

from a good deal of mental exertion and excitement in the day. A sort of sick distaste awoke in him for most of the incidents of existence—for Aunt Hannah, for Uncle Reuben's incomprehensible prayers, for the thought of the long Puritanical Sunday just coming. And, in addition, the low vibrations of that distant sobbing stirred in him again, by association, certain memories which were like a clutch of physical pain, and which the healthy young animal instinctively and passionately avoided whenever it could. But to-night, in the dark and in solitude, there were no distractions, and as the boy put his head down on his arms, rolling it from side to side as though to shake them off, the same old images pursued him—the lodging-house room, and the curtainless iron bed in which he slept with his father; reminiscences of some long, inexplicable anguish through which that father had passed; then of his death, and his own lonely crying. He seemed still to *feel* the strange sheets in that bed upstairs, where a compassionate fellow-lodger had put him the night after his father died; he sat up again bewildered in the cold dawn, filled with a home-sickness too benumbing for words. He resented these memories, tried to banish them; but the nature on which they were impressed was deep and rich, and, once shaken, vibrated long. The boy trembled through and through. The more he was ordinarily shed abroad, diffused in the life of sensation and boundless mental curiosity, the blacker were these rare moments of self-consciousness, when all the world seemed pain, an iron vice which pinched and tortured him.

At last he went to his door, pulled it gently open, and with bare feet went across to Louie's room, which he entered with infinite caution. The moonlight was streaming in on the poor gauds, which lay wildly scattered over the floor. David looked at them with amazement. Amongst them he saw something glittering. He picked it up, saw it was a gold necklace which had been his mother's, and carefully put it on the little toilet table.

Then he walked on to the bed. Louie was lying with her face turned away from him. A certain pause in the sobbing as he came near told him that she knew he was there. But it began again directly, being indeed a physical relief which the child could not deny herself. He stood beside her awkwardly. He could think of nothing to say. But timidly he stretched out his hand and laid the back of it against her wet cheek. He half expected she would shake it off, but she did not. It made him feel less lonely that she let it stay; the impulse to comfort had somehow brought himself comfort. He stood there, feeling very cold, thinking a whirlwind of thoughts about old Lias, about the sheep, about Titus and Jerusalem, and about Louie's extraordinary proceedings—till suddenly it struck him that Louie was not crying any more. He bent over her. The sobs had changed into the long breaths of sleep, and, gently drawing away his hand, he crept off to bed.

## CHAPTER IV

It was Sunday afternoon, still cold, nipping, and sunny. Reuben Grieve sat at the door of the farmhouse, his pipe in his hand, a 'good book' on his knee. Beyond the wall which bounded the farmyard he could hear occasional voices. The children were sitting there, he supposed. It gave him a sensation of pleasure once to hear a shrill laugh, which he knew was Louie's. For all this morning, through the long services in the 'Christian Brethren' chapel at Clough End, and on the walk home, he had been once more pricked in his conscience. Hannah and Louie were not on speaking terms. At meals the aunt assigned the child her coarse food without a word, and on the way to chapel and back there had been a stony silence between them. It was evident, even to his dull mind, that the girl was white and thin, and that between her wild temper and mischief and the mirth of other children there was a great difference. Moreover, certain passages in the chapel prayers that morning had come home sharply to a mind whereof the only definite gift was a true religious sensitiveness. The text of the sermon especially—'Whoso loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how shall he love God, whom he hath not seen?'—vibrated like an accusing voice within him. As he sat in the doorway, with the sun stealing in upon him, the clock ticking loudly at his back, and the hens scratching round the steps, he began to think with much discomfort about his dead brother and his brother's children.

As to his memories of the past, they may perhaps be transformed here into a short family history, with some details added which had no place in Reuben's mind. Twenty years before this present date Needham—once Needham's—Farm had been held by Reuben's father, a certain James Grieve. He had originally been a kind of farm-labourer on the Berwickshire border, who, driven southwards in search of work by the stress of the bad years which followed the great war, had wandered on, taking a job of work here and another there, and tramping many a score of weary miles between, till at last in this remote Derbyshire valley he had found a final anchorage. Needham Farm was then occupied by a young couple of the name of Pierson, beginning life under fairly prosperous circumstances. James Grieve took service with them, and they valued his strong sinews and stern Calvinistic probity as they deserved. But he had hardly been two years on the farm when his young employer, dozing one winter evening on the shafts of his cart coming back from Glossop market, fell off, was run over, and killed. The widow, a young thing, nearly lost her senses with grief, and James, a man of dour exterior and few words, set himself to keep things going on the farm till she was able to look life in the face again. Her sister came to be with her, and there was a child born, which died. She was left better

provided for than most women of her class, and she had expectations from her parents. After the child's death, when the widow began to go about again, and James still managed all the work of the farm, the neighbours naturally fell talking. James took no notice, and he was not a man to meddle with, either in a public-house or elsewhere. But presently a crop of suitors for the widow began to appear, and it became necessary also to settle the destiny of the farm. No one outside ever knew how it came about, for Jenny Pierson, who was a soft, prettyish creature, had given no particular sign; but one Sunday morning the banns of James Grieve, bachelor, and Jenny Pierson, widow, were suddenly given out in the Presbyterian chapel at Clough End, to the mingled astonishment and disgust of the neighbourhood.

Years passed away. James held his own for a time with any farmer of the neighbourhood. But, by the irony of fate, the prosperity which his industry and tenacity deserved was filched from him little by little by the ill-health of his wife. She bore him two sons, Reuben and Alexander, and then she sank into a hopeless, fretful invalid, tormented by the internal ailment of which she ultimately died. But the small farmer who employs little or no labour is lost without an active wife. If he has to pay for the milking of his cows, the making of his butter, the cooking of his food, and the nursing of his children, his little margin of profit is soon eaten away; and with the disappearance of this margin, existence becomes a blind struggle. Even James Grieve, the man of iron will and indomitable industry, was beaten at last in the unequal contest. The life at the farm became bitter and tragic. Jenny grew more helpless and more peevish year by year; James was not exactly unkind to her, but he could not but revenge upon her in some degree that ruin of his silent ambitions which her sickness had brought upon him.

The two sons grew up in the most depressing atmosphere conceivable. Reuben, who was to have the farm, developed a shy and hopeless taciturnity under the pressure of the family chagrin and privations, and found his only relief in the emotions and excitements of Methodism. Sandy seemed at first more fortunate. An opening was found for him at Sheffield, where he was apprenticed to a rope-maker, a cousin of his mother's. This man died before Sandy was more than half-way through his time, and the youth went through a period of hardship and hand-to-mouth living which ended at last in the usual tramp to London. Here, after a period of semi-starvation, he found it impossible to get work at his own trade, and finally drifted into carpentering and cabinet-making. The beginnings of this new line of life were incredibly difficult, owing to the jealousy of his fellow-workmen, who had properly served their time to the trade, and did not see why an interloper from another trade, without qualifications, should be allowed to take the bread out of their mouths. One of Sandy's first successes was in what was called a 'shop-meet-

ing,' a gathering of all the employés of the firm he worked for, before whom the North-countryman pleaded to be allowed to earn his bread. The tall, finely grown, famished-looking lad spoke with a natural eloquence, and here and there with a Biblical force of phrase—the inheritance of his Scotch blood and training—which astonished and melted most of his hearers. He was afterwards let alone, and even taught by the men about him, in return for 'drinks,' which swallowed up sometimes as much as a third of his wages.

After two or three years he was fully master of his trade, an admirable workman, and a keen politician to boot. All this time he had spent his evenings in self-education, buying books with every spare penny, and turning specially to science and mathematics. His abilities presently drew the attention of the heads of the Shoreditch firm for which he worked, and when the post of a foreman in a West-end shop, in which they were largely interested, fell vacant, it was their influence which put Sandy Grieve into the well-paid and coveted post. He could hardly believe his own good fortune. The letter in which he announced it to his father reached the farm just as the last phase of his mother's long martyrdom was developing. The pair, already old—James with work and anxiety, his wife with sickness—read it together. They shut it up without a word. Its tone of jubilant hope seemed to have nothing to do with them, or seemed rather to make their own narrowing prospects look more narrow, and the approach of the King of Terrors more black and relentless, than before. Jenny lay back on her poor bed, with the tears of a dumb self-pity running down her cheeks, and James's only answer to it was conveyed in a brief summons to Sandy to come and see his mother before the end. The prosperous son, broadened out of knowledge almost by good feeding and good clothes, arrived. He brought money, which was accepted without much thanks; but his mother treated him almost as a stranger, and the dour James, while not unwilling to draw out his account of himself, would look him up and down from under his bushy grey eyebrows, and often interpose with some sarcasm on his 'foine' ways of speaking, or his 'gen'leman's cloos.' Sandy was ill at ease. He was really anxious to help, and his heart was touched by his mother's state; but perhaps there was a strain of self-importance in his manner, a half-conscious inclination to thank God that his life was not to be as theirs, which came out in spite of him, and dug a gulf between him and them. Only his brother Reuben, dull, pious, affectionate Reuben, took to him, and showed that patient and wondering admiration of the younger's cleverness, which probably Sandy had reckoned on as his right from his parents also.

On the last evening of his stay—he had luckily been able to make his coming coincide with an Easter three days' holiday—he was sitting beside his mother in the dusk, thinking, with a relief which every now and then roused in him a

pang of shame, that in fourteen or fifteen more hours he should be back in London, in the world which made much of him and knew what a smart fellow he was, when his mother opened her eyes—so wide and blue they looked in her pinched, death-stricken face—and looked at him full.

'Sandy!'

'Yes, mother!' he said, startled—for he had been sunk in his own thoughts—and laying his hand on hers.

'You should get a wife, Sandy.'

'Well, some day, mother, I suppose I shall,' he said, with a change of expression which the twilight concealed.

She was silent a minute, then she began again, slow and feebly, but with a strange clearness of articulation.

'If she's sick, Sandy, *doan't grudge it her*. Women 'ud die fasster iv they could.'

The whole story of the slow consuming bitterness of years spoke through those fixed and filmy eyes. Her son gave a sudden irrepressible sob. There was a faint lightening in the little wrinkled face, and the lips made a movement. He kissed her, and in that last moment of consciousness the mother almost forgave him his good clothes and his superior airs.

Poor Sandy! Looking to his after story, it seems strange that any one should ever have felt him unbearably prosperous. About six months after his mother's death he married a milliner's assistant, whom he met first in the pit of a theatre, and whom he was already courting when his mother gave him the advice recorded. She was French, from the neighbourhood of Arles, and of course a Catholic. She had come to London originally as lady's-maid to a Russian family settled at Nice. Shortly after their arrival, her master shot his young wife for a supposed intrigue, and then put an end to himself. Naturally the whole establishment was scattered, and the pretty Louise Suveret found herself alone, with a few pounds, in London. Thanks to the kind offices of the book-keeper in the hotel where they had been staying, she had been introduced to a milliner of repute in the Bond Street region, and the results of a trial given her, in which her natural Frenchwoman's gift and her acquired skill came out triumphant, led to her being permanently engaged. Thenceforward her good spirits—which had been temporarily depressed, not so much by her mistress's tragic ending as by her own unexpected discomfort—reappeared in all their native exuberance, and she proceeded to enjoy London. She defended herself first against the friendly book-keeper, who became troublesome, and had to be treated with the most decided ingratitude. Then she gradually built herself up a store of clothes of the utmost elegance, which were the hopeless envy of the other girls employed at Madame Catherine's. And, finally, she looked about for serviceable acquaintances.

One night, in the pit of Drury Lane Theatre, while 'The Lady of Lyons' was going on, Sandy Grieve found himself next to a

dazzling creature, with fine black eyes, the smooth olive skin of the South, white teeth, and small dimpled hands, hardly spoilt at all by her trade. She had with her a plain girl-companion, and her manner, though conscious and provocative, had that haughtiness, that implied readiness to take offence, which is the *grisette's* substitute for breeding. She was, however, affable to Sandy, whose broad shoulders and handsome, well-to-do air attracted her attention. She allowed him to get her a programme, to beguile her into conversation, and, finally, to offer her a cup of coffee. Afterwards he escorted the two to the door of their lodging, in one of the streets off Theobald's Road, and walked home in a state of excitement which astonished him.

This happened immediately before his visit to the farm and his mother's death. During the six months after that event Sandy knew the 'joy of eventful living.' He was establishing his own business position, and he was courting Louise Suveret with alternations of despair and flattered passion, which stirred the now burly, full-blooded North-countryman to his depths. She let him escort her to her work in the morning and take her home in the evening, and she allowed him to give her as many presents of gloves, ribbons, bonbons—for which last she had a childish passion—and the like, as he pleased. But when he pressed her to marry him she generally laughed at him. She was, in reality, observing her world, calculating her chances, and she had several other strings to her bow, as Sandy shrewdly suspected, though she never allowed his jealousy any information to feed upon. It was simply owing to the failure of the most promising of these other strings—a failure which roused in Louise one of those white heats of passion which made the chief flaw in her organisation, viewed as a pleasure-procuring machine—that Sandy found his opportunity. In a moment of mortal chagrin and outraged vanity she consented to marry him, and three weeks afterwards he was the blissful owner of the black eyes, the small hands, the quick tongue, and the seductive *chiffons* he had so long admired more or less at a distance.

Their marriage lasted six years. At first Louise found some pleasure in arranging the little house Sandy had taken for her in a new suburb, and in making, wearing, and altering the additional gowns which their joint earnings—for she still worked intermittently at her trade—allowed her to enjoy. After the first infatuation was a little cooled, Sandy discovered in her a paganism so unblushing that his own Scotch and Puritan instincts reacted in a sort of superstitious fear. It seemed impossible that God Almighty should long allow Himself to be flouted as Louise flouted Him. He found also that the sense of truth was almost non-existent in her, and her vanity, her greed of dress and admiration, was so consuming, so frenzied, that his only hope of a peaceful life—as he quickly realised—lay in ministering to it. Her will soon got the upper hand, and he sank into the patient servant of her pleasures, snatching feverishly at all

she gave him in return with the instinct of a man who, having sold his soul, is determined at least to get the last farthing he can of the price.

They had two children in four years—David Suveret and Louise Stephanie. Louise resented the advent of the second so intensely that poor Sandy became conscious, before the child appeared, of a fatal and appalling change in her relation to him. She had been proud of her first-born—an unusually handsome and precocious child—and had taken pleasure in dressing it and parading it before the eyes of the other mothers in their terrace, all of whom she passionately despised. But Louie nearly died of neglect, and the two years that followed her birth were black indeed for Sandy. His wife, he knew, had begun to hate him; in business his energies failed him, and his employers cooled towards him as he grew visibly less pushing and inventive. The little household got deeper and deeper into debt, and towards the end of the time Louise would sometimes spend the whole day away from home without a word of explanation. So great was his nervous terror—strong, broad fellow that he was—of that pent-up fury in her, which a touch might have unloosed, that he never questioned her. At last the inevitable end came. He got home one summer evening to find the house empty and ransacked, the children—little things of five and two—sitting crying in the desolate kitchen, and a crowd of loud-voiced, indignant neighbours round the door. To look for her would have been absurd. Louise was much too clever to disappear and leave traces behind. Besides, he had no wish to find her. The hereditary self in him accepted his disaster as representing the natural retribution which the canny Divine vengeance keeps in store for those who take to themselves wives of the daughters of Heth. And there was the sense, too, of emerging from something unclean, of recovering his manhood.

He took his two children and went to lodgings in a decent street near the Gray's Inn Road. There for a year things went fairly well with him. His boy and girl, whom he paid a neighbour to look after during the day, made something to come home to. As he helped the boy, who was already at school, with his lesson for the next day, or fed Louie, perched on his knee, with the bits from his plate demanded by her covetous eyes and open mouth, he got back, little by little, his self-respect. He returned, too, in the evenings to some of his old pursuits, joined a Radical club near, and some science lectures. He was aged and much more silent than of yore, but not unhappy; his employers, too, feeling that their man had somehow recovered himself, and hearing something of his history, were sorry for him, and showed it.

Then one autumn evening a constable knocked at his door, and, coming in upon the astonished group of father and children, produced from his pocket a soaked and tattered letter, and showing Sandy the address, asked if it was for him. Sandy, on seeing it, stood up, put down Louie, who, half undressed, had been

having a ride on his knee, and asked his visitor to come out on to the landing. There he read the letter under the gas-lamp, and put it deliberately into his pocket.

'Where is she?' he asked.

'In Lambeth mortuary,' said the man briefly—'picked up two hours ago. Nothing else found on her but this.'

Half an hour afterwards Sandy stood by a slab in the mortuary, and, drawing back a sheet which covered the burden on it, stood face to face with his dead wife. The black brows were drawn, the small hands clenched. What struck Sandy with peculiar horror was that one delicate wrist was broken, having probably struck something in falling. She—who in life had rebelled so hotly against the least shadow of physical pain! Thanks to the bandage which had been passed round it, the face was not much altered. She could not have been long in the water. Probably about the time when he was walking home from work, she— He felt himself suffocating—the bare whitewashed walls grew dim and wavering.

The letter found upon her was the strangest appeal to his pity. Her seducer had apparently left her; she was in dire straits, and there was, it seemed, no one but Sandy in all London on whose compassion she could throw herself. She asked him, callously, for money to take her back to some Nice relations. They need only know what she chose to tell them, as she calmly pointed out, and, once in Nice, she could make a living. She would like to see her children, she said, before she left, but she supposed he would have to settle that. How had she got his address? From his place of business probably, in some roundabout way.

Then what had happened? Had she been seized with a sudden persuasion that he would not answer, that it was all useless trouble; and in one of those accesses of blind rage by which her clear, sharp brain-life was at all times apt to be disturbed, had she rushed out to end it all at once and for ever? It made him forgive her that she *could* have destroyed herself—could have faced that awful plunge—that icy water—that death-struggle for breath. He gauged the misery she must have gone through by what he knew of her sensuous love for comfort, for *bien-être*. He saw her again as she had been that night at the theatre when they first met,—the little crisp black curls on the temples, the dazzling eyes, the artificial pearls round the neck, the slight traces of powder and rouge on brow and cheek, which made her all the more attractive and tempting to his man's eye—the pretty foot, which he first noticed as she stepped from the threshold of the theatre into the street. Nature had made all that, to bring her work to this grim bed at last!

He himself died eighteen months afterwards. His acquaintances never dreamt of connecting his death with his wife's, and the connection, if it existed, would have been difficult to trace. Still, if little David could have put his experiences at this time into words, they might have thrown some light on an event which

was certainly a surprise to the small world which took an interest in Sandy Grieve.

There was a certain sound which remained all through his life firmly fixed in David's memory, and which he never thought of without a sense of desolation, a shiver of sick dismay, such as belonged to no other association whatever. It was the sound of a long sigh, brought up, as it seemed, from the very depths of being, and often, often repeated. The thought of it brought with it a vision of a small bare room at night, with two iron bedsteads, one for Louie, one for himself and his father; a bit of smouldering fire in a tiny grate, and beside it a man's figure bowed over the warmth, thrown out dark against the distempered wall, and sitting on there hour after hour; of a child, wakened intermittently by the light, and tormented by the recurrent sound, till it had once more burrowed into the bed-clothes deep enough to shut out everything but sleep. All these memories belonged to the time immediately following on Louise's suicide. Probably, during the interval between his wife's death and his own, Sandy suffered severely from the effects of strong nervous shock, coupled with a certain growth of religious melancholy, the conditions for which are rarely wanting in the true Calvinist blood. Owing to the privations and exposure of his early manhood, too, it is possible that he was never in reality the strong man he looked. At any rate, his fight for his life when it came was a singularly weak one. The second winter after Louise's death was bitterly cold; he was overworked, and often without sleep. One bleak east-wind day struck home. He took to his bed with a chill, which turned to peritonitis; the system showed no power of resistance, and he died.

On the day but one before he died, when the mortal pain was gone, but death was absolutely certain, he sent post-haste for his brother Reuben. Reuben he believed was married to a decent woman, and to Reuben he meant to commend his children.

Reuben arrived, looking more bewildered and stupid than ever, pure countryman that he was, in this London which he had never seen. Sandy looked at him with a deep inward dissatisfaction. But what could he do? His marriage had cut him off from his old friends, and since its wreck he had had no energy wherewith to make new ones.

'I've never seen your wife, Reuben,' he said, when they had talked awhile.

Reuben was silent a minute, apparently collecting his thoughts.

'Naw,' he said at last; 'naw. She sent yo her luv, and she hopes iv it's the Lord's will to tak yo, that it ull foind yo prepared.'

He said it like a lesson. A sort of nervous tremor and shrinking overspread Sandy's face. He had suffered so much through religion during the last few months, that in this final moment of humanity the soul had taken refuge in numbness—apathy. Let

God decide. He could think it out no more; and in this utter feebleness his terror of hell—the ineradicable deposit of childhood and inheritance—had passed away. He gathered his forces for the few human and practical things which remained to him to do.

'Did she get on comfortable with father?' he asked, fixing Reuben with his eyes, which had the penetration of death.

Reuben looked discomposed, and cleared his throat once or twice.

'Wal, it warn't what yo may call just coomfortable atween 'em. Naw, I'll not say it wor.'

'What was wrong?' demanded Sandy.

Reuben fidgeted.

'Wal,' he said at last, throwing up his head in desperation, 'I spose a woman likes her house to hersel when she's fust married. He wor childish like, an mighty trooblesome times. An she's allus stirrin, and rootin, is Hannah. Udder foak mus look aloive too.'

The conflict in Reuben's mind between his innate truthfulness and his desire to excuse his wife was curious to see. Sandy had a vision of his father sitting in his dotage by his own hearth, and ministered to by a daughter-in-law who grudged him his years and his infirmities, as he had grudged his wife all the troublesome incidents of her long decay. But it only affected him now as it bore upon what was still living in him, the one feeling which still survived amid the wreck made by circumstance and disease.

'Will she be kind to *them*?' he said sharply, with a motion of the head towards the children, first towards David, who sat drooping on his father's bed, where for some ten or twelve hours now he had remained glued, refusing to touch either breakfast or dinner, and then towards Louie, who was on the floor by the fire, with her rag dolls, which she was dressing up with smiles and chatter in a strange variety of finery. 'If not, she shan't have 'em. There's time yet.'

But the grey hue was already on his cheek, his feet were already cold. The nurse in the far corner of the room, looking up as he spoke, gave him mentally 'an hour or two.'

Reuben flushed and sat bolt upright, his gnarled and wrinkled hands trembling on his knees.

'She *shall* be kind to 'em,' he said with energy. 'Gie 'em to us, Sandy. Yo wouldna send your childer to strangers?'

The clannish instinct in Sandy responded. Besides, in spite of his last assertion, he knew very well there was nothing else to be done.

'There's money,' he said slowly. 'She'll not need to stint them of anything. This is a poor place,' for at the word 'money' he noticed that Reuben's eyes travelled with an awakening shrewdness over the barely furnished room; 'but it was the debts first, and then I had to put by for the children. None of the shop-folk

or the fellows at the club ever came here. We lived as we liked. There's an insurance, and there's some savings, and there's some commission money owing from the firm, and there's a bit investment Mr. Gurney (naming the head partner) helped me into last year. There's altogether about six hundred pound. You'll get the interest of it for the children; it'll go into Gurneys', and they'll give five per cent. for it. Mr. Gurney's been very kind. He came here yesterday, and he's got it all. You go to him.'

He stopped for weakness. Reuben's eyes were round. Six hundred pounds! Who'd have thought it of Sandy?—after that bad lot of a wife, and he not thirty!

'An what d' yo want Davy to be, Sandy?'

'You must settle,' said the father, with a long sigh. 'Depends on him—what he turns to. If he wants to farm, he can learn with you, and put in his money when he sees an opening. For the bit farms in our part there'd be enough. But I'm feart' (the old Derbyshire word slipped out unawares) 'he'll not stay in the country. He's too sharp, and you mustn't force him. If you see he's not the farming sort, when he's thirteen or fourteen or so, take Mr. Gurney's advice, and bind him to a trade. Mr. Gurney 'll pay the premiums for him and he can have the balance of the money—for I've left him to manage it all, for himself and Louie too—when he's fit to set up for himself.—You and Hannah 'll deal honest wi 'em?'

The question was unexpected, and as he put it with a startling energy the dying man raised himself on his elbow, and looked sharply at his brother.

'D' yo think I'd cheat yo, or your childer, Sandy?' cried Reuben, flushing and pricked to the heart.

Sandy sank back again, his sudden qualm appeased. 'No,' he said, his thoughts returning painfully to his son. 'I'm feart he'll not stay wi you. He's cleverer than I ever was, and I was the cleverest of us all.'

The words had in them a whole epic of human fate. Under the prick of them Reuben found a tongue, not now for his wife, but for himself.

'It's not cliverness as ull help yo now, Sandy, wi your Mäaker! and yo feeace t' feeace wi 'un!' he cried. 'It's nowt but satisfashun by t' blood o' Jesus!'

Sandy made no answer, unless, indeed, the poor heart within made its last cry of agony to heaven at the words. The sinews of the spiritual as well as the physical man were all spent and useless.

'Davy,' he called presently. The child, who had been sitting motionless during this talk watching his father, slid along the bed with alacrity, and tucking his little legs and feet well away from Sandy's long frame, put his head down on the pillow. His father turned his eyes to him, and with a solemn, lingering gaze took in the childish face, the thick, tumbled hair, the expression, so piteous, yet so intelligent. Then he put up his own large hand,

and took both the boy's into its cold and feeble grasp. His eyelids fell, and the breathing changed. The nurse hurriedly rose, lifted up Louie from her toys, and put her on the bed beside him. The child, disturbed in her play and frightened by she knew not what, set up a sudden cry. A tremor seemed to pass through the shut lids at the sound, a slight compression of pain appeared in the grey lips. It was Sandy Grieve's last sign of life.

Reuben Grieve remembered well the letter he had written to his wife, with infinite difficulty, from beside his brother's dead body. He told her that he was bringing the children back with him. The poor bairns had got nobody in the world to look to but their uncle and aunt. And they would not cost Hannah a penny. For Mr. Gurney would pay thirty pounds a year for their keep and bringing up.

With what care and labour his clumsy fingers had penned that last sentence so that Hannah might read it plain!

Afterwards he brought the children home. As he drove his light cart up the rough and lonely road to Needham Farm, Louie cried with the cold and the dark, and Davy, with his hands tucked between his knees, grew ever more and more silent, his restless little head turning perpetually from side to side, as though he were trying to discover something of the strange, new world to which he had been brought, through the gloom of the February evening.

Then at the sound of wheels outside in the lane, the back door of the farm was opened, and a dark figure stood on the threshold.

'Yo're late,' Reuben heard. It was Hannah's piercing voice that spoke. 'Bring 'em into t' back kitchen, an let 'em take their shoes off afore they coom ony further.'

By which Reuben knew that it had been scrubbing-day, and that her flagstones were more in Hannah's mind than the guests he had brought her. He obeyed, and then the barefooted trio entered the front kitchen together. Hannah came forward and looked at the children—at David white and blinking—at the four-year-old Louie, bundled up in an old shawl, which dragged on the ground behind her, and staring wildly round her at the old low-roofed kitchen with the terror of the trapped bird.

'Hannah, they're varra cold,' said Reuben—'ha yo got summat hot?'

'Theer'll be supper bime-by,' Hannah replied with decision. 'I've naw time scrubbin-days to be foolin about wi things out o' hours. I've nobbut just got straight and cleaned mysel. They can sit down and warm theirsels. I conno say they feature ony of *yor* belongins, Reuben.' And she went to put Louie on the settle by the fire. But as the tall woman in black approached her, the child hit out madly with her small fists and burst into a loud howl of crying.

'Get away, nasty woman! *Nasty* woman—*ugly* woman! Take me away—I want my daddy,—I want my daddy.'

And she threw herself kicking on the floor, while, to Hannah's exasperation, a piece of crumbling bun she had been holding tight in her sticky little hand escaped and littered all the new-washed stones.

'Tak yor niece oop, Reuben, an mak her behave'—the mistress of the house commanded angrily. 'She'll want a stick takken to her, soon, I can see.'

Reuben obeyed so far as he could, but Louie's shrieks only ceased when, by the combined efforts of husband and wife, she had been put to bed, so exhausted with rage, excitement, and the journey, that sleep mercifully took possession of her just after she had performed the crowning feat of knocking the tea and bread and butter Reuben brought her out of her uncle's hand and all over the room.

Meanwhile, David sat perfectly still in a chair against the wall, beside the old clock, and stared about him; at the hams and bunches of dried herbs hanging from the ceiling; at the chiffonier, with its red baize doors under a brass trellis-work; at the high wooden settle, the framed funeral cards, and the two or three coloured prints, now brown with age, which Reuben had hung up twenty years before, to celebrate his marriage. Hannah was propitiated by the boy's silence, and as she got supper ready she once or twice noticed his fine black eyes and his curly hair.

'Yo can coom an get yor supper,' she said to him, more graciously than she had spoken yet. 'It's a mussy yo doant goo skrikin like your sister.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' said the little fellow, with a townsman's politeness, hardly understanding, however, a word of her north-country dialect—'I'm not hungry.—You've got a picture of General Washington there, ma'am;' and, raising a small hand trembling with nervousness and fatigue, he pointed to one of the prints opposite.

'Wal, I niver,' said Hannah, with a stare of astonishment. 'Yo're a quare lot—the two o' yer.'

One thing more Reuben remembered with some vividness in connection with the children's arrival. When they were both at last asleep—Louie in an unused room at the back, on an old wooden bedstead, which stood solitary in a wilderness of bare boards; David in a sort of cupboard off the landing, which got most of its light and air from a wooden trellis-work, overlooking the staircase—Hannah said abruptly to her husband, as they two were going to bed, 'When ull Mr. Gurney pay that money?'

'Twice a year—so his clerk towed me—Christmas an Midsummer. Praps we shan't want to use it aw, Hannah; praps we might save soom on it for t' childer. Their keep, iv yo feed em on parritch, is nobbut a fleabite, an they'n got a good stock o' cloos, Sandy's nurse towed me.'

He looked anxiously at Hannah. In his inmost heart there was a passionate wish to do his duty to Sandy's orphans, fighting

with a dread of his wife, which was the fruit of long habit and constitutional weakness.

Hannah faced round upon him. It was Reuben's misfortune that dignity was at all times impossible to him. Now, as he sat in his shirt-sleeves and stocking-feet, flushed with the exertion of pulling off his heavy boots, the light of the tallow candle falling on his weak eyes with their red rims, on his large open mouth with the conspicuous gap in its front teeth, and his stubby hair, he was more than usually grotesque. 'As slamp an wobbly as an owd corn-boggart,' so his neighbours described him when they wished to be disrespectful, and the simile fitted very closely with the dishevelled, disjointed appearance which was at all times characteristic of him, Sundays or weekdays. No one studying the pair, especially at such a moment as this—the *malaise* of the husband—the wife towering above him, her grey hair hanging loose round her black brows and sallow face instinct with a rugged and indomitable energy—could have doubted in whose hands lay the government of Needham Farm.

'I'll thank yo not to talk nonsense, Reuben Grieve,' said his wife sharply. 'D'yo think they're *my* flesh an blood, thoose childer? An who'll ha to do for 'em but me, I should loike to know? Who'll ha to put up wi their messin an their dirt but *me*? Twenty year ha yo an I been married, Reuben, an niver till this neet did I ha to goo down on my knees an sweep oop after scrubbin-day! Iv I'm to be moidered wi em, I'll be paid for 't. Soa I let yo know—it's little enough.'

And Hannah took her payment. As he sat in the sun, looking back on the last seven years, with a slow and dreaming mind, Reuben recognised, using his own phrases for the matter, that the children's thirty pounds had been the pivot of Hannah's existence. He was but a small sheep farmer, with very scanty capital. By dint of hard work and painful thrift, the childless pair had earned a sufficient living in the past—nay, even put by a bit, if the truth of Hannah's savings-bank deposits were known. But every fluctuation in their small profits tried them sorely—tried Hannah especially, whose temper was of the brooding and grasping order. The *certainty* of Mr. Gurney's cheques made them very soon the most cheerful facts in the farm life. On two days in the year—the 20th of June and the 20th of December—Reuben might be sure of finding his wife in a good temper, and he had long shrewdly suspected, without inquiring, that Hannah's savings-bank book, since the children came, had been very pleasant reading to her.

Reuben fidgeted uncomfortably as he thought of those savings. Certainly the children had not cost what was paid for them. He began to be oddly exercised this Sunday morning on the subject of the porridge Louie hated so much. Was it his fault or Hannah's if the frugal living which had been the rule for all the remoter farms of the Peak—nay, for the whole north country—

in his father's time, and had been made doubly binding, as it were, on the dwellers in Needham Farm by James Grieve's Scotch blood and habits, had survived under their roof, while all about them a more luxurious standard of food and comfort was beginning to obtain among their neighbours? Where could you find a finer set of men than the Berwickshire hinds, of whom his father came, and who were reared on 'parritch' from year's end to year's end?

And yet, all the same, Reuben's memory was full this morning of disturbing pictures of a little London child, full of town daintiness and accustomed to the spoiling of an indulgent father, crying herself into fits over the new unpalatable food, refusing it day after day, till the sharp, wilful face had grown pale and pinched with famine, and caring no more apparently for her aunt's beatings than she did for the clumsy advances by which her uncle would sometimes try to propitiate her. There had been a great deal of beating—whenever Reuben thought of it he had a superstitious way of putting Sandy out of his mind as much as possible. Many times he had gone far away from the house to avoid the sound of the blows and shrieks he was powerless to stop.

Well, but what harm had come of it all? Louie was a strong lass now, if she were a bit thin and overgrown. David was as fine a boy as anyone need wish to see.

*David?*

Reuben got up from his seat at the farm door, took his pipe out of his pocket, and went to hang over the garden-gate, that he might unravel some very worrying thoughts at a greater distance from Hannah.

The day before he had been overtaken coming out of Clough End by Mr. Ancrum, the lame minister. He and Grieve liked one another. If there had been intrigues raised against the minister within the 'Christian Brethren' congregation, Reuben Grieve had taken no part in them.

After some general conversation, Mr. Ancrum suddenly said, 'Will you let me have a word with you, Mr. Grieve, about your nephew David—if you'll not think me intruding?'

'Say on, sir—say on,' said Reuben hastily, but with an inward shrinking.

'Well, Mr. Grieve, you've got a remarkable boy there—a curious and remarkable boy. What are you going to do with him?'

'Do wi him?—me, sir? Wal, I doan't know as I've iver thowt mich about it,' said Reuben, but with an agitation of manner that struck his interrogator. 'He be varra useful to me on t' farm, Mr. Ancrum. Soom toimes i' t' year theer's a lot doin, yo knaw, sir, even on a bit place like ours, and he ha gitten a good schoolin, he ha.'

The apologetic incoherence of the little speech was curious. Mr. Ancrum did not exactly know how to take his man.

'I dare say he's useful. But he's not going to be the ordinary labourer, Mr. Grieve—he's made of quite different stuff, and,

if I may say so, it will pay you very well to recognise it in good time. That boy will read books now which hardly any grown man of his class—about here, at any rate—would be able to read. Aye, and talk about them, too, in a way to astonish you!'

'Yes, I know 'at he's oncommon cliver wi his books, is Davy,' Reuben admitted.

'Oh! it's not only that. But he's got an unusual brain and a wonderful memory. And it would be a thousand pities if he were to make nothing of them. You say he's useful, but—excuse me, Mr. Grieve—he seems to me to spend three parts of his time in loafing and desultory reading. He wants more teaching—he wants steady training. Why don't you send him to Manchester,' said the minister boldly, 'and apprentice him? It costs money, no doubt.'

And he looked interrogatively at Reuben. Reuben, however, said nothing. They were toiling up the steep road from Clough End to the high farms under the Scout, a road which tried the minister's infirm limb severely; otherwise he would have taken more notice of his companion's awkward flush and evident discomposure.

'But it would pay you in the long run,' he said, when they stopped to take breath; 'it would be a capital investment if the boy lives, I promise you that, Mr. Grieve. And he could carry on his education there, too, a bit—what with evening classes and lectures, and the different libraries he could get the use of. It's wonderful how all the facilities for working-class education have grown in Manchester during the last few years.'

'Aye, sir—I spose they have—I spose they have,' said Reuben, uncomfortably, and then seemed incapable of carrying on the conversation any further. Mr. Ancrum talked, but nothing more was to be got out of the farmer. At last the minister turned back, saying, as he shook hands, 'Well, let me know if I can be of any use. I have a good many friends in Manchester. I tell you that's a boy to be proud of, Mr. Grieve, a boy of promise, if ever there was one. But he wants taking the right way. He's got plenty of mixed stuff in him, bad and good. I should feel it anxious work, the next few years, if he were my boy.'

Now it was really this talk which was fermenting in Reuben, and which, together with the 'rumpus' between Hannah and Louie, had led to his singularly disturbed state of conscience this Sunday morning. As he stood, miserably pulling at his pipe, the whole prospect of sloping field, and steep distant moor, gradually vanished from his eyes, and, instead, he saw the same London room which David's memory held so tenaciously—he saw Sandy raising himself from his deathbed with that look of sudden distrust—'Now, you'll deal honest wi 'em, Reuben?'

Reuben groaned in spirit. 'A boy to be proud of' indeed. It seemed to him, now that he was perforce made to think about it, that he had never been easy in his mind since Sandy's orphans came to the house. On the one hand, his wife had had her way



—how was he to prevent it? On the other, his religious sense had kept pricking and tormenting—like the gadfly that it was.

Who, in the name of fortune, was to ask Hannah for money to send the boy to Manchester and apprentice him? And who was going to write to Mr. Gurney about it without her leave? Once upset the system of things on which those two half-yearly cheques depended, how many more of them would be forthcoming? And how was Hannah going to put up with the loss of them? It made Reuben shiver to think of it.

Shouts from the lane behind. Reuben suddenly raised himself and made for the gate at the corner of the farmyard. He came out upon the children, who had been to Sunday school at Clough End since dinner, and were now in consequence in a state of restless animal spirits. Louie was swinging violently on the gate which barred the path on to the moor. David was shying stones at a rook's nest opposite, the clatter of the outraged colony to which it belonged sounding as music in his ears.

They stared when they saw Reuben cross the road, sit down on a stone beside David, and take out his pipe. David ceased throwing, and Louie, crossing her feet and steadying herself as she sat on the topmost bar of the gate by a grip on either side, leant hard on her hands and watched her uncle in silence. When caught unawares by their elders, these two had always something of the air of captives defending themselves in an alien country.

'Wal, Davy, did tha have Mr. Anerum in school?' began Reuben, affecting a brisk manner, oddly unlike him.

'Naw. It wor Brother Winterbotham from Halifax, or soom sich name.'

'Wor he edifyin, Davy?'

'He wor—he wor—a leather-yed,' said David, with sudden energy, and, taking up a stone again, he flung it at a tree trunk opposite, with a certain vindictiveness as though Brother Winterbotham were sitting there.

'Now, yo're not speakin as yo owt, Davy,' said Reuben reprovingly, as he puffed away at his pipe and felt the pleasantness of the spring sunshine which streamed down into the lane through the still bare but budding branches of the sycamores.

'He wor a leather-yed,' David repeated with emphasis. 'He said it wor Alexander fought t' battle o' Marathon.'

Reuben was silent for a while. When tests of this kind were going, he could but lie low. However, David's answer, after a bit, suggested an opening to him.

'Yo've a rare deal o' book-larnin for a farmin lad, Davy. If yo wor at a trade now, or a mill-hand, or summat o' that soart, yo'd ha noan so mich time for readin as yo ha now.'

The boy looked at him askance, with his keen black eyes. His uncle puzzled him.

'Wal, I'm not a mill-hand, onyways,' he said, shortly, 'an I doan't mean to be.'

'Noa, yo're too lazy,' said Louie shrilly, from the top of the gate. 'Theer's heaps o' boys no bigger nor yo, arns their ten shillins a week.'

'They're welcome,' said David laconically, throwing another stone at the water to keep his hand in. For some years now the boy had cherished a hatred of the mill-life on which Clough End and the other small towns and villages in the neighbourhood existed. The thought of the long monotonous hours at the mules or the looms was odious to the lad whose joys lay in free moorland wanderings with the sheep, in endless reading, in talks with 'Lias Dawson.

'Wal, now, I'm real glad to heer yo say sich things, Davy, lad,' said Reuben, with a curious flutter of manner. 'I'm real glad. So yo take to the farmin, Davy? Wal, it's nateral. All yor forbears—all on em leastways, nobbut yor feyther—got their livin off t' land. It cooms nateral to a Grieve.'

The boy made no answer—did not commit himself in any way. He went on absently throwing stones.

'Why doan't he larn a trade?' demanded Louie. 'Theer's Harry Wigson, he's gone to Manchester to be prenticed. He doan't goo loafin round aw day.'

Her sharp wits disconcerted Reuben. He looked anxiously at David. The boy coloured furiously, and cast an angry glance at his sister.

'Theer's money wanted for prenticin,' he said shortly.

Reuben felt a stab. Neither of the children knew that they possessed a penny. A blunt word of Hannah's first of all, about 'not gien 'em ony high noshuns o' theirsels,' aided on Reuben's side by the natural secretiveness of the peasant in money affairs, had effectually concealed all knowledge of their own share in the family finances from the orphans.

He reached out a soil-stained hand, shaking already with incipient age, and laid it on David's sleeve.

'Art tha hankerin after a trade, lad?' he said hastily, nay, harshly.

David looked at his uncle astonished. A hundred thoughts flew through the boy's mind. Then he raised his head and caught sight of the great peak of Kinder Low in the distance, beyond the green swells of meadowland,—the heathery slopes running up into its rocky breast,—the black patch on the brown, to the left, which marked the site of the smithy.

'No,' he said decidedly. 'No; I can't say as I am. I like t' farmin well enough.'

And then, boy-like, hating to be talked to about himself, he shook himself free of his uncle and walked away. Reuben fell to his pipe again with a beaming countenance.

'Louie, my gell,' he said.

'Yes,' said the child, not moving.

'Coom yo heer, Louie.'

She unwillingly got down and came up to him.

Reuben put down his pipe, and fumbled in his waistcoat pocket. Out of it, with difficulty, he produced a sixpence.

'Art tha partial to goodies, Louie?' he said, dropping his voice almost to a whisper, and holding up the coin before her.

Louie nodded, her eyes glistening at the magnitude of the coin. Uncle Reuben might be counted on for a certain number of pennies during the year, but silver was unheard of.

'Tak it then, child, an welcome. If yo have a sweet tooth—an it's t' way wi moast gells—I conno see as it can be onythin else but Providence as gave it yo. So get yorsel soom bull's-eyes, Louie, an—an—he looked a little conscious as he slipped the coin into her eager hand—'doan't let on ti your aunt! She'd think mebbe I wor spoillin your teeth, or summat,—an, Louie—'

Was Uncle Reuben gone mad? For the first time in her life, as it seemed to Louie, he was looking at what she had on, nay, was even taking up her dress between his finger and thumb.

'Is thissen your Sunday frock, chilt?'

'Yes,' said the girl, flushing scarlet, 'bean't it a dish-clout?'

And she stood looking down at it with passionate scorn. It was a worn and patched garment of brown alpaca, made out of an ancient gown of Hannah's.

'Wal, I'm naw judge i' these matters,' said Reuben, dubiously, drawing out his spectacles. 'It's got naw holes 'at I can see, but it's not varra smart, perhaps. Satan's varra active wi gells on this pint o' dress—yo mun tak noatice o' that, Louie—but—listen heer—'

And he drew her nearer to him by her skirt, looking cautiously up and down the lane and across to the farm.

'If I get a good price for t' wool this year—an theer's a new merchant coomin round, yan moor o' t' buyin soart nor owd Croker, soa they say, I'st save yo five shillin for a frock, chilt. Yo can goo an buy it, an I'st mak it straight wi yor aunt. But I mun get a good price, yo know, or your aunt ull be fearfu' bad to manage.'

And he gazed up at her as though appealing to her common sense in the matter, and to her understanding of both his and her situation. Louie's cheeks were red, her eyes did not meet his. They looked away, down towards Clough End.

'Theer's a blue cotton at Hinton's,' she said, hurriedly—'a light-blue cotton. They want sixpence farthin,—but Annie Wigson says yo could bate 'em a bit. But what's t' use?' she added, with a sudden savage darkening of her bright look—'she'd tak it away.'

The tone gave Reuben a shock. But he did not rebuke it. For the first time he and Louie were conspirators in the same plot.

'No, no, I'd see to 'at. But how ud yo get it made?' He was beginning to feel a childish interest in his scheme.

'Me an Annie Wigson ud mak it oop fast enough. Theer are

things I can do for her; she'd not want no payin, an she's fearfu' good at dressmakin. She wor prenticed two years afore she took ill.'

'Gie me a kiss then, my gell; doan't yo gie naw trouble, an we'st see. But I mun get a good price, yo know.'

And rising, Reuben bent towards his niece. She rose on tip-toe, and just touched his rough cheek. There was no natural childish effusiveness in the action. For the seven years since she left her father, Louie had quite unlearned kissing.

Reuben proceeded up the lane to the gate leading to the moor. He was in the highest spirits. What a mercy he had not bothered Hannah with Mr. Ancrum's remarks! Why, the boy wouldn't go to a trade, not if he were sent!

At the gate he ran against David, who came hastily out of the farmyard to intercept him.

'Uncle Reuben, what do they coe that bit watter up theer?' and he pointed up the lane towards the main ridge of the Peak. 'Yo know—that bit pool on t' way to th' Downfall?'

The farmer stopped bewildered.

'That bit watter? What they coe that bit watter? Why, they coe it t' Witch's Pool, or used to i' my yoong days. An for varra good reason too. They drowned an owd witch theer i' my grand-feyther's time—I've heerd my grandmither tell th' tale on't scores o' times. An theer's aw mak o' tales about it, or used to be. I hannot yeerd mony words about it o' late years. Who's been talkin to yo, Davy?'

Louie came running up and listened.

'I doan't know,' said the boy,—'what soart o' tales?'

'Why, they'd use to say th' witch walked, on soom neets i' th' year—Easter Eve, most pertickerlerly,—an foak wor feart to goo onywhere near it on those neets. But doan't yo goo listenin to tales, Davy,' said Reuben, with a paternal effusion most rare with him, and born of his recent proceedings; 'yo'll only fretten yorsel o' neets for nothin.'

'What are witches?' demanded Louie, scornfully. 'I doan't bleeve in 'em.'

Reuben frowned a little.

'Theer wor witches yance, my gell, becos it's in th' Bible, an whativer's in th' Bible's true,' and the farmer brought his hand down on the top bar of the gate. 'I'm no gien ony judgment about 'em nowadays. Theer wor aw mak o' queer things said about Jenny Crum an Needham Farm i' th' owd days. I've heerd my grandmither say it worn't worth a Christian man's while to live in Needham Farm when Jenny Crum wor about. She meddled wi everythin—wi his lambs, an his coos, an his childer. I niver seed nothin mysel, so I doan't say nowt—not o' my awn knowledge. But I doan't soomhow bleeve as it's th' Awmighty's will to fretten a Christian cuntry wi witches, i' th' present dispensation. An murderin's a graat sin, wheder it's witches or oother foak.'

'In t' books they doan't coe it t' Witch's Pool at aw,' said Louie, obstinately. 'They coe it t' *Mermaid's Pool*.'

'An another book coes it a "Hammer-dry-ad,"' said David, mockingly, 'soa theer yo are.'

'Aye, soom faddlin kind of a name they gie it—I know—those Manchester chaps, as cooms trespassin ower t' Scout wheer they aren't wanted. To hear ony yan o' *them* talk, yo'd think theer wor only three fellows like 'im cam ower i' three ships, an two were drowned. T'aint ov ony account what they an their books coe it.'

And Reuben, as he leant against the gate, blew his smoke contemptuously in the air. It was not often that Reuben Grieve allowed himself, or was allowed by his world, to use airs of superiority towards any other human being whatever. But in the case of the Manchester clerks and warehousemen, who came tramping over the grouse moors which Reuben rented for his sheep, and were always being turned back by keepers or himself—and in their case only—did he exercise, once in a while, the commonest privilege of humanity.

'Did yo iver know onybody 'at went up on Easter Eve?' asked David.

Both children hung on the answer.

Reuben scratched his head. The tales of Jenny Crum, once well known to him, had sunk deep into the waves of memory of late years, and his slow mind had some difficulty in recovering them. But at last he said with the sudden brightening of recollection:

'Aye—of *coorse*!—I knew theer wor soom one. Yo know 'im, Davy, owd 'Lias o' Frimley Moor? He wor allus a foo'hardy sort o' creetur. But if he wor short o' wits when he gan up, he wor mich shorter when he cam down. That wor a rum skit!—now I think on 't. Sieh a seet he wor! He came by here six o'clock i' th' mornin. I found him hangin ower t' yard gate theer, as white an slainp as a puddin cloth oop on eend; an I browt him in, an was for gien him soom tay. An yor aunt, she gien him a warld o' good advice about his gooins on. But bless yo, he didn't tak in a word o' 't. An for th' tay, he'd naw sooner swallowed it than he runs out, as quick as leetnin, an browt it aw up. He wor fairly clemmed wi' t' cold,—'at he wor. I put in th' horse, an I took him down to t' Frimley carrier, an we packed him i' soom rugs an straw, an soa he got home. But they put him out o' t' school, an he wor months in his bed. An they do tell me, as nobory can mak owt o' 'Lias Dawson these mony years, i' th' matter o' brains. Eh, but yo shudno meddle wi Satan.'

'What d'yo think he saw?' asked David, eagerly, his black eyes all aglow.

'He saw t' woman wi t' fish's tail—'at's what he saw,' said Louie, shrilly.

Reuben took no notice. He was sunk in silent reverie poking at his pipe. In spite of his confidence in the Almighty's increased

goodwill towards the present dispensation, he was not prepared to say for certain what 'Lias Dawson did or didn't see.

'Nobory should goo an meddle wi Satan,' he repeated slowly after an interval; and then opening the yard gate he went off on his usual Sunday walk over the moors to have a look at his more distant sheep.

Davy stood intently looking after him; so did Louie. She had clasped her hands behind her head, her eyes were wide, her look and attitude all eagerness. She was putting two and two together—her uncle's promise and the mermaid story as the Manchester man had delivered it. You had but to see her and wish, and, according to the Manchester man and his book, you got your wish. The child's hatred of sermons and ministers had not touched her capacity for belief of this sort in the least. She believed feverishly, and was enraged with David for setting up a rival creed, and with her uncle for endorsing it.

David turned and walked towards the farmyard. Louie followed him, and tapped him peremptorily on the arm. 'I'm gooin up theer Easter Eve—Saturday week'—and she pointed over her shoulder to the Scout.

'Gells conno be out neets,' said David firmly; 'if I goo I can tell yo.'

'Yo'll not goo without me—I'd tell Aunt Hannah!'

'Yo've naw moor sense nor rotten sticks!' said David, angrily. 'Yo'll get your death, an Aunt Hannah 'll be stick stock mad wi boath on us. If I goo she'll never find out.'

Louie hesitated a moment. To provoke Aunt Hannah too much might, indeed, endanger the blue frock. But daring and curiosity triumphed.

'I doan't care!' she said, tossing her head; 'I'm gooin.'

David slammed the yard gate, and, hiding himself in a corner of the cowhouse, fell into moody meditations. It took all the tragic and mysterious edge off an adventure he had set his heart on that Louie should insist on going too. But there was no help for it. Next day they planned it together.

## CHAPTER V

'REUBEN, ha yo seen t' childer?' inquired Aunt Hannah, poking her head round the door, so as to be heard by her husband, who was sitting outside cobbling at a bit of broken harness.

'Noa; niver seed un since dinner.'

'They went down to Clough End, two o'clock about, for t' bread, an I've yerd nothin ov em since. Coom in to your tay, Reuben! I'll keep nothin waitin for them! They may goo empty if they conno keep time!'

Reuben went in. An hour later the husband and wife came