted it in large consignments—like some men will have their tobacco by the pound and their cigars by the hundred; while others be smaller minded and have a little to a time and make that little go far.

The next crash between me and Mercy Jane falled out after Christmas time, and 'twas a terrible complicated business altogether. In fact, there's a very great doubt in my mind if I shall make it clear to you. But the main point be this: there happened a thing that much unsettled her, and there also happened quite another thing that much unsettled me

The thing that upset Mercy Jane was the travelling pantomime at the theatre, and the thing that overtook me and regular turned me

upside down happened at a Revivalist meeting of the Wesleyan Methodists.

Of course, the results were very different; but strangely enough, at one point Mercy Jane and me found ourselves perfectly agreed.

In her case it chanced that an old friend or two come to Penzance to play in the pantomime. There was a chap called Frederick Fitzgeorge, who acted the comic man and played clown to the harlequinade, and there was a young person by the name of Clare Audrey, who was the "principal boy". In other words, she wore tights and pretended to be a young male; but she wouldn't have deceived a baby. In fact, you might say that a baby was about the last thing that she would have deceived. And there was also a Mr. Bellamy—a very handsome, fine chap and more of a born gentleman than t'others. He didn't act, but was manager to the company.

Well, I've nothing to say against any of 'em, save that they unsettled my wife a good bit. Mr. Fitzgeorge was an ugly, cock-eyed Cockney, but he had a most amazing flow of speech and a happy-go-lucky way with him

that certainly won the friendship of the people. Jokes flowed from him like feathers off a goose. He painted the charms of theatrical life and told Mercy Jane that she was throwed away behind the counter of our little shop, and talked a lot of nonsense to her. And Miss Clare Audrey, she done the same. She and my wife had been in the same pantomime to Plymouth, you see, and now t'other had risen something wonderful in her calling and was good for ten pound a week—so she said, though Mercy Jane didn't believe it.

I could see their talk was beginning to tell, for my wife had been off her food, and she'd murmured once or twice, in a thoughtful sort of way, that she felt terrible like going back to her sewing again. And I knowed what that meant. In fact, I was troubled, and 'twas for that reason, as much as any other, that I went to the Revival Meeting—just to see if I could pick up a crumb or two of sound sense to help me and to help Mercy Jane against her new interest.

When I begged her to come, she came; and that in itself I felt to be no good sign; for,

looking back, I couldn't fail to note that she never was so kind and affectionate and yielding to me as she was just afore she went off for change of air.

However, she went to chapel at my request, and we sat there and heard all; and then that happened that lifted me far, far above the things of earth and turned my mind upside down for me. I saw everything in my existence tumble out, you might say, and life was left empty as a drum. Fire and sword, the man preached—fire and sword; and what the fire didn't burn, the sword slew, till I felt myself a shivering, naked worm trembling afore my Maker. "The one thing needful"—that was what that amazing man hammered at, and when he'd finished, I felt that I must have that one thing, if I lost all the world in getting it. I was so dazed as a sheep and very near fell in a swound. "The one thing needful," I said over and over again to myself, and I couldn't take my eyes off the blazing face of the man, and I felt that if he'd lifted his finger, I'd have gone through fire and water for him.

Cries and groans rose up when he finished and I groaned louder than any of 'em. There was the penitents' bench and there was I; and wild hosses wouldn't have kept me back from it then. The man had stripped every rag away from my soul and I saw myself a hard-hearted, selfish, stubborn devil—good for nought in the world but to make hell-meat when I left it.

I rose among the first, and if there'd been a cross waiting for me instead of the bench, I'd still have gone to it. Everything had slipped away out of my mind but the longing to put myself right with the Lord, and make up while there was yet time for my wasted, wicked life.

Then, as I got on my feet, staggering like a bullock under the pole-axe, Mercy Jane laid hold upon my coat-tail and held on.

"What the mischief be you about, William?" she asked me.

"The one thing needful—the one thing needful, Mercy Jane," I said. "Come—come!"

With that I offered her my hand, not doubting but what she felt as I did, and being only sorry that I'd not thought of her afore myself.

But there's nought makes you more selfish than seeking salvation, till you be safe yourself.

Unfortunately, as it seemed to me then, Mercy Jane wasn't taking any.

XVII

"Don't be a born fool," she said, loud enough for all our pew and the next to hear her. "Pick up your hat and hop it. The man's only play-acting, and if I don't know, who should? His perspiration and his pocket-handkercher and everything—'tis all pretence: he's paid well for it, no doubt, and the more sillies that go up, the more money he makes. He ought to be in the panto."

I felt terrible shocked to hear such wickedness, and warned her under my breath.

"Wretched woman!" I said. "I won't stand no mocking at holy things, whatever else I will stand. 'Tis better fit you come this moment, and you'll never forgive yourself if you don't."

"Thank Thee, O Lord! Thank Thee, O Lord!" the Revival man kept crying out as the people, one after another, crept over to the penitents' bench; but Mercy Jane looked and her heart was so hard as Pharaoh's.

"'Tis like the Mayor of Falmouth, as gived God the praise when they doubled the size of the gaol," she said. "If there's such a cruel lot of sinners in this place, 'tis a shame on Heaven and little to thank anybody for!"

In fact, the Revival man had done Mercy Jane more harm than good, though no fault of his own, I'm sure, but owing to some fatal flaw in the woman's nature. I couldn't argue with her, for in some of her fits she said things I hadn't the power to follow; but to-night I was armed with better weapons than my own wits and felt strong to prevail with her.

"Oh, my dear Mercy Jane," I whispered. "Think afore 'tis too late and the accepted time be gone. Don't let it be said as the Almighty piped to you and you wouldn't dance!"

She sniffed.

"I can dance all right, William," she

answered, "and, by the looks of it, I shall be doing so afore I'm much older."

"The one thing needful, Mercy Jane," I said to her: "the one thing needful!"

"Iss fay," she replied. "The one thing needful. But one man's meat be another man's poison, and if you think the one thing needful to me be to sit up there with them snivelling, poor-spirited toads and cry out that I'm the worst of sinners when I'm no sinner at all, but only a healthy creature wanting joy—if you think that, you're more mistook than usual. And I may remind you that Mr. Barbellion Bellamy and Mr. Fitzgeorge and Miss Audrey are coming in to take some supper with us after the show. And so I'd best to get back and make ready for 'em."

She went out along with the rest of the congregation, and my heart sank into my boots. I was no prophet, yet I felt, somehow, that so sure as I went home and told my wife that I was saved, she'd be off.

And then I found myself on the bench along with a good few more neighbours—men and women; and there was a boy next to me not

fifteen year old. His mother had brought him up there, but I felt she'd done wrong and the wish was father to the thought. For the child was looking wicked as a serpent perched up there, and he hadn't no more wish for the Light than an owl.

"Idden no good forcing him to the bench," I whispered to the mother. And she whispered back—poor, over-driven creature.

"Can't do the little devil no harm, mister," she said, "and it may do him good." She was wrong, however. A reformatory would have been the only salvation for that boy.

The minister addressed us, and for my part I felt, as he spoke and spoke, that 'twas the highest calling in the world; and there came a message to me, as the Light to Saul, or the ram to Abraham, namely, to be up and preaching myself!

"Gird up your loins," said the Message, "and arm yourself with the Breastplate of Righteousness and the Spear of the Spirit. Go forth conquering and to conquer," said the Message. "Set out to save souls, even as your soul has been saved this night. Make war on

the World, the Flesh and the Devil!" cried out the Message. "And put from you the petty calls of this life, so that your ear may be open and ready to hear the trumpet cry from the battlements of the Eternal City!"

After such a call as that, my tobacco shop sank to nothing, and my life, with all its hopes and its fears, sank to nothing also. Why, even Mercy Jane sank to nothing—just for the moment! Then I felt that 'twas with her I must begin my great task, and something also told me that if I could win Mercy Jane, and get her to look at life in all its grim and grey worthlessness, and alter her general opinions and lift her up to share my new task, then there wouldn't be any faulty soul on earth I shouldn't find myself strong enough to reform.

"Other folk will be child's play after her," I thought.

The preacher had said that we must judge people and choose our friends by what they sought or shunned; and with that great advice ringing in my ear, I ran over my handful of pals and was a good bit shocked to find that

not one in the whole boiling of 'em was worth knowing. "Worth knowing, they may not be," I said to myself, as I left the chapel and set my face homeward; "but worth saving they are; and if I can't rescue a soul here and there afore my usefulness is ended, then shame be upon me!" And I remember, as I traapsed home, how I took the people what I knew in turn, and set my mind to the great task of speaking the word in season to each, and showing them the one thing needful. I trusted, mind you—I trusted Providence like a child trusts his mother. "The Providence that gave the apostles the gift of tongues, will have to do the like for me," I thought. "I idden much of a talker thus far, for chance willed it that I should work and not talk; but now I'm called to talk, and I'll talk the hind leg off a horse, if need be, to save a soul alive."

In that high frame of mind I reached my home and found 'twas after eleven o'clock.

The party had got in full swing, and beside Miss Audrey and Mr. Fitzgeorge, one or two more had been invited unbeknownest to me.

There was a Mr. Marmaduke Archer, and Mr. Barbellion Bellamy, of course, was there. He'd fairly haunted my tobacco shop and bought cigars and cigarettes in utter recklessness ever since before Christmas. But he'd always paid for 'em—in justice to a downy character, I say it. They hadn't waited for me, but I took my place. I didn't expect to find them serious-minded, and I wasn't disappointed. For they were all "the let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die" sort. Yet pleasant company, I must own, and very charitable and kind-hearted; and I've no doubt that any other evening but this, I should have taken 'em in their own easy spirit. But somehow to-night, coming among 'em from the penitents' bench, I couldn't see with their eyes, nor yet taste with their tongues. But Mercy Jane told 'em frankly what had overtook me during the evening, and she offered it as a sort of excuse for my quiet behaviour—like the toothache, or any other evil.

"My old man's been and catched the Revival fever along with the Wesleyan Methodists," she said. "They gave him a terrible dusting

this evening and he hasn't got over it yet So you must forgive him if he's a bit out of sorts and can't see a joke so quick as usual."

"Life ban't a joke, Mercy Jane," I said.

"True," she answered. "Not along with you, Billy—and never was."

But the acting folk — especially Mr. Barbellion Bellamy—felt very interested, and begged I'd tell 'em all about the "rival show", as they called it.

"I know one thing," said Mr. Fitzgeorge, "our houses have dropped a lot since this racket started, and the man's not even a sportsman. He has his matinées the same day as the panto. Dog oughtn't to eat dog—that's what I say."

"You mustn't put it like that," I said. "I tell you people straight out from the shoulder, that you're in the wrong of it, and you'll live to know I'm right. My eyes have been opened and I see the hollowness. He wants to draw the people away from the play-house and the public-house and every house but God's house; he wants to sound the trumpet of the Redeemer in our deaf ears; he wants to——"

"Steady on," said Mercy Jane; "this is a party."

"I know that," I answered, "and I'm the last man to be a kill-joy, I should hope, or interfere with the pleasures and the pastimes of other people. But I'm only taking the opportunity to say the word in season. The very best and kindest that you can speak for the theatre is that 'tis a luxury, and the money spent on that might be better spent."

"If it comes to that, cigars are a luxury," said Mr. Bellamy.

"I know it only too well, and that's why I'm going to give up selling 'em," I replied.

"You can't have a tobacconist's shop without cigars, if you don't want to be a laughing-stock," declared Mercy Jane, and I admitted it.

"Right again," I answered, "and therefore I'm not going to have a tobacconist's shop. My mind's made up and a thousand people wouldn't shake it. I sell no more tobacco. The shop be for sale this moment."

"My! We're hearing things," said Mercy Jane. It quite took her appetite away my

telling my news in this manner, and she had very little more to say to her friends; and what little she did say was spoken to Mr. Barbellion Bellamy, in a voice pitched so low that I couldn't catch it. And he answered in the same way. In fact they was whispering—a thing I always much distrust.

"And if you are going to give up shop-keeping, what shall you do, Mr. Chirgwin?" asked Miss Clare Audrey. She'd been eating and drinking solid for two hours—a wolf's appetite that woman had.

"I'm going to do good," I answered. "The Lord helping me, I shall do good and nothing but good."

"And what about your money?" asked somebody. I don't know whether it was my wife, or one of the gentlemen, asked; but I do know that I was a bit above myself by now and talked somewhat at random. What with the Revival Meeting, and my Call, and the supper-party, with a lot of drink and so on, I opened my mouth too wide without a doubt and said some foolish things. And when they was all gone, Mercy Jane asked me whether I

meant 'em, and I stuck to it resolute, that I did.

"You don't want the money?"

"No," I said. "Money's stood between too many a man and salvation. Give me a few pound, so I shall have where to lay my head of a night, and I care not."

"You'd better put the rest in my name then," she told me, and afore I slept that night, I'd set out a document empowering my wife to control the rest of my capital.

There was about five hundred or a bit over, and next morning, as I found myself with the headache, I was late and not about so early as usual. But Mercy Jane opened the shop and, when I got down to mind it, she had gone out. It happened there was a good lot doing that morning, and in the middle of the work a clerk stepped over from the bank to see if 'twas all right about putting my money in my wife's name, and I explained to him 'twas quite all right and the money was her lawful own.

Then, two days later, Mercy Jane told me she was off sewing for an uncertain time.

"The pantomime's over," she said, "and

the company is breaking up, and Mr. Bellamy is kindly going to see me so far as Exeter, where he resides."

"Take care he don't see you so far as hell," I told her, for I'd got a regular preaching manner upon me now day and night, and was longing to be up and doing my Maker's work at every street corner.

"He's quite the gentleman," said Mercy Jane. "He's a man of the world also, and he knows what he wants and how to get it. And you needn't be uneasy about me. I shall try and do somebody a bit of good too—if 'tis only myself."

I offered her some money, but she said there was no need to think upon that as I'd gived her the lot, and when I sold the business I should have plenty also. In fact, as soon appeared, she'd drawn the five hundred as I told her I didn't want. Of course, I'd gived her free permission and right to do it. But I was a bit over excited at the time and I quite forgot it after, and somehow I felt a bit sore when I knowed 'twas gone. I waited for her address, which she promised me from Exeter;

but her memory played her false in that matter and I never got it.

Somehow I felt that 'twas really "good-bye" to Mercy Jane this time, and I hardened my heart and sold my tobacco business and began the new life in trust and hope, though not without a pinch of human sorrow, for 'twas wisht setting out to better the world all alone.

XVIII

I shan't quickly forget my first stroke for the Lord. You see, I was well known in the neighbourhood and I might have done wiser to go off and begin where none could tell anything about me; but I started by the highway side 'twixt Penzance and Madron on a Sunday afternoon. And then I very soon learned the difference between wanting to preach and being able to do it. In fact, like everything else that's worth doing, preaching calls for a lot of practice and hard work; and even then 'tis a gift to be first rate at it, and not one man in

a hundred can be said to have the knack of getting home to his fellow man's heart. And 'tis all very well to trust Providence, but you must also keep your powder dry; and if you haven't got no powder, 'tis no use going out shooting; and if you haven't got no proper bait, 'tis no good angling for souls. In a word the Gift of Tongues didn't come along. I ought to have called home these simple truths afore, but I'm the everyday sort of fool that don't get sense till he breaks his shins on it.

And so it came about that my first appearance for the Lord fell powerful short of what I hoped and expected. Even so, it might have turned out better than it did, but for a beastly imp of a boy who drawed up along with the other sightseers. A party of ten stayed to hear me and among 'em, strangely enough, was my wife's half-sister, Susie—her as married a professional preacher. And the sight of her made me a bit nervous. However, 'twasn't her, but her ten-year old youngster as may be said to have ruined my first effort. He'd got a pop-gun and the way he let it off, just at the critical places, was as if the Devil hisself

prompted him. No discourse could have stood against the creature; and instead of helping me and clouting Susie's son into silence, the thoughtless people fell in with the fun of the thing, and if a collection had been took up after, that horrid child and not me would have got the pennies.

I can better show you how it happened by telling over my words. There was the people round me in a half-circle, and a few others joined 'em when I began; and there I was, lifted a bit above 'em on a lump of grass by the wayside; and there was Susie's toad of a boy, lurking behind the congregation.

It went like this:—

"Oh, my dear friends, I want you to listen to me a few minutes afore you go on your way. I've got a Message for you—a Message far more important than any telegram, or any letter that ever you received. And firstly I must tell you that only a month ago, I was just like all of you. (Pop.) Yes, my dear friends—you that know me and you that don't—I was just like you—full of the cares of this world, and I tinkered after the lusts of the flesh (pop)

and money, and goods, and all they silly things we set store upon. But then one day, all of a sudden, there came a (pop) there came the Light of Morning, and I gived up all to follow that Light. I tell you, my dear friends, the world's but a horny-winky place if we haven't got that Light and it ain't worth a (pop)—it ain't worth a—not a penny-piece——and—and—I beg you won't laugh, my friends, for this is no laughing matter to any of you. I want you to hear the Message—the Message of peace and hope, come down from the sky for them as have ears to hear. And the Message is (pop)—the Message is short, my friends—short and strong: the Message is 'The one thing needful'. 'Tis all in them simple words—'The one thing needful'—the thing that every man wants and every woman wants and every child wants. And what is that thing? (pop). What is that thing?"

"Cash!" said a ribald fool in the front of the congregation, and everybody sniggered. But I knowed him and I was down on him like a sack of oats.

"No, Henry Penjerrick, not cash, and none

but a timdoodle like you would think 'twas. Cash be no more to do with the Message than last year's dead leaves. Cash won't get you into Heaven—'tis a lot more likely to keep you out; and if none of you can give a better answer than that, I'm sorry for Penzance."

I made a pause there and Henry Penjerrick turned red and pulled a face at me. But he wouldn't go away, and I knew he meant to get a bit of his own back, as the saying is, afore the meeting broke up.

I mopped my brow and went on.

"And what is the one thing needful? 'Tis peace (pop) peace and goodwill and everybody bearing his neighbour's (pop) burden. If us could but do that, my friends, what a different world it would be! And why don't we? Why don't we set about helping our neighbour this minute? Why don't we (pop)? Why don't we fight for Christ instead of for ourselves? Why don't we say——?"

"Don't ask so many riddles," piped up Henry Penjerrick, and a few thoughtless ones laughed.

"I'll ax you a riddle, Henry," I told him,

"and if you can answer it, then I—I'll forgive you for interrupting the Word of the Lord."

"The Word of the Lord!" he retorts back very scornful; "Like your cheek! A nanny goat can bleat better than you. You go back in your shop, William, and sell fusees!"

"You won't want no fusees where you're going, Henry," I said.

They laughed again, poor souls, and so I passed it off and went on. But a good few had already heard enough, and they moved away.

"I'll say but this," I continued. "I want you to remember what I've told you (pop). I don't want you to forget it. It sounds but little, but it means so much. 'Tis the Message of good fellowship—to help our neighbour and (pop) to love him better than ourselves."

Then a man interrupted me.

"We're not told to do that, Uncle," he said. He was a gentleman by the looks of him, and he spoke quite civil.

"Ban't we, your honour?" I asked him—falling into my usual respectful manner before the upper classes.

"No," he answered. "We're told to love our neighbour *as* ourselves—not better."

"One in the eye for you, William," shouted Henry Penjerrick, and I began to lose my nerve a bit and wish I was out of it. But I felt that would be a poor-spirited thing to throw up the sponge on my fight for Heaven so soon, and had a last try to do some good upon them people.

"No doubt 'tis asking too much to love them better," I went on; "but love is the first thing and the greatest thing, my dear friends, and love is charity and charity covers a multitude of sins (pop). And afore you go on your way I want you to hear me lift my voice to the (pop)—to the throne of Grace on your account. I want to do you good; I want (pop) for every man, woman and (pop) and child amongst you to know that you are the richer by a (pop) prayer from a well-meaning (pop)——"

Here I broke off, for the child was firing his toy so fast as he knew how by now and I couldn't get a word in edgewise. Most of the people had gone away shaking their heads, but

a good few remained and there was a lot of senseless laughter still.

"Do stop that hateful little child, Susie!" I said to my sister-in-law. "Can't you see he's making Holy matters a laughing stock?"

"Shan't do no such thing," she answered back pert as you please. "'Tis a free country and he've as much right to play with his pop-gun, as you have to talk. 'Tis you be making Holy matters a laughing stock, not him."

She was vexed, you see, because I'd called her son a "hateful little child"! No doubt I didn't ought to have spoken so, because a child is a child, and what did he know of my burning soul and my hungry wish to do good? In fact, to be honest, I'd lost my temper a trifle, and the folk knew it, and my power of usefulness was gone.

Then Henry Penjerrick struck up again, and asked me where my wife was spending the spring; and I told the man that I should pray for him; and he said that was the last straw to break the camel's back. I can't mind what happened next, but a lot got talking and booing all at once, and there was a regular

tantarra by the wayside and some fool offered to fight me on a point of Scripture. Then James Lanine, the policeman, came along and scattered the meeting in the name of law and order. 'Twas a sorry end to my first effort and it shook me a lot. And 'twas the first time as ever I saw Jimmy Lanine, for he'd only been a policeman a week when he broke up my meeting. In fact 'twas his first public act, and we often argued about it, in the time to come, when we got to be friends. He always held that he was right to make me pass along; and I dare say he was. But, at the time, I felt it very sharp; though I comforted myself towards evening by remembering that I weren't the first man zealous for the Lord as had got a flea in his ear.

XIX

Uncle Jack didn't take kindly to my new ideas. He was a good bit vexed with me for giving up the tobacco business, and worse still when he heard what I'd sold it for. But he

said the silver lining to the cloud was the departure of Mercy Jane.

"With all her faults," I told him, "she's an industrious woman. She won't go on the public stage no more. She'll just seek change, for change she must have: 'tis her breath of life. And I trust she may see the Light, too, in God's good time. We may differ as to right, but I wouldn't say as she was ever known to sin against her conscience."

"More wouldn't I, William," he answered. "No man can say that Mercy Jane ever sinned against her conscience; because she ain't got the shadow of one, and never did have."

Uncle Jack advised me to go further off if I must preach.

"You'm like the rest of our breed," he said, "obstinate as a pig. So no doubt you'll carry out your intention of obstructing traffic and making a noise in the streets till you be tired of it, or the police are. But 'tis better to play the fool where you'm not known in a case of this kind. And when you've had enough of it and your money's gone, you can come back to me."

He'd always got a soft spot in his heart for me—poor old dear—though I vexed him cruel with my opinions. He was getting up in years now and the people wondered what he'd do with Journey's End when he had to leave it. A very lonely man, for his sole remaining relation, except me and Mercy Jane, was the second of the three brothers—my Uncle Isaac—him that went to Australia or some such place to mend his fortune in youth and was never heard of again.

Sometimes I guessed that Uncle Jack might leave Journey's End to me; yet there was no reason why he should.

He mentioned the matter the night afore I left him on my travels.

"That Huxtable was here again a bit ago," he said. "Him from Upper Madron Farm. He'd got over his anger, though it have took him a good few years to do it; but time's teaching him wisdom and he was more civil. He wants this place so much as ever and would give a tidy sum for it. But I wouldn't hear tell of such a thing. Then he grew crafty and was wishful to hear what I meant to do with

it in future. I told him I ban't gone yet and there was no cause to fear that I should drop for another ten year."

"Nor yet twenty," I said. "You'm a very well preserved old man, and long may you keep your strength."

He was full of kick and sprawl then, as we say, and could still do things and stand to work in a way to credit a younger man, though rheumatics gained very fast upon him, and he was to break up, poor old dear, far sooner than either of us thought for.

So I left him and went on my way; and in a fortnight I was back again.

At Camborne, a place that be a strong tower of the Methodies, they flinged stones at me, and one hit me on the hand and broke a bone. So I went from there and tried Fowey, and they was a thought more civil in that neighbourhood and let me speak without much hindrance, though few listened. The mischief was that I couldn't get them in a serious spirit. They must be laughing, and the more serious me, the more light-minded them. At Redruth I tried to frighten them with a picture

of the Bad Place, but they made light of it, and one said I could see a worse hell than mine in the Midlands any day.

And then—to Truro 'twas—I talked to a matter of a dozen people one Sunday afternoon, and tried to bring 'em Light. I told 'em about myself first, because I found that always interested 'em more than the Message, and I said what I'd set out to do and how I meant to do it.

"Two hundred pounds I've got, my friends," said I. "Money given me by the Lord for saving a life. And more than that I had once; but the rest be out of my keeping now. And I hope 'tis doing more good in the world than I done with it. And I'm in the Lord's Hand, and so long as He wills that bit of money to last, so long shall I go up and down telling His Message to all as be pleased to listen. I don't look for payment in this world, because to do good in this world ban't a paying game; but I'm very anxious to make my fortune all the same. And I'm trying to do it. And 'tis in Heaven I'm going to make it, not here. So, till my money's gone, I shall work for

no earthly pay, and if, when there's none left, I be called back to the plough, to the plough I'll go, and know that is the place for me."

They chaffed a bit, but after they'd all gone off to hear a Godless man as was preaching anarchism—just the opposite of me—t'other side the green, I saw that one chap had stopped, and he came over and asked if he might be allowed to put me a few questions. I said that he might, and he laid open his case afore me and owned up to a many mistakes; but he declared that he was very anxious to do better. He said that I'd shown him the Light; and 'twas a glad moment for me, because this was the first human creature as had felt the better for what I was doing. At any rate he was the first that confessed so much. He looked fairly neat and clean in his clothes, but declared himself destitute for all that, and he said that all he now hoped and wished for was to get himself right with the next world afore he went out of this one.

His name was Mr. Godfrey Blenkiron and, strangely enough, he'd once been in the

preaching way himself, only his throat give out and he had to relinquish the task. He looked very well, but the poor soul had a tuber that was eating him alive. Still he kept cheerful about it and said he was very glad there was younger men like me to carry on the work. He praised my flow of words very highly and said that with practice I should be a power. I offered him two shilling, to see him on his way, but he wouldn't take it.

"'Tisn't yours to give," he said to me. "You must look at it like this: the Lord have lent you two hundred pounds; I think you said that was the figure; but 'twasn't to give it to the likes of me. You must hoard it up and only spend it on your own needs."

He took that high-minded view, you see. He was a grey-haired man and his age was fifty-two, so he told me, though he didn't look so much. He axed me where I should preach next time and advised a certain place, and I fell in with his suggestion. He came again and again to hear me and told me that I was softening the road to the dark river for him.

He said his tuber was gaining ground something fearful. There wasn't much pain to it, but he felt terrible weak and had no money to buy nourishing food. He was a teetotaller and wouldn't touch a drop of any intoxicating liquor; but once, after a pretty successful meeting, I pressed him and he hesitated. He said:

"I've no right, but still, as a friend, I'll come in your home and drink a dish of tea with you. Just once and no more."

I was only too glad and told him so. He took my arm and we went along very slow, for his weakness was great. I had a room in a little back street, and lodged there with a very good woman who'd seen trouble and buried her husband and four. Mr. Blenkiron said: "Peace be to this house", when he came into it, and he didn't mind my humble room, for he was living in one a lot humbler himself.

"As you shall see," he said, "when you pay me a return visit."

He made a very good meal for such a sufferer and declared that it had put fresh life into him. He talked a lot about the calling and

advised me to be a free lance always and not bind myself to no persuasion in particular.

"Just you preach stark Bible and leave the Lord to sow the seed where He will," he said.

The doctors gave him two months, if he didn't smoke anything but good cigars; but only one, if he took common tobacco. Tobacco in some shape he had to have, for he'd become a slave to it. And I'm sure I understood that, for in all my ups and downs I never have been able to do without it and never shall be able.

Upon hearing this news I ran round the corner and bought the dying creature a three-penny, and he shook my hand and smoked it to the stump and said that, after one or two such weeds as that, he'd be quite ready to face his Maker. He wouldn't go till I promised faithfully to visit him on the afternoon of the next day, and I did so and he went off.

I had a feeling, then, that 'twould be my task to close the eyes of that poor friendless creature in six weeks or so, and I decided with myself to bide at Truro till after the sad event.

And, at the accepted time, I waited upon the man for tea.

'Twas a very low part of the town and a very common house. A girl answered the door and I asked if Mr. Godfrey Blenkiron dwelt there:

"He'm lodging here," she answered. "He've just slipped out to buy two penn'orth of milk, and if you be Mr. William Chirgwin, I was to ask you to walk in his room and wait for him."

Which I did do, and I felt sorry to see the poverty of the man.

There weren't a thing in the place but his bed, and a washing-basin on a chair, and a towel full of holes, and a pair of cruel trousers behind the door. There was a little wood trunk open in one corner of the chamber, but 'twas empty save for a few bits of newspaper, and the chamber hadn't nothing else in it at all, more than a Scripture text nailed high over the mantelshelf. I shan't forget the familiar words neither, for they seemed to be made to fit the day.

Seek and ye shall find.

I waited very patient for Mr. Blenkiron;

for patience be about the only vartue that belongs to me, and even that may be misplaced sometimes. Then, after an hour was gone, I felt some fear that trouble might have overtaken the poor chap, and at the end of another half-hour I determined to go and seek him.

Not a sign of the man could I mark round about, and really it looked as if something serious had happed to him, for on returning to his wretched lodging I found he was still absent. The landlady came out then and axed a lot more about him than I could answer. She said he was owing for a week's food and lodging—seven shilling in all—and I told her about his tuber. She hadn't heard nothing of it and said in that case as he'd have to go, because such evils was catching.

Then I went home, and heard the singular news that Mr. Blenkiron had called for me ten minutes after I went out and had waited another ten in my room. After that he had said there must be some misunderstanding; and then he had gone off to seek me. The plot thickened and I couldn't for the life of me understand

what had overtaken the man. But a few minutes after, all was as clear as day.

I determined that, come what might to poor Blenkiron, his landlady shouldn't lose by him, and so I went to my valise, which was all the luggage I had, for a bit of money. But to my horror and dismay, I found that somebody else had been there for the same purpose. The lock was broke and my pocket-book and my two hundred pound was gone!

He hadn't overlooked a shilling, and the saucy hound, by way of adding insult to injury, left a letter in the lid, hoping, in a prayerful spirit, that he'd be able to do more good with my money than what I seemed able to do, and looking forward to meeting me again, "in another and a brighter world, where the wicked cease from troubling and the zanies are at rest!"

Of course, you see in a moment, as I did, that 'twas a shameful and wicked imposition; and if I could have catched the man that night, I don't hesitate to say I should have handled him very rough. I'd been a good, kind friend to him, and 'twas a most dishonourable thing

to take advantage of me same as he had done.

I didn't hesitate for a moment to go to the police-station, for the man well deserved to get into trouble. He was a wicked lion, seeking what he might devour, and a great danger to society in general.

I told them at the police-station and the Inspector made a lot of notes. He'd been faced with like robberies on a smaller scale before and didn't show much hope. He weren't a helpful man exactly, and seemed inclined once or twice to doubt the truth of the tale.

"He can't live long, whatever happens," I said, "for he's got a tuber."

"Got a grandmother!" answered the Inspector of Police.

In a word, he didn't believe about the tuber; and he didn't believe the man's real name was Blenkiron; and, moreover, he wanted to know a lot more about me than I could tell.

I explained that I was a preacher, and he grew more and more suspicious until, what with my great misfortune and my doubts as to the future and so on, I got a thought vexed with the man and chid him.

"Dammy!" I said—more shame to me for the word—"it looks as if you want to lock *me* up!"

He stared at me rather insolent and scornful.

"Either I ought to—or your friends did," he answered.

He was a cool hand and very distrustful of his kind. But he let me go with a policeman, and my landlady gave testimony and I heard no more afore the next day. Then the Inspector was a thought more civil. It turned out they'd been warned from Plymouth to keep a close eye on a chap resembling my description of Godfrey Blenkiron. A dozen names they'd had with him, but not that one, and they knew a wonderful lot about him—his whole history, in fact—up to the last fortnight.

"And where is he now?" I asked. Because I didn't feel interested for the moment in the man's past wrong-doing, which was very various.

"He's doubtless in London, having a high old lark with your money," answered the Inspector.

"And next time your betters tell you to keep

your eye on a rogue, I hope you'll do it!" I told him. "My address will be Journey's End Farm, Madron, Penzance, after to-morrow, and the sooner you send back my money, the better pleased I shall be with you."

He took down my address, but didn't say anything more, rude or civil. In fact, he was a good bit upset, and I dare say, if I'd made a fuss and named him to the authorities, it might have harmed the man a lot. But 'twas no good bringing more trouble on anybody, of course.

I pawned my watch then, and paid my landlady and took train home.

A sorrowful home-coming, you might say, and Uncle Jack didn't hesitate to speak some harsh things. I told him all, even to the text over the mantelpiece in Mr. Blenkiron's chamber, and that was the only touch in the whole story as made him smile a bit.

"It held very well for him," said uncle; "but I doan't reckon 'twill hold for you."

And he was right, as usual, for never a word did I hear more about that bad man or my

money; and I must own as I didn't think very highly of policemen in general for a long time afterwards.

XX

My Uncle Jack was one of they reckless men who believe not in principalities, nor yet powers, and don't seem one penny the worse for it. I always feared for him that a day of reckoning was bound to come, but it never did.

And yet, in fairness to the old chap, you couldn't say he believed nought exactly; for he believed in work, and he believed in the laws of Nature; and a lot of queer, natural things that us Christian folk don't believe in, he stuck to through thick and thin. Some called him superstitious, but that didn't trouble him. One of the things he swore by was the crick-stone—and he gave chapter and verse to show 'twas a very valuable, ancient contrivance, only fallen into disuse owing to the school-board.

He was terrible bad for a whole winter some

years after I went back to him. He'd got the worst tissick in the breathing parts as ever he had, also lumbagey in the loins; and he was struck down very sudden so he couldn't go to the crick-stone for a long time. Therefore he sent for Mother Nancherrow, as I've named afore.

She was getting on now and over eighty year old, but comed one evening and brought some herbs for uncle's tissick, and while she mixed 'em as usual and my old man sat wheezing like a hurdy-gurdy, Mother Nancherrow talked and ranged over hidden things and the power in the herbs of the field and in stones and in stars.

'Twas Godless talk, but it certainly did uncle good, and me no harm.

She got very excited with her subject and presently rose up and waved the spoon she was using, and her rorey-torey gown, all patches, fluttered around her long legs, and her white hair stuck up like a fuzz-bush under snow.

"They don't know and they won't larn," she said; "they'll stir cream against the way of the sun and then wonder it goes sour; and

the water in St. Madron's brook might so well run dry for all the use it is to this generation; and the crick-stone might so well be pulled down and broke up for road-metal. Who passes through it now?"

"I shall," answered Uncle Jack. "I shall go up over and pass through it nine times for this here blasted lumbagey, so soon as you've cured my tissick. I don't hold much with St. Madron's well, because I mistrust the saints in general; but the crick-stone be a power of might, and my father healed hisself of rheumatics there, and me and my two brothers was passed through many and many a time by my mother to make us strong and lusty. There's no miracle or nonsense about it," finished my uncle; "'tis just a natural object working by Nature's law, and it have been known time out of mind for a healing stone long afore there was any saints to worry the people."

And when he got well again he was full of the crick-stone, and nothing would do but he must get on his pony and ride up to it and take the cure, old as he was.

"'Twill lift up the lumbagey and add years to my life," he said.

Of course, Mother Nancherrow encouraged him in his silly plan, and at last the day for doing the deed came, and I walked up to the crick-stone with uncle to help him. To me, as a Christian creature as had seen the Light, 'twas a very fantastic idea indeed, and terrible old-fashioned, if not properly wicked.

In a croft belonging to Lanyon Farm the stone do stand along with two others, and learned folk call it "Men-an-tol", which means the stone with a hole in it. The other stones stand upright and make a triangle with the crick, but I haven't heard as any vartue, natural or otherwise, belongs to them.

Now Uncle Jack prepared to crawl through the hole in the stone nine times against the sun, because that backens the disease; and I stood on one side to help him through, for he was terrible stiff at the joints and it called for a lot of cleverness to assist him without giving him pain. Even as 'twas he suffered a good bit in the process and once or twice, at the bottom of his heart, I think he had an uneasy

suspicion that he was doing rather a parlous thing. And for my part I felt that, if any use at all, faith was the first need in such a business, and I knowed as well as possible that uncle's faith was going fast, especially after he slipped getting through the fifth time and hurt his pin-bone something terrible. But I dursn't say nothing and he set his old jaws and went on with it to the bitter end; and then I helped him back on his pony again and we started for home with never a word.

And the sad thing about it all was that Uncle Jack dated his downfall from that vain piece of work. He had a terrible bad bout of rheumatics after, and at last, but not until I'd very near gone on my knees to him, he consented to see a proper doctor. And the proper doctor was far ways from being a cheerful or a hopeful gentleman. He gived uncle some belly-vengeance physic and told me off to rub ointments into the shoulders and back and joints; and when we looked for better things, they didn't come; and afore long the cruel truth faced uncle that he'd soon have to sink to be

an indoor man, if not a bed-lier. Then he tried another doctor, and the second one found that Uncle Jack's heart was a very uncertain member and advised him to drink a little more and smoke a little less; but the old man, though he followed the first half of the advice with great profit, didn't pay no heed to the second. He said that baccy soothed the ceaseless pain and he wasn't going to bate burning it for any man.

Then he thought, owing to the good luck of the number three, that he'd try yet another physician, and he did so and called in a very clever hunting doctor. This gentleman worked at uncle for six weeks, and he was always welcome, because he had a bit of fun at the tip of his tongue every time he came, and said whisky was the king of cautcheries, and cheered uncle's spirits very clever. But my old man's carcase didn't get no better, and often and often he'd look back to the crick-stone and throw all the blame there, and cuss it forcible enough to split the granite in pieces. He'd quite changed his mind about its value, and over and over again he said: "I've only done

one damn silly thing in my life, and now that thing be going to kill me!"

His illness cleared his views a good bit, and if it didn't show him the Light exactly, it helped to lift the fog. For one thing he had a terrible quarrel with Mother Nancherrow, and told her she'd put the evil eye on him. In fact, he fell out with most all the neighbours in the end; but, of course, they forgived him, because he was grown tootlish by then and couldn't be taken serious no more.

He swounded once when I was from the house and fell and cut his poor old head cruel on the edge of the fender; so after that I got in a man to do my work on the farm and I spent the greater part of my time with Uncle Jack. He liked me about him and when slowly, but surely, he took to his bed, 'twas I that tended him and spent many hours at his side. I mind once, just towards the sudden end, how his thoughts turned to the future. But his old opinion was not abated. His brain was clear and he spoke good sense.

"If I'm wrong and there's a world beyond the grave, then I shall be there along with

the best and the worst," said Uncle Jack three days afore he was took. "And if that is so, then the cheel that died yesterday knows a darned sight more about it than the Archbishop of Canterbury; and if I'm right and there idden nothing after, 'tis no good troubling our intellects upon the subject. So, whether there be or whether there ban't, one thing's clear as mud and that is, that we'm wasting every minute of this life that we squander on the subject of the next."

"But if the Book's right and you'm wrong, my old dear," I said, "then you're making a cruel mistake, and the Last Day will prove it only too clearly when the Records be opened."

"Not at all," answered my uncle; "if the Book be right, William, then we'm told to do unto others as we would be done by; and when I'm face to face with the Almighty, if such a Party there be, I shall speak without fear and remind Him of that far-reaching text. And where be He then? Properly cornered, I reckon! He can't injure me without going back on His own Bible in the face of all human kind assembled!"

"No," said Uncle Jack presently, after he'd rested a bit; "no, William, there may be a Heaven, or there may be a Hell; but there ain't going to be both. The one knocks out t'other and, for my part, if I believed in either, I should plump for Hell. I don't see a speck of a watchful, loving God nowhere from one year's end to the next, whereas the Prince of this World, as they call the Dowl, be busy as a bee, and you can't miss His performances even if you would. If bad things happen, 'tis out of badness they spring, and you won't get goodness out of badness, any more than you'll get a good potato out of peat soil. If there's a God, he's a hard nut and I won't love Him, nor yet pretend to."

Of course, Uncle Jack was at his end and didn't know what he was talking about ezacally. But I seed his drift myself and felt very glad when he passed away to a brighter land, where his great errors were swept from his mind and everything made tolerable clear to his wits, no doubt. And I'm sure the angels very soon showed him where he was wrong, for he had a good brain and was a most understanding

old man—full of vartues and always ready to admit a mistaken opinion if anybody could prove it to him. Though, to be honest, nobody ever could.

For my part I always shall say that God's a bit too deep for us and, clever though we may get, He will yet keep a surprise or two up His Holy sleeve. 'Tis no manner of use trying to explain the things He does, because He haven't built our intellects to do it; and yet all the silly parsons are at, from morning till night nowadays, be to whitewash the Almighty, and explain away His parlous doings to the faithful. A while ago there was an earthquake, and two hundred thousand men, women and children were miserably destroyed. Instead of being dumb on the subject and admitting frankly that in our view of goodness such things didn't ought to be done, a live bishop got up and said that the earthquake was a very fine earthquake, and all right and proper and well planned in every respect; but that the trouble lay in them two hundred thousand people being silly fools for not building houses that wouldn't tumble down.

So he held they was very properly punished for their stupidity! That was how the bishop explained the matter. A very pious, Christian thought no doubt, and I don't suppose that ignorant, everyday folk have any right to question a bishop; yet, somehow, the God that kills His children for building their poor houses wrong, lacks a little patience in my view. A common human father wouldn't sink to such a disgrace, and for my part I don't think that was the reason at all. I reckon that 'tis better for to hush up things like that, and keep 'em out of the newspapers, as much as possible, and not bleat about 'em, or try to explain 'em away in the pulpits. We don't understand 'em, and it only makes the unrighteous scoff and God laugh, I judge, when we try to give our little silly reasons for His dreadful deeds.

Uncle Jack suffered a cruel lot at the finish, and the toughness of the man wouldn't let the spirit break through and away without a terrible effort. He wanted to die and knowed he was dying, but Death played with him, same as a cat plays with a mouse.

He called for my German concertina just afore he went and I turned it on very vigorous, and he kept his eyes upon me and faded away at last to a sailor shanty tune. I went playing on like streaks of bacon and didn't stop a moment, but dashed from one tune into another till the nurse suddenly stopped me.

"Hush!" she said. "'Tis nearly over. I think he wants to speak to you."

I just put down the musicker then and went and knelt by Uncle and put my ear to his mouth to hear if there was anything he wished to tell. And he groaned out a few words; and I caught 'em:

"So soon as I be gone, mark me, you'll have that love-hunter back," he said.

Whoever 'twas he meant I'm sure I don't know, and never did know, for there weren't no time to ask him.

He beginned to rattle like a kettle-drum the next minute; and I put my arm under him and held him up; and he cast a kindly look upon me and died.

XXI

There reigned a thunder planet in the air when Uncle Jack went, and it didn't pass till a very awful storm ran over Cornwall and a good few beasts and cattle was struck by lightning. But it finished before the day of the funeral and all Madron walked behind me to see him laid in his pit. For he was very well thought upon and his bark was worse than his bite, as all men knew.

I missed him a terrible lot and 'twas a great grief to me that I'd never thanked him for all his endless patience and goodness. Because his door was never shut against me, and his hand was always ready to grasp mine and draw me in and make me welcome, when I came back to Journey's End after my various failures in the world.

And, as if that wasn't enough, when he died, he left me the farm for my very own and everything he had; and though the money was not much, yet there was far more than I needed, and the farm had always paid for

itself and left a clear balance for me and uncle to live upon without care.

I ordered a brave stone for the man, and as there was still full time afore it could be set up, I ordained with myself to read the Bible slap through from forel to forel, that I might find a brace or more of texts exactly suited to Uncle Jack.

Then came a quiet evening in late August, a fortnight after he was laid to rest, when I sat by the open window of the kitchen and smoked my pipe and conned over Genesis to find if the fitting thing was there. Still as death 'twas, a starry, windless evening wi' the night moths fluttering in and out drawed by my taper.

There had been a queer feeling of unrest in my mind all day somehow. I'd felt like the cattle afore the recent thunderstorms, and I never get that feeling without something comes of it. 'Twas very near ten o'clock and my housekeeper had gone to bed and my two men was out. Then, through the nightly silence, I heard wheels, and I knowed they must be coming to me, for there wasn't nowheres else that way for them to come to. Nearer and

nearer they rolled and I mind how I started up with a queer feeling of weakness—so feeble as a goose-chick I went all of a sudden—and I said to myself: "'Tis Mercy Jane!"

And so it was.

The fly drew up and I went out, and the fust word her voice spoke was:

"Have 'e got a florin for the driver, dear William?"

The man put down a tin box and Mercy Jane got out with a bundle. Then the man drove away, after I'd gived him his two shillings, and I shouldered the box and walked in, and Mercy Jane followed after; and then I set down the box and put home the door and faced her. 'Twas as easy and simple as if I'd expected her. I was just going to put my arms round the wanderer, when she opened the bundle and out came a little three-year-old cheel, bright as a bee and pretty as a picture.

"Good powers," I cried; "what's this then?"

"Kiss me, Will, and I'll tell you all about her," answered my wife. "But first I'll go in the dairy and see if there's a drop of milk for the child."

I will own that for one fleeting moment there shot over me a base doubt. The little one was grey-eyed and golden-haired and terrible pretty. To my eye she was the tiny moral of Mercy Jane—Mercy Jane as she must have been in her babyhood. But I hadn't lived for nothing; I hadn't larned patience for nought. I held off Mercy Jane when she comed back with some milk. I waited for her to speak, but she got busy with the cheel; so I spoke first after all.

"Where have you been and what have you been doing since you left Penzance?" I asked her.

"I've been to Exeter and other places," she answered, "and I've been doing what you always did: I've been trying my best to make other people happy, William."

"And so we all should," I answered her. "And what's the meaning of that baby?"

She was rocking the little thing to sleep on her bosom by now.

"Do you remember poor Mr. Barbellion Bellamy—him that used to be acting-manager?" she asked.

I turned back into the past and presently the man came back into my remembrance.

"'Twas him that was to take you so far as Exeter when you went away," I said.

"Yes; I saw a good deal of him. His wife died soon after this little dinky maid was born. 'Tis his child, William. And a year ago I'm sorry to say that Mr. Bellamy died also. And 'twas at Cardiff he passed away. I was at Exeter—sewing at the time—and he sent for me, and he told me that I'd been his wife's best friend, for so I had been, and he committed this young creature to my care. And being a dying man, how could I refuse him? 'Tis a very lovely little one, and I'd miss her now myself."

She looked in my face with her wonnerful grey eyes, so gentle and soft as a moor mist. She was in black and she'd growed a thought thinner; but she was lovelier than a dream still.

"And how's the needle-work?" I asked her.

"I'm weary of it," she answered. "My thoughts have turned to you, William, many and many a hundred time since I left you.

I've often wished I'd been a more restful build of creature; but you always understood me as none else ever did. 'Twas your great cleverness always to do it. And I began to yearn for a sight of you and a sound of your big voice. And I felt the call of the country, too, and wanted to see Journey's End again and my own people and so on. But I shouldn't have come, because well I knew that poor Uncle Jack never cared much about me. He didn't understand my nature like you did Then, when I saw his death in the paper, I guessed as you'd be master, and I said to myself: I'll make so bold as to visit my dear man again and see how 'tis with him, and whether he can do with me, or whether he can't! And so I came. And I shall quite understand if you've got back into bachelor ways again, William, and then I'll be off to-morrow and ask for no more than a shake-down in the parlour for one night. But if you like to claim me, then I'm your loving wife as always, and proud to be. But as to the little girl, I'm afraid I must keep her, because her mother would wish it, and her father, too.

You wouldn't have me break a promise to the dead—not with your high opinions."

I thought a lot. 'Twas like music to hear her voice again.

"Come here to me," I said, and 'twas a proud sensation to order such a lovely piece about and see her obey like a lamb. She set down the sleeping child in Uncle Jack's old dog-eared chair, and then she walked over to me so meek and humble and wifely as you please.

In a word she stopped; and poor Mr. Bellamy's little orphan daughter—she stopped, too. I never could refuse a child anything—least of all such a wondrous pretty little maid as her.

'Twas a great thing for me, of course, having Mercy Jane back again once more, and it added very much to the joy of life; and her people were fairly pleased to see her, but less surprised than what I had been.

Yet she was changed and she had learned a lot of things during the last four years. She said, however, that town learning was all dust and ashes beside country learning, and I was glad she felt that, because I'd always

held the same. She often went to Madron Well with the baby, and the little thing took to country ways very quick and grew very fast. 'Twas the living image of its mother, so Mercy Jane said; and the mother had been not unlike Mercy Jane herself by a strange chance.

Bridget, the cheel was named, and it got to be called "B.B."—short, of course, for Bridget Bellamy.

Mercy Jane was as good as a second mother to it and kept her promise to the dead most faithful. But, as I say, she'd changed in a good many ways and did much less for herself and expected to be waited on a lot more than formerly. In fact, I had to hire a regular servant for her, because she had quite a lot of little fine lady manners now; and she'd become very finnicking in her speech; and as to sewing, she wouldn't touch it no more for love or money.

This seemed odd at a first glance, but she explained it very easily.

"I've had such a cruel dose of it that I hate the sight of a needle and thread something

terrible," she explained. "It may come back in time; but you mustn't try to hurry it."

"God knows I don't want to hurry it!" I told her. "No more sewing for you if I can help it, I promise you."

"I hope not," she answered me. "I'm sure I hope not, William. Far off be the day!"

XXII

Mercy Jane had got together a lot of very queer and puzzling ideas since I saw her last, and she explained the reason when I ventured to ask her how she came by them.

"Sitting sewing all day," she said, "you have a deal of time for thinking, and you know I was always a great thinker even in my youth."

"True," I answered her. "Many might have doubted your opinions, but I haven't heard as any ever doubted your cleverness. None of your family ever came near you for that."

"I knew nought as a girl," she assured me. "Nobody does. You don't know you're born —till you've read a few books and heard what the world says."

"Books be two-edged things, however," I warned her. "There's a lot of boys, and girls, too, for that matter, as date their downfall from print."

"Are there?" she said.

"Iss fay! But I'm glad to think you got no harm by 'em."

"Nothing but good," she promised me. "Truth's truth, and the truth is that life's short and a lot of the fag-end of it isn't worth living; so the wise way is to live while you can—and help others to do the same."

"Never heard anything more sensible, Mercy Jane," I replied. "Helping others to live is a very proper and high-minded action, and if us all set our minds to it more than what we do, then the world would be a better place."

"Don't know about 'better'," she said. "I reckon the world's good enough—too good, you might say. Goodness knocks the spirit

out of people almost as quick as having no money does. But if everybody helped the others to live, 'twould be a lot happier for all, and I'd sooner be happy than good any day."

Of course I didn't follow her there.

"You'm in a dangerous error, if you think that," I told her. "Goodness and happiness be one and the same, and if you read a book that says not, 'tis a devil's book."

"'Twasn't a devil's book," she answered. "'Twasn't a book at all. 'Twas a conversation I had with a friend of mine. He was a very clever and deep chap and knew more than you'll find in Madron—or Penzance either; I didn't understand half he said, but his sense was clear and he showed me that the truth of life is to be so happy as you know how while you'm young, and so good as you know how when you'm old."

"And how if you never live to grow old?" I asked her; and she looked at me with them queer, misty grey eyes of hers and smiled and said:

"Then you've been happy anyway, and can

die the easier for knowing you've missed nought in your power to win."

She was certainly different from other women, and though very practical at times, yet she had a great trick of "make believe" in some directions. And them as have got that have also got the power to make others believe, too. A queer gift, no doubt. To see her with little baby Bridget was so pretty as a picksher. The child loved her with a great love and she could do anything she liked with it. And I was minded of a clever story that I heard once when I see the way she managed it. Her power was to take the little girl's mind out of itself and fill it with other things. She had the art to interest anybody in an instant; she could be that serious herself, though all about nothing, that you felt the whole world was standing still till the matter was settled.

The tale I call home was about a clever man as took a lot of little ones for a long walk and talked to 'em, and showed 'em the beauties of Nature and such like, and went tramping on, quite forgetting, for all his cleverness,

that his legs were long and theirs were short.

Then the poor children began to cry out that they were cruel tired and couldn't go no farther. They were quite over-gone, in fact, and weary to death. So he feared it would be a terrible business getting 'em home again, for, of course, he couldn't carry half a score of little things on his back and 'twas clear they'd have to travel on their legs somehow. So what did he do? He emptied their minds of the trouble and cried out: "We must all ride home again!" And then to the hedge he went and cut down a little stick for each young one and a great stake for himself; and then he made pretence and showed 'em how to mount the hobby-horses and mounted his own. And the babbies all laughed with glee and forgot their tired toes, and he brought 'em all trotting home again in joy and gladness.

And that was Mercy Jane's way, for her mind was wondrous quick in many directions.

She never could see my jokes somehow, and I never could see hers; yet she often laughed at jokes she made in her mind, and the child

made her laugh full heartily. She was like a mother to it, in fact, and I'm sure many mothers don't set half such store by their own offspring as Mercy Jane did by B.B. She did more than her duty; in fact, that was another remarkable thing about her. She never scamped anything. For leaving a job alone and letting others do it, there was never her equal in the universe; but if she did take on anything, whatever it might be, you knowed it would be done through and through to the end as well as it could be done.

She turned the farm inside out, of course, and we papered and painted and renoviated till you'd hardly have known the place. Smart and sweet and showy we became, and the thatch went and Delabole slates appeared instead—the old tumble-down lew houses was done away with and new ones took their place. Blossoms, too, she would have afore the front windows, and we laid in clove pinks and gillyflowers and such-like of her favourites.

And then, after some very beautiful and restful years of peace and prosperity, I began to see the first shadow of some of the old

hateful signs again. They comed over her very gradual, and I do believe she tried to choke 'em off; but they gained upon her. Living in the country on milk and honey and bacon had made Mercy Jane perfectly lovely again, and she was years younger than her age, and had a walk and a figure and a colour like twenty-five.

She spent nearly all her time with Bridget at this period, and for a while the child seemed to hold her to home with its little fat hands. In fact, such was her feeling towards it that she might have weathered the storm; but ill chances fell upon us and money got a little tight for a while, and she began to work in the thin edge of the wedge and murmured gently about going off to ease the strain on my purse and do a bit of sempstress work, in the damned old way.

Then unknown to her, I got in what had promised to be a bad debt, and it fired my mind and I plotted to run up to Plymouth and buy her a present and bring it home to amaze her. My happy thought was a brave sewing-machine; and I pictured her face lighting

up with pride and joy when I displayed the wonder!

So, cunning as a barrel of snakes, I said I was going to Truro for the day about some sheep; of course, she raised no objection and off I went. But I'd left a letter with my man to give to Mercy Jane so soon as I'd gone too far to be stopped. For I couldn't really have set off like that with a lie on my conscience; and in the letter I told her that my real plan was to go up to Plymouth on her account, not to Truro for sheep, and that I shouldn't be home till the next day and then hoped to give her a big surprise.

But, as usual, with Mercy Jane, all the surprises were mine.

Things happened to Plymouth you'd never believe. A nightmare be a fool to what awaited me.

I hadn't been in the town an hour and was walking down George Street, after leaving my tooth-brush and a clean collar at a room what I'd engaged to sleep in, when a gentleman comed across the street and stopped me. He was a fine, well-set-up man, straight in the

back and good-looking; but he had a haggard face and the grey was beginning to show in his hair and moustache.

"Excuse me, sir," he said. "But am I not speaking to Mr. William Chirgwin, of Penzance?"

"Bill Chirgwin, of Madron, am I; but I used to be at Penzance and kept a tobacco shop there," I answered.

"I thought 'twas you. I recognized you by your height, and your limp that you got in the fire," he said. Then he broke off and his voice took a peculiar tone and he asked me a question.

"D'you know anything of Mercy Jane?"

'Twas rather familiar and I didn't like it coming from a stranger.

"If you mean Mrs. Chirgwin," I answered, "she's home now to Journey's End, which be the name of my farm."

"Has she got a little girl with her—a child rather like her—only with flaxen hair instead of auburn?" he said.

"And what if she have?" I answered the man, because I was getting a bit tired of this.

"Don't be annoyed, Mr. Chirgwin," he replied. "'Tis quite natural that I should want to know. Would you mind taking a bit of a stroll up and down before the Guildhall? Then I'll explain why I stopped you."

We did as he wished, and he quickly began upon me:

"Do you remember Mr. Barbellion Bellamy?" he asked.

"Yes—I remember the name very well," I replied.

"I'm Mr. Bellamy," he said.

"You're a damned liar!" I answered. "'Twas his little girl that Mercy Jane brought home back-along, because her father and her mother were both dead; and with their last breath—one or t'other—I forget which 'twas—begged her so to take it."

"I'll be frank," he answered, "because 'tis only fair to you. I won't excuse myself. I loved her—Mercy Jane, I mean. She filled my life. I am a widower, I may tell you. I lived for her; and she lived for me—for some years. We had a little girl. I was a damned scoundrel to you and all that sort of thing,

but what man would have done differently? You know what that amazing woman is as well as I do. Perhaps even better. She told me, long before we left Penzance, that she was going to leave you. She said that she wanted a change of air. And, mind you, I was mad—stark, staring mad for her. She loved me passionately—there's not a shadow of doubt about that—and I thought she would go on doing so for ever. Then after some years of it—God knows I'd never lived before and never have since—she said that a feeling had come over her for change of scene. She wanted to go off quietly somewhere with baby and do a little sewing. I was managing at the Newcastle Theatre then, and we were coming on to the pantomime, and I told her I couldn't go. Then she said that didn't matter; in fact, she wanted to be alone for a while.

"She went and I feared nothing. She started for Folkestone, where I had friends; but she never went there and they never heard of her. She vanished, in fact. And she took my child with her. God knows I've hunted high and low for her. It's turned my hair grey losing

her. But one place I never did think of—and that—forgive me for saying so—was Penzance. I'm a fairly rich man now and—" There he stopped.

The villain was so terribly troubled about losing her that I hadn't the heart to say what I ought to have said. Many a man would have struck him to the earth no doubt; but it comed over me what awful things he must have felt to lose her like that; and, knowing Mercy Jane so well, I couldn't help but understand what a cruel void she always left behind her when she went.

Suffering in man, or beast, do always sap my manhood somehow, and, besides, there was the pride of knowing that Mercy Jane, after all her terrible goings on, had come back to the old original, like the wandering lamb to the fold. So I found it in me to be merciful even to this worm.

However, I took good care to show the man I was vexed about it. My first impulse was to ax him to come and have a drink along wi' me; but I steeled myself and cast the thought from me as weakness.

"You've done a damned wicked deed," I said. "You saw what Mercy Jane was, when she was in the tobacco shop, and instead of helping her to a steadier frame of mind and being on the side of religion and the home, as we all should, you let yourself go and love her. And love in that woman is a banked fire ready to bust forth at a look. I'm ashamed of you, and I'm ashamed of what you've done, and 'tis a terrible bad advertisement for the dramatic stage. And as to the child, she's as happy as a little innocent angel can be, and if you want it——"

"Curse the child," he said. "I don't want the child. It's all over now—at least, it's got to be all over, I suppose. So long as she's happy—Mercy Jane I mean."

"Set your mind at rest on that score," I answered. "She's given up all gadding and, after I tell her about this, the shock of my finding out the shameful truth ought to keep her quiet for life along with me to Journey's End Farm, Madron. I hate a falsehood and always have done. Honest and open is my motto."

The man wasn't listening, however. He'd fallen into a great silence. Presently he spoke again.

"I've done you a terrible injury and I've been terribly punished for it," he said in a very manly way. "I humbly beg you'll forgive me, William Chirgwin."

He offered me his hand.

"You was tempted and you fell," I answered, dropping by a sort of habit into my old preaching way. "And it idden for me to bear malice, or cast a stone. Sin no more, Mr. Bellamy, and don't you seek to write no letters, or get into communication with my wife; because that would be to do wrong past forgiveness in my opinion and I wouldn't stand for it."

"Undoubtedly," he said.

Then he offered to stand me a drink, and I was dry as a chip and felt the matter, so far as he was concerned, might end like that.

He showed a natural desire to get out of my sight after one drink and so I left the man, for a painful task now awaited me. I didn't know whether to write and break it to Mercy Jane that I knew all; or whether to go home

and face her with the bitter truth. But a sort of sporting feeling, as I always have where the weaker sex be concerned, prompted me to tell her that she was forgiven, by letter. I calculated that she'd get my message by first post up to Madron next day, and then I'd follow it in the afternoon. 'Twas a hard problem, but I solved it afore the country mail went out, and wrote and told her how I'd met with the living Barbellion Bellamy and heard the worst. But I didn't say as she'd broke his heart and turned his hair grey, because there wasn't any call to do so, in my opinion. I couldn't be said to stand under any obligation to the man. In fact, it was all the other way.

XXIII

When I got home next day 'twas towards evening and the house seemed quite quiet and cold. Candle-teening time had come, but not a candle burned. My big yellow cat walked in from somewhere and purred and rubbed his

head against my leg, but there wasn't another sign of life anywhere round the place.

And the first thing I saw, on getting in the kitchen, was one of they telegraph envelopes empty on the floor. My man wasn't about and I felt as if I was alone with an open grave. She'd gone, and she'd took the child seemingly and she hadn't had my letter at all. The sweat poured off my face. It came home upon me that I was a widow-man again and this time very like for ever.

Then I went up over to Mercy Jane's people, and her mother had a bit of a tell along with me.

Mrs. Penrose knowed as my wife was gone.

"She was away yesterday evening," she told me. "She said her heart was set on Scotland —where ever that is. Any way she's off; and she's left the child along with me. And if you won't take it, I must, but I'd a lot sooner you did. I've had my share of children, I believe."

"Scotland!" I said. "'Twas Plymouth!"

"Well, she's gone, anyway, and Bridget's asleep along with our sheepdog for the moment," answered Mercy Jane's mother. "The child

will make a proper tantarra when she finds your wife be off."

"If she's left the child, there's hope," I said to Mrs. Penrose. "In fact, her love for that little thing be a rope of steel."

"'Twould be a clever rope to hold Mercy Jane," answered the woman. "But, anyhow, I beg as you'll take the cheel."

"I must surprise you very painfully now," I answered her now. "I met—well, 'tis no odds, but in a word Mercy Jane is the mother of Bridget."

"Everybody else in the world have knowed that perfectly well for years," she answered. "Could the brat have got them eyes from any woman on earth but my darter? Of course 'tis so. And you'd better take her, for if she bides here, she'll get no teaching, or nothing of that, and have to go for a bal-maiden to the mines so soon as ever she's strong enough for the work."

"I'll fetch her home," I replied to Mrs. Penrose. "She's very fond of me and I must do what I can."

"You'll want a woman round the house, I

suppose," she answered. "Why not try my darter, Milly—the widow? She can cook very clever and understands men folk."

"No," I said. "I don't mean no offence, ma'am, but I'd rather not have my wife's sister, or anybody of her blood around about me. I'm a good deal cast down over this job. 'Tis a very crushing and unexpected thing. I'd brought Mercy Jane home a flam-new sewing-machine and all. It may have been a foolish act to buy it, seeing how things fell out and what I'd heard; but to return good for evil hurts nobody, and I did buy a machine and a cruel fine one, too. Though I hadn't meant to give it to her till I found a broken and a contrite heart in her."

The eyes of Mrs. Penrose shone when I mentioned a sewing-machine.

"What a godsend for somebody!" she said, and I knew she was thinking of her daughter —the cripple one as lived at home.

"Us'll talk about that another time," I promised. "And now you'd better let me have the child."

"You'll do well to think twice touching our

Milly," went on my mother-in-law. "She's very different from Mercy Jane. Your wife was always a bit of a changeling and quite unlike the others."

"A very great truth," I admitted. Then she woke up B.B. and somehow, when I got the little girl in my arms and knowed she was flesh and blood of my Mercy Jane, I broke down and had to turn my back on the old grandmother and go off without a word. What pangs I suffered that night none will ever know now, for the first days after she went from me was always the worst, and I tramped, tramped the blue stone floor of my kitchen till all the world else was sleeping and I said, in my great grief and rage, that I'd liefer see the woman dead at my foot wi' her red hair filling her coffin than suffer any more from her. For, of course, I'd put two and two together and saw she'd gone back to the play-actor after he'd sent the telegram to her behind my back.

And then, by slow degrees, I calmed down and got in Uncle Jack's old chair and sat gazing at the fire and telling over the wicked ways and wonders of Mercy Jane.

A pisgey-led life was hers, but I couldn't keep my wrath hot when I began to think upon her. It quailed* with the ashes in the grate and was grey as the ashes and cold as the dawn afore I rose up and went to my chamber.

I ban't near clever enough to read the true characters of men and women in a general way; but after so many years, off and on, with Mercy Jane, I did get to see a good deal of her methods and general plans for running her life. One thing about her was that she was always so wonderful sure of herself. Now, I never could feel that. She always knowed what she wanted and, so far as I could see, always found a way to get it. And that, in a nutshell, is the art of living, no doubt. But few folk there be that reach it. Because, if you try to be good also, you can't reach it. For my part I never saw another succeed but Mercy Jane. There was a disreputable greatness about her, and a sense of power; and if she'd been born to a higher station of life, 'tis difficult to say how far up in the world she might have climbed,

**Quailed.* Withered.

her without a conscience. For, given a conscience, nobody can't climb very far in a world like this here, and the lofty ones be always doubtful in that respect.

She never seemed to care a button what folk thought of her, which be another fine and fearless thing in its way. She was always terrible interested in her own affairs, but never in other people's. She just went her own-self road and ran over you, like the coulter of a plough, if you chanced to be in the way. She kept her mouth shut unless she wanted anything; and if it could be got by lying, she lied; and if it could be got by loving, she loved; and she was a masterpiece at both of them. And if every road failed, she'd have a fit of thoughtfulness and brood a while, though always bright and pleasant with it; and then she'd change her stratagems and up and strike for her own hand again.

She was very large-minded and never cast a stone. Live and let live appeared to be her motto; and I never heard her to praise vartue or to blame vice; or pass any moral opinions upon good folk, or bad. You might say of her

that she had a regular genius for minding her own business; and if you put all your time and thought into that, of course it prospers. Yet, again, what her business was ezacally, who could say? Her business was pleasure in a sense; and yet, again, in another sense it was not. Because to make your business your pleasure be a very selfish habit, and you couldn't in honesty call Mercy Jane selfish. She had no use for loneliness; she always liked to share her life with somebody; she was always busy trying to help on the world one way and another.

So I pondered over Mercy Jane and remembered a thing that her mother had said about her years and years before, when I chanced to wonder why she was so unlike all the rest of her brood.

"She is," admitted Mrs. Penrose. "She's a sport, and yet when I call home what my father used to tell about his grandmother, it do look as if she was only a try-back, after all. For father's grandmother had a devil and made history in them far-off days. 'Tis well remembered by tradition in our family that

she was taken to Mr. Wesley, the last time he came preaching in to Cornwall, for him to put his hands upon her and cast it forth; and he tried very valiantly—and failed. She was a proper caution, by all accounts, and none ever knowed what became of her, though most people guessed, for Satan looks after his own."

She spoke with a light heart and a careless voice; because it weren't till long after that time that Mercy Jane reached to her full powers.

XXIV

And, now there came to me the great adventure of my yellow cat. A very wonderful matter, you may say, looked at from every point of view, and if I'd still been in the preaching line, the beast would have made material for several very fine discourses. God Almighty be like Nature in some ways and can find a use for everything, so long as 'tis in its proper place. And He looks ahead something wonderful and will fit His creatures

in and make the humblest serve His Almighty purpose, with a cleverness quite beyond the power of man to copy; though, after the trick is done, He gives us the sense to see the point and admire the witty workings of the Divine skill.

It fell out like this—to say it with all respect. God found that my life was to be took from me by wicked men. Nought could have saved me, and the Devil made a terrible plan to have me cut off. Well, the Almighty comed to hear of it, for there's nought happens or will happen, but the schemes have to be passed by the Creator of all. And when this outrageous bit of work reached His Ear, He just up and said, short and sharp:

"No, I haven't done with William Chirgwin yet and, in a word, 'tisn't to be!"

Then, all-powerful as He is, we know He could have taken any step He pleased to prevent it. A man would have set out quite different, and shown up the sinners, and made a rare fuss no doubt and very like turned the parish upside down, but God—what does He do? He gives His intellect to the task and, in

one flash, sees the whole thing with its ins and outs and difficulties and devilries; and then, before putting two and two together and making four, as only He can, sees the way out and appoints one of His humblest, though at the same time one of His trickiest, creatures to stand for the cause of right and justice.

I don't mean Mercy Jane neither; she had nought to do with it at all. But the affair must be told from the beginning and that takes me back a bit.

Long, long ago, I was smoking my pipe by the stream that flows round my place and then runs into Upper Madron Farm and waters the meadows, when I see a man named Paul Trewoof, walking by the brook. He'd got four yowling chets in his hat and a wretched mother cat running after him in a great state of misery.

This Trewoof was an old Penzance man and had been a sailor for some years. He'd come back to his native place a beggar, and having known him in youth, I befriended him and was able to get him regular work. I couldn't take him on myself, but my neighbour, Gregory Huxtable, master of Upper Madron,

still hankered after Journey's End and had a hope to get it from me yet. So he bided his time and did me a service when he could. And at my wish he employed Paul and found him a very useful man. For a sailor's the only sort that can turn his hand to any trade, and from tilling of the sea, Trewoof came to tilling the land, and soon got very clever at cattle and rotation of crops and all the rest of it. He'd been frost-bitten going round the Horn, and his left flapper had been mangled in a donkey engine, and he was ugly as sin, with a broken nose and jackdaw eyes and a mouth that hadn't no lips to it; but in other ways he was a quiet and interesting man and, though I didn't hold with any of his opinions, I got to like him very well and, as an old fellow salt, he often came in and had a tell and a drink with me of an evening. A queer thing in his nature was an uncanny liking for killing creatures. He'd rise any morning with the light to slay a pig, or other beast; and 'twas just death he was busy with now, as I met him by the river.

"Hullo, Paul," I cried out; "what be up to?"

"Drowning these here kittens," he said; "they'm May chets and would bring bad luck if us let 'em live."

"Nonsense," I answered. "You ought to know better than believe that stuff. Let's have a look at 'em."

I looked and found that one of the poor blind things was yellow as a guinea wi' a touch of red in his fur. Somehow the colour put me in mind of Mercy Jane's hair.

"I'll take that one," I told Trewoof. "You let it go back to its mother for a while, and a month hence I'll give 'e a shilling for it."

Of course he fell in with that; and so I bought my life for twelve-pence as well as the kitten's. For 'twas that squeaking ball of fur that the God of the stars had fixed upon to play its part in my salvation presently.

"Gaffer" I called the creature, when it come in due time to Journey's End, and 'twas a very successful, self-respecting sort. One of they quiet cats, that goes its own way and gets all it can, and keeps its own counsel and don't make any trouble about the house. Very

good company he was, and always glad to see you and always ready for any little tit-bit you might give him; but he never would cringe or lick your shoes, like some cats, and then, after you've gived 'em what they want, turn their backs on you as if you was dirt and wash their faces and curl up and forget you, till they want you again. He was one of Nature's gentlemen, you might say. Mercy Jane was always very fond of him and spoilt him shocking, and when she went the last time, he missed her pretty near so much as I did. But he had Bridget for a playmate and they loved each other well; and by day he'd often go with her on the moor and poke about like a dog, or have a snooze on a sunny bank, while she picked flowers, or played her little games.

And so it was; and then, when my wife had been gone again a matter of years and Bridget was about six, and "Gaffer" had got to be nine, or thereabout, his usefulness happened.

I'd seen Mr. Huxtable again and again on the subject of the farm, and after about a dozen long talks, he'd worked me up to make a promise that he should have it in the time

to come. He was younger than me and he coveted Journey's End as much as ever, and kept on at me about it till at last I consented that he should have the farm when I died. You see I knew that, come what might, Mercy Jane, if she was still about, wouldn't have no use for the place, and more wouldn't the child, so I made a price and he met me very fair in that matter and it finally stood that, so soon as I went to my reward, Gregory Huxtable would take over Journey's End and add it to Upper Madron if he onlived me.

Little I knowed my man when I settled upon that. He was a dark and fiery chap and some whispered that the family taint crept out now and again. Indeed, his wife, in a weak moment, had confessed that seven devils was nothing to his temper sometimes when things went awry; but so far as the outer world was concerned, the man passed for a prosperous, peppery farmer, who kept well inside the law and came out top as a rule. He'd three childer—two boys and a girl—and they was put to good boarding schools; and 'twas for his eldest son—a nice lad that he loved like the apple of his eye—

that he had made these plans touching Journey's End.

He knowed, of course, that I wasn't the sort that dies in a moment; but he calculated that I must be gone afore him, and his hope was, as he frankly told me, to rope in Journey's End and make all right for his eldest before he closed his own eyes.

So it stood, and it might have been a year or so after our bargain that the thing was put afore me in a new and very painful light.

There came a peaceful evening in the fall and little Bridget and me and "Gaffer" had gone out 'pon the moor for a bit. I sat upon a bank and smoked my pipe, and being in a sort of dreamful mood, was turning over the past.

Well, as I sat and thought, Paul Trewoof walked off the moor, gun in hand. 'Twas mid September and he'd been after the snipe ith young master Huxtable, home for the holidays.

The boy, as happened to be very fond of Bridget, went off to help her play a new game, and Paul pitched alongside me for a minute.

And then, for the first time I found he was getting discontented with his lot at Upper Madron. He said some harsh things of Gregory Huxtable and declared he couldn't stand much more of his fiendish temper and so on.

"Why, I thought you were so thick as thieves," I answered. "You'm well known to be his friend. He have put up your wages and he thinks the world of you."

"Not of late," declared Trewoof. "At one time it was so, and he promised me to be head man presently, and all looked very hopeful; but times are changed. In fact, I want to leave him."

I was very much astonished to hear this unexpected news, for it had been a matter of some note in Madron of late how Gregory Huxtable had taken to Trewoof. Of course, Paul was a handy and valuable man; but he didn't belong to the class of Mr. Huxtable, and some wiseacres had long foretold the friendship wouldn't last. Now it looked as if they was to be right.

"Have you been giving yourself airs and taking too much upon yourself?" I asked.

"Not at all," he replied. "I'm always the same. You can take me or leave me. You know my sort. There's no quarrel, but I hate the man who blows soft to-day and hard to-morrow. He's a fitful, fiery chap and he hasn't got no religion and you never know what he'll be doing next."

Then Trewoof asked me if I'd take him on at Journey's End, and I refused.

"I'm full up," I said, "and I couldn't sack neither of my boys; and besides that, if you came to me and left Huxtable, he'd rage against me and never forgive me. We are very good friends now and I wish it to be so always between us."

Then the man told me the painful news.

"Friends! Don't you think that," he answered. "You can't be friends with a man that wishes you dead, I should reckon."

"Wishes me dead!" I cried. "Good Lord, Paul, what be you telling? Why ever should he wish any such wicked thing as that?"

"Haven't you promised him his heart's desire when you're dead? Idden it the most natural thing in the world?" he asked. And

more he wouldn't say; but he left me in a very uncomfortable frame of mind and I couldn't get the shocking idea out of my head.

Trewoof and young Huxtable went off presently, and later on me and Bridget and Gaffer turned homewards in the dimpsy light.

I mind how the little one marked the bats beginning to flitter, and she sang in her pretty voice the old song about 'em that her mother had taught her.

> "Airymouse! Airymouse! fly by my head
> And you shall have a crust of bread,
> And when I brew and when I bake,
> You shall have a piece of my wedding cake!"

'Twas a peaceful evening with the reds in the sky and no wind stirring. And the fair hour and B.B.'s little happy face and twittering voice seemed quite at odds with my own heart and the trouble in it. Because for such a mild man as me—one as never could have hurt a hair of any human creature—'twas a very cruel and terrible bit of news to learn that his next door neighbour wished him underground so furious. In fact, I felt quite downdaunted about it and couldn't eat my meat

for thinking what to do. And what was even worse than that happened: I got a sort of un-Christian dislike of Gregory Huxtable.

XXV

Well, time passed and I saw a good deal of Paul and marked that him and his master grew more and more at enmity.

Trewoof would often come in and spend an evening with me and share my grog. In the matter of drinking I may say I never took a drop now till the day's work was done. But after supper of a night I was used to have a couple of goes of rum, and sometimes, if in the mood, I'd stretch a point with a friend and take three and smoke an extra pipe.

Trewoof, he liked rum, too, for 'tis the regular familiar tipple of old sailor men, and we'd sit and yarn and drink together very friendly. But he was discontented and didn't let me forget the matter of Huxtable neither. In fact, he dwelt upon it far too much and not seldom I made him change the subject on pain

of my displeasure. One night in early winter he wouldn't let it alone and warned me, as he had a hundred times afore, against the master of Upper Madron.

"I keep my ears open," he said, "and hear many things I'm not thought to hear. 'Twould be libellious and he might have me in prison for it; but you're my friend and you've got me your side and I'll say this: that man don't merely wish you ill. He'd do you an injury any day if he could and may lie behind a hedge for you yet some dark night. Whether or no, he'll put on no mourning the day you drop in your grave, for his consuming hunger after Journey's End is like a fire in him; in fact, the ruling passion of his life."

"'Tis very unpleasant to me to hear these things," I answered, "and God He knows I'd much rather not hear 'em. I bear the man no ill will, though I can't pretend to like him no more. And I'm sure I be very thankful I've got a friend in his house. Sometimes I confess I'm angered to think upon it, because I've done my best to pleasure him, as you know; and if I thought he meant in cold blood to do

away with me, I'd go up to him in the open street and pull his nose. 'Tis a very dirty thing to harbour such thoughts against an innocent man and, in plain English, I won't stand it."

"Do nothing rash," answered Trewoof. "If you give him the least chance to have a row, he will."

Then the man broke off and laughed in his grim way.

"Keep your weather eye lifting, and don't be too long a-dying—that's all you've got to do," he said.

We fell into a moment's silence and I watched Paul at his old game with my rum bottle and his glass. We call it "vamping" in these parts and 'tis a common trick with topers. They make one glass of grog last all night; but they never empty it. First water goes in, then rum, and then, presently, a drop more water, and then rum again, and so on; till a man's bosky-eyed and gone at the knees; and yet he'll tell you, if he can still speak, that he haven't had but one drink all the evening!

But that night Trewoof went a good bit

lighter on the rum than usual and when he said "good night", there was still half a bottle or near it undrunk.

We sat late and he talked and talked of the past and his adventures, which had been various and queer. His manner was a bit different from usual that night: he stayed rather later than his custom and then rose and went off in a hurry.

'Twas the last time I ever had a drink with Paul Trewoof. I let him out of the house and, according to his rule, Gaffer rose from the fire-side and went out at the same time. For he was a cat as ran his life very regular when under my eye, and from the time I let him in of a morning to the time he went out at night, he was wont to wash his face and eat and sleep and drink like clockwork. So now I saw my friend down to the wicket and stood there looking at the moon for five minutes along with him. 'Twas a soft night with a plum* wind offering to bring up rain, though the sky was still clear and the stars shining dim as they do in vapoury weather. Then Trewoof

Plum. Gentle, mild.

went off down my lane; and Gaffer's tail gave a whisk as he jumped over the fence and disappeared; and I put home the door and locked it and went to rest.

I'd fallen into the way of saying my evening prayers beside B.B.'s bed. She had a little chamber next to mine and she'd come into me of a morning and wake me with her chatter. And looking back on that night, I often think that my prayers would have been a good size longer if I'd known about the enemy that was going to move against me afore the sun rose. But I only prayed as usual and just named the few as was most to me in the world and called on the Lord to keep 'em safe, whether living or dead. Then I turned in and went off to sleep as usual, almost afore my head was on the pillow. I'd got Uncle Jack's room now—the one as stood at the top of the stone stairs from the kitchen to the upper floor; and I always kept the door open, so as I could hear Bridget if she woke or called by night.

How long I had slumbered I couldn't say, but it must have been three or four hour at the least, and then I woke suddint and knowed

I wasn't alone. A hand, as I thought, was clawing at the coverlet, and just as I prepared to thrust forth my own and clutch at it, there come a jump and some great, heavy thing dropped lumpus on the bed! I was too sleepy to cry out but stared afore me, and then I seed, dark against the dim square of the window blind, that 'twas Gaffer had leapt to me; and there he stood, padding with his forepaws up and down softly as is their wont, to make their beds afore they lie down and curl up for a sleep. Then I heard his purr, which was loud enough by day; but in the silence of the night he 'peared to be humming like a steam saw. And then he come right up to me and I seed his yellow eyes glint like little moons, and he rubbed his cold nose against my whiskers and tried to get in the bed alongside me for warmth.

Well, my waking senses worked very slow, but gradually reason come to work.

I said to myself:

"Here's the cat! But I see him go over the fence just afore I shut up house. And the question is, 'how the mischief did he get in

again?' I kept pretty still for half a minute and stroked Gaffer and made him come in the bed and lie down. Then I argued it out—pretty pertly for me.

"He couldn't have come in single-handed," I thought, "so 'tis sartain he found a door or window open. But if so be there's a door or window open, it didn't happen without hands; and the man who have done it idden no friend of mine."

When I got that far, I reckoned 'twas time I rose and went down house. And so I did, but very clever and quiet, for I didn't want to run upon some dare-devil of a fellow in my night-shirt, wi' nothing to my hand but a hob-nailed boot and no neighbours nearer than Upper Madron farm. My two men was at the other end of the building, you see, and so was my housekeeper, and I couldn't get to 'em without going through the kitchen.

So I donned my trousers and crept out to the top of the stairs to find if ought was moving; but further I didn't go for the moment, because there was a dark lantern flashing below. For a while it looked as if the light was moving

without help; but then I saw that a man held it. I got down on my belly then and just put my head over the edge of the top step and watched the villain.

And if I hadn't been lying flat 'tis odds but I should have fallen so, for a moment later I marked who 'twas. Paul Trewoof had come back, and there he stood, just as he had left me a few hours before! He'd took off his boots for silence, and silent as a spider he moved. He'd come in through the window I marked, for 'twas wide open behind him, and now he went to the cupboard and fetched out my rum and put down his lantern and opened the bottle. 'Twas a pretty queer thing to do and a pretty queer time to come for a drink, to a man as had just stood him as much as he wanted; but then I found as Paul hadn't come to take nothing out of my bottle; but to put something into it! He fetched a physic phial of blue glass from his breast pocket and he poured its contents into my rum. Then he returned the cork to the bottle, and put the bottle in its place again and shut the cupboard and slowly crept to the window. He doused

the lantern, picked up his boots, closed the sash very gentle and was gone, as I thought. But then I heard a scraping, and when I went down house presently, I found he'd even drawed back the window bolt with a piece of wire, so as to leave no trace of his visit.

I must confess my hair stood on end after Paul Trewoof was away, for somehow, like a flash, it comed over me what he had planned to do. My mind never moved so quick afore, and I even looked on ahead and saw myself having a good pull at my bottle next night. And then, no doubt, I should roll over in untold agonies and drum the stone floor of the kitchen with my heels and so die a hideous and poisonous death.

Thinking upon this fearful idea for a bit, I began to get properly angry with Paul Trewoof. For two pins I'd have gone down there and then, and followed after him, and given him a damned good hiding, or very like bound him with ropes and handed him over to the law. But I didn't do that. I let him go unmolested; I let him sneak off, very well pleased with

himself, no doubt, and leave death behind him for the man who had never done him nought but kindness. I could have wept to think of such hard-hearted wickedness, but presently I went down and lighted the fire and brewed myself a strong dish of tea. I couldn't have slept again that night for money. Then Gaffer, he popped down stairs to see why for I didn't go back to bed again; and as a small thing, yet showing how my mind was worked up to fever pitch, I went in the larder and fetched out half of a rabbit pie and gived it to the cat as a thank offering. He stared and couldn't believe his luck, of course; but he didn't waste no time wondering. To work he went like a master, and no doubt in his little cat's mind he thought that he'd done a very smart night's work. Which I'm sure from my point of view he had done; because if he hadn't come in, I shouldn't have waked up; and if I hadn't waked up, I shouldn't have seen Trewoof at his midnight work; and if I hadn't done that, I should have been a dead man out of mind afore the Christmas bells was ringing.

XXVI

Well, I felt that some steps did ought to be took. But I couldn't exactly see what. 'Twasn't a thing to pass over at all; because a man who would act like what Paul Trewoof had acted shouldn't be running loose among honest folk. I felt the matter many sizes too large for me and reckoned 'twas better fit I took it to a cleverer creature. To find him, of course, looked easy enough, though the choice was large.

First I thought upon parson, but he was a man of peace, like myself; and then I judged that Gregory Huxtable would be the wisest party; yet I didn't feel like telling him, because I couldn't help fearing that in his hard heart he'd be terrible sorry the worst hadn't happened. Finally I ordained to break it to James Lanine, the policeman. He was a clever fellow and stood well with his superiors; and so I went to him with the whole tale; and I took the doctored bottle of spirits also.

He became terrible interested and his trained policeman mind saw a lot more in the affair than what I did. If I'd been horrified afore, I was ten times more so after Jimmy set out the matter from his point of view. He threw a very ugly light on the affair and swept away my hope that it might be found Trewoof was mad and not responsible for his actions. 'Twas like a piece out of a newspaper to hear James, and yet for my life I couldn't see but what his view might be the properest one.

He listened to my story from first to last without saying a word, and when I'd quite done, he told me what he thought.

"There's a bigger than Paul Trewoof behind this," he began.

"Too well I know it, Jimmy; and his name's the Devil," answered I.

"His name's Gregory Huxtable," declared Lanine. "'Tis all so easy for me to read as print. Huxtable's hungering after your farm, and he knows that when you go out of it he'll be master of Journey's End. Then he sets his blackguard wits to work and finds the very tool ready to his hand in this chap. But

he does nothing in a hurry. He takes his time to make all safe. And, as an additional safeguard, 'tis pretended that him and his man are none too friendly, and Trewoof, to throw dust in your eyes, be always grumbling against Huxtable and even warning you against him. That's all to get your trust and confidence, which he did do. Then he learns your habits and wins your friendship. So he knows the ways of Journey's End and comes and goes till the place is as familiar to him as it is to you. And what would have happened next? To-night, at the usual time, you would have took down your bottle of rum and poured out four fingers; and so like as not the poison was such that you'd have been a goner afore you could have cried for help. Then, with to-morrow morning, the murder would have been out, but the murderer, never. Huxtable gets his farm and Trewoof gets his blood-money and you go down to the grave with the slur of suicide on you, very like, for no mortal man would ever be able to prove you hadn't done away with yourself, at least no man but them two anointed scoundrels."

"You take my breath away, James," I said to him.

"Not I," he replied, "but they would have done so; and they expect to yet. They'm waiting very anxious for nightfall, you may be sure."

I fairly gasped to hear him and the sweat flowed off me.

"No good your shivering," he told me. "The thing is to know exactly what to do next."

I couldn't help him more than the dead, and he pondered over it a bit. Then he told me to go on with my life for the present, as if nothing was up against me, and come back to him in the afternoon.

"The first thing we've got to find out be this, William. What was it he put in your drink? And that I'll learn down to Penzance to-day. I know Doctor Pollard there—a wonderful clever man at chemicals he is and can keep his mouth shut, too, for 'tis a part of every good doctor's work to be able to do that. And he'll analyse this stuff and then we shall know where we stand. And if he don't

find a deadly poison in it, I'll quit the Force and come and dig your potatoes for you."

So 'twas left at that and, come the evening, I went to Jimmy again and he took me down from his house to the Constabulary, and we had a long tell with the Inspector.

'Twas just as James Lanine had said; the rum had got poison enough in it to kill a regiment. Trewoof had poured arsenic into my bottle; and if I'd took my usual dose, I should have been gone inside two minutes. And then Jimmy laid his amazing plan afore me and the Inspector, and I think the Inspector was sorry he hadn't hit on the thought himself; but he was a very good sportsman and congratulated Jimmy and said nothing better and nothing more likely to lead to the naked truth could be done. In a word, James suggested that I should go home and keep quiet and do nought.

"Trewoof won't call to see you to-night," he said. "He'll not want to join you in your drinking this evening, you may bet your

bottom dollar. And he'll think that somewhere between ten and eleven of the clock, or earlier, 'tis all over; and to-morrow he'll expect to hear Madron ringing with the sad news that Mr. William Chirgwin have died a sudden death. Very well, now my plan is this. To-morrow morning, allowing time for the thing to have got known, I walk over with Mr. Inspector to Upper Madron and ask to see Paul Trewoof. Then we arrest him for the murder of William Chirgwin. Like a thunderbolt this shock will fall, and he'll be all over the shop to find 'tis known, and then he'll turn traitor and give all away in hope to save his own neck. I'll lay my life," finished up Jimmy, "that the man will make a clean breast of it and we shall find 'twas his master that egged him to the crime."

The cleverness of Jimmy fairly amazed me, but yet I doubted whether 'twas quite an honest course to take.

"The cruel shock might turn his brain," I said, "and make him a drivelling idiot for life."

But Inspector thought that we needn't trouble ourselves too much about Trewoof's

wits nor his life neither. He seemed pretty sure that Trewoof would be shut up long enough to repent afore the bolt fell, anyway. In fact, he didn't much care what overtook him. Both the policemen, you see, were flying at higher game and wanted to have his master by the heels. They were sure he was in it; and when I put Huxtable's wife and family and good name afore them and explained that his character might be gone for ever, they grew a thought impatient with me and talked about law and justice and the welfare of the community. Of course, the police have got their own way of looking at their lawful prey, so, having come to them with the fearful affair, I could do no less than fall in with their directions.

'Twas a very horrible thing altogether to happen upon such a mild-mannered man as me; but I raised no more objections and went my way and kept out of sight in my house next morning and spent some hours with Bridget and Gaffer. Then fell the end of the tale.

Lanine dropped in on the evening of that

day and told me of all that had falled out and confirmed a dark rumour that had got wind in the village soon after noon. My housekeeper brought it back from Madron long afore Jimmy turned up; and then, when I axed him if the thing was true, he said it was and told me how it had happened. He took very little credit in his usual quiet and modest way; but for my part I shall always think the praise was his, and though very awful results followed, that was all part of the eternal plan of things and we were no more than the weapons of Divine justice. Paul Trewoof was pounced upon at seven thirty o'clock, and Jimmy said he went in a swound when they taxed him and had a sort of fit. But, so soon as ever he could speak again, he told all, and 'twas almost to a hair as Lanine had guessed. I had no difficulty in believing every word but one; and that was when Jimmy told me the man had been promised two hundred pound by his master for putting me away. It seemed too much and out of proportion to the job; but that's the figure he had named.

Anyway, they took him, and after he'd told

his tale, how he'd done the thing at the direction of Farmer Huxtable, they went to take Huxtable also. But 'twas too late. He'd got wind earlier, and when his wife brought him the news that Trewoof had been arrested at daylight for the murder of William Chirgwin, Gregory Huxtable had gone out in his barn and taken a gun kept there for frightening birds; and he had loaded it up and fired into his mouth.

"Another of them mad Huxtables gone to his account," said James Lanine, "but better him than you, William."

. . . . .

As for Trewoof, he got ten years for his bit of fun. They tried to bring him in weak-minded, but the doctors wouldn't stand for it and held him sane as themselves. So he went up to Princetown in the Dartymoors to work off his punishment.

Of course, it all filled columns of the papers and was the wonder of the countryside; but there wasn't no money in the adventure for

me this time. The cat came out most famous, after his Maker, for I'm a fair man and let it be clearly known what part Gaffer had played under Providence, in saving my life. His history was set out from the time I bought him from Trewoof for a bob, and 'twas quite understood what he'd done; and one paper even went so far as to send a man to photograph the cat for publication. Many strange persons called to see him, and a sane woman offered me ten pounds for him; but I couldn't part. Gaffer he wouldn't suffer no picture of him to be took either. He was terrible feared of the camera and thought 'twas some new strange three-legged beast had come amongst us. In a word he fled afore it and didn't turn up no more till the man had gone.

XXVII

And now, after just a few more properly amazing things, you may say that my craft made harbour and my adventures were at an

end. For while the first forty years, or thereabout, that I lived in the world were full of surprises, the second forty turned out wondrous quiet. In fact, I couldn't have made a book out of the fag-end of my days, for they was exceeding peaceful. And I liked 'em so, for there's nought better than an even keel after you've been tossed by the tempest.

Following on that very improper attempt to put me away, Providence kindly give my life a bit of a rest for best part of two years; but though no particular thing happened to my outward affairs during this time, a very crushing adventure overtook me inside.

It began quiet enough, when poor Arthur Tregenza—the shoemaker's brother—went to his death in the tin mine, owing to the stupid oversight of a man by name of Manders. And many called it criminal carelessness and blamed Abel Manders. Be that as it will, when Arthur died, Manders offered to marry his widow, Nelly Tregenza. But though a very nice-looking man and religious, Nelly felt somehow it weren't vitty to take him, and so she declined. She'd only been wedded a month to

poor Arthur when she lost him, and she felt, that it being a fool's trick of Manders which had put her husband out of life, he weren't exactly the one to fill Arthur's place. Besides all that, she didn't like him. 'Twas then I asked her if she'd come and look after me and my little maiden at Journey's End, for I'd had a failure or two there; and Nelly came willingly, and such was her wonderful fine nature, nice appearance, kind heart and general cleverness, that I found myself, little by little, getting a good bit interested in her. And she felt the same to me, for I was the quiet fashion of man to please her. One night, when we unfolded our feelings, while I smoked and she mended my old coat and put another six months' life into it, we decided that, if things had only been different, we might have jogged along very happy together. A dark, neat, shapely piece she was—clean as a new pin, but not a driver, as so many of them spotless women are prone to be. A high complexion, black eyes and very self-respecting. In fact, for a woman only round about thirty-five, an unusual lot of sense and a

pretty fair trust in God, despite her sad experience.

"As for me, Nelly," I said, "I couldn't wish to have no better wife than you, but living as you may describe it, in the perpetual shadow of Mercy Jane, and also of right and wrong, it looks as if we must ordain to bide apart. And I'm sorry for it," I said.

"I like you exceedingly well, William," she answered. "You be the sort of male I could rest with very happy and work for very hard."

We'd known each other getting on for two year then, and though we agreed for the moment for her to stop at Journey's End, I warned her that if I catched myself getting any more addicted to her, she might have to go.

"'Tis round about the time," I said, "when one may begin to look for Mercy Jane. You'll generally find that from two to three years brings her back."

"And you'll generally find," added Mrs. Tregenza, who knew the whole history

of Mercy Jane only too well, "that there's always something have happened to you to fetch her back."

"True," I granted, "and since all's quiet with me, and no particular prosperity in sight, or nothing like that, she'll wait and watch—unless she finds herself storm-foundered."

"Yes," said Nelly Tregenza. "That's what she'll do, no doubt. And there's some men, William, as wouldn't think it half good enough—nice men, too."

I examined the state of my feelings pretty close after that and I was forced to grant, in sober honesty, that I'd lost my old excitement about Mercy Jane. It was all very well as a young man, for the young can stand most anything; but now more'n forty years had passed out of my life, and I didn't wish for no more excitements, or great feats, or surprises, least of all with Mercy Jane. Nelly was like a nice wood fire, while my wife might be said to resemble fireworks; and the taste for fireworks dies with youth, while steadfast warmth be the requirement of middle age. And then Christianity told me that the

steadfast warmth of poor Tregenza's widow was getting a darned sight too hot for me, and I had to face the trial of bidding her depart from Journey's End for my soul's sake, and also hers. I touched the subject with a good deal of delicate feeling; but she surprised me, for she said that in her opinion we should be a pair of fools to part. She was a practical-minded woman and asked me why the mischief I didn't divorce Mercy Jane and be done with her.

"You can only live your life once," she said, "and unless you still harbour a secret and romantical fancy after the wilful creature, William, I much wonder you don't move in the matter—that is if you care for me like what you say."

It was a great thought and I turned it over and Nelly bided on till I'd resolved about it. Then there came upon me one of they whispers you get sometimes beyond words I felt in my bones the hour was nearing that Mercy Jane might be on the scene of action once more; and I told Nelly, and she granted that they whispers were never sent to the heart

for nothing, and she'd much like to know what I was going to do about it.

I said, "as to a bill of divorcement, so long as she's hid from me, I can do nought; but if she appears, then 'tis well in my power to draw one out against her, owing to the little girl, and that fearful Barbellion Bellamy."

And Nelly shook her head and sighed.

"If she appears," she told me, "I'm so sure as I'm alive that 'tis she and not you will look after the future happenings."

But there I strongly felt the widow to be mistook.

"No, Nelly," I told her. "You need find yourself in no doubt as to that. If, and when, Mercy Jane returns, she'll find me a very different fashion of man from what she left me. In the light of your company I've got a mighty new view of my wife. The worm will turn," I said, "and if she's on her beam ends and down and out, or anything like that, mercy she'll certainly have, though all the mercy she ever knowed herself was her name; but justice to me, if not you, have also got to be considered."

However, Nelly weren't hopeful and didn't pretend she was; and then the whisper came true and I was up against Mercy Jane once more.

A hugeous surprise, of course, and everything quite different from what you might have expected, for she never did the same thing twice—would have scorned to do so. With all her faults she had a passion for novelty; and yet that may be to wrong her also, for now I found that she was in a contented frame of mind and it only remained for me to keep her in it. In fact, Providence that had blessed me so often, was offering to do the like again.

Nelly Tregenza saw postman come up the path to the gate one afternoon, while I drank a dish of tea. Drouthy weather and haymaking going on.

"A letter, by the look of it," said Nelly, and went out to the door; and there, sure enough, was a letter for me.

Little Mrs. Tregenza knew what she was fetching! Me and her had come to the parting of the ways just then and, though I'm no

man to do anything hasty, I had made it fairly clear to the woman, for six months or more, that she must look about for work outside Journey's End, since I could see no other way for it.

She didn't know the writing, but I did, and, as she put it in my hand, I shook like a leaf and gazed upon it as if I were struck, for there shone out my wife's free and fearless stroke. Her penmanship always ran uphill in a hopeful fashion, just like herself.

"'Tis from Mercy Jane," I said, and Nelly went so white as a dog's tooth. But her womanly feelings didn't desert her and she slipped off into the wash-house, like the delicate-minded creature she was, so as I should read the letter in complete private. I stared at it a good five minutes, I dare say, and for two pins would have cast the document into the kitchen fire unread; but duty be duty and forewarned is forearmed. It shows what I felt for Tregenza's widow, however, that I was resolved not to face what the future hid till she was by my side to say her say. So I summoned her, and she came with tears

running down her face, and I told her to pull herself together.

"List to me," I said. "Me and you be got to such a pass now that this letter is just as much to you as what it is to me, and I'll thank you to go back in your chair and pour me out another cup, so strong as you mind to; and when I've drunk it, I'll ope this letter and read her movements and intentions. And this I'll say also, that if her purpose don't chime with mine——"

"Read it," she said, "and get face to face. No use chittering about it—else she'll very like come in that door afore you've opened it —with a wagon-load of childer behind her."

'Twas a nasty stab, but a woman's a woman, however fine, and I didn't blame Mrs. Tregenza. I drank my tea while we kept silence, and then I opened the letter, to find six pages of Mercy Jane and a cutting from a newspaper.

"Us'll read her ideas first," I said. And so I did. And here 'tis copied word for word.

"4 Southernhay Grove,
Exeter.

"MY DEAR WILLIAM,

"I dare say you will feel a good deal of pleasure to see my handwriting again; but your pleasure won't be half so great as mine, to think I'm the one to bring you some hopeful news.

"I'll tell you about myself after, because I don't matter; but the thing that has brought a bit of real happiness into my life is the cutting from *The Times* newspaper I enclose. Your uncle in Australia and the last of your relatives left on earth, so far as I remember, is gone dead, and he never married by the looks of it, and a London lawyer has put an advertisement into the paper for the next of kin. And if they reply they will hear of something to their advantage."

"I knew it! And now—" began Nelly Tregenza, but I bade her list.

"Silence, woman," I said, "and let me flow on."

Then I continued with Mercy Jane.

"Your uncle was a wool-grower on the Murray River, in New South Wales, and they wool-growers often leave great fortunes; and if you find yourself in sight of big money, William, God's my judge, but nobody will be better pleased on earth than me—except Mr. Bellamy. You may remember him, and also remember that Mr. Bellamy and myself were much attached in the past; and I may tell you that, after I got his telegram, when he heard from you in Plymouth where he was at the time, I felt that man was the only right and proper one for me to home with. And though you may not believe it he can tell you that I never left him no more. I've stuck to him like a limpet ever since I went back, and when I tell you that he lost nearly all his money after taking a theatre, and that at this moment he's working only second in command at the Theatre Royal in this town, for a small salary, you'll understand how I'm changed.

"But as you grow older you do change, and he suits me as well as ever he did and we're heart to heart and always shall be. And it's come over us a good deal lately that we'd like to be married. And Mr. Bellamy is very much set on getting back his little girl, Bridget, before she grows any older.

"With your nice feelings on the subject, dear William, I'm pretty sure you will support Mr. Bellamy in these ideas the same as I do; because now you may fairly say it's finished between me and you. And I can assure you that even if you have inherited big money from your Uncle, I should still feel the same and not come back to trouble your tender heart again. Somehow I never quite felt myself along in the country with you; but the life of the theatre suits me very well, and I also like the cathedral.

"So it's up to you to do the needful, both for religion and your peace of mind; and I should dearly like to think there was some nice woman, far better than I

am, to be a wife to you in the good time I hope is coming.

"And I'll ask you, firstly, to divorce me and, secondly, to send back the little girl. And there's a thirdly, dear William, which I'll leave to your fine character, namely, the delicate question of whether, since I found the enclosed advertisement, you may not see your way to thank me for it. I know you'll be obliged all right; but if, as I hope and pray, there's a lot of money going to come to you pretty soon, I should be very pleased indeed if, out of the goodness of your big heart, which never yet failed you, you might see your way to reward us a little in a practical sort of fashion. I wouldn't hint at nothing like this if we was prospering; but for the minute we are not, and if, when the good time comes, you could give us a little wedding present of money, in proportion to what I may have done for you in sending the advertisement, then I feel sure you won't be any the worse for such a noble deed in the long run.

You never forgot that I was the weaker vessel, dear William, and I bless your name and always shall do.

"Mr. Bellamy wishes to send you his kindest regards and greatly hopes that, in your wonderful Christian style, you'll let the past bury the past, as they say. He feels nothing but respect for you, and I need not tell you, dear William, that my own feelings for you are absolutely unchanged. I wish there were more like you, but I never met such another.

"Your well-wisher always,

"MERCY JANE."

Silence fell between me and Nelly after I'd finished the letter, and I forgot all about the advertisement; but she did not. She picked it up off the floor, where it had fallen, and read it out.

It was from people called Messrs. Longley and Crimp, in London, who wanted news of anybody related to the late Isaac Chirgwin of Penzance and of "Madron" on Murray River.

We talked till dusk and we talked pretty

well all the next day, which was Thursday, and by the following Monday I had got my ideas pretty well in order. In fact, I wrote off two letters—one to Mercy Jane and one to Messrs. Longley and Crimp.

Nelly helped me with both and we only differed for a bit about poor little Bridget. I had a feeling that she was better with me, but Mrs. Tregenza did not share it. In fact, she reckoned that the child did ought to go back to her lawful protectors, and when I asked B.B. herself if she'd like to go back to her mother at Exeter, she said she would.

"It's Nature calling," declared Nelly, "and you've no right to feel hurt about it. You can't have it all your own way, William," she said, "and surely to God Providence have done more than enough for you and come to the rescue in a way you seldom meet with."

Which I had to grant.

I marked time a bit with Mercy Jane and weren't particular excited in my letter to her. Interested I was without a doubt, but strange to say her letter woke no deep sensations in me. I didn't find myself in the least jealous

of Bellamy, nor even a shade disappointed she weren't coming back. Quite the contrary, in fact. Time do kill the feelings something amazing, specially if there be distance also. And I didn't mention Nelly for the moment either; but I told Mercy Jane that for the sake of law and order and rightness I'd get out the bill of divorcement if it could still be done, and that the child was very well and very wishful to return to her and should do so in due course. I didn't send no kind messages to Barbellion Bellamy, however, but I did say that if anything came out of the advertisement, I'd keep her in mind, so soon as the marriage was accomplished and I had legal proofs of the same. That was Mrs. Tregenza's idea, and I expect it surprised Mercy Jane above a bit to find me grown into such a hard man of the world. But so it was. And I put a postscriptum telling her that little Bridget was used to say her prayers night and morning, and I hoped, her being the reformed character she told about, that she'd watch over her little one and keep her so good as what she had always been along with me, and take her to the cathedral

a lot oftener than the play-house. And I ended up, "Yours faithfully, William Chirgwin."

" 'Faithful' will be a strange fashion of word in her ear," said Nelly Tregenza; but I bade her harbour no unkind thought.

"Don't you judge the woman, Nelly," I said, "for she never judged nobody and I wouldn't have my future wife sink beneath my first."

XXVIII

To my astonishment the lawyers sent a clerk down when they got my letter, and he took a lot of pains poking about in the parish to make good my tale. Of course, he found out all about it, and that Uncle Isaac's two brothers were both dead, and that I was the only member of the family with any claim on the estate And then came the amazing news that I was good for twelve thousand of the best—or may be more, when certain property in Australia was all sold off.

It took a long time, however, and so did

the bill of divorcement, which was hard to get and made a pot of money for the lawyers; but afore a full year had run its course, Mercy Jane was free to marry Bellamy, and I'd offered and been accepted by Tregenza's widow. In sight of fifteen thousand pounds I stood when all was done, and I ordained to give Mercy Jane one third of the money. Nelly thought it rather poetical; but I withstood her there, and when she wanted me to settle the capital on B.B. and give her mother the run of the interest for life only, I withstood her again.

"No," I said, "single-handed she found that advertisement and, in my judgement, it would be unworthy to stand between her and the cash. She's earned it and it shall be hers."

So, when I got evidence of the marriage, I wrote her cheque. They left Exeter and was wedded before a registrar in London, and they much wanted me to join them at a little luncheon-party afterwards; but "No" I wrote them. "I don't want for to be at your second wedding, Mercy Jane, and I ain't going to ax you to mine."

She wrote to say the money had reached 'em safe. She didn't lose her head about it, neither. 'Twas much as if I'd sent 'em a brace of game birds and no more. Like everything else, her ideas on money was large and I expect she thought I ought to have sent half. Perhaps I did ought.

And now, so strangely do things fall out, instead of Journey's End being swallowed up by Higher Madron Farm, 'tis us that are the better by a nice slice of meadow and tilth that once belonged to them. And us have builded a lot of new modern fashion rooms into my house also.

The Huxtables have vanished out of the land; but the Chirgwins have not, for while I end my tale, I be here still, with a brave married son, nearer forty than thirty, living along with me and my wife, and his wife and family, and another son on the sea, and yet a third to Truro—market-gardening. And my eldest daughter's married to a church verger at Truro; my second, widowed and living with me, though tokened once more to a game-keeper hard by Penzance. And so far seven

grandchilder. But there ain't nothing to write about over all them flying years, for my adventures ended when I married Nelly Tregenza and nought have took place since that red-letter day which might not have happened to any man.

I think upon Mercy Jane sometimes. A wonderful piece. When my first child was born, she see it in the *Western Morning News*, where Nelly, for pride, would have it printed, and she sent me her congratulations and a very nice letter. They was doing very well with a touring company, she said, and I hope their lives went happily forward and the little girl grew up to be glad she was born. But I never heard tell no more about 'em after that. The past fades when the present be full of content-ment—and a good thing it do most times.

Not that Mercy Jane will ever fade altogether, being the sort that leaves a lasting image on the mind. I often wonder what her Maker thought of her. Great gifts, undoubtedly, and the grand power to forget what she didn't want to remember and remember what she didn't want to forget. Barbellion Bellamy, for all he

didn't look it, must have been a gifted creature to hold her, in my opinion.

But looking back through all my eighty years now, I blame nobody alive, or dead. A terrible clever man once said the pitchfork must have stout tines with which we would thrust away Nature. And he was right.

THE END

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IIA